

Obama must press Israel for 1967 borders: Abbas

World backs US MidEast plan

AFP, Paris

Palestinian leaders Friday pressured US President Barack Obama to insist that Israel must accept a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders as Key global players backed US call for a Palestinian state including land lost in the 1967 war.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas reacted angrily after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu bluntly told Obama in White House talks that Israel could not return to the "indefensible" 1967 territorial lines.

"Netanyahu's position is an official rejection of Obama's initiative, of international legitimacy and of international law," Palestinian spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina said.

"We call on President Obama and the Mideast Quartet to pressure Netanyahu to accept the 1967 borders," he said.

The diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East, which includes the

European Union, the United Nations, the United States and Russia, expressed "strong support" for Obama's statement that a Palestinian state should include land that Israel has occupied since the 1967 war.

European nations in particular have sought to relaunch the peace process using the Quartet, which set out a roadmap to peace under a land-for-security deal.

Israel would have to give up territory, while all Palestinian factions, notably the Hamas rulers in Gaza, would have to recognize Israel's right to exist and end violence.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton "warmly welcomes President Obama's confirmation that the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines," a spokeswoman said.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Obama's speech was "a very important message for the Middle East peace process" and the proposal "a good path that both sides should consider".

In London, British Foreign Secretary William Hague said he supported Obama's "clear message that the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps."

In the Arab world, Jordan hailed the American president who it said "for the first time clearly spoke of his vision for the establishment of a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders and which must enjoy autonomy."

Lebanese prime minister-designate Najib Mikati said Obama's speech made no mention of Palestinian refugees' right to return -- a key concern for his country which is estimated to host up to 400,000 Palestinian refugees.

Syria's official SANA news agency said Obama's speech offered nothing new but "reaffirmed the deep-rooted and unwavering support for Israel's security."

Alone in outright condemnation, Iran slammed Obama's statement as a sign of "despair".



People with their mouths taped up participate in a protest against Spain's economic crisis and its sky-high jobless rate at the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid on Friday. Some 25,000 people, according to Spanish media, crammed the central Puerta del Sol square to stage a silent protest defying a ban on such gathering.

Russia plays down missile differences with US

AFP, Moscow

Russia said yesterday it may be ready to remove its objections to the US-backed missile defence shield for Europe if it receives a formal security pledge from the United States.

The comments by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov suggest an easing of Moscow's position and precede a meeting between US President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart on the sidelines of a May 26-27 G8 summit in France.

"We are proposing, and asking that it be put in writing, that the missile defence system for Europe is not directed against any of the participating states -- not Nato, Russia or other European states," said Lavrov.

Syrian troops 'kill five mourners at funeral'

Death toll in Friday's clashes rises to 44

AGENCIES

Syrian security forces have killed at least five people and wounded at least 12 when they fired live rounds into a funeral crowd in Homs, activists said.

The funeral, for protesters killed on Friday, was taking place at the city's Nasr cemetery.

Witnesses reported that the shooting began as mourners were leaving the cemetery.

Security forces shot dead at least 44 people on Friday as mass protests swept the country after prayers.

Ammar Qurabi, head of the National Organisation for Human Rights, said 26 people were killed in the province of Idlib and 13 in Homs. Two people were also killed in the eastern town of Deir Ezzor, one in Daraya, a suburb of the capital Damascus, one in the coastal city of Latakia and one in central Hama.

The official news agency SANA for its part put the death toll at 17 -- among them police and security troops -- and blamed the violence on "armed groups."

Fridays have become a rallying point in the nine-week revolt that has posed the greatest challenge to President Bashar al-Assad's 11-year rule.

Protesters were initially emboldened by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and more lately by punitive international sanctions on Assad and top aides.

Assad's regime has responded to the violence with a brutal crackdown that has left at least 850 people dead and hundreds injured, according to rights groups. Thousands more have been arrested and tortured, activists say.

Meanwhile, US President Barack Obama expressed "acute concern" about the situation in the country.

In a policy speech on Thursday Obama said: "President Assad now has a choice... He can lead that transition or get out of the way."

The European Union too has placed sanctions on several Assad aides although not on the president himself.

IMF seeks new chief by June 30

THE NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE

The executive board of the International Monetary Fund said Friday it intends to select a new managing director by the end of June.

The board is seeking a successor to Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who resigned this week after being charged with sexually assaulting a maid at a New York hotel.

Kemal Dervis, the Turkish contender, took himself out of the running for the position on Friday.

Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner said Friday the United States wanted the post filled quickly.

In the past, selection of a managing director, which is made by the 24 representatives of the IMF's shareholder countries, has taken months.

END-OF-WORLD

Three predictions made for this month

AFP, Washington

An aging Christian fundamentalist has predicted that the Rapture -- phase one of the end of the world, when good Christians go up to heaven -- will happen Saturday, but is not the only one to pinpoint this month.

Harold Camping came up with his prediction using a calculation that started with the year of the Great Flood, 4990 BC, added 7,000 years because, in the Bible, God "reminds us that one day is as 1,000 years," and then subtracted one because of a glitch when passing from the old to the new testament calendars.

"Because the year 2011 AD is exactly 7,000 years after 4990 BC when the flood began, the Bible has given us absolute proof that the year 2011 is the end of the world during the Day of Judgment," the website of Family Radio, the worldwide evangelizing

network run by Camping, says.

"Amazingly, May 21, 2011 is the 17th day of the second month of the Biblical calendar of our day. Remember, the flood waters also began on the 17th day of the 2nd month, in the year 4990 BC," it says.

Camping isn't the only one who has predicted the apocalypse for May of this year.

Last week, Italians fled Rome for the suburbs and distant holiday destinations because a prediction made decades earlier by a self-taught seismologist said the Italian capital would be hit by a massive earthquake on May 11, 2011.

Rome was not hit by an earthquake that day, but a quake did hit the Spanish city of Lorca, killing nine people.

And in Taiwan, self-styled prophet Wang Chao-hung predicted that a magnitude-14 earthquake would hit the island nation, also on May 11.

NEWS IN brief

N Korean leader visits China

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il headed yesterday to southern China on day two of a trip which experts said was aimed at showing he was still in charge of the impoverished and starving communist state.

Previous trips by Kim Jong-Il to China have been shrouded in secrecy, with state-controlled media in both countries reporting them only after they end.

Iran arrests 30 suspected US spies

AFP, Tehran

The Iranian intelligence ministry announced that it had uncovered and dismantled a network suspected of spying for the United States and made 30 arrests, state television reported yesterday.

"Due to the massive intelligence and counter-intelligence work by Iranian intelligence agents, a complex espionage and sabotage network linked to America's spy organisation was uncovered and dismantled," a ministry statement read out on the

Two children killed, 21 injured in Malaysia landslide

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A landslide caused by heavy rains hit an orphanage in Malaysia yesterday, killing two children and burying at least 21 others, a local lawmaker said.

The incident took place at around 2:30pm local time at the Children's Hidayah Madrasah Al-Taqwa orphanage in Hulu Langat, just south of the capital Kuala Lumpur.

The tragedy struck when the children were practising the traditional Malay drums, "kompang"

Ivory Coast's President Alassane Ouattara inaugurated

BBC ONLINE

Alassane Ouattara has been formally inaugurated as Ivory Coast's president yesterday.

The guest list included Nicolas Sarkozy, president of the former colonial power France, several African heads of state and the UN Secretary

Royal couple back from honeymoon

BBC Online

Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge have returned to the UK yesterday from their 10-day honeymoon in the Seychelles, St James's Palace has said.

Royal officials had earlier declined to confirm where the couple were staying though media speculation had focussed on the Indian Ocean archipelago.

The palace said couple had "thoroughly enjoyed their time together."

They thanked the Seychelles government for helping to make "the honeymoon such a memorable and special 10 days".

The couple left for their honeymoon a few days after they were married on 29 April.

Attack on Nato fuel truck kills 16 in Pakistan

REUTERS, Landikotal

At least 16 people were killed in northwest Pakistan yesterday after a bomb attack claimed by a militant group hit a truck carrying fuel supplies for Nato forces in Afghanistan, the latest attack in an upsurge in violence since Osama bin Laden was killed.

It took place near the Torkham border crossing in the Khyber region, the main route for moving supplies to Nato and American forces in Afghanistan.

Police officials said the first blast was caused by a bomb. In another attack in the same region, a bomb struck 16 Nato fuel trucks late on Friday, setting them on fire. No one was hurt.

Militants have stepped up attacks in Pakistan, an unstable US ally, since US special forces killed al-Qaeda leader bin Laden in the garrison town of Abbottabad this month.

Abdullah Azzam Brigade, a militant group affiliated with Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for both attacks on the Nato trucks.

The attacks on the Nato trucks in Khyber came hours after the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for a bomb attack on a US consulate convoy in the city of Peshawar.

One Pakistani was killed and 12 people were injured, including two lightly wounded US nationals.

SEX SCANDAL

The wives of Strauss-Kahn

TIME ONLINE

When the news broke that Dominique Strauss-Kahn, 62, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), had been arrested for sexual assault and attempted rape in New York City, his wife Anne Sinclair wasted no time in declaring her unquestioned belief in his innocence.

The heiress to an art-gallery fortune, Sinclair, also 62, is a celebrity in her own right, having been an award-winning radio and television journalist in France. She has stood by him in the recent past too when her husband was reprimanded by the IMF after his relationship with a Hungarian economist in 2008.

Sinclair is Strauss-Kahn's third wife. He was first married in 1967 to Hélène Dumas, whom he met in 1963 in the south of France when she was 16 and he was 14, when he was in the equivalent of 12th grade.

When his parents opposed their living together, the pair got married. They would have a daughter, Vanessa.

He and Dumas appeared to be inseparable as Strauss-Kahn became active in leftist political circles and befriended many of the



Strauss-Kahn with Anne Sinclair

people who'd later become Socialist Party heavyweights like himself.

As part of that networking, Strauss-Kahn met a communications expert who inspired him to undergo a radical makeover in 1983 that included him shaving his beard, losing his eyeglasses and updating his wardrobe. That expert was Brigitte Guillemette. And in 1984, he married her after what is described as a civil but rapid rupture with his childhood sweetheart, Dumas.

Another rupture would follow after Strauss-Kahn was introduced to Sinclair, a rising TV journalist. Strauss-Kahn was introduced to the then married Sinclair in 1989 by advisers feeling he needed more professional media coaching. He reportedly fell for her immediately, calling her several times a day.

Strauss-Kahn and Sinclair finally married in 1991 after divorcing their respective spouses.

Guillemette, like Sinclair, has acknowledged that Strauss-Kahn cheated on her, but both the two women heatedly contest notions that there was anything predatory or violent in his character.


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