

WEST BANK

Israelis revive flashpoint settlement

AFP, Burqah

Israelis started reviving a flashpoint outpost settlement in the occupied West Bank on Monday, AFP journalists said, constructing a building at the site which has drawn international attention.

Using a truck, diggers and an earth roller, work got underway to erect a portable building at the northern West Bank site.

AFP journalists saw Israeli soldiers guarding around 20 people carrying out construction work at the Homesh site, which Israel evacuated nearly two decades ago.

Meanwhile, an Israeli civilian was shot dead at the entrance to a Jewish settlement in West Bank yesterday, medics said. The 32-year-old was identified as Meir Tamari by the Shomron Regional Council, the Israeli body which administers settlements in the northern West Bank.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A firefighter walks near cars damaged during a massive Russian drone strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv yesterday.

Differences on Ukraine won't hurt ties with India: US

REUTERS, New Delhi

The friendship between the United States and India has never been stronger and disagreements over Russia's invasion of Ukraine won't hinder ties between the two, Washington's new ambassador to New Delhi said yesterday.

Eric Garcetti said India had helped to keep the price cap on Russian oil imposed by the Group of Seven economies, the European Union and Australia late last year to try to deprive Moscow of funds to fight its Ukraine war.

"We won't stop speaking about the unprovoked war of aggression by Russia against Ukraine," Garcetti told news channel CNN-News 18, weeks before Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state-visit to the United States from June 21-24.

"At the same time, where we don't agree 100 percent of the time, we are not going to stop the momentum in this relationship," he said. "We know that we can continue doing things together."

New Delhi has refused to condemn its old ally Russia for the war and has increased its trade with Moscow to record levels, driven largely by imports of Russian oil.

KOSOVO CLASHES

Russia tells West to stop 'propaganda'

Nato soldiers on guard in Kosovo Serb town

AGENCIES

Russia yesterday told the West to stop its "deceitful propaganda" after more than 30 peacekeepers deployed in a Nato-led mission in Kosovo were injured in clashes with ethnic Serbs.

Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, but Belgrade and Moscow have refused to recognise it. Russia, Serbia's traditional ally, also effectively barred Kosovo from having a seat at the UN.

"We call on the West to finally halt its deceitful propaganda and stop blaming the incidents in Kosovo on desperate Serbs, who are trying to defend their legitimate rights and freedom peacefully and without weapons," the foreign ministry said.

Dozens of Nato troops secured a municipal building in the Kosovo town of Zvecan yesterday, reports Reuters.

Kosovo is mainly populated by ethnic Albanians, but Serbs there have remained largely loyal to Belgrade, especially in the north where they are a majority.

Last month, ethnic Albanian mayors were elected in several northern towns, triggering protest from ethnic Serbs who demand their removal. "It is not too late to reverse the story of these fake municipal elections of April 23, if Westerners really care about peace and stability," Russia said.

Serbs boycotted last month's election in northern provinces, allowing ethnic Albanians to take control of local councils despite a low turnout, reports AFP.

SUDAN CONFLICT

Fighting subsides after truce extended

UN says 13.6m children in urgent need of humanitarian support

REUTERS, Dubai

Clashes subsided in Sudan's capital yesterday though fighting could be heard in some areas, residents said, after military factions battling for more than six weeks agreed to extend a ceasefire aimed at allowing aid to reach civilians.

The army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) agreed to extend a week-long ceasefire deal by five days just before it was due to expire late on Monday.

The truce was brokered and is being remotely monitored by Saudi Arabia and the United States, which say it has been violated by both sides but has still allowed for the delivery of aid to an estimated two million people.

"We hope this truce succeeds even if only to stop the war a little and that we can return to our normal lives. We have hope in the truce and we don't have other options," said Hind Saber, a 53-year-old resident of Khartoum.

Hours before the ceasefire extension was signed, residents reported intensive fighting in all three of the adjoining cities that make up Sudan's greater capital around the confluence of the Nile - Khartoum, Omdurman and Bahri.

The war has caused nearly 1.4 million people to flee their homes,

including more than 350,000 that have crossed into neighbouring countries.

Areas of the capital have been hit by widespread looting and frequent cuts to power and water supplies. Most hospitals have been put out of service.

The conflict erupted on April 15 over internationally backed plans for a transition to elections under a civilian government.



The army and the RSF had held the top positions on Sudan's ruling council since former leader Omar al-Bashir was toppled during a popular uprising in 2019.

They staged a coup in 2021 as they were due to hand leadership of the council to civilians, before falling out over the chain of command and restructuring of the RSF under the planned transition.

UN children's agency Unicef said more than 13.6 million

children in Sudan, a country of 49 million people, were in urgent need of lifesaving humanitarian support.

The UN World Food Programme, which expects up to 2.5 million people in Sudan to slip into hunger in coming months, said that 17,000 tonnes of food had been looted since the conflict began.

WFP said on Monday that it had begun to distribute food in parts of the capital for the first time since the outbreak of fighting.

The situation is particularly dire in Darfur, the vast western region already ravaged by two decades of war and civil strife, where about a quarter of Sudan's population lives, reports AFP.

Activists and observers warn that Darfur civilians continue to be attacked, entire districts have been burned to the ground, and tens of thousands have been forced to flee into neighbouring Chad.

Amid the chaos, the region has been all but cut off from the world, with only sporadic access to power and the internet.

The UN has warned for weeks that fighting in Darfur's major cities between the army and the RSF has also drawn in local militias, tribal fighters and armed civilians.

NUKE ACTIVITIES

Iran 'resolves' one of IAEA's concerns

AFP, Tehran

Iran has "resolved" one of three cases raised by the UN watchdog as possible evidence it had not declared all its past nuclear activities, Iranian media reported yesterday.

The reports came just days before the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency is due to meet to review progress in addressing the watchdog's remaining concerns.

The IAEA had reported the discovery of traces of radioactive material at three sites not declared by Iran as having hosted past nuclear activity in a blow to efforts to restore a landmark 2015 deal between Tehran and major powers.

"With the improvement of interactions between Iran and the IAEA... the case related to one of the agency's alleged sites -- Abadeh -- has been resolved," Iran's Fars news agency reported.

"This concludes the agency's inquiry into one of the three alleged locations raised," it added.

The Marivan site in Abadeh county in the southern province of Fars is the first of the three sites to be addressed under a work plan agreed by Iran and the IAEA in March last year.

AI carries 'risk of extinction' for humans

Say industry chiefs, experts

AFP, Paris

Global leaders should be working to reduce "the risk of extinction" from artificial intelligence technology, a group of industry chiefs and experts warned yesterday.

A one-line statement signed by dozens of specialists, including Sam Altman whose firm OpenAI created the ChatGPT bot, said tackling the risks from AI should be "a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war".

ChatGPT burst into the spotlight late last year, demonstrating an ability to generate essays, poems and conversations from the briefest of prompts -- and sparking billions of dollars of investment into the field.

But critics have raised the alarm over everything from biased algorithms to the possibility of massive job losses as AI-powered automation seeps into daily life.

The latest statement, housed on the website of US-based non-profit Center for AI Safety, gave no detail of the potential existential threat posed by AI.

But several of the signatories, including Geoffrey Hinton, who created some of the technology underlying AI systems and is known as the father of the industry, have made similar warnings in the past.

Biden discusses F-16 sale with Erdogan



REUTERS, Washington

US President Joe Biden said Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan in a call on Monday repeated Ankara's desire to buy F-16 fighter jets from the United States, while Biden told him Washington wanted Ankara to drop its objection to Sweden's joining Nato. The exchange took place when Biden called Erdogan to congratulate him on his victory in Turkey's presidential election on Sunday.

"I spoke to Erdogan. I congratulated Erdogan. He still wants to work on something on the F-16s. I told him we wanted a deal with Sweden, so let's get that done. And so we'll be back in touch with one another," Biden told reporters before departing the White House for Delaware.

WWII WRECKS LOOTING

Malaysia searches Chinese ship

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's coast guard said yesterday authorities were questioning the crew of a Chinese vessel detained on suspicion of looting two British World War II shipwrecks. Officers discovered unexploded shells upon boarding the Chinese-registered vessel, which was detained for illegal anchorage at the weekend, said Nurul Hizam Zakaria, Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency chief in Johor state. "Our investigation is now directed to where these cannon shells originated from. Right now, we have officers from multi-agencies searching the big ship," he told AFP. Hizam said the vessel from the city of Fuzhou had a crew of 32, some of whom were in coast guard custody for questioning.

MOSQUE CLASHES

China deploys cops, makes arrests

AFP, Beijing

China deployed hundreds of police and made arrests in a mostly Muslim southwestern town after clashes erupted over the planned partial demolition of a mosque, witnesses said.

The town of Nagu, Yunnan province, recently pushed ahead with plans to raze four minarets and dome roof of Najaiyang Mosque, a resident said on Monday.

The area is home to a sizable enclave of Hui, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group who have come under pressure in the face of a broad crackdown.

On Saturday, dozens of officers wielding truncheons and riot shields repelled a crowd outside the mosque that was hurling objects at them, videos circulating on social media and the witness said.

"They want to proceed with forced demolitions, so people here went to stop them," a local woman said.



PHOTO: AFP

Security personnel with ballistic shields escort Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan, centre, to the High Court in Lahore, Pakistan yesterday. Khan was granted bail on a new charge of abetting violence against the military by his protesting supporters after he was arrested and detained on May 9 in a corruption case, his lawyer said.