

## Saudi names ambassador for Palestinian Territories

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia yesterday named a non-resident ambassador for the Palestinian Territories who will also serve as consul general in Jerusalem, a new position announced amid speculation about possible future ties with Israel.

The role will be filled by Nayef al-Sudairi, the current ambassador to Jordan, according to a social media post from the embassy in Amman confirmed by a Saudi foreign ministry official.

The appointment represents “an important step” underscoring the desire of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman “to strengthen relations with the brothers of the State of Palestine and give it a formal boost in all areas”, Sudairi said in a video broadcast by the Saudi state-affiliated Al-Ekhbariya channel.

The file for the Palestinian Territories has traditionally been handled by Saudi Arabia's embassy in Amman.

Saudi Arabia does not recognise Israel and did not join the 2020 US brokered Abraham Accords that saw Israel establish ties with two of the kingdom's neighbours, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

But during US President Joe Biden's tour of the Middle East last year, the Saudi civil aviation authority announced that it was lifting overflight restrictions on “all carriers”, paving the way for Israeli planes to use Saudi airspace.

Biden himself flew directly to Jeddah from Israel's Ben Gurion airport for his talks with Saudi leaders.

The kingdom denied at the time that the airspace move was “a precursor to any further steps” towards normalisation.



A man wades through a flooded street in Bago township in Myanmar's Bago region, yesterday. Floods and landslides caused by monsoon rain have killed five and forced around 48,000 people to flee their homes, the relief ministry said.

PHOTO: STAR

## What lies ahead for Pakistan as it heads to polls

REUTERS

Pakistan's caretaker government under interim Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar will oversee a general election after the dissolution of the lower house of parliament. Kakar and his cabinet will run the government until a national election is held and the winner can secure a parliamentary majority and select a new PM.

**Will the elections be delayed?** Kakar's caretaker government must hold elections within 90 days. However, after the outgoing government approved a new census in its final days, new electoral boundaries must be drawn up by the Election Commission. The exercise of drawing fresh boundaries for hundreds of federal and provincial constituencies in a country of 241 million people may take six months or more, according to a former commission official. The Election Commission has to announce how long it will take to complete the exercise, which may also

involve litigation by candidates over the new formations of the constituencies, and, based on that, give an election date.

**What is the role of the caretaker government?** Caretakers are usually limited to overseeing elections, but Kakar's set-up will be the most empowered in Pakistan's history thanks to recent legislation that allows it to make policy decisions on economic matters. The move is ostensibly aimed at keeping on track a nine-month \$3 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout secured in June.



**What is the military's role?** The military still has a huge role behind the scenes. Kakar's party, the Balochistan Awami Party, is widely considered to be close to the military. Political analysts fear that if the caretaker set-up stretches beyond its constitutional tenure, a prolonged period without an elected government would allow the military to consolidate control.

**Who are the main contenders?**

There are three main contenders to lead the next government: Khan's PTI, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) of Shehbaz Sharif and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

With Khan in jail and barred from the polls, his PTI will hope to exploit supporters' sympathy and anger and repeat its 2018 victory. But amidst a continuing standoff with the military, PTI's prospects hinge on a detente with the generals, which looks unlikely.

Three-time premier Nawaz Sharif, the brother of the outgoing prime minister and whose PML-N was the senior partner in the outgoing coalition government, is seeking a return from exile. But with a corruption conviction against him still in force, Shehbaz remains a front-runner to return to power.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, 34, the young chairman of the PPP and son of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, is another key candidate. He made waves locally and in foreign capitals in his first government job as foreign minister in the outgoing government, and is widely seen as a future premier.

## 6 die in migrant boat tragedy in Channel

AFP, Lille

Six people were killed when a boat carrying migrants heading to Britain sank in the Channel early yesterday, French maritime officials said, as a search continued to find those still missing. A spokeswoman from the French coastal authority Premar said between five and 10 passengers were still missing, while 55 had been rescued. Three French ships, a helicopter and a plane have been mobilised to search the area off Sangatte in northern France, along with two British ships. The boat capsized around 2:00am local time off the northern coast of France, according to the prosecutor. More than 100,000 migrants have crossed the Channel on small boats from France to southeast England since Britain began publicly recording the arrivals in 2018, official figures revealed on Friday.

## Security alert prompts Eiffel Tower evacuation

AFP, Paris

A security alert yesterday prompted the evacuation of three floors of the Eiffel Tower in central Paris, France's most emblematic symbol which drew 6.2 million visitors last year. SETE, the body which runs the site, said bomb disposal experts as well as police were scouring the area, including a restaurant located on one of the floors. “It's a usual procedure in this kind of situation which however is rare,” a spokeswoman said. Visitors were evacuated from both the three floors and the square under the monument shortly after 1:30pm (11:30 GMT). Construction work on the tower began in January 1887 and was finished on March 31, 1889. It received two million visitors during the World's Fair of 1889.

## Malaysians vote in six state polls

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysians in six states went to the polls yesterday to vote for state assembly members in elections widely seen as a barometer of support for Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's unity government. While the elections are unlikely to immediately affect Anwar's current two-thirds majority in parliament, analysts said his hold on power could weaken if his Pakatan Harapan coalition suffers a setback, especially among Malay Muslim voters in the largely Islamic Southeast Asian nation. More than 9.7 million voters are expected to cast their ballots to elect 245 assembly members in the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Penang, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. Of the six states, Anwar's coalition holds three, while the rest are controlled by an influential rural-based Malay Muslim alliance led by former PM Muhyiddin Yassin.

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