

Yes, Israel 'occupies' West Bank, says US

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden's administration said Wednesday that Israel's control of the West Bank is indeed "occupation," clarifying its stance after the release of a report that seemed to downplay the term, adopting language used by Donald Trump's government.

The State Department's annual report on human rights "does use the term 'occupation' in the context of the current status of the West Bank," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters. "This has been the longstanding position of previous administrations of both parties over the course of many decades," he said.

But under the staunchly pro-Israel Trump, the annual human rights report renamed the section on "Israel and the Occupied Territories" as "Israel, West Bank and Gaza."

The first of the reports issued under Biden, which was released Tuesday, kept the same formulation but stated that the language was not meant to convey any position.

The top State Department official on human rights, Lisa Peterson, said that the report generally uses geographical names and that "Israel, West Bank and Gaza" was easier and clearer for readers.

Trump's secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, broke past precedent by visiting a Jewish settlement in the West Bank and said he disagreed with the broad international consensus that such construction is illegal.

Trump also recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital as well as Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights from Syria.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken has indicated the United States will not reverse Trump's decisions on Jerusalem but will also do more to work toward an independent Palestinian state.



(From left, clockwise) This undated handout photos from Free Burma Rangers received yesterday show a destroyed building in Hpa-pun in eastern Myanmar's Karen state by Myanmar military air strikes; an injured Karen villager receives medical treatment in the jungle in Hpa-pun; and Karen villagers build bunkers to take shelter from air strikes.



PHOTO: REUTERS

'We aren't seasonal with our religious belief'

Modi hits back at Mamata over his temple visit row

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday hit back at West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress criticism of his visit to temples in Satkhira and Orakandi in Bangladesh trip as "unethical and violative" of the election model code of conduct and defended his trips to the shrines.

"Didi did not like me praying at the Ma Kali temple in Bangladesh. We are not seasonal with our religious belief," he said.

"I am not one to pay respect at temples seasonally. I always take pride in our faith and tradition," Modi said addressing an election rally in Jainagar in South 24 Parganas district while responding to Trinamool Congress' criticism of his temple visits in Bangladesh on March 27.

This was the first time Modi commented on Trinamool Congress' attack on his visits to Matua shrine at Orakandi and



Jashoreswari Kali temple in Satkhira.

On March 28, Mamata-led party wrote a letter to the Election Commission alleging Modi's recent visit to Bangladesh violated the model code of conduct in place for the West Bengal Assembly polls and some of his programmes there "intended to influence the voting pattern" in certain constituencies of the state. Mamata had paid respect at nine temples in Nandigram constituency on the day she filed her nomination papers.

Modi exuded confidence that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would secure more than 200 seats in the ongoing West Bengal Assembly polls to a total of 294 seats.

Modi took a jibe at Mamata's letter to various opposition leaders calling for a united fight against the BJP. The letter was a clear admission of Mamata didi's impending defeat in West Bengal assembly poll, the PM said.

Suu kyi 'breached official secrets law'

Her lawyer says she has been charged under colonial-era law; Karen rebels kill 20 soldiers amid warnings of 'imminent bloodbath'; diplomacy gathers pace to end crisis

REUTERS

Myanmar's deposed leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been charged with breaking a colonial-era official secrets law, her lawyer said yesterday, the most serious charge against the veteran opponent of military rule.

Myanmar has been rocked by protests since the army overthrew Suu Kyi's elected government on Feb. 1 citing unsubstantiated claims of fraud in a November election that her party swept.

Her chief lawyer, Khin Maung Zaw, told Reuters by telephone that Suu Kyi, three of her deposed cabinet ministers and a detained Australian economic adviser, Sean Turnell, were charged a week ago in a Yangon court under the official secrets law, adding he learned of the new charge two days ago.

A conviction under the law can carry a prison sentence of up to 14 years.

At least 538 civilians have been killed in protests against the coup, 141 of them on Saturday, the bloodiest day of the unrest, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) activist group.



Protesters were back out in several places yesterday and two more people were killed, according to media reports, as activists burned copies of a military-framed constitution and called for unity among all those opposed to army rule.

The coup has also triggered new clashes in Myanmar's old wars.

At least 20 soldiers were killed and four military trucks destroyed in clashes with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), one of Myanmar's most powerful rebel groups, DVB news reported. Myanmar military aircraft have started

bombing positions of another group, the Karen National Union (KNU), for the first time in more than 20 years and thousands of villagers have fled from their homes, many into Thailand.

The UN special envoy on Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgene, told the 15-member UN Security Council on Wednesday that the military was not capable of managing the country.

The council must consider "potentially significant action" to reverse the course of events as "a bloodbath is imminent", she said.

Meanwhile, Britain sanctioned a Myanmar conglomerate yesterday for its close links to the military leadership.

The United States on Wednesday urged China, which has significant economic and strategic interests in Myanmar, to use its influence to hold to account those responsible for the coup.

In a sign of stepped-up shuttle diplomacy, the foreign ministers of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines are due to meet China's top diplomat Wang in China this week.

The Myanmar military has traditionally been impervious to external pressure.



Pro-democracy activist Alexandra Wong (C), also known as grandma wong, is led off a driveway by police outside West Kowloon court in Hong Kong yesterday, before a verdict is handed down to pro-democracy activists who organised an unauthorised assembly on August 18, 2019.

PHOTO: AFP

US plant ruins 15m J&J Covid vaccine doses

AFP, Washington

About 15 million doses of the single-shot coronavirus vaccine made by Johnson & Johnson were ruined in a factory error in the United States, The New York Times reported.

When contacted by AFP, the pharmaceutical giant said it had identified a batch of doses at a plant in Baltimore run by Emergent BioSolutions "that did not meet quality standards" but did not confirm the specific number affected.

The FDA told AFP it was "aware of the situation" but declined to comment further. J&J is expected to deliver an additional 24 million shots "through April."

The J&J vaccine has won praise for its single dosage and because it does not need to be frozen -- unlike the shots from Moderna and Pfizer -- making distribution much simpler.

India moves to deport Rohingya girl to coup-hit Myanmar

REUTERS, New Delhi

A 14-year-old Rohingya girl has been taken to a border town in northeastern India for deportation to Myanmar, police officials said yesterday, as the UN refugee agency and rights groups pressed New Delhi to halt the process.

Tens of thousands of Rohingya, who are denied citizenship in their home country Myanmar, have lived in India for years but Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government regards them as a security threat and has started detaining them.

Police have taken the girl to a border crossing in Manipur state, where paperwork

was being finalised to send her back to coup-hit Myanmar. She had been sheltered for more than a year in the neighbouring Indian state of Assam, while her family lived as refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar.

"It is under process," Assam police official BL Meena told Reuters, referring to her deportation. "This was previously scheduled."

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, opposed the deportation.

"The situation in Myanmar is not yet conducive for voluntary return in a safe, secure, and sustainable manner, and returning the child to Myanmar may place her at immediate risk of serious harm," a UNHCR spokesperson said.

Surging cases deepen woes

Brazil deaths hit new monthly record as France imposes limited lockdown

AGENCIES

Countries have gone back to reimposing lockdowns to curb the spread of coronavirus as cases and deaths surge around the world owing to the new strains of virus.

The Covid-19 death toll spiraled out of control in Brazil in March, more than doubling the country's previous monthly record, officials said Wednesday, as French President Emmanuel Macron announced a limited nationwide lockdown.

In a sign of the devastation the virus is still causing while the world races to roll out vaccines, Brazil reported 66,573 people had died of Covid-19 in March -- more than twice as many fatalities as the country's second-deadliest month of the pandemic, July 2020.

"Never in Brazilian history have we seen a single event kill so many people" in one month, said doctor Miguel Nicolelis, former pandemic response coordinator for Brazil's impoverished northeast.

Germany's capital Berlin will impose a nighttime ban on gatherings from today and reduce the number of children at nursery from next week to try to stop a third wave of the coronavirus pandemic, its city government said yesterday.



WHO slams slow vaccine rollout in Europe India launches biggest vaccination drive yet

In China, which has mostly beaten back the virus, authorities declared a week-long lockdown in the city of Ruili, after six cases were detected near the Myanmar border -- the country's first such move in months.

Greece meanwhile said it would reopen most retail stores and relax leisure restrictions despite high Covid numbers.

And Brisbane, Australia lifted a three-day mini-lockdown it imposed to stop an outbreak that infected 14 people.

At least 2,816,908 people have died of Covid-19 around the world since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according

to an AFP tally from official sources. The WHO yesterday slammed Europe's "unacceptably slow" vaccine rollout and warned of a "worrying" surge in cases.

"Vaccines present our best way out of this pandemic... however, the rollout of these vaccines is unacceptably slow," the World Health Organization's director for Europe Hans Kluge said in a statement.

"We must speed up the process by ramping up manufacturing, reducing barriers to administering vaccines, and using every single vial we have in stock," he added.

India yesterday expanded its vaccination drive to the 45-60 age group as the country tries to tackle a surge in new infections.

Public and private centres offering jabs would be open every day throughout April including on public holidays in a "significant step to exponentially expand the countrywide vaccination drive", the health ministry said.

The increased urgency follows a rise in cases since early February -- when new daily infections dropped below 9,000 -- to more than 72,000 yesterday, the highest level since October.

Experts have warned that infections are increasing at a faster pace compared to last year, when single-day cases peaked at almost 100,000 in September.

আমরা শোকাহত

যমুনা ব্যাংকের পরিচালক ও যমুনা ব্যাংক ফাউন্ডেশনের চেয়ারম্যান আলহাজ্ব নূর মোহাম্মদ এর মাতা, নূর জাহান, গত ৩১ মার্চ ২০২১ রোজ বুধবার সন্ধ্যা ৫:৩০ ঘটিকায় ৯০৪ বছর বয়সে ইন্তেকাল করেন (ইন্না লিল্লাহি ওয়া ইন্না ইলাইহি রাজিউন)।

তাঁর মৃত্যুতে যমুনা ব্যাংক পরিবার গভীরভাবে শোকাহত এবং মহান আল্লাহ্ তা'আলার দরবারে মরহমার বিদেহী আত্মার চির শান্তি কামনা করছে।

যমুনা ব্যাংকের পরিচালনা পর্ষদ এবং কর্মকর্তা ও কর্মচারীবৃন্দ