

'Lebanon Prepared for Potential War With Zionist Regime'

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanese General Security Chief Abbas Ibrahim has assured that Lebanon is prepared for any war with the Zionist regime if it happens, local media reported.

"We do not want a war but we are ready for it while Israel is not prepared for a war even if it wants it," Ibrahim was quoted as saying by the National News Agency.

Ibrahim also pointed to the fact that the threat of terrorist cells has decreased to a large extent, but its possibility still exists.

Lebanese caretaker Interior Minister Nohad Machnouk announced on Friday that Internal Security Forces succeeded in thwarting nine terrorist attacks in 2018.

"Lebanon is considered one



This file picture shows members of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces during a parade.

of the safest countries and we hope that the safety and security are maintained by strong cooperation among different security services," Machnouk said.

Meanwhile, Jordan con-

demned repeated violations by the Zionist regime against Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Jordan's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed Qatarneh slammed storming the yards of the mosque by Zionist agricul-

ture minister and Zionist radicals under the protection of the regime's police earlier in the day.

"Such acts are provocative to the feelings of the Muslims across the world and represent a violation of Israel's commitment as an occupying force in East al-Quds in line with the international law," Qatarneh said in a statement.

The Jordanian officials held the Zionist regime accountable for such acts, calling for the immediate cease of these provocations.

Jordan, which signed a so-called peace treaty with the Zionist regime in 1994, oversees the Islamic and Christian holy sites in East al-Quds, which is envisaged as the capital of the Palestinian state.

Iran's... (Continued From Page One)

The income deposited with an Indian bank is subject to a withholding tax of 40 percent plus other levies, further complicating oil purchases from Iran by India's refiners.

Early this month, the Indian government intervened and exempted rupee payments to Iran from the steep tax.

Zarif said there were numerous areas of cooperation for boosting ties, one of them being Iran's strategic port of Chabahar. "Indians are keen on being present in Chabahar as well as in Iran's transit infrastructure," he said.

Gadkari said India was hoping to fully operationalize Chabahar, with the Bank Pasargad branch in Mumbai intended to handle the related transactions.

The minister termed his meeting with Zarif on Chabahar as "very fruitful," saying a lot of issues had been resolved during the detailed discussions.

"Chabahar Port is very important for us. We are working very hard on it... Some problems were there, but the Iranian government and their minister... are also in the process to resolve all the issues as early as possible. I am confident that we will be in a position to start full function of Chabahar Port at the earliest," he said.

Barter Trade via Chabahar

Chabahar on the coast of the Gulf of Oman is Iran's southernmost city. The port is easily accessible from India's west coast and New Delhi hopes to utilize its transit potentials to embolden the country's connectivity footprints.

Gadkari said India had placed \$85 million machinery order for Chabahar and the first ship from Brazil had already been received at the port.

India took over the operations of the first phase of Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar in December 2018. Commercial operations began the same month with the arrival of a Cyprus-registered bulk carrier with 72,458 tonnes of corn cargo.

Gadkari said the financial arrangement for Chabahar was also ready and proposals on a mutual barter system could also be considered.

India, he said, can provide steel rails and locomotive engines to Iran, and receive urea in return.

Zarif also noted that he was negotiating higher urea sales at "reasonable" rates with Indian officials.

"We are very happy that both UCO Bank of India and Pasargad Bank of Iran are getting started with the business," the Iranian minister said, adding the two banks will facilitate transactions relating to operation of berths at Chabahar Port.

Contrasting Trump

Pompeo Vows to Punish Saudi Over Khashoggi Murder

WASHINGTON (Press TV) – U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says his country will punish Saudi Arabia for the "heinous" murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi, contrasting President Donald Trump's statements that doing so would hurt American interests.

While Trump had suggested in the aftermath of the murder that there was too much at stake for Washington to go after Riyadh, Pompeo made it clear that Khashoggi's murderers were not getting away with their deeds.

"We've taken a very clear message to the world with respect to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi," the top U.S. diplomat told CNBC on Monday. "This was a heinous act. It's unacceptable. It's inconsistent with the way nations ought to behave around the world."

Weeks after Khashoggi, a U.S. resident, went missing after entering the Saudi consulate in Turkey's Istanbul on October 2, Riyadh admitted that he had been killed by security agents in a brawl.

Mounting evidence released by Turkish officials, coupled with a controversial CIA assessment, left little doubt that the hit job had been ordered by Saudi leaders, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in particular.

Defying his own intelligence agents, however, Trump said back then that punishing the Saudi would jeopardize billions of dollars in weapons deals with the kingdom and cause oil prices to skyrocket.

At the time, Trump even warned that punishing Saudis puts Israel in the harm's way.

Asked whether oil prices had anything to do with Washing-

ton's response, Pompeo said: "They're disconnected."

"We've told the Saudis that we've held Saudi citizens accountable for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. We will continue to do so as new facts arise," Pompeo said, referring to a series of sanctions that Washington slapped on 17 Saudi officials in the aftermath of the killing.

"At the same time, we're going to continue to do the things that protect the American people, and that includes a deep and lasting relationship with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia" he continued.

Mixed messages Pompeo made the remarks a day before setting off on a Middle East tour that would include stops in Jordan, Egypt and several countries in the Persian Gulf region.

It was not yet clear how serious Pompeo's pledge was because several outlets reported later on that he was planning to applaud Riyadh's handling of Khashoggi's murder in a speech in the Egyptian capital on Tuesday.

The Trump administration's reluctance to punish bin Salman over Khashoggi's murder as well as the kingdom's deadly war on Yemen has prompted bipartisan fury in Congress.

Last month, the Senate voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution that called MbS an "accomplice" in the murder.

American senators also voted to end Washington's continued support for Riyadh's deadly war on Yemen, which has killed thousands of Yemeni civilians and put millions other on the verge of famine since its onset in March 2015.

1 Civilian Killed, 26 Injured in Bomb Attack in East Afghanistan

KHOST (Xinhua) – At least one civilian was killed and 26 others wounded after an explosion ripped through a road in Khost, a city in eastern Afghanistan, on Tuesday, officials said.

"An improvised explosive device (IED) attached to a motorcycle was detonated near the city's main mosque roughly at 11:30 a.m. local time, causing panic among the residents," a police officer on condition of anonymity told Xinhua.

Security forces have cordoned off the area for precautionary measures in the city, which is the capital of Khost province.

Ahmad Shah, acting head of provincial health department, told Xinhua that

one dead body and 26 wounded people were admitted to hospitals in Khost city following the incident.

The official added that the death toll could rise, as many injured remain in critical conditions.

The nearby building's windows were blasted out and shards of glass were strewn over the sidewalk.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack yet.

More than 2,790 civilians were killed and over 5,250 others injured in conflict-related incidents in the first nine months of 2018 in the war-torn country, according to figures released by the United Nations mission in the country.

Turkey...

(Continued From Page One)

and with the right partners, saying only Turkey had "the power and commitment to perform that task".

In an op-ed article for the New York Times, Erdogan said Turkey was committed to defeating Daesh and "other terrorist groups" in Syria.

Speaking to members of his Justice and Development party (AKP) in parliament on Tuesday, Erdogan also said the idea that the YPG were fighting Daesh was "a huge lie".

"Elements of the U.S. administration are saying different things," said Erdogan. "The YPG and the PKK can never be representatives of the Kurdish people."

The Turkish leader said Ankara's military had finished preparations to enter Syria and that Washington was stalling on a commitment to leave the town of Manbij as a first step.

Before arriving in Ankara, Bolton had directly contradicted the U.S. president, claiming Washington would not leave Syria without first receiving guarantees that Turkey would not attack its allies.

Lebanon's Winter Storm Freezes Refugees in Flooded Camps

BEIRUT (Reuters) – Storms in Lebanon have flooded Syrian refugee camps, ruining tents, mattresses and food and compounding the misery of people enduring powerful winter winds and biting cold.

More than a million Syrians fled to neighboring Lebanon since war broke out at home in 2011, and UN agencies say most live of them live in poverty.

"There is almost half a meter of water on the ground and in the tents ... the war in Syria forced us into this situation," said Hussein Zeidan who came to Lebanon from Homs in Syria in 2011.

He lives in a makeshift camp near a river in north Lebanon's Akkar region. He and some of its other residents said the storm had left them and their children with no

clothes, furniture or food.

Families were moving around in search of dryness and warmth.

"Water flooded us in the camp: me and my children. Our situation is bad ... God bless our neighbors, they welcomed us in yesterday night. Today, water flooded them so we came here, as you can see, to this half-built house with no windows or doors," Ghazwan Zeidan, who has three children, said in Akkar.

The UN refugee agency said on Tuesday that the storm had completely flooded or collapsed 15 informal settlements out of at least 66 that were "heavily impacted".

In the Bekaa valley in east Lebanon, the cold temperatures have also brought snow.

Abu Shahid, who fled Hasaka in Syria three years ago with his family, stood in flooded water in an informal camp in Bar Elias village. He described how his tent had completely submerged, damaging all his family's belongings.

"The only solution is to leave our things and move, run away with our lives ... Water is everywhere, where do we go?" he said. The previous night, he and his wife and two children had slept in a neighbor's tent that was less damaged by the floods.

For 19-year-old Hamed Haj Abu and his relatives, the night was cold and wet.

"We did not sleep all night. Some were sleeping for an hour, others were waking up. Water was coming on us, in the tent, from everywhere," he said in Bar Elias.