



Israel a state 'only of the Jewish people'

Says Netanyahu

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel is "not a state of all its citizens", in a reference to the country's Palestinian Arab population, adding that all citizens, including Arabs, had equal rights.

However, in his comments on Instagram, Netanyahu referred to a deeply controversial law passed last year declaring Israel the nation-state of the Jewish people.

"Israel is not a state of all its citizens," he wrote in response to criticism from an Israeli actor, Rotem Sela.

"According to the basic nationality law we passed, Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people - and only it."

The law, passed last summer, downgraded the Arabic language from an official language to a language with "special status", making Hebrew the only official language, and stipulated that "Israel is the historic homeland of the Jewish people and they have an exclusive right to national self-determination in it".

It also states that an undivided Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.

Sela had posted on Instagram her criticism of an interview with right-wing Culture Minister Miri Regev, one of the Netanyahu cabinet's most vocal critics of the Palestinians.

"When will anyone in this government tell the public that this is a country of all its citizens, and all people are born equal," Sela wrote.

"Arabs are also human beings. And also the Druze, and the gays, and the lesbians and... gasp... leftists."



People stand near collected debris at the crash site of Ethiopia Airlines near Bishoftu, a town some 60 kilometres southeast of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, yesterday. Inset, delegates at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) world environmental forum observe a minute's silence in memory of the victims of the plane crash, at the United Nations complex within Gigiri in Nairobi, Kenya. At least 22 UN employees were among those who died when the jet crashed early Sunday.



Brexit crunch looms for May

UK PM travels to Strasbourg in a bid to finalise her deal ahead of today's crucial vote as EU talks stall

AGENCIES

British Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit strategy was in meltdown yesterday after her failure to win last-minute concessions from the European Union set the stage for another humiliating defeat of her divorce deal in parliament.

Just 18 days before the United Kingdom is due to leave the EU on March 29, there is still no ratified divorce deal and talks with the bloc have stalled as May tries to break the political deadlock in London.

May's spokesman said a "meaningful" parliamentary vote on her deal would go ahead today, even though talks with the EU are deadlocked, and the motion was set to be published later yesterday. The exact vote format was not immediately clear.

European officials said there had been no breakthrough in talks over the weekend and expressed frustration with May's attempts to secure concessions just weeks before Britain's exit.

"May has boxed herself even deeper into a corner, it seems the second meaningful vote will go ahead on Tuesday but it also seems like it won't be the last meaningful vote on

this," one EU official said.

"We really want to be over with it now. It's not going anywhere so even an extension is unlikely to break the impasse. There is not much patience or goodwill left on our side."

European Commission spokesman Margaritis Schinas said it was up to the British parliament to take important decisions on Brexit this week.

The European Union's chief negotiator Michel Barnier told AFP the British leader must negotiate with MPs rather than the EU.

"We held talks over the weekend and the negotiations now are between the government in London and the parliament in Brussels."

May was set to travel to Strasbourg yesterday in a bid to "finalise" her Brexit deal ahead of a crucial vote in the UK parliament, Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said.

The United Kingdom's tortuous crisis over EU membership is approaching its finale with an extraordinary array of options including a delay, a last-minute deal, a no-deal Brexit, a snap election or even another referendum.

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EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier

Pak PM's income drops in 3 years

Says report citing official documents

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's net income has dropped sharply by Rs 3.09 crores in the last three years even as the income of some Opposition leaders continued to rise, according to a media report yesterday.

The cricketer-turned politician's net income in the year 2015 was 3.56 crore Pakistani rupees, it dropped sharply to Rs 1.29 crore in 2016 and further down to Rs 0.47 crore in the year 2017, Dawn newspaper reported.

In 2015, a major chunk of Khan's income comprised the gain of a little over Rs 0.1 crore from the sale of an apartment in Islamabad, followed by Rs 0.98 crore of foreign remittances, the report said citing official documents.

In 2016, his total income dropped to Rs 1.29 crore of which he earned Rs 0.74 crore from "foreign services" alone.

In contrast, the income of the Leader Opposition of the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif continued to see an upward trend as his net income rose from Rs 0.76 crore in 2015 and crossed Rs 1 crore in 2017.

Former president Asif Ali Zardari's agricultural income that comprises most part of his net income stood at Rs 10.5 crore in 2015.

It rose to Rs 11.4 crore in 2016 and surged to Rs 13.4 crore in 2017. He holds 7,748 acres of land.

While Zardari's son Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari appears richer than him in terms of assets he holds in Pakistan and elsewhere, he lags behind the father in terms of income, according to the documents.

Indian polls rules kick in

Modi govt ads blitz dries up after schedule announced

REUTERS, New Delhi

An advertising blitz by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration, which saw more than 150 newspaper ads exulting over its performance in 10 days, stopped yesterday, a day after the schedule for the next general election was announced.

The election will be held over seven stages from April 11 in what will be the world's biggest democratic exercise, the Election Commission said on Sunday, when a code of conduct over election campaigning came into force.

Citing the code, the commission said "no advertisements shall be issued in electronic and print media highlighting the achievements of the govt. at the cost of public exchequer".

Leading English-language national dailies including the Times of India, the Hindustan Times and the Indian Express carried no government ads yesterday.

The New Delhi editions of the same three newspapers had 162 government ads between March 1 and March 10, according

to Reuters calculations. Of those, 93 were full page.

Most included a picture of Modi and highlighted government initiatives from rural development and solar power to airport infrastructure and social security benefits, among others.

One of the full-page ads took a broad view to highlight 12 achievements in different sectors, saying it was "putting farmers first" and "national security is top priority". It ran with a slogan: "impossible is now possible".

Some people took to Twitter to express their frustration with what they regarded as the excessive advertising.

One user, Dhruv Rathee, last week tweeted a video in which he flipped pages of the Times of India newspaper and said: "Every page you turn has Modi's face on it". The video received nearly 82,000 views.

The Directorate of Advertising & Visual Publicity, a government agency which coordinates with ministries on government ads, did not respond to a request for comment. Modi's office also did not respond.

Leading dailies carried no govt ads yesterday

Most ads included picture of Modi and highlighted government initiatives

Some time may pass before third N Korea summit: US

Seoul monitors Pyongyang's 'missile launch' plans

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump is open to a third summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un but some time may have to go by before this takes place, Trump's national security adviser said on Sunday.

Speaking on ABC, John Bolton said the United States has no illusions about North Korea's capabilities, but Trump remains confident in his personal relationship with the North Korean leader.

Bolton's comments came after two US think tanks and Seoul's spy agency said last week that North Korea was rebuilding a rocket launch site at Sohae in the west of the country.

There have also been reports from South Korea's intelligence service of new activity at a factory at Sanumdong near Pyongyang that produced North Korea's first intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States.

Bolton declined to discuss those reports or say whether a new North Korean missile launch would scuttle engagement with the United States. He said, however, that it was a mistake to assume North Korea would "automatically" comply with its obligations.

"The president's confident in his personal relationship with Kim Jong Un. He's invested a lot of time in trying to develop that relationship," Bolton told ABC's "This Week."

Meanwhile, South Korea's military said yesterday it was closely monitoring North Korean facilities after a series of satellite images triggered international alarm that Pyongyang might be preparing a long-range missile or space launch, reported AFP.

But some analysts suggest the North might be stage-managing activity at certain key sites, to stoke concern and secure "better terms" when the two sides next meet.



John Bolton



Islamic State members walk in the last besieged neighborhood in the village of Baghouz, Deir Al Zor province, Syria on Sunday. Kurdish-led forces pounded the last scrap of land held by the militant group and seized several positions yesterday.

Myanmar's land law to hurt ethnic minorities

Says UN expert

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A UN expert has expressed grave concern over implementation of a new land law in Myanmar that has disastrous implications for traditional farming communities in ethnic minority regions and would affect a third of the country.

"Today marks the day that thousands of people living in rural areas in Myanmar may be charged with criminal trespass if they continue to use their land as they have done for generations," Yanghee Lee, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, told the Human Rights Council in Geneva yesterday.

She said the amended Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law fails to recognise shared land ownership practices including customary tenure and land belonging to IDPs and refugees of conflict that has been left unattended.

"The law does not sufficiently recognise this reality," Lee said. "The law affects so many people, and with land insecurity central to the cycle of conflict, poverty and denial of rights, it has the potential to be disastrous," she said, according to a UN press release issued in Geneva.

The law, which comes into effect on March 11, 2019, requires anyone occupying or using "vacant, fallow, or virgin" land to apply for a permit to use it for 30 years or face eviction and up to two years in jail. She called on the government to immediately suspend and review the law.

She also expressed serious concern about natural resource extraction, saying it was the sector of the economy she received more reports of rights abuse than any other sectors.

Former Taliban leader lived under US nose

REUTERS, Kabul

A biography of one-eyed former Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar says he lived near a US base in Afghanistan for years, not in Pakistan as US officials have said, exposing Western failure to track him down, but a spokesman for the Afghan president described the claim as "delusional".

In her book "Op Zoek Naar De Vijand (Searching for an Enemy)", Dutch journalist Bette Dam says Omar never hid in neighbouring Pakistan.

He lived in hiding just three miles from a major US military base in his home Afghan province of Zabul, said Dam, who says she spent five years interviewing Taliban members for the book.

Omar's headline Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, and has waged an anti-government insur-

gency since then.

Omar, who delegated effective Taliban leadership after 2001, appears to have acted as more of a spiritual leader, according to the book, and the militant movement kept his death in 2013 secret for two years.

He was wanted in the United States for providing a safe haven for al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, who masterminded the 9/11 attacks on the United States and lived in hiding in Pakistan, and Washington had placed a \$10 million bounty on his head.

US forces even searched his accommodation on one occasion, but failed to find Omar's hiding place, Dam told Reuters.

"The book underlines the failure of Western intelligence at a time when US and Taliban officials are holding peace talks to end the 17-year-old war in Afghanistan," she said.



Mullah Omar

Venezuela still in dark

Opposition leader Guaido wants 'state of alarm' declared

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaido was set to ask lawmakers yesterday to declare a "state of alarm" over the country's devastating blackout in order to facilitate the delivery of international aid -- a chance to score points in his power struggle with President Nicolas Maduro.

At least 15 patients with advanced kidney disease were reported to have died since the massive power outage began on Thursday, as hospitals struggled to provide emergency services and the threat of spoiling food supplies put many on edge.

"We must attend to this catastrophe immediately. We cannot turn away from it," said Guaido, the 35-year-old leader of the National Assembly who in January declared himself interim president, triggering a power struggle in the oil-rich South American country of 30 million.

On Sunday, he told reporters he would convene an emergency session of the opposition-controlled National Assembly to declare the "state of alarm" -- setting up another test of wills with Maduro.

Last month, Maduro used the military to block an opposition bid to bring in more than 250 tons of supplies over

land from Colombia and Brazil.

On Sunday, the embattled president -- who has presided over a calamitous economic collapse that has left people in need of basic food and medicine -- vowed not to back down.

"This macabre strategy to bring us to a confrontation will fail," he wrote on Twitter.

Power was restored late Sunday in some areas of the capital Caracas, sparking enthusiastic cheers. But already twice so far, the restoration of electricity has been fleeting.

Businesses and schools remained closed yesterday.

Guaido has called for more street protests yesterday to pressure Maduro to step down.

"You have the right to go into the street, to protest, to demand, because this regime is letting Venezuelans die," he said Sunday, appealing to the armed forces "to stop covering for the dictator."

In Washington, National Security Advisor John Bolton suggested members of the military were reconsidering their support for Maduro. "There are countless conversations going on between members of the National Assembly and members of the military in Venezuela, talking about what might come, how they might move to support the opposition," Bolton said in an interview on ABC's "This Week."

Military reconsidering their support for Maduro: Bolton

Govt suspended school and business activities



Juan Guaido