

Division in Arabs as West hails deal

AFP, Jerusalem

World leaders voiced hope yesterday that a historic deal between the UAE and Israel could kickstart moribund Middle East peace talks, even as the Palestinians and their supporters denounced the move to normalise ties as a betrayal of their cause.

Announced by US President Donald Trump on Thursday, it was only the third such accord Israel has struck with an Arab country, and raised the prospect of similar deals with other pro-Western Arab states.

The deal sees Israel pledge to suspend its planned annexation of Palestinian lands, a concession welcomed by European and some pro-Western Arab governments as a boost for hopes of peace.

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed Israel was halting, not abandoning its plans to one day annex the Jordan Valley and Jewish settlements across the occupied West Bank.

News of the agreement was broken by US President Donald Trump, in a tweet hailing a “HUGE breakthrough”.

He said leaders from the two countries would sign the deal at the White House in around three weeks, evoking memories of previous US-mediated Middle East accords.

The Palestinian leadership rejected the deal as a “betrayal” of their cause, saying they would withdraw their ambassador from the

NORMALISATION OF ISRAEL-UEA TIES

Palestinians reject deal, call Arab League meeting

Saudi Arabia mute as Egypt, Bahrain, Oman backs deal

Iran, Turkey call deal ‘betrayal’

UN chief hopes deal can help two-state solution; China backs regional peace



Palestinians protest against the United Arab Emirates’ deal with Israel to normalise relations, in Nablus, West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Emirates.

In Ramallah in the West Bank, office worker Jihad Hussein, said: “The Palestinian people have been stabbed in the back by the Emirates leadership.”

“But neither this agreement nor anything else will undermine our will to fight for the freedom and independence,” he added.

Establishing diplomatic ties between Israel and Washington’s Middle East allies, including the oil-rich Gulf monarchies, has been central to Trump’s regional strategy to contain Iran, also an arch-foe of Israel.

Tehran yesterday condemned the deal

as an act of “strategic stupidity” that would only strengthen the Iranian-backed “axis of resistance”.

Among other US allies in the Gulf, both Bahrain and Oman put out statements backing the normalisation deal.

The European Union said normalisation would benefit both Israel and the UAE, but foreign policy spokeswoman Nabila Massrali stressed the bloc’s commitment to a two-state solution.

“We are, of course, ready to work on the resumption of the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians,” she said.

Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a longtime critic of Israel and frequently at odds with western powers, threatened to suspend diplomatic relations with the UAE or withdraw Ankara’s ambassador.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said normalisation of ties between the two countries was “an important contribution to peace in the region”.

There was no immediate word from regional heavyweight and Emirati ally Saudi Arabia.

The controversial Trump plan, unveiled in January, had offered a path for Israel to annex the Jordan Valley and Jewish settlements across the West Bank, communities considered illegal under international law.

The Palestinians had rejected the plan outright as biased and untenable, as did Israel’s Arab neighbours, and it sparked fears of further escalation in a tense region.

UN chief Antonio Guterres said he hoped Israel’s suspension of annexations under the plan could help realise a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

Annexation would “effectively close the door” on negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders and “destroy the prospect” of a viable Palestinian state, he said.

The deal marks a major foreign policy achievement for Trump as he heads into a difficult campaign for re-election in November.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Afghan govt releases 80 of final 400 Taliban prisoners

The Afghan government has begun releasing the last Taliban prisoners from a final batch of 400 who the militants want freed before they agree to start peace negotiations, a security agency spokesman said yesterday. The government agreed on Sunday to release the 400 “hard-core” prisoners after consulting a grand assembly of elders and other community leaders, known as a Loya Jirga. He did not say when the remaining 320 would be set free. Disagreement over the release of the prisoners, who include some of those accused in connection with some of Afghanistan’s bloodiest attacks, has delayed negotiations for months as the United States withdraws troops under a deal signed with the Taliban in February.

Militants kill 2 cops in Kashmir ahead of Independence Day

Militants attacked a police team in Kashmir yesterday, killing two officers and wounding one despite tight security in the disputed Muslim-majority region ahead of India’s Independence Day. A group of militants opened fire on the police team that was on duty in the Nowgam area of Srinagar city, the chief of police in Kashmir, Vijay Kumar, told Reuters. The attack comes days after the first anniversary of the revocation of Kashmir’s constitutional autonomy, a reform the Indian government said would promote the region’s development by drawing it closer to the rest of the country. But many people in Kashmir saw the loss of special autonomy as another step in the erosion of the rights of Muslims by the Hindu-nationalist government. The government rejects that. India celebrates Independence Day today.

Covid-19 vaccine will be free for Americans: officials

If a Covid-19 vaccine is proven effective, the US will ensure it’s distributed for free to all Americans, officials said Thursday, underscoring there will be no shortcuts on safety. “We are not at all reducing the regulatory rigor with which we will evaluate and hopefully approve vaccines,” Paul Mango, a senior health department official, told reporters. Washington has invested more than \$10 billion in six vaccine projects and signed contracts guaranteeing the delivery of hundreds of millions of doses should they be approved following clinical trials. Russia this week approved a vaccine even before the start of the last phase of clinical trials, in which the drug is injected into tens of thousands of volunteers to verify its effectiveness and safety. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), compared Russia’s vaccinet to a game of “Russian roulette.”

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Malaysia to lift limit on hiring of foreign labour

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia has decided to lift an earlier limit on the hiring of foreign workers meant to protect jobs for locals in most sectors, the Human Resources Ministry said late on Thursday.

Last month, the ministry said the hiring of foreign labour would be limited to the construction, agriculture and plantation sectors, a move to increase employment opportunities for locals affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

The ministry said more than 67,000 local workers and over 4,700 foreign workers had lost their jobs as of July.

“However, there were some employers who claim to still need a number of foreign workers and urged the government to withdraw the freeze on recruitment of new foreign workers,” Minister Saravanan Murugan said in the statement.

Saravanan urged employers to prioritise filling job vacancies with local workers before considering re-employing foreign workers who are still in Malaysia with a valid work permit. The foreign workers, if rehired, must work in the same sectors they were previously employed in.

Malaysia hosts about 2.1 million documented foreign workers, according to government estimates.

EU readies Belarus sanctions

Set to confront Turkey amid tensions in the eastern Mediterranean

AFP, Brussels

The European Union yesterday began the process of imposing sanctions on Belarus and express its support for Greece and Cyprus in their stand-off with Turkey.

Foreign ministers from the 27 member states joined a hastily-arranged video conference hosted by Brussels’ diplomatic chief Josep Borrell, European officials told AFP.

Ahead of the meeting, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called for sanctions against those who “violated democratic values... and abused human rights” in Belarus.

In Berlin, German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said Chancellor Angela Merkel had been shocked by the detention and abuse of peaceful protesters.



The EU has declared the situation in Belarus, where President Alexander Lukashenko has launched a crackdown on protests after his disputed re-election, a “matter of grave concern”.

Poland, Latvia and Lithuania say they are ready to act as mediators to try to resolve the post-election crisis, after a poll that Brussels has said was “neither free nor fair”.

Belarus’ Foreign Minister Vladimir

Makei said in a call with his Swiss counterpart Ignazio Cassis that Minsk is ready “for a constructive and objective dialogue with foreign partners”.

The soaring tensions in the eastern Mediterranean will also be high on the agenda, after France dispatched naval vessels and jet fighters to back up Greece and Cyprus.

Longstanding tension between Turkey and EU member state Greece escalated when Ankara resumed energy exploration in the region off the Greek island of Kastellorizo on Monday.

Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and EU chief Charles Michel on Thursday and hit out at France’s President Emmanuel Macron, who sent warships, accusing him of “putting on a show”.



Flames from the Ranch Fire burn the hills in Azusa, California, yesterday, 40 kms east of Los Angeles. Mandatory evacuations were in place Thursday night after a wildfire erupted in Azusa and rapidly consumed 3,000 acres in the Angeles National Forest, officials said. The blaze was 0% contained Thursday night, fire officials said.

PHOTO: AFP

Landslides in Nepal kill 16; many missing

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Landslides triggered by heavy rain swept away dozens of houses and killed at least 16 people in mountainous villages of Nepal yesterday and many people were missing, a home ministry official said.

Nepal suffers flash floods and landslides during the June-September rainy season, resulting in loss of life and property every year.

A massive landslide swept away dozens of houses, killing at least 10 people, early yesterday in Sindhupalchowk, near the capital Kathmandu, ministry official Murari Wasti said.

He said 28 people were missing.

Six people, aged between 10 and 19, were killed in remote Kalikot in far west Nepal - four of them from the same family.

Floods and landslides have so far killed 215 people this year in Nepal, while 85 are missing, according to official data.

Diby Raj Poudel, of the Nepal Red Cross Society, said 40,000 people had been housed in temporary huts or were staying with relatives or friends.

EU agrees first vaccine deal with AstraZeneca

Move could weaken WHO-led vaccine initiative

REUTERS, Brussels

The European Union has agreed to buy at least 300 million doses of AstraZeneca’s potential Covid-19 vaccine in its first such advance purchase deal, which could weaken plans led by the World Health Organisation for a global approach.

The European Commission, which is negotiating on behalf of all 27 EU member states, said the deal included an option to purchase 100 million additional doses from the British drugmaker should its vaccine prove safe and effective.

The EU’s bilateral deal mirrors moves by the United States and other wealthy states, some of which are critical of the WHO’s initiative, and further reduces the potentially available stock in the race to secure effective Covid-19 vaccines.

The EU agreement follows an initial deal with AstraZeneca reached in June by Europe’s Inclusive Vaccines Alliance (IVA), a group formed by France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands to secure vaccine doses for all member states.

The Commission did not disclose the terms of the new deal and declined to say whether it had replaced the IVA’s.

“This new agreement will give all EU member states the option to access the vaccine in an equitable manner at no profit during the pandemic,” AstraZeneca said in a statement.

The EU executive said its deals are aimed at financing part of the upfront costs to develop vaccines. The funding would be partial down-payments to secure the shots, but actual purchases would be decided at a later stage by each EU state.

The EU said over the past two weeks

it was in advanced talks with Johnson & Johnson and Sanofi for their vaccines under development.

It is also in talks with Pfizer, Moderna and CureVac to buy upfront their potential Covid-19 vaccines, EU officials told Reuters in July.

The EU move could make more difficult efforts led by the WHO and GAVI, a global alliance for vaccines, to buy shots on behalf of rich and developing countries with a separate scheme.



The Commission has urged EU states to shun the WHO-led initiative because it sees it as too expensive and slow, EU officials told Reuters in July.

Now the Commission is openly saying that vaccines bought from AstraZeneca, and from other vaccine makers, could be donated to poorer states, effectively taking on the very task that the WHO is pursuing with the so-called ACT-Accelerator Hub.

Brussels has publicly said that its purchasing scheme is complementary to the WHO’s, but in private told EU states that there may be legal issues if they joined the WHO programme.

‘She doesn’t qualify’

Trump promotes false birther theory about Kamala Harris

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump said Thursday he had heard Democratic vice-presidential running mate Kamala Harris was not eligible to serve, stoking a false claim echoing the baseless “birther” theory he promoted about Barack Obama.

At a White House news conference, Trump was asked about “claims circulating on social media” that Harris was not eligible and whether he could say she met the legal requirements for vice president.

“I heard it today that she doesn’t meet the requirements. And, by the way, the lawyer that wrote that piece is a very highly qualified, very talented lawyer. I have no idea if that’s right,” Trump said.

“I would have assumed the Democrats would have checked that



out before she gets chosen to run for vice president,” he said.

“But that’s a very serious -- you’re saying that -- they’re saying that she doesn’t qualify because she wasn’t born in this country.”

In his Newsweek op-ed, Chapman University law professor John Eastman claimed some “commentators” said Harris was ineligible as she was not a “natural born citizen” as her parents were not naturalized US citizens at the

time of her birth.

Harris was born in California in 1964 to a father from Jamaica and a mother from India. According to the Constitution, any natural born US citizen over the age of 35 is eligible to be president or vice president.

Constitutional law expert Erwin Chemerinsky told CBS News the claim about Harris “is a truly silly argument.”

“Under section 1 of the 14th Amendment, anyone born in the United States is a United States citizen. The Supreme Court has held this since the 1890s,” the dean of UC Berkeley School of Law said in an email to CBS.

“Some conservatives, such as John Eastman, think that is wrong and being born in the country is not enough,” he said. “(They’re) clearly wrong under the language of the 14th Amendment and under Supreme Court precedent.”

