

Zionist Regime Resumes Building 'Apartheid Wall' in West Bank

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime has resumed constructing its controversial wall northwest of the occupied West Bank city of Bethlehem that is viewed as an embodiment of Tel Aviv's oppression against the Palestinians.

Zionist troops have placed a four-meter-high barbed wire fence in Ein Jwaizeh area to the northwest of al-Walaja village, completely encircling it, Hasan Brijijeh from the committee against the Apartheid Wall and settlements in Bethlehem, told the official Palestinian news agency Wafa on Saturday.

"Construction of the barrier in the West Bank gravely violates the rights of Palestinians in the areas affected, restricting their access to their lands, crucial services and relatives on the other side of the barrier. The barrier also prevents any possibility of economic development," said Israeli rights group B'Tselem on its website.

The occupying regime began building the barrier of walls and fences inside the occupied West Bank back in 2002. Tel Aviv argues that the project is aimed at preventing infiltration into the occupied territories, but Palestinians say the move is yet another violation of their rights and allows for further annexation of their land.

If completed, the wall will result



Participants in the 5th Palestine Marathon run along the contentious separation barrier, which divides the West Bank from al-Quds, in Bethlehem on March 31, 2017.

in the isolation of 9.4 percent of the West Bank, including East al-Quds, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The International Court of Justice said in an advisory opinion issued in 2004 that the "apartheid wall" violates international law and urged the regime to remove it from the occupied territories.

In another development on

Saturday, Tel Aviv announced a closure of the West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip ahead of the Israeli holidays of Memorial Day and Independence Day. The closure will last until Tuesday night.

Tel Aviv has accelerated its land grab and settlement construction activities in the occupied Palestinian territories after US President Donald Trump took office earlier this year.

The settlement activities are in defiance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334. The resolution, which was adopted in December 2016, condemned the settlements as a "flagrant violation of international law."

Earlier this week, the occupying regime's housing ministry said it had been working for two years on the plan to build 25,000 units in al-Quds.

Ayatollah ...

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The Leader said, "Those who are in charge of the elections, whether the Interior Ministry, the Guardian Council, the IRIB, or elsewhere, they must protect and guard what is entrusted to them--the ballots, and the people's participation."

Ayatollah Khamenei added, "The utmost precautions must be taken to protect and guard the vote, in case, God forbid, some want to violate this trust."

"The law should be enforced accurately. No exception is to be accorded with regard to the law. The law is the law, it's the same for everyone, with no exception. By accurately enforcing the law, a right and desirable occupation, satisfactory in front of God, can be accomplished."

The Leader went on to say that the main manifestation of the people's presence is during the elections, adding the people know the Islamic Republic endeavors for their glory, security and progress

"The Islamic Republic has secured this country from the intrusion of enemies, and this shall not be taken lightly. It is a great accomplishment."

Economy ...

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Qalibaf rejected criticism that a raise in the handouts would lead to inflation, arguing that it would rather create market boom if taken in a controlled way.

Jahangiri said during a live TV interview that the next government should put fighting poverty at the top of its agenda and swiftly deal with any corruption in state institutions.

"Clean-handedness should be the most important feature of the government. The prerequisite for choosing managers should be the condition that they not encroach on state assets," he said.

Jahangiri offered his definition of an efficient government, saying it is the one which "relies on the people and is accountable to them for what it does."

"The role of the president in such an administration is to lead the society, where creativity, economic empowerment and clean-handedness of its managers are important," he said.

Former culture minister Mostafa Aqa-Mirsalim took aim at President Rouhani's economic policies, saying his administration's measures to rein in inflation have resulted in a decline in investment, increased unemployment and deepened recession.

The current government is credited with keeping inflation in check after it shot up to 40% under Rouhani's predecessor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. However, Rouhani has presided over an economic inertia which has exacerbated Iran's unemployment problem.

Mostafa Hashemi-Taba, a former vice president, gave credit to Rouhani over the nuclear agreement, calling it a victory for his administration.

On Sunday, Rouhani lashed out at the internal critics of the nuclear deal signed under his administration between Tehran and the six world powers, saying "some people" are ignorant of the regulations governing election campaigns.

"Some people begin quarreling just after an administration is elected. This shows that they do not know the rules of campaigning for the election," he said in Bandar Abbas.

Some 55 million people are eligible to vote for a new president on May 19 in what is expected to be a close race.

Why ...

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While former president Barack Obama sought to ring fence the JCPOA from clashes with Iran on other issues, EU diplomats say they fear Trump will try to provoke Iran to withdraw from it.

"The deal wasn't designed to build trust but it was certainly hoped for," said Joost Hiltermann, an expert with the Brussels-based think tank the International Crisis Group.

Even in the face of certain provocations the Iranians will not pull out but there is a limit."

For now, Iranian officials have kept their cool, with Salehi saying Iran will only take "reciprocal action" if the U.S. is found in breach of the deal - leaving EU diplomats caught in a balancing act between the two long-time rivals.

In recent months, European leaders have been frequent visitors to Tehran with businessmen in toe - in an effort to keep alive the 2015 accord, which also has the support of Russia and China, rivals for influence in the Islamic Republic.

The bloc's trade with Iran has partially recovered - much of that due to oil exports from Iran in what one EU official called "a direct incentive to stick to the deal."

The International Monetary Fund this year applauded Iran's "impressive recovery", with growth expected over 6 percent for the last 12 months and low inflation - a record that Rouhani has been keen to defend.

But the hope for a boom since the EU and United Nations sanctions over Iran's nuclear program were lifted a year ago has been hampered by separate U.S. measures in place over Iran's missile program.

"The Europeans want to at least create the optical impression they are politically invested in this deal working," said Ellie Geranmayeh of the European Council on Foreign Relations. "Even if from a commercial perspective, companies are essentially on hold."

The risk of falling afoul of U.S. measures has been enough to persuade major Western banks to stay away from Iran, and Tehran accuses Washington of undermining the nuclear deal by scaring investors away from Iran.

While acknowledging domestic criticism, Salehi told reporters Tehran will remain committed to the JCPOA regardless of the outcome of next month's vote.

There are also signs that the EU's firm stance has given U.S. officials pause, with senators saying they delayed a bill to slap new sanctions on Iran due to worries over how the bloc would react and the Iranian presidential elections.

Kurdish Forces Advance on Town Near Syria's Raqqah



Members of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) warm themselves by a fire on the bank of the Euphrates River, west of Raqqah, Syria, April 8, 2017.

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – Kurdish fighters are reportedly advancing against Daesh in a town near the Syrian city of Raqqah, the terrorist group's stronghold in the Arab country.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said on Sunday that heavy clashes were underway in Tabqa.

SOHR director Rami Abdel Rahman said Kurdish fighters were

in control of at least 40 percent of the town and over half of its center despite Daesh attacks and bombings to slow their advances.

U.S.-backed forces, known as Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), surrounded Tabqa in early April, entering the town on Monday as part of an offensive to capture Raqqah. The operation, dubbed "Wrath of the Euphrates," was launched last November.

Tabqa is situated on a strategic supply route some 55 kilometers west of Raqqah and serves as an important Daesh command base. The town also lies near Tabqa Dam, commonly known as the Euphrates dam that is held by Daesh.

The so-called Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) forms the backbone of the SDF. Ankara has been pressing the U.S. to drop its military alliance with the YPG which it views as part of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Washington, however, considers

the YPG as one of the most important allies in Syria.

Speaking at a business conference in the city of Istanbul on Saturday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged the U.S. to join hands and turn Raqqah "into a graveyard" for Daesh. He also called on the U.S. not to use Kurdish forces for the Raqqah operation.

The developments come amid fresh escalation in tensions along the Turkish-Syrian border, with Turkey and the US moving armored vehicles to the area.

The deployment on Friday and Saturday followed Turkish airstrikes Kurdish positions in northern Iraq and in northeastern Syria.

Ankara said the air raids were meant to "destroy these terror hubs which threaten the security, unity and integrity of our country and our nation."

The YPG said 20 of its fighters and media activists were killed in the Turkish strikes, which was followed by cross-border clashes.

Turkey Sacks 4,000 Officials as Part of Post-Coup Crackdown

ANKARA (Press TV) – Turkey has sacked around 4,000 public officials and banned televised dating programs as part of its crackdown on people alleged to be linked to last year's failed coup.

Turkey's Justice Ministry released a decree with the names of 3,975 dismissed officials, 1,000 of whom formerly worked for the ministry and 1,000 others were employed by the army.

Some 100 pilots were among sacked army personnel, while the names of about 500 state-employed academics were also included in the decree.

The move comes just days after Turkey suspended over 9,000

members of the country's police force and sacked 1,000 people for alleged links to U.S.-based cleric, Fethullah Gulen, who Ankara claims orchestrated last year's failed putsch.

Meanwhile, in a separate decree, Turkey also banned television dating programs, a move which had been hinted by Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus last month.

"In radio and television broadcasting services, such programs in which people are introduced to find a friend ... cannot be permitted," read the decree.

In March, Kurtulmus had

remarked that some "strange programs," which were endangering "the institution of family" would be scrapped.

Earlier in the day, a Turkish internet monitoring group announced that Ankara had blocked all access inside the country to the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia.

The latest moves come around two weeks after a tightly contested referendum approved the expansion of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's powers, according to preliminary results.

Turkey witnessed a coup attempt on July 15, 2016, when a faction of the Turkish military declared that

the government of Erdogan was no more in charge of the country.

A few hours later, however, the coup was suppressed. Almost 250 people were killed and nearly 2,200 others wounded in the abortive coup.

Since then, Ankara has been engaged in suppressing the media and opposition groups, who were believed to have played a role in the failed putsch.

Over 40,000 people have been arrested and more than 120,000 others sacked or suspended from a wide range of professions, including soldiers, police, teachers, and public servants, over alleged links with the failed coup.