

# Palestinians win UN backing to lead developing country bloc



RAFAH: Smoke billows following an Israeli air strike in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Israel launched raids against targets in the Gaza strip in response to rocket fire from the Palestinian territory that caused damage in a southern city, the Israeli army said. — AFP

**UNITED NATIONS:** The Palestinians won backing Tuesday to lead the biggest bloc of developing countries at the United Nations, raising their profile at the world body despite opposition from the United States. The General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to grant the observer-state of Palestine temporary rights to act as chair of the Group of 77 plus China, a bloc that has grown to 134 countries at the United Nations. A resolution drafted by Egypt was adopted by a vote of 146 to 3 with 15 abstentions. The United States, Israel and Australia were the only three countries to oppose the measure in the 193-nation assembly.

US Ambassador Nikki Haley branded the decision a "UN mistake", recalling that the "Palestinians are not a UN member state or any state at all" and should not be granted privileges reserved for full-fledged members. "Today's UN mistake undermines the prospects for peace by encouraging the illusion held by some Palestinian leaders that they can advance their goals without direct peace negotiations," said Haley in a statement.

The result came as no surprise as the G77 had agreed last month to give the Palestinians the chair and could easily garner enough support in the General Assembly to win approval for the measure. The resolution gives the Palestinians, who take up the year-long chair in January, additional rights such as the authority to submit proposals on behalf of the G77 and request that they be put to the vote. The measure does not, however, change the status of the Palestinians, considered a non-member observer state at the United Nations without voting rights at the General Assembly.

## 'Misguided'

Only UN member-states with full recognition should be entitled to speak and act on behalf of groups of

countries, US Deputy Ambassador Jonathan Cohen told the assembly ahead of the vote. Calling the resolution "misguided", Cohen warned that the United States will "leave no doubt about where we stand" and will not recognize the Palestinians in their new UN role. "When the Palestinians speak as chair of the G77 in the General Assembly, we will remind our fellow member-states that the United States does not recognize that there is a Palestinian state and that no such state has been admitted as a UN member state," he said.

Taking the floor, Palestinian ambassador Riyad Mansour pledged to "spare no effort" to defend the interests of the G77 and to work "constructively with all partners". "Australia's decision to vote no on this resolution reflects our long-standing position that Palestinian attempts to seek recognition as a state in international fora are deeply unhelpful to efforts towards a two-state solution," Australian UN Ambassador Gillian Bird told the General Assembly.

The G77 and China are influential on budgetary issues at the assembly and have been effective in pushing their agenda as the biggest bloc. The vote came amid tensions between President Donald Trump's administration and the Palestinians over US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and other decisions deemed pro-Israel.

The Trump administration has cut aid to the Palestinians and funding to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, and is working on peace proposals that the Palestinians fear will be biased in favor of Israel. In 2012, the United States voted against the resolution that upgraded the Palestinians to UN non-member observer state, arguing there should be no international recognition for the Palestinians until progress is made in peace efforts with Israel. — Agencies

## Sisi hails 'new chapter' in ties...

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The talks were overshadowed by an attack on a college in Crimea in which at least 17 were killed and more than 40 injured. Moscow initially described as it a "terrorist attack" before investigators reclassified it as a mass shooting. Investigators said the shooting was carried out by a teenage student who killed himself. Putin called for a minute's silence for the victims. Relations

between Russia and Egypt have strengthened in recent years despite the 2015 bombing of a Russian airliner by militants. The plane was carrying holidaymakers from a Red Sea resort that killed all 224 on board, a devastating blow to Egypt's tourist industry.

In December the countries signed an agreement for Russia to build Egypt's first nuclear power station. In April this year, a flight from Moscow to Cairo marked the relaunch of direct flights between Russia and Egypt. Flights had been suspended after the 2015 plane bombing. Charter flights to Egyptian resorts once popular with Russians remain suspended, however. "We considered the question of full restoration of air links... and noted that our Egyptian friends are doing all they can to ensure security," Putin said. "We will strive to restart charter flights in the near future." — AFP

## Trump stays cautious over...

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After talks with the Saudi leadership in Riyadh marked by expressions of mutual goodwill, Pompeo met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara. But Pompeo was tight-lipped, telling journalists he did not want "to talk about any of the facts".

Turkish police yesterday began searching the residence of the Saudi consul in Istanbul for their investigation, with forensics experts in white overalls entering the building, an AFP correspondent said. The Saudi consul Mohammed Al-Otaibi left Istanbul for Riyadh on a scheduled Saudia flight Tuesday afternoon, with Ankara insisting he had not been expelled but left of his own choice. Turkish police on Monday night also carried out an eight-hour search at the consulate itself, taking away soil and DNA samples. Erdogan said toxic material was found which had been "painted over".

Several US media outlets said Monday that the Saudis are preparing a report that Khashoggi's death resulted from a botched interrogation. However there has yet to be any sign of this being published. Pro-government Turkish daily Yeni Safak reported it had heard audio recordings of Khashoggi being tortured during an inter-

rogation, having his fingers cut off and then being decapitated. It said Otaibi can be heard on one tape saying during Khashoggi's torture: "Do this outside. You are going to get me in trouble." The daily reported that in another tape, an unknown individual tells Otaibi: "If you want to live when you return to Saudi Arabia, be quiet!"

The New York Times reported Tuesday that a suspect identified by Turkey was a frequent companion of the prince's. Three other suspects are linked to his security detail and a fifth is a high-level forensic doctor, the Times said. International Monetary Fund chief Christine Lagarde was the latest to pull out of Prince Mohammed's investment conference next week. An IMF spokesman said she had postponed her planned trip to the Middle East with a stop in Saudi Arabia.

Pompeo came to Ankara after Riyadh, where he held a 20-minute talk with King Salman and then a brief meeting and much lengthier dinner with his son Prince Mohammed. The top US diplomat said that in Saudi Arabia he stressed the "importance of them conducting a complete investigation". "They made a commitment that they would show the entire world the results of their investigation," said Pompeo, adding Saudi also vowed that no-one would have immunity. Pompeo held 40 minutes of talks at the airport with Erdogan. Interviewed by state-run Anadolu news agency, Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu refused to be drawn into commenting on what may have happened inside the consulate. — Agencies

## India minister in #MeToo...

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reporter at the Asian Age newspaper in 1997. "He ran his hands from my breast to my hips. I tried pushing his hands away, but they were plastered on my waist," wrote Ghazala Wahab on news website The Wire. "I ran out of his cabin and into the toilet to cry my eyes out," added Wahab, who now works as executive editor of Force magazine.

A third accuser said Akbar had greeted her in his underwear after calling her to his hotel room and then forcibly kissed her. "Suddenly you got up, grabbed me and kissed me hard - your stale tea breath and your bristly moustache are still etched in the recesses of my memory," journalist Tushita Patel wrote in an article for Scroll on Tuesday. She said the incident dated back to 1992 when she was a trainee.

While Modi's Hindu nationalist government did not make a public statement, pressure was building internally for Akbar's removal as more allegations of misconduct surfaced, sources in the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party said. Akbar's boss, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj, and Women and Child Welfare Minister Maneka Gandhi both were opposed to him continuing in office while he fought a legal battle against his accusers, the sources, who cannot be named because of the sensitivity of the matter, said.

Since he got back from a tour of Africa on Sunday, Akbar had sought a meeting with Modi but that did not come through. He also asked to meet the National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, a close Modi aide, but that too did not happen. Ram Das Athawale, junior minister for social justice, said he supported Akbar's decision to quit. "The allegations against him should be properly investigated," Athawale said.

Sandeep Shastri, a political analyst at Jain University

in the city of Bengaluru, said Akbar's defamation lawsuit and his subsequent resignation could indicate damage limitation by the government. "You are facing an election in several states and this could have been highly embarrassing for the government. It would have been tough for the government to justify retaining him," said Shastri. Allegations of sexual harassment have ensnared the opposition party as well. This week, the chief of the youth wing of the Congress stepped down after a female member alleged harassment, the party announced.

India's belated #MeToo movement has made headlines in recent weeks with women sharing accounts of alleged harassment by several powerful men in the worlds of Bollywood, journalism, comedy and even cricket. The phenomenon remains confined to India's urban elite at present, with vast numbers of women elsewhere in the country lacking either access to justice or a platform to name their tormentors. The trigger appears to have been actress Tanushree Dutta, who recently accused well-known Bollywood actor Nana Patekar of inappropriate behavior on a film set 10 years ago. Patekar has denied the claims.

Last Friday, the production of a Bollywood blockbuster was halted after the film's lead called for the claims against Patekar, his co-star, and the feature's director Sajid Khan to be "stringently" investigated. Three women had accused Khan of sexual harassment the day before the film was halted. One said Khan had insisted that she strip during an audition while another alleged the director had flashed his penis at her during an interview. Khan has denied the accusations.

Bollywood director Vikas Bahl has meanwhile been accused of assaulting a female employee of Phantom Films, the production house behind Netflix series "Sacred Games", in 2015. Bahl has denied the allegations and threatened to sue his accusers for defamation. The hallowed world of Indian cricket has also not been spared, with the chief of India's powerful cricket board, Rahul Johri, on Friday giving a week to explain allegations of sexual harassment. Johri has yet to comment publicly. — Agencies

## Kuwait moves to 54th rank in Global

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environmental issues. In 2015, Chevron shut Wafra after failing to agree operating rights with Kuwait. Shutting output is expensive because it requires investments of tens of millions of dollars per year for maintenance.

## Teenager kills 19 in Crimea college...

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Russia but there have been several high-profile cases recently with far fewer victims.

The Investigative Committee, which probes major incidents, had initially classified the attack as an act of terror and described it as an explosion. But it later said it was investigating a mass murder after "this young man shot people dead in the college and then committed suicide", adding that all the victims died of gunshot wounds. Russia's National Anti-Terrorism Committee also said an "unidentified explosive device" had gone off in the canteen. Committee spokesman Andrei Przhedzomsky said that Roslyakov's body was found next to a pump-action gun.

Crimean leader Sergei Aksyonov told Russian television: "It was a mass murder committed by one scumbag." The reported killer was a "student in the fourth year who was studying at the college. His body was found in the college library," Aksyonov wrote on Facebook. A source in the emergency services told RIA Novosti state news agency that Roslyakov had legally acquired a gun license.

The Investigative Committee said most of the victims were teenagers. The college's website says it accepts students in the last three grades of school, from the age of 14. The regional health ministry said six of the injured were in an extremely serious condition and eight in a serious condition. Aksyonov announced three days of mourning from today over the "terrible tragedy".

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, said in televised comments that a "tragic event" had happened, speaking during talks with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. "It's already clear that it's a crime, the motive and possible versions for this tragedy are being carefully examined," Putin said. "I want to express condolences to the relatives of the dead and express the hope that the injured recover as quickly as possible," the president said, calling for a minute's silence to mourn the victims. Kerch is linked to the Russian mainland by a bridge that Putin opened in May.

Witnesses said that the attacker fired shots but also spoke of hearing an explosion. A student at the college who asked not to be named told AFP: "I was in a class when I heard shooting on the first floor. When we all ran out into the corridor, there were others running and

shouting that some guy with a machine gun was randomly shooting everyone in turn."

"Then a strong explosion went off. But thank God, I was already outside and saw our guys being thrown out of the windows by the explosive wave," he said, adding that part of the building collapsed.

The director of the school, Olga Grebennikova, described the scene that she encountered when she entered the college building after the attack. "There are bodies everywhere, children's bodies everywhere. It was a real act of terrorism. They burst in five or 10 minutes after I'd left. They blew up everything in the hall, glass was flying," Grebennikova told Crimean media outlets. "They then ran about throwing some kind of explosives around, and then ran around the second floor with guns, opened the office doors, and killed anyone they could find."

Anastasia Yenshina, a 15-year-old student at the college, said she was in a toilet on the ground floor of the building with some friends when she heard the sound of an explosion. "I came out and there was dust and smoke, I couldn't understand, I'd been deafened," Yenshina told Reuters. "Everyone started running. I did not know what to do. Then they told us to leave the building through the gymnasium. Everyone ran there... I saw a girl lying there. There was a child who was being helped to walk because he could not move on his own. The wall was covered in blood. Then everyone started to climb over the fence, and we could still hear explosions. Everyone was scared. People were crying."

Photographs from the scene of the blast showed that the ground floor windows of the two-storey building had been blown out, and that debris was lying on the floor outside. Emergency services teams could be seen in the photographs carrying wounded people from the building on makeshift stretchers and loading them on to buses and ambulances.

Another witness who gave his name as Sergei and who worked nearby said in a video on the Kerch.tv website that he heard "a bang and shots". Sergei, whose shirt was covered in blood, said victims "were taken away in public transport, in minibuses and buses, with two or three people in each ambulance". "They are children and staff," the witness said. "I saw people without legs, without arms."

Attacks by disaffected teenagers at their schools and colleges have hit the headlines recently in Russia. In January, a school student attacked a teacher and fellow students with an axe in Siberia and tried to set fire to the school building and to kill himself. In April, a school student stabbed a teacher and a fellow student in the Urals Mountains and then set fire to a classroom. — Agencies