

Don't opine
on foreign
elections
Trump admin
tells US diplomats
abroad

REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio instructed US diplomats worldwide not to comment on the fairness or integrity of elections conducted by foreign countries, according to an internal note seen by Reuters on Thursday, in a significant departure from Washington's traditional approach of promoting free and fair elections overseas.

The order, sent to all US diplomatic posts in a July 17 internal State Department cable, says the Department will no longer issue election-related statements or social media posts from Washington unless there is a "clear and compelling" foreign policy interest.

"When it is appropriate to comment on a foreign election, our message should be brief, focused on congratulating the winning candidate and, when appropriate, noting shared foreign policy interests," said the cable.



A Palestinian reacts to tear gas during a demonstration against what Palestinians say is Israel's confiscation of their land in Raba, near Jenin, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Syria tribes clash with Druze fighters

Says monitor; bloodshed leaves 321 dead in ongoing sectarian violence; Israel sends aid for Druze community



in several villages near the city.

AFP correspondents heard intermittent gunfire and explosions and saw smoke rising from the villages. Druze fighters told AFP they were responding to the sources of fire.

Asas al-Enad, a tribal chief from the central city of Hama, said he and his men had made the journey to the village of Walqa, northwest of Sweida, because "the Bedouin called for our help and we came to support them".

The United Nations rights chief yesterday demanded that Syria's interim authorities ensure accountability after days of deadly clashes in Sweida.

"In light of the recent attacks targeting the Druze community in Sweida and the severe humanitarian situation in the area, Foreign Minister Gideon Saar has ordered the urgent transfer of humanitarian aid to the Druze population in the region," the foreign ministry said.

The two million shekel (nearly \$600,000) package includes food parcels and medical supplies, the ministry said.

AFP, Walqa

Armed tribes supported by Syria's Islamist-led government clashed with Druze fighters outside Sweida yesterday a day after government troops withdrew from the Druze-majority city, the warring parties and a monitoring group said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported "clashes west of Sweida pitting tribal fighters and Bedouin supported by the authorities on one side, against Druze fighters on the other".

Combatants on both sides confirmed the clashes and AFP correspondents reported hearing exchanges of fire. Syrian government forces withdrew from Sweida province on Thursday after coming under heavy bombardment by Israel.

The pullout from Syria's Druze heartland came on the orders of interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa, who said mediation by the United States and others had helped avert a "large scale escalation" with Israel.

Bloodshed in Sweida left at least 321 people dead, the Syrian Network for Human Rights said, in a new toll, as Druze fighters clashed with Sunni Bedouin tribes, who were later joined by government forces.

A ceasefire took effect on Thursday, but Sharaa's office accused Druze groups of violating the agreement.

Tribal fighters gathered around Sweida yesterday to reinforce the Bedouin, positioning themselves

adding: "Those responsible must be held to account."

"It is crucial that immediate steps are taken to prevent recurrence of such violence," he said. "Revenge and vengeance are not the answer."

Israel, which bombed the Syrian army in Sweida and Damascus earlier this week to put pressure on the government to withdraw, said yesterday that it was sending aid to the Druze community in Sweida.

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Lightning strikes kill 33 in eastern India this week

Dozens injured

AFP, Patna

Lightning strikes during monsoon storms in eastern India this week killed at least 33 people and injured dozens, officials said yesterday.

The deaths in Bihar occurred during fierce storms between Wednesday and Thursday, a state disaster management department statement said, with the victims mostly farmers and labourers working in the open.

More heavy rain and lightning are forecast for parts of the state.

Bihar state's disaster management minister, Vijay Kumar Mandal, told AFP that officials in vulnerable districts had been directed to "create awareness to take precautionary steps following an alert on lightning".

The state government announced compensation of 4 million rupees (\$4,600) to the families of those killed by lightning.

At least 243 died by lightning in 2024 and 275 the year earlier, according to the state government.

India's eastern region, including Bihar, is prone to annual floods that kill dozens and displace hundreds of thousands of people during peak monsoon season.

MYANMAR CONFLICT

Junta offers cash rewards to anti-coup defectors

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta said yesterday it is offering cash rewards to fighters willing to desert armed groups defying its rule and "return to the legal fold" ahead of a slated election.

The Southeast Asian country has been consumed by civil war since a 2021 coup, with the embattled junta facing an array of pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic armed rebels.

The "National Unity Government", a self-proclaimed administration in exile dominated by ousted lawmakers, has called the junta's call for cooperation "a strategy filled with deception aimed at legitimising their power consolidating sham election".

After suffering major battlefield reverses, the military has touted elections around the end of the year as a pathway to peace -- plans denounced as a sham by opposition groups and international monitors.

State media The Global New Light of Myanmar said yesterday "individuals who returned to the legal fold with arms and ammunition are being offered specific cash rewards".

The junta mouthpiece did not specify how much cash it is offering, but said 14 anti-coup fighters had surrendered since it issued a statement pledging to "welcome" defectors two weeks ago.

"These individuals chose to abandon the path of armed struggle due to their desire to live peacefully within the framework of the law," the newspaper said.

KASHMIR ATTACK

US designates Pakistan group as terrorists
India welcomes US move

AFP, Washington

The United States on Thursday designated as terrorists a shadowy group blamed for an April attack in India-administered Kashmir, which triggered the worst conflict between India and Pakistan in decades.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio described The Resistance Front (TRF) as a "front and proxy" of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a UN-designated terrorist group based in Pakistan.

The terrorist designation "demonstrates the Trump administration's commitment to protecting our national security interests, countering terrorism, and enforcing President (Donald) Trump's call for justice for the Pahalgam attack," Rubio said in a statement.

India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar yesterday said that Washington's action was a "strong affirmation of India-US counter-terrorism cooperation", writing on X. Gunmen in April shot dead 26 people, almost all Hindus, in Pahalgam, a tourist hub in the Indian-administered side of divided Kashmir.

Survivors told reporters that gunmen separated women and children and ordered some of the men to recite the Muslim declaration of faith.

Little had been previously known about TRF, which initially claimed responsibility for the Pahalgam attack. But as public criticism mounted over the killings, the group retracted its claim.

India designates TRF as a terrorist organisation and the India-based Observer Research Foundation think tank calls it "a smokescreen and an offshoot of LeT".



'Benign' vein issue behind Trump's swollen legs
Says White House

REUTERS, Washington

The White House said on Thursday that US President Donald Trump is experiencing swelling in his lower legs and bruising on his right hand, after photographs emerged of Trump with swollen ankles and makeup covering the afflicted part of his hand.

White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt, reading a letter from Trump's doctor at a press briefing, said both ailments were benign. His leg swelling is from a "common" vein condition, and his hand is bruised from shaking so many hands, she told reporters.

After Leavitt's briefing, the White House released the letter from a US Navy officer who is Trump's physician, Sean Barbabella.

It said Trump underwent a suite of tests about the issues. Leavitt told reporters Trump was not experiencing discomfort due to the condition.



Malaysian protesters display placards during a demonstration against US envoy nominee Nick Adams outside the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Trump nominated Adams—a self-proclaimed 'alpha male' known for his outspoken views—a week ago for the envoy role, which commentators say requires a nuanced understanding of Malaysia's multicultural and Muslim-majority society.

ON THE NOTE OF
KEEPING PROMISES

THE DESTINATION DHANMONDI

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