

Modi targets neighbours at UNGA, but not by name

AP, New York

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi didn't directly mention Pakistan or China in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly yesterday, but the targets of his address were clear.

He called upon the international community to help the women, children and minorities of Afghanistan and said that it was imperative the country not be used as a base from which to spread terror.

"We also need to be alert and ensure that no country tries to take advantage of the delicate situation there, and use it as a tool for its own selfish interests," he said in an apparent reference to Pakistan, wedged in between Afghanistan and India. Modi also highlighted what he called the need



to protect oceans from "the race for expansion and exclusion." India and China have long competed for influence in the Indian Ocean.

On the heels of waves of coronavirus surges that have ravaged India, Modi made no mention of his own country's death toll. But he reaffirmed last week's announcement that India would restart exporting vaccines next month.

"Deeply conscious of its responsibility towards mankind, India has resumed the process of providing vaccines to those who need it in the world," Modi said.

'We stand for rule of law, freedom'

Leaders of US, Japan, India, Australia call for stable, open and democratic Indo-Pacific, present united front in veiled China dig

AGENCIES

Leaders of the United States, Japan, India and Australia vowed on Friday to pursue a free and open Indo-Pacific region "undaunted by coercion" at their first in-person summit, which presented a united front amid shared concerns about China.

The two-hour meeting at the White House of the Quad, as the grouping of four major democracies is called, will be watched closely in Beijing, which criticised the group as "doomed to fail."

"We stand for the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity of states," US President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott

FIRST IN-PERSON QUAD SUMMIT

- ▶▶ Beijing criticised the group as "doomed to fail"
- ▶▶ Quad agreed to monitor Pakistan's role in Afghanistan
- ▶▶ Leaders agree to co-operate on vaccines, clean energy and space



Joe Biden walks with, from left, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, in the White House on Friday evening. PHOTO: AP

Morrison, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a joint statement after the talks.

While China was not mentioned in the public remarks by the four leaders or in the lengthy joint statement and a factsheet issued afterwards, Beijing was

clearly top of mind.

In a briefing on Friday a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman appeared to criticize the Quad, or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, as it is formally known, reports Reuters.

"A closed, exclusive clique targeting other countries runs counter to the

trend of the times and the aspirations of regional countries," said the spokesman, Zhao Lijian.

"It will find no support and is doomed to fail."

The Quad leaders urged North Korea to engage in diplomacy over its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs.

The leaders took steps to expand vaccines worldwide, welcoming India's plan to resume exports of eight million one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccines in October.

India also said that members of the Quad had agreed to monitor Pakistan's role in Afghanistan.

The Quad announced several new pacts, including one to bolster supply chain security for semiconductors and to combat illegal fishing and boost maritime domain awareness. It also rolled out a 5G partnership and plans to track climate change.

"Acknowledging the role of governments in fostering an enabling environment for 5G diversification, we will work together to facilitate public-private cooperation and demonstrate in 2022 the scalability of open, standards-based technology," the leaders said.

Israel has one year to quit Palestinian territory

Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas tells UNGA

AFP, United Nations

Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas gave Israel one year to withdraw from occupied territory Friday or he said he would no longer recognize the Jewish state based on pre-1967 borders.

In a virtual address to the United Nations General Assembly, Abbas called on Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to "convene an international peace conference."

But along with that request he also issued an ultimatum.

"We must state that Israel, the occupying power, has one year to withdraw from the Palestinian territory it occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem," he said.

Abbas added that the Palestinians were ready "to work throughout the year" on solving the final status of the states of Israel and Palestine "in accordance with United Nations resolutions."



But "if this is not achieved, why maintain recognition of Israel based on the 1967 borders?" he said.

Abbas added that the Palestinians would also go to the International Court of Justice "on the issue of the legality of the occupation of the land of the Palestinian state."

The peace process to achieve a two-state solution between in the Middle East has been deadlocked for years.

Israel immediately brushed aside the Palestinian leader's demands.

Abbas "proved once again that he is no longer relevant," said the Israeli ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan.

"Those who truly support peace and negotiations do not threaten delusional ultimatums from the UN platform as he did in his speech," he added.

Meanwhile, a Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli troops Friday when clashes broke out on the sidelines of a demonstration in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said.

'Are we related?'

Biden discusses Indian Bidens with Modi at White House

REUTERS, Washington

"Are we related?" US President Joe Biden asked India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi when they met at the White House on Friday. "Yes!" Modi joked in reply.

At the start of his first bilateral White House meeting with Modi as leaders, Biden explained that he had learned about an Indian branch of the Biden family when he was first elected to Congress in 1972 and received a letter from someone called Biden living in Mumbai.

"I found out that there was a Captain George Biden, who was a captain in the East India tea company," Biden said.

"That's hard for an Irishman to admit!" he quipped, referring to the East India Company, which laid the foundations of the British Empire but ceased to exist more than 150 years ago.

Biden said he learned that George Biden stayed in India and married an Indian woman, but added: "I've never been able to track it down, so the whole purpose of this meeting is for him to help me figure out who he was!"

Modi said Biden had mentioned the connection to him previously, so he had hunted for documents that could help fill in the gaps in the family tree.

"Today I have brought along some documents... Maybe those documents could be of use to you!" he told Biden.

MORE NEWS

US CDC backs Covid boosters for high-risk adults, workers

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Friday backed a booster shot of the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine for Americans aged 65 and older, adults with underlying medical conditions and adults in high-risk working and institutional settings. The decision by CDC Director Rochelle Walensky is aligned with the US Food and Drug Administration's authorization of the shot earlier this week and follows an August announcement of a broad booster rollout from her and other top US health officials. The CDC recommendation cleared the way for booster shots to start on Friday.

Merkel makes final push for successor in polls

Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday urged Germans to give her would-be successor Armin Laschet the vote to shape Germany's future, in a last-ditch push to shore up his beleaguered campaign 24 hours before Germans vote. Laschet, 60, has been trailing his Social Democrat challenger Olaf Scholz in the race for the chancellor, although final polls put the gap between them within the margin of error, making the vote one of the most unpredictable in recent years. Merkel had planned to keep a low profile in the election battle as she prepares to bow out of politics after 16 years in power. But she has found herself dragged into the frantic campaign schedule of the unpopular chairman of her party, Laschet.



Hong Kong's Tiananmen vigil organiser disbands

The Hong Kong pro-democracy group that organised three decades of vigils commemorating the victims of Beijing's Tiananmen Square crackdown voted to disband yesterday in the face of China's sweeping clampdown on dissent. The Hong Kong Alliance was one of the most prominent symbols of the city's former political plurality and its dissolution is the latest illustration of how quickly China is remoulding the business hub in its own authoritarian image. After announcing the decision to disband, a representative of the alliance read out a letter from their chairman Lee Cheuk-yan, who is currently in jail. "A regime cannot take away the people's memory and conscience," the letter read.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

China frees two Canadians after Huawei boss released

AFP, Beijing

Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou was headed home from Vancouver yesterday as two Canadians were released from prison in China, ending a bitter diplomatic row that has poisoned ties for three years.

Meng and the two Canadians -- former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor -- are all on their way back to their home countries after years of being detained in what critics have called "hostage diplomacy".

Meng, the 49-year-old daughter of Ren Zhengfei, the billionaire founder of Chinese telecoms giant Huawei, was granted release in a Vancouver court hearing after three years of house arrest in Canada while fighting extradition to the United States.

This came hours after US prosecutors announced an agreement under which fraud charges against her are to be suspended and eventually dropped.

She then quickly boarded a flight to the city of Shenzhen, returning to China for the first time since her arrest at Vancouver's international airport at the behest of US authorities on December 1, 2018.

Meanwhile, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that the two

detained Canadians had left Chinese airspace, and were on their way home.

Their plane was expected to land Saturday in Canada, Trudeau told a news conference in Ottawa, adding they had gone through "an unbelievably difficult ordeal."

The "two Michaels" -- as they have been dubbed by international media -- were detained just days after Meng on what Ottawa has contended were "trumped up" espionage charges.

In turn, Beijing called Meng's case "a purely political incident."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said "the US Government stands with the international community in welcoming the decision" to release the men.

Speaking to reporters before heading to China, Meng said: "Over the past three years, my life has been turned upside down. It was a disruptive time for me as a mother, wife and a company executive."

She later posted a message on Chinese social media from her plane saying "thank you to the party and government."

A red banner hanging at Shenzhen airport arrivals hall read "Welcome home Meng Wanzhou."

Some chanted "Go Huawei!"

SABINA NESSA KILLING

Hundreds hold vigil in London

AFP, London

Hundreds of people gathered in southeast London on Friday night at a vigil for Sabina Nessa, a 28-year-old British-Bangladeshi teacher who was found dead in a park, the latest case to spark public concern about women's safety.

The primary school teacher disappeared a week ago after leaving her home to go to a bar just five minutes' walk away. Her body was found by a member of the public the following day hidden in a pile of leaves.

The young woman's death, like that of 33-year-old Sarah Everard, has galvanised public opinion over the safety of women in public spaces. Carroll, a 35-year-old teacher, told AFP that Nessa's death had caused her to fear for her own safety.



Civilians and Somali security officers gather at the scene of a suicide car bomb blast at a street junction near the president's residence, in Mogadishu, Somalia yesterday. At least eight people were killed in the blast, police said, as the Al-Shabaab jihadist group claimed responsibility for the attack.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Watchdog, new laws not needed

FROM PAGE 1

been utilised to detect foul play. "But they have failed. These incidents have taken place right in front of the eyes of the Bangladesh Bank. Their negligence was obvious," said Mashroor, one of the pioneers of the country's e-commerce sector.

"It's a complete failure of the government agencies -- they have portrayed inefficiencies in almost every step," said Tanjib-ul Alam, head of chamber at Tanjib Alam & Associates.

Were the institutional capacity of the agencies robust enough and their integrity upheld, the current storm over the e-commerce sector would not have brewed.

The biggest capacity and leadership failure came from the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), he said. After a newspaper report in August last year unveiled that Evaly's business model was akin to a Ponzi scheme and multi-level marketing model company, the BFIU had suspended the company's transactions for a month citing the money laundering provision law.

Using that law, the BFIU could have extended the suspension and taken legal action against Evaly, Alam said. But the BFIU did no such thing, which

led the common people to believe that Evaly's business practices were fine as the authority responsible for overseeing transactions found nothing wrong after scrutinising them.

"That time, I thought Mohammad Rassel, the CEO of Evaly, would face legal action. But to my surprise, he turned the crisis into opportunity. The BFIU efficiently handed him the opportunity and he continued his business with multiple times the agility."

Then, he started spending money collected from the general people recklessly, sponsoring the Bangladesh Cricket Board series, the movie of Rapid Action Battalion, appointing celebrities as brand ambassadors and providing advertisements to media. Evaly made further inroads when it became a sponsor of the Bangabandhu Innovation Grant 2021, a competition of the IDEA Project of Bangladesh Computer Council under the ICT Division, and the e-Commerce Movers Award 2020.

This gave the company validation, buttressing the positive impression in the general public's mind, according to Alam.

There were several occasions when the Bangladesh Competition Commission

should have taken prompt action under competition law.

"But they haven't done it. There were thousands of complaints filed at the DNCRP, but the institution did not have the capacity to handle this avalanche of complaints. They failed to take an institutional step," Alam added.

The e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (e-CAB), the sector's trade body, had tipped off the authorities on the risky models of many e-commerce companies but no action was taken due to lack of coordination between monitoring institutions, said Muhammad Abdul Wahed Tomal, its general secretary.

"In Bangladesh, wherever we face any crisis, we all try to indicate that the crisis took place due to lack of adequate laws to prevent it," Alam said.

In a similar vein, after the e-commerce scams unfolded, there are propositions for new laws to regulate the sector.

"But that would derail the growth of the good players in the sectors. There is no need for new laws as existing laws are enough to prevent the irregularities in the sector," he added.

There is no separate regulatory body to regulate e-commerce in a country like the US, said Waseem Alim, CEO of Chaldal.com, an online supermarket

that saw dizzying growth amid the pandemic.

"This will make e-commerce more difficult."

"It will be more effective to increase surveillance through the existing agencies of the government, he said.

"We have built the trust of customers over the years and the ongoing incidents have dealt a blow to us. We have been facing difficulty in adding new customers in the last few weeks," Alim added.

There are also questions about the role of banks as they allowed payment to e-commerce companies against whom there has been a deluge of customer complaints of unfulfilled orders for a while now, according to Mashroor.

The recent fraudulent e-commerce businesses seem to have turned into investment schemes for some people and this should have been intervened earlier, said Selim RF Hussain, CEO of BRAC Bank.

He also pointed out that there is a lack of coordination among relevant stakeholders, giving a boost to the scammers to wreak havoc on the sector. Unemployment is a big problem in the country, Mashroor said.

"Numerous young people are unemployed - and frustrated. The bank

interest rates are low and the stock market is not safe either. So where the youth will go for income?"

Naturally, they would gravitate towards the fast-growing e-commerce sector.

"It's wrong if you think that just forming a regulatory body would take care of all the problems," Mashroor added.

Meanwhile, for recovering the customers' money, Alam recommended the victims file a wind-up petition in High Court under section 241 of company law.

"Then, the court can appoint a provisional liquidator or administrator who will take the charge of the company and start the process of recovering money."

Later, the recovered money will be distributed among victims proportionately and the victims should abandon the hope of getting back all of their money as a big amount of it has already been spent recklessly.

It would be unconstitutional to compensate those victims by the government for taxpayers' money, Alam said.

Rehman Sobhan, chairman of CPD, said he is very impressed that the e-commerce industry has a host of young entrepreneurs and the current events should not derail the growth of entrepreneurship in the sector.

"This is essentially an outlier of the system. This is a scam -- it's not inherited in the system. And this is not the first scam that has taken place."

Scams mostly originate from regulatory failures.

"It's a governance problem. It's a question of how you enforce the laws."

In all the big scams, the parties tend to mingle with policymakers to wriggle into their good books and get protection, he added.

The e-commerce sector has a huge potential for job creation and economic growth, said Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the CPD.

The sector has flourished due to increased internet connectivity and the demand of consumers.

However, the sector is new and should be guided by appropriate policies, she added.

Md Ziaul Haque Bhuiyan, chief of Staff at ShopUp, and Afana Asif, managing partner at Asix BD, also spoke.