

WEST BANK ANNEXATION
UN, EU
warns Israel

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

The United Nations and the European Union warned Israel not to annex parts of the occupied West Bank. The UN's special Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov on Thursday said such a move would be a "devastating blow" to the internationally-backed two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the EU said annexing Palestinian territory "would constitute a serious violation of international law".

Earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main rival Benny Gantz signed a coalition agreement that includes a clause to advance plans to annex parts of the West Bank, including Israeli settlements, starting on July 1. In a video briefing with the UN Security Council, Mladenov warned that "the dangerous prospect of annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied West Bank is a growing threat", and said such a move would violate international law.

The envoy said annexation would also "deal a devastating blow to the two-state solution, close the door to a renewal of negotiations, and threaten efforts to advance regional peace."

Separately on Thursday, the EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said the bloc of 27 member countries does not recognise Israeli sovereignty over the Palestinian territory and that it will "continue to closely monitor the situation and its broader implications, and will act accordingly".

Netanyahu's pro-settler base is eager to move forward with annexation while the friendly administration of US President Donald Trump is in office.

The White House's Mideast plan envisions leaving parts of the West Bank under permanent Israeli control. The Palestinians have rejected the plan as biased.



Demonstrators leave fake body bags outside the Trump International Hotel during a protest critical of the Trump administration's handling of the coronavirus outbreak in Washington on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Experts trash dangerous idea

AFP, Paris

Experts yesterday dismissed as reckless and irresponsible US President Donald Trump's suggestion of injecting disinfectant to treat patients with Covid-19 as global death toll crossed 190,000.

"Is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside (the body)?", Trumps asked at his daily briefing Thursday, having said that disinfectant knocks out the virus "in a minute".

"Because, you see, it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs," Trump continued, apparently referring to disinfectant. "So it would be interesting to check that out."

In interviews and on social networks, doctors and others dismissed Trump's idea out-of-hand.

"This notion of injecting or ingesting any type of cleansing product into the body is irresponsible, and it's dangerous," Vin Gupta, pulmonologist and global health expert told NBC News.

"It's a common method that people utilise when they want to kill themselves."

Walter Shaub, former director of the US Office of Government Ethics, said Trump's daily briefings are doing more harm than good.

"As a public service, please stop airing these coronavirus briefings, they are endangering lives," he tweeted. "And please do not drink or inject disinfectant."

TRUMP'S 'DISINFECTANT' THEORY



Muslims start Ramadan under lockdown
US Congress approves a \$483 billion stimulus plan
EU leaders haggle over virus rescue deal
Sunlight destroys virus quickly: US scientists

The bizarre suggestion came as, in a briefing at the White House, scientists said they had found that the virus was quickly destroyed by sunlight, raising hopes that the pandemic could ease as the northern hemisphere summer approaches.

It prompted Trump to suggest researchers investigate whether it would be possible to inject light and disinfectant into the body to cure the disease -- comments that raised eyebrows among medical professionals.

Meanwhile, Muslims across the world began marking the holy month of Ramadan under unprecedented coronavirus lockdowns yesterday as the US added another half a trillion dollars to

an economic support package and Europe groped towards its own huge rescue plan.

The economic devastation wreaked by lockdowns that have half the planet indoors is huge, with the world facing its worst downturn since the Great Depression.

US lawmakers covered their faces with masks and voted in small groups to approve a \$483 billion stimulus plan, on top of the \$2.2 trillion package already enacted.

The money will back small businesses on the brink of bankruptcy and hard-pressed hospitals as the American economy reels, with more than 26 million people losing their jobs since the pandemic hit.

In Europe, leaders haggled by video conference over their own package that could top one trillion euros, as the European Central Bank chief warned of the risk of "acting too little, too late".

The 27-nation European Union agreed to ask the bloc's executive arm to come up with a rescue plan by May 6, sources told AFP.

The crucial economic discussions come as parts of Europe slowly loosen restrictions after progress on reducing the number of new infections.

But experts have warned of a possible second wave of cases, and authorities are ramping up their capacity to deal with it in Germany -- where curbs on public life have been eased recently.

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
LATEST UPDATES

190,000 DEATHS WORLDWIDE
At least 190,989 people have died worldwide since the epidemic surfaced in China in December, nearly two thirds of whom are in Europe, according to an AFP tally at 1100 GMT Friday based on official sources. More than 2,719,450 cases have now been reported in 193 countries or territories. The United States has the most deaths of any country with 49,963. Italy is the second hardest-hit country, with 25,549 dead. Spain follows with 22,524 then France with 21,856 and Britain with 18,738.

DRUG "WEEKS TO MONTHS" AWAY
The world is "weeks to months" away from knowing what drugs will work to fight Covid-19, said Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, the technical lead for the World Health Organization's coronavirus response. The WHO is tracking a number of studies that are trying to determine exactly how many people have been infected around the world, Van Kerkhove said.

3,176 DIE IN US IN 24 HOURS
The novel coronavirus has killed 3,176 people in last 24 hours, according to a tally Thursday from Johns Hopkins University. The deaths were recorded in the 24 hours up to 8:30 pm (0030 GMT Friday). The US, the worst-hit country in the world, now has 866,646 confirmed cases of coronavirus, up 26,971 from the previous day.

\$1.0 TRILLION IN DEBT RELIEF
UN called Thursday for a global debt deal, including the creation of an international body to oversee "substantive debt relief" to prevent an economic catastrophe in poorer nations amid the pandemic. The agency reiterated a call from last month to grant \$1.0 trillion in debt relief to the hardest-hit developing countries, and called for the creation of an international developing country debt authority to oversee the programme.

EU DITHERS OVER RESCUE
The 27 leaders of the European Union ask officials to come up with a plan to recover from the economic devastation wrought by the coronavirus pandemic by early May. The divided leaders, meeting by video conference, put off until later decisions on demands from debt-laden southern states such as Spain and Italy, both badly hit by the disease, for help from the richer north.

POMPEO'S NEW ALLEGATION
US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo charged Thursday that China may have known of the new coronavirus as early as November, renewing accusations that Beijing has not been transparent and again drawing ire from China. "You'll recall that the first cases of this were known by the Chinese government maybe as early as November, but certainly by mid-December," Pompeo said in an interview.

SPAIN: LOWEST TOLL IN A MONTH
Spain saw 367 people die of novel coronavirus over the past 24 hours for the lowest daily number of deaths in four weeks, government said yesterday. The latest figures are the lowest daily toll since March 22 when 394 deaths were reported. That brought the total fatalities from the pandemic in the country to 22,524, the third-highest number of virus deaths in the world after the United States and Italy.

SOURCE: AFP

India to double daily virus testing capacity by May 31

AGENCIES

India is going to almost double its present daily capacity of conducting tests for coronavirus infection by the end of next month, said Health Minister Harsh Vardhan.

"We are going to increase the numbers of government labs to 300 and ramp up our present daily testing capacity of 55,000 to one lakh per day by 31st May, 2020," he said during a virtual meeting between health ministers of WHO member-countries last night.

Vardhan said India stands on "a better footing" in combating Covid-19 than the rest of the world "because of the valuable and sincere services of our corona warriors," reports our New Delhi correspondent.

Referring to the active surveillance efforts made by government agencies to monitor potential victims or carriers of the disease, he said "we know the enemy and its whereabouts. We are able to check this enemy through community surveillance, issuance of various advisories, cluster containment and dynamic strategy."

Meanwhile, parts of India have recorded dramatic falls in mortality rates after a nationwide lockdown was imposed to fight the new coronavirus, suggesting there has not been an undetected surge in virus-



related deaths.

All over the world, mortality rates are being scrutinised to determine the true impact of the coronavirus, which emerged in China late last year and is known to have infected more than 2.7 million people globally, with over 190,000 deaths.

While death rates in some countries have risen sharply in recent weeks, in India the opposite seems to be happening, at least in some places, leaving hospitals, funeral parlours and cremation sites wondering what is going on, reports Reuters.

"It's very surprising for us," said Shruthi Reddy, chief executive officer of Anthyesti Funeral Services, which operates in the eastern city of Kolkata and the southern tech hub of Bengaluru.

Taliban reject Ramadan truce offer

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban have dismissed a government call for a Ramadan ceasefire in Afghanistan, saying a truce is "not rational" as they ramp up attacks on government forces.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani appealed to the militants to lay down their arms for the Islamic holy month that began yesterday, as the country battles the growing coronavirus pandemic.

Under a landmark US-Taliban deal signed earlier this year, the Afghan government and the insurgents were by now supposed to have concluded a prisoner swap and started talks aimed at bringing about a comprehensive ceasefire. The latest round of bickering comes after dozens of Afghan security forces personnel were killed in a fresh wave of violence launched by the insurgents this week.



A man dressed as Hindu deity of death Yamaraj (C) to raise awareness about the coronavirus interacts with people on a street during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Kolkata, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

World Bank fears 'secondary' health crisis

AFP, Paris

Diverting the scarce healthcare resources of developing countries to the rapidly expanding COVID-19 pandemic could see a 45 percent jump in child and maternal mortality before the end of the year, an international health consortium warned Thursday.

Unless poorer nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America get a rapid infusion of drugs, medical oxygen, protective equipment and on-the-ground assistance, the global South is likely see 1.2 million children and 57,000 mothers die over the next six months, according to a study under review by The Lancet Global Health.

The new coronavirus outbreak "could reverse decades of progress," said Muhammad Ali Pate, global director for health, nutrition and population



peer review.

While Europe and North America have felt the brunt of the pandemic, with some two million confirmed cases out of a world total of 2.6 million, lockdowns have slowed its spread on these continents even as the virus picks up pace elsewhere.

In Africa, the week leading to April 21 saw a 43 percent jump in COVID-19 cases and a 38 percent increase in the number of COVID-19-related deaths, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported Wednesday.

Trump Kim's health report 'incorrect'

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump on Thursday rejected reports that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was ailing, criticizing his frequent nemesis CNN for running the story.

"I think the report was incorrect, let me just put it that way," Trump told reporters. "I'm hearing they used old documents."

Trump declined to say if he had direct knowledge from North Korea that Kim was fine.

He instead attacked cable news network CNN.

"I think it was a fake report done by CNN," Trump said at a daily briefing on the coronavirus pandemic, before refusing to take further questions from a journalist of the network.

CNN, quoting what it said was an anonymous US official, on Monday reported that Washington was "monitoring intelligence" that Kim was in "grave danger" after undergoing surgery.

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