

President Trump asks Israeli PM Netanyahu to 'hold back' on settlements

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Washington: US President Donald Trump on Wednesday asked Israel to “hold back” on building new settlement “for a little bit”.

Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu participate in a joint news conference

"As far as settlements, I'd like to see you hold back on settlements for a little bit," Trump told visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a joint White House news conference after their first face-to-face meeting.

Breaking with past traditions, Trump also said that he will be open to alternate solutions that does not necessarily involve a two-state solution to the six-decade-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"It is something that is very different, hasn't been discussed before. It's actually a much bigger deal -- much more important deal in a sense," he said.

"I'm looking at two-state and one-state, and I like the one that both parties like. I'm very happy with the one that both parties like. I can live with either one," he added.

"We'll work something out but, I think a deal will be made... It might be a bigger and better deal than people in this room even understand," he further said.

Trump also said that his administration is very seriously looking at moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem.

"As far as the embassy moving to Jerusalem, I'd love to see that happen. We're looking at it very, very strongly," Trump said.

Relocating the US Embassy to Jerusalem will signal American recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

While not committing to the Trump request to put a hold on settlement, Netanyahu set two prerequisites for peace with the Palestinians.

"First, the Palestinians must recognise the Jewish state. They have to stop calling for Israel's destruction, they have to stop educating their people for Israel's destruction," he said.

"Second, in any peace agreement, Israel must retain the overriding security control over the entire area west of the Jordan River because if we don't, we know what will happen. Because otherwise, we'll get another radical Islamic terrorist state in the Palestinian areas exploding the peace, exploding the Middle East," he said.

"Now unfortunately, the Palestinians vehemently reject both prerequisites for peace," he rued and squarely blamed Palestinians for the failure of arriving at a peace deal.

"The persistent Palestinian refusal to recognise a Jewish state in any boundary, this persistent rejectionism, that's the reason we don't have peace. Now that has to change, I want it to change," he said.

Netanyahu said that he believe that the great opportunity for peace comes from a regional approach from involving

Arab partners in the pursuit of a broader peace with the Palestinians.

The Israeli Parliament had earlier this month approved the so-called "Regulation Bill"™ in a 60-52 vote. Under the new legislation, about 3,850 housing units in dozens of outposts built illegally on privately owned Palestinian lands will be retroactively legalised. Israel will seize the lands, offering compensations or alternative land to the landowners, even if they do not agree to waive their property.

The outposts were erected by ultra-right settlers without permits from the Israeli authorities but the governments often have turned a blind eye to their construction. There are additional 120 settlements that Israel considered as legal.

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