



GAZA CITY



EGYPT



LEBANON



PAKISTAN



IRAN



MALAYSIA

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

(Top left) Protesters run for cover during clashes with Israeli troops as Palestinians call for a "day of rage" in response to US President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, near the border with Israel in the east of Gaza City, yesterday. Thousands of Palestinians demonstrated, scores were hurt and at least one was killed in the clashes with Israeli troops yesterday. Across the Muslim world, thousands more demonstrators took to the streets expressing solidarity with the Palestinians.

US RECOGNITION OF JERUSALEM AS ISRAEL CAPITAL

Trump fans flames of global terror

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Several Western foreign ministries, including the UK and US, have issued travel warnings for the Middle East and North Africa following US President Donald Trump's announcement that his country would recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

The move, designed to satisfy Trump's domestic right-wing voter base, has been met with anxiety and furious protest in the rest of the world.

Of all the US's shocked allies, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi had perhaps the sharpest rebuke for what he said was Trump's "reckless" move. Trump should "retreat from that decision in order to stop a dangerous escalation that leads to extremism and creates an atmosphere which helps terrorism," the Iraqi leader said.

With Islamic State almost defeated in the country - with the help of US air power - Abadi's words should serve as a strong warning.

Islamist movements across the world view the recognition of the Holy City as Israel's capital at the expense of Muslims as a call to arms.

"Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital presents opportunity for jihad," Oxford University analyst Elisabeth Kendall warned on Twitter.

IS's daily media dump on Thursday released mocked-up images of Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi King Salman and his son, Crown Prince Mohammed, blaming them for the destruction of the holy Muslim site.

Al-Qaeda also quickly moved to capitalise on the current outrage. Al Qaeda-linked east African group al-Shabab also urged "all Muslims to raise arms and defend the blessed al-Aqsa from the Zionist occupiers supported by America, because what was taken by force can only be restored by force".

Similar statements were issued across several Taliban media outlets in Afghanistan, while Hezbollah-friendly Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar declared "death to America" in its Thursday front page.

US VP Pence not welcome

Says Palestinian official; Egypt's grand imam cancel meeting

AGENCIES

A senior Palestinian official said Thursday that US Vice President Mike Pence was "not welcome in Palestine" during his upcoming regional visit after a White House decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

"The American vice president is not welcome in Palestine," Jibril Rajoub, a senior member of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah, told AFP. Rajoub also signalled that Abbas would not meet with Pence during his planned visit later this month. "And President Abbas will not welcome him because of the statements he made" about Jerusalem.

Pence is travel to Egypt and Israel in the second half of December, a visit that has taken on extra significance in the wake of President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Jerusalem is home to sites holy to Muslims, Jews and Christians.

Al-Azhar's Grand Imam Ahmed al-Tayeb also cancelled a meeting with Mike Pence.

In a statement, Al-Azhar, Egypt's highest Sunni institution, said Tayeb had reversed his previous decision to meet Pence, who is due to travel to Egypt and Israel in the second half of

TRUMP'S JERUSALEM MOVE



White House warns scrapping talks counter-productive

December.

Meanwhile, The White House warned that cancelling a planned meeting between Abbas and Pence in the wake of the US policy shift on Jerusalem would be "counterproductive."

A White House aide said Pence "still

plans to meet with Abbas as scheduled" and "believes it would be counterproductive for him to pull out of the meeting."

Trump's move to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel sparked Palestinian protests, sporadic clashes and a call for a new intifada as fears grew of fresh bloodshed in the region.

Some Palestinian leaders have indicated that they no longer consider the United States an honest broker in the peace process.

Breaking off ties with Washington in such a public way would be risky, but the 82-year-old Palestinian leader could be under fierce domestic pressure to make the snub.

Washington's major Western and Arab allies have warned that Trump's decision on Jerusalem could doom attempts to achieve what the US president has called the "ultimate deal" of Israeli-Palestinian peace, reported Reuters.

Stop meddling in Lebanon

World powers urge Saudi Arabia, Iran

REUTERS, Paris

World powers yesterday attempted to shore up Lebanon's stability by pushing Saudi Arabia and Iran to stop interfering in its politics and urging Hezbollah to rein in its regional activities.

Lebanon plunged into crisis on Nov 4 when Saad al-Hariri resigned as prime minister while he was in Saudi Arabia, saying he feared assassination and criticising the Saudis' regional arch-rival Iran along with its Lebanese ally Hezbollah.

After international pressure and negotiations between Lebanese political factions, he rescinded his resignation on Tuesday and his coalition government, which includes Hezbollah, reaffirmed a state policy of staying out of conflicts in Arab states.

The International Lebanon Support Group (GIS), a body that includes the five members of the UN Security Council --

Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- met in Paris yesterday to try to reinforce Hariri's hand to prevent a new escalation.

"Disassociation applies to everyone - inside and outside," Jean-Yves Le Drian said at a news conference with Hariri after the meeting.



Saad al-Hariri

"These principles were reaffirmed this morning," he said, later referring specifically to both Iran and Saudi Arabia. Without naming Hezbollah, he urged all sides not to "import regional tensions" into Lebanon.

Hariri said that any breach of the policy of non-interference would drag Lebanon back into the "danger zone".

The meeting had earlier been opened by President Emmanuel Macron. He has invested political capital in the crisis and leveraged France's close relations with both Lebanon and Saudi Arabia to secure a deal that saw Hariri travel to Paris and open the door to a resolution of the crisis last month.

NEWSIN brief

Hope for German coalition rises

AFP, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel will meet leaders of the Social Democrats next Wednesday after the labour party gave the green light to exploratory talks on ending the country's political stand-off. At a fractious party congress on Thursday, Schulz won members' approval for "open-ended" talks that could lead to either a new right-left "grand coalition", a Merkel minority government or, if negotiations fail, new elections.

US cop gets 20 years for killing black man

AFP, Charleston

A white former US cop was sentenced to 20 years in prison Thursday over the fatal shooting of an unarmed black motorist -- a case that sparked mass protests and anger over excessive use of force by police. The death of Walter Scott in April 2015 was one of the most shocking in a series of high-profile US police shootings, often involving minorities, that have deepened tensions and added to distrust between officers and the communities they serve.

EU, Japan finalise free trade deal

AFP, Brussels

The EU and Japan yesterday announced they have finalised terms for a giant free trade deal. The trade deal, which the EU called its biggest ever, must still be signed and ratified by both sides who first agreed to its broad outlines in July. Once completed it will forge an economic zone of 600 million people with 30 per cent of global GDP.



RUSSIA, CLINTON CASES

FBI chief Wray rejects Trump criticism

AFP, Washington

FBI Director Christopher Wray defended his agency Thursday against President Donald Trump's criticisms, amid a mounting Republican push aimed at discrediting the probe into alleged collusion between the US leader's campaign and Russia in last year's election.

Trump laid into the Federal Bureau of Investigation last weekend, accusing its agents of political bias and Wray's predecessor James Comey, whom Trump fired in May, of lying. "Its reputation is in Tatters - worst in History," Trump wrote on Twitter of the FBI.

Republicans on the committee pressed Wray hard over allegations that pro-Clinton, anti-Trump FBI investigators and lawyers controlled both last year's probe into Clinton's use of classified material on a private email server, and special prosecutor Robert Mueller's ongoing investigation into possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Moscow to tilt the White House race.

Trump and Republicans appear to be building such a case to undermine the Mueller probe, which has already unleashed charges against four former Trump aides and increasingly menaces the White House and Trump's family.

NORTH KOREA THREAT

Japan to buy long-range missiles

AFP, Tokyo

Japan plans to purchase offensive air-to-surface missiles to counter North Korea's rising military threat, its defence minister said yesterday, a move likely to stir debate over its decades-long pacifist policy.

Itsunori Onodera said the ministry intends to request a special budget for the fiscal year starting April 2018 to purchase long-range cruise missiles deployed on fighter jets.

According to local media, the ministry plans to buy JASSM and LRASM long-range, air-to-ground missiles with a range of some 900 kilometres from US firms.

It also plans to buy Joint Strike Missiles with a range of some 500 kilometres from Norway's Kongsberg Defence and Aerospace, news reports said.

The move will likely draw controversy as Tokyo has long maintained an exclusively defence-oriented policy under its pacifist constitution, which bans the use of force as a means of settling international disputes.

Japan's military policy has been restricted to self-defence and relies heavily on the US to attack enemy territory under the Japan-US security alliance.



Activists burn a caricature of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte near the Malacanang palace in Manila yesterday. The demonstrators denounced the government's war on drugs campaign, the extension of martial law in Mindanao and the crackdown on activists, while calling for Duterte's ouster from office.

PHOTO: AFP

Marriage does not change women's religious status

Says India's SC during hearing on a Parsi woman's rights

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court has said a woman does not lose her religious identity after marrying a man from another faith until she converts and law does not sanction the concept of a wife's religion getting merged with her husband's faith after inter-religion marriage.

"There is no law which says that a woman loses religious identity after marrying a man from another faith... Moreover, the Special Marriage Act is there and allows that two persons can marry and maintain their respective religious identities," said a five-judge Constitution bench, headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra on Thursday. The bench was dealing with a legal question whether a Parsi woman loses her religious identity if she marries a man from a different religion.

The bench, also comprising Justices A K

Sikri, A M Khanwilkar, D Y Chandrachud and Ashok Bhushan, asked senior advocate Gopal Subramaniam, representing the Valsad Parsi Trust, to take instruction and apprise it on December 14 as to whether it can allow Goolrokh M Gupta, a Parsi woman who had married a Hindu, to attend the last rites of her parents.

Gupta has challenged the customary law, upheld by the Gujarat state High Court in 2010, that a Parsi woman marrying a Hindu loses her religious rights in the Parsi community and hence, loses the right to visit the Tower of Silence in the event of her father's death to perform the last rites.

The Tower is used for funerary purposes by the adherents of the Zoroastrian faith, in which the traditional practice for disposal of the dead involves the exposure of the corpse to the sun and vultures.



Modi faces key test as Gujarat votes today

AFP, Surendranagar

India's Narendra Modi faces a key test of his popularity after a series of controversial economic reforms when the state where he forged his political career goes to the polls today.

Modi built his reputation as an economic reformer in his prosperous home state of Gujarat, which boomed under his rule, attracting investment from around the globe.

But turning around the national economy has proved more difficult and the Modi government reforms have hurt the very constituency of traders and small business owners who were his biggest supporters in the western state.

US is like Nazi Germany in the 30s: Obama

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Barack Obama has warned of the fragility of American democracy, making reference to the rise of Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

Speaking during a question and answer session at the Economic Club of Chicago on Tuesday, the former US president warned against growing nativism in America.

"We have to tend to this garden of democracy or else things could fall apart quickly," Obama said.

He went on to compare the situation to Germany in the 1930s where, despite a long history of high-level cultural and scientific achievements (and the existence of a functioning democracy), Adolph Hitler nonetheless rose to power, reported Crain's Chicago Business.

"Sixty million people died," he added. "So, you've got to pay attention. And vote."

Although Obama did not mention Donald Trump by name, some believed his comments were aimed at the current US president and his "Make America Great Again" rhetoric - which critics argue has fuelled nationalism.

Trump has been accused of fuelling anti-Muslim sentiment across the US.

In November, the President came under fire for retweeting inflammatory videos from the Twitter account of a British far-right, ultra-nationalist figure, which contained anti-Muslim content.

His actions were publicly rebuked by prime minister Theresa May, whose official spokesperson condemned the president's actions as "wrong".

