

EJECTION OF HEBRON MONITORS

US blocks UNSC statement

AFP, United Nations

The United States on Wednesday blocked a proposed UN Security Council statement expressing regret over Israel's decision to end an international observer force in the West Bank city of Hebron, diplomats said.

Kuwait and Indonesia had circulated the draft statement following a closed-door council meeting during which many countries expressed concern about the Israeli move.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced last week that he would not renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), accusing the mission led by Norway of bias.

The 64-member team of unarmed observers was established in Hebron following a massacre of Palestinians in 1994.

The proposed statement was to express the Security Council's "regret" about Israel's "unilateral decision" and call for "calm and restraint" in Hebron, according to the text seen by AFP.

The text warned Israel that it has an obligation under international law "to protect the Palestinian civilian population in Hebron" as well as the rest of the occupied territories.

The United States, which has firmly defended Israel's policies at the United Nations, moved quickly to block the proposed response, diplomats said. Council statements require unanimous approval.

Kuwait's Ambassador Mansour al-Otaibi said the council would discuss a proposed visit to the Israeli occupied territories for a close-up look at the situation on the ground.

The Hebron mission is tasked with promoting a sense of security for Palestinians in Hebron, the largest city in the West Bank.

Hebron is holy to both Muslims and Jews and has been a flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



Trump back to combative self after appeal for compromise

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump needed barely a day after a soaring State of the Union speech to revert to his usual combative self Wednesday, branding an opponent a "hacker" and investigations into his allegedly suspicious dealings with Russia "harassment."

Trump's address to Congress on Tuesday made repeated appeals to optimism and the spirit of cooperation.

Although he goaded opposition Democrats by lashing out against "socialism" and insisting, as ever, on his controversial US-Mexico wall project, he spent much of the speech in unusually compromising mode.

At least, until around lunchtime Wednesday.

Asked by reporters about the Democrat-led intelligence committee in the House of Representatives expanding a probe into his Russia connections, Trump reverted to his habit of name calling.

He labelled Adam Schiff, the chairman of the committee, "a political hack who's trying to build a name for himself."

Trump was infuriated by Schiff's decision to boost an already sensitive look by the committee at Trump's dealings with Russia.

Trump said he is being victimized.

The intelligence committee's investigation will run parallel to a major existing probe run by special prosecutor Robert Mueller into explosive allegations that Russian agents colluded with Trump in his 2016 election campaign.

Drug-resistant TB a 'blinking red' threat

AFP, New Delhi

Deadly, drug-resistant tuberculosis -- as lethal as Ebola and tough to treat in even the best hospitals -- is a "blinking red" worldwide threat, the head of a global health fund warned in an interview with AFP.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is on a mission to eradicate the three epidemics and plans to spend around \$12 billion on it over the next three years.

"We should all be more worried about multidrug-resistant TB than we are. It gets nothing like the level of attention it should do," Peter Sands, Global Fund's head, told AFP during a visit to New Delhi.

Tuberculosis has become resistant to antimicrobials in an estimated 600,000 cases worldwide.

The disease "does not obey borders or need visas, nor pay attention to how wealthy you are. At the moment, about 25 percent of those 600,000 cases are being diagnosed and treated," said Sands, who became head of the organisation last year.

"If you look across the threats to global health security, this is one where the light should be blinking red."

The UN has set the goal of eradicating AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis epidemics by 2030.

"The blunt truth is that we are not on track for that ambition," Sands said.



Rescuers work at the site of a collapsed building in Kartal district of Istanbul, Turkey. Inset, A woman is being rescued. An eight-storey apartment building in Istanbul collapsed on Wednesday leaving at least six people dead and 13 injured, Turkish media reported. It was not immediately clear why the building had collapsed.

PHOTO: AFP

EU agrees to more talks

Says will not reopen Withdrawal Agreement as May visits Brussels; Corbyn sets terms for backing UK PM

REUTERS, Brussels/london

The European Union yesterday promised to work with Theresa May on "whether a way through can be found" to avoid the disruption of a no-deal Brexit after the British prime minister demanded changes to the divorce deal to get it through parliament.

May was in Brussels yesterday to plead with EU leaders to change the Withdrawal Agreement she negotiated last year, after the British parliament rejected it overwhelmingly in January.

A cool handshake for the cameras with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker did little to conceal the tension, just 50 days before Britain could leave the European Union without measures in place to keep trade flowing freely.

Neither spoke, with one reporter shouting to the retreating leaders: "Is this hell, prime minister?" EU summit chair Donald Tusk said on Wednesday that Brexit promoters deserved "a special place in hell" - a blunt display of frustration in Brussels that drew condemnation from many in Britain.

"President Juncker underlined that the EU27 will not reopen the Withdrawal Agreement," the EU's executive arm said after what it described as

BREXIT IMPASSE



"robust but constructive" talks with May.

But the two tasked their teams to work on "whether a way through can be found that would gain the broadest possible support in the UK Parliament and respect" the EU's stance. They agreed to meet again before the end of the month.

Parliament, which rejected May's agreement by the biggest majority in modern British history, voted to renegotiate the deal, replacing a provision that some fear could keep British-ruled Northern Ireland under EU rules indefinitely.

Unless parliament approves a deal, Britain is on course to leave the EU on March 29 with no transition arrangement in place, a scenario that many businesses say would be catastrophic for the economy. Other options could include delaying Brexit, holding a new referendum or cancelling it altogether.

May will return to parliament on Feb 14 for a debate on the Brexit negotiations when lawmakers could again try to wrest control of the process from her, but a vote on approving the Brexit deal is likely to come later in the month.

Both May's Conservative Party and the main opposition Labour Party are formally committed to carrying out Brexit following a 2016 referendum in which voters chose to leave the EU by a margin of 52-48 percent. But both parties are deeply divided internally over how or even whether to do so.

In a letter to May released on Wednesday, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn set out five conditions for Labour to support a deal, including a "permanent and comprehensive" customs union with the bloc, which May has ruled out.

The EU sees a permanent customs union with the United Kingdom after Brexit as its preferred way out of the Irish backstop stalemate.

Germany sets new limits on Facebook

Watchdog bans feeding data from WhatsApp, Instagram to Facebook

REUTERS, Bonn

Facebook has been ordered to curb its data collection practices in Germany after a landmark ruling yesterday that the world's largest social network abused its market dominance to gather information about users without their consent.

Germany, where privacy concerns run deep, is in the forefront of a global backlash against Facebook, fuelled by last year's Cambridge Analytica scandal in which tens of millions of Facebook profiles were harvested without their users' consent.

The country's antitrust watchdog objected in particular to how Facebook pools data on people from third-party apps - including its own WhatsApp and Instagram - and its online tracking of people who aren't even members through Facebook 'like' or 'share' buttons.



"In future, Facebook will no longer be allowed to force its users to agree to the practically unrestricted collection and assigning of non-Facebook data to their Facebook accounts," Federal Cartel Office chief Andreas Mundt said.

Facebook said it would appeal the decision, the culmination of a three-year probe, saying the regulator underestimated the competition it faced, and undermined Europe-wide privacy rules that took effect last year.

"We disagree with their conclusions and intend to appeal so that people in Germany continue to benefit fully from all our services," Facebook said in a blog post.

In its order, the cartel office said Facebook would only be allowed to assign data from WhatsApp or Instagram to its main Facebook app accounts if users consented voluntarily. Collecting data from third-party websites and assigning it to Facebook would similarly require consent.

If consent is withheld, Facebook would have to substantially restrict its collection and combining of data. It should develop proposals to do this within 12 months, subject to the outcome of appeal proceedings at the Dusseldorf Higher Regional Court that should be filed within a month.

Suicide rate falls by a third globally

AFP, Paris

Suicides have fallen globally by more than a third since 1990, according to a far-reaching analysis released yesterday that highlighted profound differences in the number of men and women taking their own lives.

The World Health Organization lists suicide as a critical public health issue and estimates at least 800,000 people kill themselves every year.

Although reporting of deaths from self-harm varies between nations, data models devised by the team behind the Global Burden of Disease -- which tracks all known causes of death by country -- show a clear downward trend in global suicide rates.

In results published in the BMJ journal, the study estimated that 817,000 people killed themselves in 2016 -- a slight increase of 6.7 percent since 1990.

However, as the global population has boomed over the last three decades, the team found that the rate of suicide adjusted for age and population size fell from 16.6 to 11.2 deaths per 100,000 people -- a plunge of 32.7 percent.

"Suicide is considered a preventable cause of death and this study shows that we should continue in our efforts towards suicide prevention," said Heather Orpana, research scientist with the Public Health Agency of Canada and a collaborator on the study.

Globally, men hugely outpaced women for suicides, suffering 15.6 deaths per 100,000 compared with 7.0 for women.

In Remembrance



We fondly remember Late Ekramul Hossain, the founder of modern poultry breeding farm and hatchery in Bangladesh, on his 30th death anniversary. He established the first poultry hatchery, Eggs and Hens Ltd. at Joydebpur, Gazipur in 1964. He is the pioneer and a role model in the poultry industry in this country. His unfathomable knowledge, vision and perseverance inspire all of us. He worked closely with Unicef and various NGO's like Care, Nari Punashon and Food For The Hungry. He assisted hundreds of people with the skill and knowledge to establish commercial poultry farms and gain sustainable income thus reduce unemployment. His contribution in building war torn Bangladesh is phenomenal. He was brutally murdered in his farm house on 8th February, 1989. Today we ask for doa for his departed soul.

Family members, Well-wishers and Employees

of

Eggs And Hens Ltd.

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Outcry over Uganda plan to draw tourists with 'curvy women'

AFP, Kampala

Female Ugandan activists yesterday slammed a government campaign to use "curvy women" as a tourism "product", which has sparked a furore in the east African nation.

Tourism Minister Godfrey Kiwanda unveiled the campaign on Wednesday at a press conference attended by a bevy of curvaceous women.

"Uganda is endowed with beautiful women. Their beauty is unique and diverse. That's why we decided to use the unique beauty, the curves... to make this beauty a product to be marketed along with what we already have as a country ranging from nature, the language and food, to make it a tourist attraction," Kiwanda told AFP yesterday.

Part of the plan to market Ugandan women is a beauty pageant, Miss Curvy Uganda, to be held in June.

"The winner of the Miss Curvy contest was to be part of our tourism campaign brand using beauty as one other product of tourism," Kiwanda said.

Ugandan women were outraged at the proposal and have called for Kiwanda's resignation.

"This is a perversion. To think women can be used as sex objects in this age and time is an absurdity and we condemn it," Rita Aciro, executive director of the Uganda Women's Network, told AFP.

Ugandan entrepreneur and activist Primrose Nyonyozi Murungi launched an online petition to stop the campaign, which she said was "totally unacceptable and demeaning to us."

"Women in Uganda have been attacked while on the streets. What happens now that the government is confirming a stereotype that women are sexual objects and can be touched regardless and more so made a product of tourism," she told AFP.

She said that if the campaign was not stopped immediately, the petitioners would take their case to court.

In addition to Kiwanda's resignation, she has demanded an apology from the government.