

A Palestinian state key to ties with Israel

Says top Saudi diplomat

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia will not normalise ties with Israel in the absence of a two-state solution with the Palestinians, the kingdom's top diplomat has said, according to a tweet by the foreign ministry yesterday.

The comments by Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos came as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed normalisation with Saudi Arabia in talks with White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in Jerusalem on Thursday.

"True normalisation and true stability will only come through... giving the Palestinians a state," Prince Faisal told Bloomberg at the summit.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, is a close partner of the United States but it has repeatedly refused to normalise ties with US ally Israel due to its occupation of Palestinian territories.

The US-brokered Abraham Accords in 2020 saw the kingdom's neighbours – the UAE and Bahrain – establish full diplomatic ties with Israel.

Netanyahu has repeatedly expressed his desire to see Saudi Arabia join the list.

In their talks on Thursday, Netanyahu and Sullivan discussed "measures to deepen the Abraham Accords... with an emphasis on a breakthrough with Saudi," the Israeli leader's office said.



A Palestinian protester attempts to hurl a burning tyre across Israel's controversial separation barrier during a demonstration near Qalandia village in the occupied West Bank, yesterday, to protest Israeli plans to expand the Atarot settlement industrial zone and to construct a new settlement in the area. PHOTO: AFP

India ready to go extra mile

FM Jaishankar pledges further support to crisis-hit Sri Lanka

AGENCIES

India yesterday pledged further support to its southern neighbour Sri Lanka, as the crisis-stricken country expects to get China's backing for its debt restructuring plan within days to help unlock a \$2.9 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund.

The island nation of 22 million people has grappled with challenges during the past year ranging from a shortage of foreign currency to runaway inflation and a steep recession - the worst such crisis since independence from Britain in 1948.

Sri Lanka is racing to secure a bailout from the IMF but requires the backing of both China and India, its biggest bilateral lenders,

to reach a final agreement with the global lender.

India has already told the IMF it strongly supports Sri Lanka's debt restructuring plan and China, the island's largest bilateral lender, is the last major creditor that has yet to agree to the deal, reports Reuters.

India has also told Sri Lanka it is committed to boosting investment in its debt-ridden neighbour, Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar said yesterday during a visit.

"India will encourage greater investments in the Sri Lankan economy, especially in core areas like energy, tourism and infrastructure," Jaishankar told reporters in Colombo. "India is prepared to go the extra mile when Sri Lanka feels the need."

"We count on the government of Sri Lanka to provide a more business friendly environment to create a powerful pull factor," he said.

Jaishankar yesterday met Wickremesinghe, and they are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding for a renewable power project covering three islands in Sri Lanka's north.

Sri Lanka owes about \$1 billion to India that will come under the purview of the debt restructuring deal. New Delhi has provided the island nation another \$4 billion in rapid assistance since early last year.

"We felt strongly that Sri Lanka's creditors should take proactive steps to facilitate its recovery," Jaishankar added.

Blast derails train in SE Pakistan

15 people injured

REUTERS, Quetta

At least 15 people were injured when a bomb blast derailed a passenger train in the southwestern Pakistani province of Balochistan yesterday, a government official said.

The attack - which was claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army, a regional separatist group - derailed eight carriages including the locomotive, Deputy Commissioner Bolan Agha Samiullah told Reuters.

He said a rescue team was facing difficulties as the site was in a mountainous area.

TIBET AVALANCHE

Death toll rises to 20, eight missing

AFP, Beijing

The death toll from an avalanche that struck a road in mountainous Tibet this week has risen to 20, state television reported yesterday. The snowslide occurred Tuesday evening at the exit of a tunnel on a highway in southeastern Tibet, trapping a number of people in their vehicles. China's Ministry of Emergency Management sent a disaster response team to the region the following day. State media reported yesterday that authorities had now placed the death toll at 20, with eight people still missing. Five of the survivors were seriously injured. "At present, the rescue work is still ongoing," state broadcaster CCTV reported, citing rescue authorities. The Duoxiongla Tunnel was shrouded in cloudy weather but it was not hindering rescue work, CCTV added. Chinese authorities say some 1,000 rescue workers and dozens of emergency vehicles have been deployed to the site of the disaster. Avalanches are common in the Himalayas, home to the world's highest mountains. In October at least 26 people died when a mountaineering expedition was caught in an avalanche on Mount Draupadi ka Danda-II in India's northern state of Uttarakhand.

'Nothing there' Biden downplays classified documents issue

AFP, Aptos



US President Joe Biden on Thursday downplayed the furor over the discovery of old classified documents improperly stored in his personal belongings, saying "there's nothing there."

Asked by reporters during a trip to California about the issue, he said: "I think you're going to find there's nothing there. I have no regrets. I'm following what the lawyers have told me they want me to do. It's exactly what we're doing. There's no there there." Biden's defiant comments came just over a week after news first emerged that around a dozen secret documents dating from his time as vice president to Barack Obama had been found sitting in a former Biden office space.

Bangladesh

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not carry over to the Super Six stage. With already four points carried to the Super Six from their wins over Sri Lanka and Australia, the Disha Biswas-led side will now be eyeing the semis.

The Super Six stage has been divided into two groups of six with three teams advancing from each group in the first round. Bangladesh are in Group I of the Super Six which consists of India, South Africa, UAE along with the two other teams from Bangladesh's first round group - Australia and Sri Lanka.

The Super Six teams avoid playing the team that finished in the same position from the other group and also avoid the team they faced in the first group stage. Thus, Bangladesh avoid India (champions of Group D) and Sri Lanka and Australia, who they faced in the first group stage.

Each team will play two games in the Super Six and the top two teams will move to the semis. In case of teams ending up with equal points, the team with most wins from the Super Six will advance. Bangladesh have three wins in the tournament so far. After number of wins, net run-rate will be the second qualifier criteria.

India also have carried four points to the Super Six stage and will play Australia and Sri Lanka. All the Super Six games will be played at Potchefstroom with Bangladesh's second Super Six game against the UAE on January 25.

Boy rescued

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He has been admitted to the Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital and is stable.

Integra, the ship, left Chattogram port with 1,337 containers, including empty ones, on January 12 and reached the outer anchorage of Port Klang on January 16.

But when the vessel was waiting for a berth, crewmembers heard a voice and bangs from inside a container.

Failing to identify the exact container, the captain informed the Port Klang authority, the ship's local and Bangladeshi agents, and Marine Police.

SM Faisal, assistant manager of the ship's Bangladeshi agent, told The Daily Star that the authorities berthed the vessel on January 17 night on an emergency basis.

After unloading six to seven empty containers, they found the boy, said Faisal, quoting an email from the vessel's captain.

Indian SC stands

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the candidate are in the public domain and have been extensively deliberated upon in the print and electronic media.

"The manner in which the candidate has expressed his views does not justify the inference that he is a 'highly biased/opinionated person' or that he has been 'selectively critical on social media on the important policies, initiatives and directions of the government' (as indicated in the objections of Department of Justice) nor is there any material to indicate that the expressions used by the candidate are suggestive of his links with any political party with strong ideological leanings," said the collegium statement.

It said Sundaresan has specialised in commercial law and would be an asset to the Bombay High Court which has a large volume of cases of commercial and securities laws.

Referring to the government's view on the appointment of the judge to the Madras High Court, the collegium said it has resolved to reiterate its earlier recommendation for the elevation of R John Sathyan.

The collegium said it found him suitable for elevation. It pointed out that the Intelligence Bureau reported that he enjoys a good personal and professional image and that nothing adverse has come to notice against his integrity.

Sathyan had shared an article published in 'The Quint', which was critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and in another post portrayed the 2017 death by suicide of Anitha, for failing to pass the pre-medical entrance test, as "political betrayal"

and tagged it "shame of you India".

"The IB [Intelligence Bureau] report notes that he does not have any overt political leanings. In this backdrop, the adverse comments of the IB extracted above in respect of social media posts made by him ... will not impinge on the suitability, character or integrity of Shri Sathyan," the collegium statement said.

"In this view, the collegium is of the considered opinion that Shri R John Sathyan is fit and suitable for being appointed as a Judge of the Madras High Court," it added.

On the proposal for the appointment of Saurabh Kirpal, a person belonging to the LGBT community, the Indian apex court collegium statement said that from letters of the Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW), it appears that there are two objections: one is that Kirpal's partner is Swiss and the other is that he is open about his sexual orientation.

The collegium said the communications of R&AW do not reflect any apprehension that the individual conduct or behaviour of Kirpal's partner has any bearing on national security.

It said, "Many persons in high positions, including present and past holders of constitutional offices, have and have had spouses who are foreign nationals."

On the second objection, it cited the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court said every individual is entitled to maintain their own dignity and individuality, based on sexual orientation, and added that the fact that Kirpal is open about his sexual orientation, goes to his credit.

12m-yr-old whale

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The museum said that it took two months to extract and move the skull, which was encased in a hardened block of sediment and weighs around 650 pounds (295 kilograms).

It is the most complete fossil whale skull ever recovered in the Calvert Cliffs area, according to the museum, and has been christened "Cody" for its finder.

Godfrey said the skull has been moved to the museum's Fossil Preparation Lab and specialised tools will be used to remove the sediment that encases most of it, a process that will take many months.

Rock legend David

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"Although he is no longer here with us, his humanity and kind soul will continue to guide and inspire us. His legacy will continue to live on through his legendary music," read his wife's statement.

"Peace, love, and harmony to all who knew David and those he touched. We will miss him dearly."

The two-time Rock and Roll Hall of Famer -- known as much for his alternative guitar tunings, lush harmonies and abstract lyrics as for his pacifist activism, brutal honesty and living dangerously -- remained a prolific artist throughout his life.

Over the course of six decades in the music industry, the vocalist, guitarist and composer at the forefront of countercultural rock penned a rich array of heartfelt ballads and knife-edged bangers.

Tributes quickly poured in honouring the beloved musician with a signature walrus mustache.

"I don't know what to say other than I'm heartbroken to hear about David Crosby," tweeted Brian Wilson, co-founder of the Beach Boys.

Police assaults

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"If the police tortured someone, action will be taken against the officer," he added.

SI Alim also refuted the allegation, saying that the police team went to the madrasa after receiving a call from the superintendent.

"We didn't find anything wrong and released them in the evening," the SI said.

Narsingdi District Education Officer Gautam Chandra said, "Even if the students had posted on Facebook, the teachers could have disciplined them. If we find any case of police beating them, action will definitely be taken against those involved."

EC yet to begin

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parliamentary constituencies. We want to complete the process by May," Election Commissioner Md Alamgir told The Daily Star.

He said the EC would follow its work plan for the 12th national election, likely to be held late December this year or early January next year.

"We will wait for a certain period for the final census report. If we do not get it, we will go ahead with delimitation using the old census data."

The BBS launched the preliminary census report in July last year.

Dilder Hossain, project director of the Population and Housing Census 2022, said they were expecting to have the post-enumeration check report from the BIDS soon.

According to the delimitation of constituencies law, boundaries of Jatiya Sangsad constituencies should be redrawn based on the distribution of population as given in the latest census report, keeping in mind intact administrative units and administrative convenience.

The commission will have to publish a preliminary list of redrawn constituencies and the voters will get the chance to file appeals against the EC's decision.

The EC would be able to finalise demarcation only after settling the objections.

According to the preliminary report of the 2022 census, the country's total population was about 16.52 crore, up from 14.40 crore in 2011 census. Population in Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna and other cities saw a significant rise.

The latest census said there were 59.79 lakh people in Dhaka north city and 43 lakh in Dhaka south city. There were 69.70 lakh people in

undivided Dhaka in 2011.

The latest report says that population of 63 districts increased, but it came down in Jhalakathi in comparison with the data of the 2011 census.

EC officials said this year they might need to redraw more constituencies than in 2018 when the delimitation was done ahead of 11th parliamentary polls.

The then KM Nurul Huda-led commission brought changes to boundaries of 25 constituencies in 2018. The ATM Shamsul Huda-led commission brought massive changes to 133 constituencies in 2008. That was the first demarcation of constituencies after the 2001 census.

The then commission, headed by Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad, redrew the boundaries of 87 constituencies in 2013 ahead of the 10th parliamentary elections. That was also the first demarcation after the 2011 census.

Election expert Abdul Alim said the EC should follow the international guiding principles for redrawing constituencies. The areas should be as equal as possible. The variation in the number of voters between constituencies should be plus or minus 5 percent, he added.

"We see that one constituency has more than seven lakh voters and another has only about two lakh."

If voters and other stakeholders suspect that the electoral boundaries have been drawn unfairly, it affects the credibility of the entire electoral process, he told The Daily Star.

"Hence, electoral boundaries must be drawn in a manner that promotes credible and fair elections," added Alim who worked on behalf of United Nations with the ATM Shamsul Huda-led EC.

Lebanese MPs sleep in House to press for end to impasse

AFP, Beirut

Two independent Lebanese lawmakers who spent the night in parliament vowed yesterday to stay until MPs elect a new president, as political deadlock hobbles the country already in deep economic crisis.

Lebanon has been without a head of state for more than two months and the government has been operating in a caretaker capacity since May as sectarian leaders fail to reach a political consensus on who should govern.

The embattled local currency,

which in three years has lost more than 95 percent of its value, dropped to a new low Thursday against the US dollar as parliament failed for an 11th time to agree on a new president.

"We will stay in parliament, and we call on lawmakers to remember their responsibilities, carry them out and elect a president," said MP Melhem Khalaf, who together with lawmaker Najat Saliba is holding the sit-in.

"Without a government, a president, and with only a powerless parliament... Are we supposed to leave Lebanon to their fate?" he told AFP from the parliament chamber.