

Biden brings Palestinians aid but no new peace plan

REUTERS, Bethlehem

US President Joe Biden yesterday promised not to give up efforts to end the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though he offered no new proposals to restart the stalled political dialogue between the two sides.

As he wrapped up the first leg of a Middle Eastern trip before departing for Saudi Arabia, Biden visited a hospital in East Jerusalem and pledged a multi-year \$100 million package of financial and technical help.

But after a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank town of Bethlehem, he acknowledged that the creation of an independent Palestinian state remained a distant prospect with no immediate prospect of new talks with Israel.

"Even if the ground is not ripe at this moment to restart negotiations, the United States and my administration will not give up on trying to bring...both sides closer together," he said.

Abbas said prospects for a two-state solution to the conflict, the model favoured by the United States and world

bodies including the United Nations, were receding and the opportunity "may not remain for a long time".

"Is it not time for this occupation to end?" Abbas said.

He reiterated demands that the United States open a consulate in East Jerusalem, which Palestinians want as the capital of a future independent state, remove the Palestine Liberation Organization from a list of terrorist groups and allow it to re-open an office in Washington.

He also asked for US support to bring to justice the killers of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American citizen who was killed during an Israeli raid on the West Bank city of Jenin.

Biden said the United States would continue to seek accountability for her death.

Biden acknowledged that after years of failed attempts to resolve the conflict, Palestinians living under onerous restrictions in the occupied West Bank and Gaza were suffering. "You can feel... the grief and frustration," he said.



Demonstrators distribute auspicious milk rice as a part of the celebration after the resignation of ousted Sri Lanka's president Gotabaya Rajapaksa at the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

PHOTO: AFP

Heatwave scorches Europe

Health warnings issued

REUTERS

Hundreds more people were evacuated from their homes as wildfires blazed in France, Spain and Portugal yesterday, while officials in Europe issued health warnings for the heatwave in the coming days.

More than 1,000 firefighters, supported by water-bomber aircraft, have battled since Tuesday to control two blazes in southwestern France that have been fanned by scorching heat, tinder-box conditions and strong winds.

While temperatures dipped a little in Portugal, they were still expected to top 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in some places, with five districts on red alert and more than 1,000 firefighters tackling 17 wildfires, authorities said.

In Spain, the Environment Ministry said it was helping tackle 17 wildfires across the country.

Meanwhile, the worst drought in over 70 years reduced Italy's longest river, the Po, to little more than a trickle in places.

Italy has declared a state of emergency along the Po, which supports about a third of the country's agricultural production, after facing its hottest July since 1800, with temperatures expected to rise next week.

Britain's weather forecaster issued its first red "extreme heat" warning for parts of England on Monday and Tuesday.

How much closer can Biden bring Saudi Arabia to Israel?

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

United States President Joe Biden has somewhat danced around questions about how he will interact with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) when he arrives in the Red Sea port city of Jeddah.

The debate over how and when Biden should directly engage with MBS is sensitive. This appears to be the reason the White House is domestically selling his trip as beneficial to Israeli security, which can make the trip less controversial in the eyes of lawmakers on both sides of the aisle in Washington.

The Biden administration wants its own addition to the normalisation deals known as the "Abraham Accords", a process under former President Donald Trump that saw Israel normalise ties with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.

For Biden, and Israel, a deal with Saudi Arabia would be the ultimate breakthrough.

Before the official confirmation of the trip to Saudi Arabia, Biden was asked whether he was waiting for "commitments" from Riyadh.

"The commitments from the Saudis don't relate to anything having to do with energy," Biden replied. "It happens to be a larger meeting taking place in Saudi Arabia. That's the reason I'm going. And it has to do with national security for them - for Israelis."

Many analysts believe that Bahrain's deal with Israel

could have only come about with a green light from Saudi Arabia, considering the close relationship between Manama and Riyadh.

"Bahrain's measures toward Israel are understood as Saudi signals given Saudi influence over Bahrain's foreign policy," Ali Bakeer, an assistant professor at Qatar University's Ibn Khaldun Center for

Humanities and Social Sciences, told Al Jazeera. "I think that in this sense more steps can be taken following Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia, whether it comes to business, tourism, or indirect communication between the two sides."

Looking ahead, if Saudi Arabia gives the go-ahead to other Arab or Muslim allies and partners of Riyadh to normalise with Israel, the Abraham Accords have greater potential to expand.

Normalisation with Saudi Arabia, or even increased ties short of full diplomatic relations, would have a knock-

on effect for Arab states which have already normalised ties. For example, the announcement on Thursday that Saudi Arabia was lifting restrictions on all airlines using its airspace, representing Riyadh's latest mini step towards normalisation with Israel, will allow Israel's partnership with the UAE and Bahrain to grow faster.

1979 Egypt-Israel peace deal, including maintaining freedom of navigation for Israeli ships in the Straits of Tiran.

Although the development does not bring Saudi Arabia into the Abraham Accords, it further highlights how Riyadh and Tel Aviv are moving in phases towards de facto normalisation.

Despite Saudi Arabia and Israel moving closer, the Biden administration understands that it is highly unlikely that any normalisation deal between the two countries will be announced while Biden is in Jeddah.

This is especially so considering that King Salman, who has been considered a supporter of the Palestinian cause for many decades, is still on the throne.

Saudi Arabia's current position is that the kingdom will not formally normalise with Israel unless and until the Palestinians have a sovereign and independent state based on the 1949-1967 borders.

It has been suggested that MBS might like to see Riyadh establish full fledged diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv.

But even after MBS ascends to the throne, Riyadh will likely move carefully on the normalisation issue, mindful of the kingdom's role in the wider Islamic world, as well as the risks of a backlash from within Saudi Arabia, where strong support still exists for the Palestinians.



Put simply, Saudi Arabia does not have to fully enter the Abraham Accords to be a part of the Arab world's trend towards normalisation.

Another major development that indicates a closer Saudi-Israeli relationship is Tel Aviv's approval for the transfer of the Red Sea islands of Tiran and Sanafir from Egypt to Saudi Arabia.

This has major implications for Riyadh and Tel Aviv's relationship for several reasons, including the fact that the deal would require the Saudis to pledge to Washington that they will adhere to the terms of the

US to resume Int'l Space Station flights with Russia

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday said it would resume flights to the International Space Station with Russia, despite its attempts to isolate Moscow over the invasion of Ukraine. "To ensure continued safe operations of the International Space Station, protect the lives of astronauts and ensure continuous US presence in space, NASA will resume integrated crews on US crew spacecraft and the Russian Soyuz," US space agency NASA said in a statement. NASA said that astronaut Frank Rubio would fly with two Russian cosmonauts on a Soyuz rocket scheduled to launch on September 21 from Kazakhstan, with another astronaut, Loral O'Hara, taking another mission in early 2023.

DEATH OF BRITON IN DONETSK UK summons Russian envoy

REUTERS, London

Britain's foreign office yesterday summoned Russian Ambassador Andrei Kelin to express "deep concern" over reports of the death of a British aid worker. "I am shocked to hear reports of the death of British aid worker Paul Urey while in the custody of a Russian proxy in Ukraine. Russia must bear the full responsibility for this," Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said. "Those responsible will be held to account."

An official in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic announced Paul Urey's death earlier in the day. His death was also confirmed by British charity Presidium Network, which described him as a humanitarian worker and denied he had any military background. Urey, 45, was detained and charged with "mercenary activities" by separatists in the DPR, a breakaway entity that is recognised only by Russia, Syria and North Korea.



Heatwave may

FROM PAGE 12

39 degrees Celsius in the last 24 hours ending at 6:00pm yesterday, said Md Monwar Hossain, a meteorologist with the department.

There could be rain after 72 hours, with moderately heavy showers at isolated places across the country.

19 Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 12

Saudi Arabia to perform hajj, which was held on July 8.

In 2019, around 1.27 lakh Bangladeshis were allowed to perform hajj. But due to the Covid pandemic, the largest annual Muslim congregation was held on a limited scale in the last two years.

Webb Telescope

FROM PAGE 12

science at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center said in a statement. "It's really exciting to think of the capability and opportunity that we have for observing these kinds of objects in our solar system."

Data from Webb's commissioning phase, as well as the data underlying the stunning first images shared with the public on Tuesday, are now being published in the Space Telescope Science Institute's Mikulski Archive for Space Telescopes for further study.

Ctg Wasa officials

FROM PAGE 1

The finance ministry on May 12 issued a circular, saying all types of foreign trips, including study tours, at the expense of operating and development budgets for all government officials would remain suspended until further notice.

Another circular issued by the ministry said foreign trips of officials of all government, statutory, state-owned, autonomous and semi-autonomous organisations and state-run companies and financial institutions will remain suspended.

About the trip to the US, a spokesperson for Chattogram Wasa said the 14-day trip was for training and inspection of factories before making purchases.

Superintendent Engineer Arifur Rahman who recently returned from a trip to Turkey, said, "We did not go abroad on government funds. The cost was borne by the project contractor. That's why we got permission from the government to travel."

Chief Engineer Maksud Alam and Superintendent Engineer Mohammad Mahabubul Alam could not be reached for comments.

South Korean firm Taeyoung E&C is the contractor for the Bhandal Jhuri Water Supply Project.

Twenty-seven CWASA officials made headlines in 2019 by travelling to Uganda for training.

88pc female

FROM PAGE 12

workers to Saudi Arabia and other Middle East countries" says the agency has to provide workers with a copy of the "recruitment contract", including Bangla translation, before migration.

An employment contract between the recruited worker and the employer will stipulate the worker's wage, accommodation facilities, duration of employment, compensation amount in the event of death or injury, cost of emigration to and return from the foreign country, and so on, says the Overseas Employment and Migrant Act-2013.

The recruitment agent shall be deemed to be a representative of the overseas employer, it says. The agencies do follow the government's 2007 policy, said Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman, former secretary general of International Recruiting Agencies.

"There is no reason that the migrant workers are not getting the hard copy of their contracts since it is part of the recruitment system. A worker cannot migrate without a job contract."

However, if a recruitment agency does not provide a written job contract, the migrant worker has to demand one, he added.

PM hopefuls

FROM PAGE 12

as they are, it's actually about the country at large," Tugendhat told broadcasters.

"What we need to show, what everybody needs to show, is that they're able to communicate Conservative messages strongly and debate hard. Because this isn't actually a knife fight in a phone box. This is about governing the United Kingdom."

Whoever gets the job will take on rocketing inflation and low economic growth, as well as the public's lack of confidence in politics after Johnson's scandal-ridden time in power.

2 univ students die as car

FROM PAGE 12

treatment at National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR), said police.

In Bogura, three people died and at least six others were injured as two buses collided head-on in Sherpur area.

Witnesses said a Naogaon-bound bus collided with a Dhaka-bound bus on the Ghoga Bridge around 3:00pm, leaving two dead on the spot.

Another person died on the way to a hospital. Identities of the victims could not be known till yesterday evening, said Baniul Anam, in-charge (inspector) of Sherpur highway police outpost.

[Our correspondents in Narayanganj, Bogura, Pabna and Gazipur contributed to this report]

Hindu temple

FROM PAGE 2

In the evening, the police took the man's father into custody from his house.

Police could not bring the situation under control before night, said locals.

The individual who allegedly made the post managed to flee the area.

Azgar Ali, upazila nirbahi officer, and Haran Chandra Paul, officer-in-charge of Lohagara Police Station, visited the village.

They said police forces were deployed in the area to prevent further violence.