

US raises pressure on Palestinians by closing Washington mission

RAMALLAH, SEPT 10 /- / The United States has decided to close the Palestinian mission in Washington in the latest move against them by President Donald Trump, a Palestinian official said today, denouncing it as a "dangerous escalation".

The closure comes as Trump seeks to force the Palestinian leadership, which has cut off contact with the White House, to negotiate as his team pursues a plan for Middle East peace - what he calls the "ultimate deal".

The United States has also been angry by the Palestinian bid to have Israel investigated for war crimes at the International Criminal Court. Palestinian officials say the reason given for the closure was their campaign at the ICC. "We

have been notified by a US official of their decision to close the Palestinian mission in the US," Palestinian Liberation Authority secretary-general Saeb Erekat said in a statement. "This is yet another affirmation of the Trump administration's policy to collectively punish the Palestinian people, including by cutting financial support for humanitarian services including health and education."

Under longstanding US law, permission for the PLO to maintain its mission in Washington must be renewed every six months. US officials say Palestinian leaders breach the arrangement by calling for Israeli officials to be prosecuted at the ICC. The United States had already threatened to close the office in Novem-

ber. The decision to close the mission comes just ahead of the 25th anniversary of the first Oslo accord on September 13, sealed with a hand shake on the White House and meant to lead to Israeli-Palestinian peace. Husam Zomlot, head of the PLO mission in Washington, told journalists in Ramallah that the closure was "to protect Israel from war crimes, crimes against humanity that Israel is committing in the occupied Palestinian territories."

Both Erekat and Zomlot pledged to push forward with Palestinian efforts at the ICC. The White House had not yet commented, but the Wall Street Journal reported that US national security adviser John Bolton was due to announce the closure in his bid to push Israel in favour of Israel. (AFP)

contact with the Trump administration after the US president recognised the disputed city of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December.

The Palestinians see east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. Trump has since pledged to withhold aid from the Palestinians until they return to the negotiating table. In recent weeks, the United States has cut more than USD 200 million in bilateral aid to the Palestinians as well as cancelled its support for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. In making such moves, Trump has sided with Israel on core issues in the conflict without publicly asking for any concessions in return. Palestinian leaders see his White House bid to withdraw support as a major setback in favour of Israel. (AFP)

7 wounded in Paris knife attack

PARIS, SEPT 10 /- / Seven people including two British tourists were wounded in Paris late on Sunday by a knife-wielding man, a terrorist attack that bystanders tried to stop by throwing petanque balls at the assailant.

Four of the victims were in a critical condition, police said, after the man brandishing a large blade and an iron bar went on the rampage next to a canal in the northeast of the capital. The suspect is believed to be an Afghan national and has been arrested, said a source close to the enquiry, adding he had targeted "strangers" but that "nothing at this stage shows signs of a terrorist nature". Chaos erupted on the banks of the Bassin de la Villette, an area popular with locals and visitors who frequent the cafes, cinemas and other cultural venues along its banks, just after 11:00 pm (local time).

Eyewitness Youssef Najah, 28, said he was walking beside the canal when he saw a man running and holding a knife about 25-30 cm (10-11 inches) long. "There were around 20 people chasing him. They started throwing petanque balls at him," Najah said, referring to the sport popular in France also known as boules. "Around four or five balls hit him in the head, but they weren't able to stop him," he added. According to the same witness, the attacker then dove into an alleyway, where the man "tried to hide behind two British tourists. We said to them: 'Watch out, he has a knife'. But they didn't react". The pair was then attacked, he said.

A security guard at one of two cinemas on either side of the water said he had seen the attacker running away from two men who were trying to stop him. "He had an iron bar in his hand which he threw at the men chasing him, then he took out a knife," he told AFP. (AFP)

UN rights chief urges new panel for Myanmar prosecutions

GENEVA, SEPT 10 /- / The UN rights chief today called for the creation of a new "mechanism" tasked with preparing criminal indictments over atrocities committed in Myanmar, amid allegations of genocide against the Rohingya minority.

In her first speech as head of the UN rights office, Michelle Bachelet called on the UN Human Rights Council to create "an independent international mechanism for Myanmar, to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of the most serious international crimes, in order to expedite fair and independent trials in national and international courts." The Council to pass a resolution, and refer the matter to the General Assembly for its endorsement, so that such a mechanism can be established, she said.

Such a panel has already been created for the Syrian conflict. A UN Fact-finding Mission last month issued a damning report concluding there was enough evidence to prosecute Myanmar's army chief and five other top military commanders for crimes against humanity and genocide against the Rohingya.

Some 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fled northern Rakhine state to Bangladesh after Myanmar launched a brutal crackdown on insurgents in August last year amid accounts of arson, murder and rape by soldiers and vigilante mobs in the mainly Buddhist country. Myanmar has vehemently denied allegations of ethnic cleansing, insisting it was responding to attacks by Rohingya rebels. The fact-finding mission is asking the UN rights council, which opened Monday and

will be in session through September, to renew its mandate for another year.

If created, the new mechanism focused on preparing cases for prosecution would comprise a separate group of experts. Bachelet, a former Chilean president, stressed that the panel would also "complement and support the preliminary examination of the ICC Prosecutor". The International Criminal Court announced last week that it had jurisdiction to probe the crisis because of the cross-border nature of the alleged "deportations" of the Rohingya to Bangladesh - a decision Myanmar's government has "resolutely" rejected. Bachelet welcomed the ICC decision, describing it as "an immensely important step towards ending impunity and addressing the enormous suffering of the Rohingya people. (AFP)

Moscow accuses US of using white phosphorous in Syria

MOSCOW, SEPT 10 /- / Russia on Sunday accused the United States of carrying out bombings using white phosphorous in eastern Syria against military targets in civilian areas, which is banned under international law.

"Two American F-15 planes carried out bombings on September 9 (Saturday) targeting the area of Hajin in the Deir Ezzor region using incendiary phosphorous ammunition," Russian General Vladimir Savchenko said in a statement. "These strikes resulted in fierce fires. We are clarifying the information concerning possible deaths and injuries," he added. In Syria, the jihadist Islamic State group still controls a pocket in Deir Ezzor between the Euphrates River and the Iraqi border, and also remains in the vast Syrian desert. An interna-

tional coalition led by the United States is helping a coalition of Kurdish and Arab fighters from the Syrian Democratic Forces (FDS) which for months have been conducting an offensive to oust IS.

The Russian Army, which has been intervening militarily since 2015 in Syria in support of the forces of its ally President Bashar al-Assad, was accused in March by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights of having used incendiary bombs during the regime's offensive against the rebel stronghold of Eastern Ghouta near Damascus. Moscow dismissed the allegation as a "shameless lie".

Use of white phosphorous is banned under the Geneva Convention for use against civilians and against legitimate military targets in areas with a major civilian population. (AFP)

At least 21 killed in Taliban attack Afghan security forces

KABUL, SEPT 10 /- / An Afghan official says the Taliban has attacked Afghan security forces in the country's north, killing at least 21.

Mohammad Yusuf Ayubi, head of the provincial council in Kunduz province, says at least 13 were killed in an attack on a checkpoint they were man-

ning in Dashti Archi district, with another 15 security forces wounded. The firefight began late Sunday and continued into Monday morning. Meanwhile in Zawajin province, Provincial Police Chief Gen. Faqir Mohammad Jawzjani says Fighting Monday morning with Taliban in Khamyab district left at least eight po-

lice killed, forcing the troops to withdraw from a district headquarters to avoid civilian casualties after intense fighting.

Three other police were wounded, he added, while seven Taliban were killed and eight were wounded. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed both attacks.



A general view shows civilians and a destroyed car at the scene of an explosion in Hodan district, Mogadishu, Somalia September -REUTERS

Musharraf treason trial to be held daily from Oct 9

ISLAMABAD, SEPT 10 /- / A special court hearing the treason case against Pakistani's former dictator General Pervez Musharraf decided today to conduct daily proceedings from October 9 against the former military ruler.

The previous Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government had filed the treason case against the ex-Army Chief Musharraf in 2013 over the imposition of extra-constitutional emergency in November 2007. Adjourning the case, three-member tribunal led by Justice Yawar All said the case will be heard against the Dubai-based former president on a daily basis from October 9, the date of next hearing. "The case has to be taken to logical conclusion soon," All said.

He also asked the interior ministry to give in writing how Musharraf can be produced in the court. Justice Ahsan Ali Zardari, a political lawyer Nasser-ud-Din Nayer to guide the court if Musharraf's statement can be recorded through a video link.

Musharraf left Pakistan for Dubai for medical treatment on March 18, 2016 with a commitment to come back. He managed to avoid after his name was removed from the Exit Control List on the orders of the Supreme Court.

A few months later, however, the special court declared him a proclaimed offender and ordered the confiscation of his property owing to his no-show. He has repeatedly refused to return to Pakistan citing security reasons.

Lanka court imposes travel ban on Rajapaksa's kin

COLOMBO, SEPT 10 /- / The Special High Court today imposed a travel ban on Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the younger brother of former Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa, and six others in a case of corruption. The court set October 9 as the next date of hearing.

While ordering the ban to travel overseas, the court granted bail to Gotabhaya, a former defence secretary, and the six others on a cash bond of Rs 100,000 and two personal bonds of Rs 1 million.

The suspects are alleged to have misused state funds worth Rs 90 million to build the museum and memorial in Medamulana in Hantantota district. Mahinda Rajapaksa, six earlier slammed the special court procedure as vendetta against his family.

Since his defeat to the incumbent Maithripala Sirisena in 2015, many members of the Rajapaksa family and their close associates have been tried in corruption cases. Speculations are rife in the local media that Gotabhaya, a US citizen, is planning to elect the next Presidential election in the island nation in 2020 by renouncing his American citizenship.

Om Prakash Mishra set to become Nepal's new Chief Justice

KATHMANDU, SEPT 10 /- / Om Prakash Mishra, who studied law in India, is set to become Nepal's new Chief Justice after the Parliamentary Hearing Committee today unanimously endorsed his name for the top judicial post.

Mishra, the senior-most justice after Justice Deepak Raj Joshee, will assume charge as the Chief Justice after President Bidya Devi Bhandari officially appoints him.



Miss New York Nia Imani Franklin has the tiara put on her by outgoing Miss America Cara Mund on stage in Atlantic City, New Jersey, U.S., September -REUTERS

China, Pak decided to extend CPEC to Afghanistan: Beijing

BEIJING, SEPT 10 /- / China and Pakistan have decided to speed up and extend the USD 50 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) towards Afghanistan during foreign minister Wang Yi's recent visit to Islamabad, the Chinese foreign ministry said today.

Wang, designated as China's top diplomat as he is also the State Councilor - a higher rank in the Chinese political hierarchy - visited Pakistan from September 7 to 9 and held talks with the new government headed by the cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan. His visit was mainly aimed at exchanging views with the new government and compare notes with Pakistan on cooperation in all areas, thus making "our bilateral cooperation to get off under the new circumstances", Chinese foreign ministry spokesman

Geng Shuang told media briefing here. Asked whether any new economic package by China has been discussed as Pakistan is currently facing serious economic crisis, he said the two sides have agreed to extend the CPEC towards west to enable more people to benefit from it.

"The two sides will advance the CPEC in the light of Pakistan's economic and social development and people's needs. We will identify the pathways and cooperation for the CPEC. We will accelerate the industrial cooperation and the projects of the people's livelihoods and extend the CPEC to the western area and make the people gets benefits from it," Geng said. India has protested over the CPEC, a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as it traversed through the Pakistan-occu-

pled Kashmir (PoK).

While Geng has not elaborated on the extension of the CPEC towards the "west", Wang in April announced plans to extend it towards Afghanistan during the first trilateral foreign ministers meeting held here. The CPEC is originally conceived by a strategic link with highways, rail and pipeline links between China's Xinjiang and Pakistan's Gwadar port.

But several projects have been extended to different provinces following allegations that all the main projects are geared by Pakistan's dominant Punjab province. Prime Minister Khan in the past had accused the previous Pakistani government of depriving other provinces, specially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the western borders with Afghanistan.

Russia prepares for biggest military drills in its history

MOSCOW, SEPT 10 /- / Russia on Tuesday will launch the biggest military drills in its history involving 300,000 troops as well as Chinese soldiers, in a move NATO denounced as "exercising large-scale conflict".

The week-long deployment alongside Chinese and Mongolian armies dubbed "Vostok 2018" (East 2018) will start in eastern Siberia on September 11. It comes at a time of escalating tensions between Moscow and the West over accusations of Russian interference in western affairs and the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. The Russian Army has compared the show of force to the USSR's 1981 war games that saw between 100,000 and 150,000 Warsaw Pact soldiers take part in "Zapad-81" (West-81) - the largest military exercises of the Soviet era.

But defence minister Sergei Shoigu said this time will be even larger, with 300,000 soldiers, 36,000 military vehicles, 1,000 planes and 80 warships taking part in the drills. "Imagine 36,000 military vehicles moving at the same time: tanks, armoured personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles - and all of this, of course, in conditions as close to a combat situation as possible," Shoigu said. The Russian Army will roll out all of its latest additions for the event: Iskander missiles that can carry nuclear warheads, T-80 and T-90 tanks and its recent Su-34 and Su-35 fighter planes.

At sea, the Russian fleet will deploy several frigates equipped with Kalibr missiles that have been used in Syria. Russia's previous military exercise in the region, Vostok 2014, was almost half the size, with 155,000 soldiers participating.

The country's war games in Eastern Europe last year, Zapad-2017, saw 12,700 troops take part according to Moscow. Ukraine and the Baltic states said the true number was far bigger. President Vladimir Putin is expected to attend Vostok 2018 after hosting an economic forum in Russia's far eastern city Vladivostok where his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping is one of the star guests. Russian military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer said the games were a "prepa-

ration for a future world war". "The Army's General Staff believes this will take place after 2020 in the form of either a global war or a series of conflicts with magnitude," he said.

"The enemy is the United States and its allies." According to Felgenhauer, China's participation - although modest with only 3,200 men - will be a key factor at the drills. "It's not just about a sign or a message, but about a preparation for a real-life war of great magnitude," he said. This opinion was shared by NATO, which said that Vostok 2018 "demonstrates Russia's focus on exercising large-scale conflict".

"It fits into a pattern we have seen over some time - a more assertive Russia, significantly increasing its defence budget and its military presence," said the alliance's spokesman Dylan White. Russia has denied the drills are a cause for worry "Vostok 2018 is far from NATO's area of responsibility and does not affect the security of its member states," the Russian foreign ministry's spokesman Dylan Zakharov said. Relations between Russia and the West declined sharply in 2014 with Moscow's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent conflict in eastern Ukraine. Since then Moscow has increased the number of its large-scale military exercises in the Caucasus, the Baltic and the Arctic.

At the same time the Kremlin has accused NATO of expanding westwards and threatening Russian national security. This week, Russia held military exercises in the Mediterranean. More than 25 warships and around 30 planes took part in the drills, as Russia increased its military presence in Syria where it intervened to help the Bashar al-Assad regime in 2015. Around 2,200 Ukrainian, American and other NATO soldiers took part in military exercises in western Ukraine in early September.

Last month, the Kremlin's spokesman said Russia's "ability to defend itself in the current international situation which is often aggressive and unfriendly to our country is justified, essential and without alternative". (AFP)

the duty of the Acting Chief Justice from August 5 when Joshee went on a 15-day leave.

Born on January 1, 1954, Mishra, a resident of Raipur of Rupandehi district, holds a master's degree in Comparative Law from Delhi University (1989) and another master's degree in Political Science from Tribhuvan University (1985). He joined judicial service in 1981 as a section 3. Mishra assumed

the Parliamentary Hearing Committee (PHC) conducted hearings on complaints filed against Mishra before giving its approval to appoint him as the Chief Justice, said committee coordinator Laxman Lal Karma.

The committee had received four complaints against Mishra, one of which was later withdrawn. The in-camera parliamentary hearings were conducted on the remaining three com-

plaints, Karnia said. The Constitutional Council on August 23 had unanimously nominated Acting Chief Justice Mishra for the appointment of the top judicial post after the PHC rejected Chief Justice nominee Joshee, citing controversial issues related to the candidate's academic certificates and discrepancies in his date of birth. He was later rejected by the PHC on August 3. Mishra assumed