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# Muscat says time to accept Israel after Bibi visits Oman

Saudi Arabia beacon of 'light' • Gulf 'pillar' of stability • 'Russia cannot replace US'

MANAMA: Oman described Israel as an accepted Middle East state yesterday, a day after hosting a surprise visit by its prime minister that Washington said could help regional peace efforts. Oman is offering ideas to help Israel and the Palestinians to come together but is not acting as mediator. Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, the sultanate's minister responsible for foreign affairs, told a security summit in Bahrain. "Israel is a state present in the region, and we all understand this," bin Alawi said. "The world is also aware of this fact. Maybe it is time for Israel to be treated the same [as others states] and also bear the same obligations."

His comments followed a rare visit to Oman by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin 'Bibi' Netanyahu, which came days after Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas paid a three-day visit to the Gulf country. Both leaders met with Oman's Sultan Qaboos. "We are not saying that the road is now easy and paved with flowers, but our priority is to put an end to the conflict and move to a new world," bin Alawi told the summit. Oman is

relying on the United States and efforts by President Donald Trump in working towards the "deal of the century" (Middle East peace), he added.

Bahrain's foreign minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa voiced support for Oman over the sultanate's role in trying to secure Israeli-Palestinian peace, while Saudi Arabia's foreign minister Adel Al-Jubeir said the kingdom believes the key to normalizing relations with Israel was the peace process. The three-day summit was attended by Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, and his counterparts in Italy and Germany also participated, but Jordan's King Abdullah cancelled his appearance after a flood that hit the Dead Sea region killed 21 people.

Trump's Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt welcomed the "warming ties & growing cooperation between our regional friends" in a tweet late on Friday. "This is a helpful step for our peace efforts & essential to create an atmosphere of stability, security & prosperity between Israelis, Palestinians &

their neighbors. Looking forward to seeing more meetings like this!" Greenblatt said.

Israel and some Gulf states share an interest in curbing Iran's influence in the region. Oman has long been to the Middle East what neutral Switzerland is to global diplomacy. The country helped to mediate secret US-Iran talks in 2013 that led to the historic nuclear deal signed in Geneva two years later. Earlier this year, bin Alawi visited Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque and Netanyahu has on several occasions hinted at warmer ties with Gulf states. He told Israel's parliament last week that due to fears of a nuclear threat from Iran, "Israel and other Arab countries are closer than they ever were before."

Though uncommon, Israeli leaders have previously visited the Gulf state. In 1996, the late Shimon Peres went to Oman and Qatar when he was prime minister and opened Israel trade representative offices in both Gulf countries. His predecessor, the late Yitzhak Rabin, made the first trip to Oman in 1994. On his visit on Friday, Netanyahu was

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MUSCAT: Oman's Sultan Qaboos meets Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during the latter's unannounced visit to the Gulf country on Friday. — AFP

## Pence attends US Kuwait Embassy's annual gala dinner

WASHINGTON: US Vice President Mike Pence and top US administration officials gathered at the Kuwait Embassy in Washington for an evening honoring Second Lady Karen Pence, the recipient of the Humanitarian Award for her commitment in raising awareness about the mental health profession of art therapy in the US and around the world. The Gala Dinner for UNHCR, hosted by Kuwait's Ambassador to the US Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah and his wife Sheikha Rima Al-Sabah honoring Karen Pence, is an event that celebrates the enduring and important friendship and strong partnership between the US and Kuwait that goes back to many decades.

Sheikh Salem shed light on Kuwait's commitment "to supporting refugees and advocating for peace, stability and dignity for all people," saying "it is a commitment that is part of our national culture". "Our leader, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, is a bridge-builder who has sought to create a broad, multilateral response to the humanitarian crises stemming from conflicts in the region and beyond," he noted.

Mike Pence delivered greetings of President Donald Trump and gratitude "for last year's honor and tonight's honor and wanted all you to know that he so appreciates the generosity and spirit represented through the event". US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said "on behalf of the US, we thank the good work of Kuwait" for its assistance and the enormous humanitarian work and the efforts it has done for the refugees around the world. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres expressed appreciation for the "solidarity and generosity" of HH the Amir, the Kuwaiti government and people of Kuwait. — KUNA (See Page 5)



WASHINGTON: US Vice President Mike Pence, Second Lady Karen Pence, Kuwait's Ambassador to the US Sheikh Salem Al-Sabah and his wife Sheikha Rima Al-Sabah attend a gala dinner on Friday. — KUNA

### News in brief

#### Data thieves nabbed

KUWAIT: Criminal detectives arrested three Egyptians for selling data of about 1.8 million citizens and expats. Security sources said the suspects sold the information for KD 250, including names, addresses, places of work and mobile phone, ID and passport numbers. The sources explained that a citizen reported he viewed an ad by an Egyptian offering to sell such data, and on calling him and getting a copy, he realized how dangerous such practices can be and immediately informed the police. The suspect was ambushed and arrested red-handed. He led police to his accomplices, including one who was arrested while about to leave the country. — By A Saleh

#### O'Connor converts to Islam

LONDON: Outspoken Irish singer Sinead O'Connor announced on Friday she has converted to Islam and changed her name to Shuhada. Having adopted the name Magda Davitt last year, the 51-year-old is now called Shuhada Davitt. She also changed her Twitter avatar to a black-and-white image of the Nike Swoosh logo and the slogan: "Wear a hijab. Just do it." "This is to announce that I am proud to have become a Muslim. This is the natural conclusion of any intelligent theologian's journey," she tweeted. "All scripture study leads to Islam. Which makes all other scriptures redundant. I will be given (another) new name. It will be Shuhada." Her Twitter account says the singer now lives in "Direland". O'Connor's 1990 hit "Nothing Compares 2 U" became a global hit, with her haunting voice, shaved head and single-tone outfits turning her into both an enigmatic and captivating figure. — AFP



Sinead O'Connor

## Turkey hosts Syria summit with leaders

ISTANBUL: The leaders of Turkey, Russia, France and Germany met yesterday to try to find a political solution to Syria's devastating civil war, provide access to humanitarian aid and salvage a fragile ceasefire in the country's last major rebel-held bastion. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan welcomed Russia's Vladimir Putin, France's Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel to the gathering on the Syrian conflict, in which more than 360,000 people have been killed

since 2011.

"The eyes of the world are on us today... I hope we will act with a sincere and constructive understanding and will not fail to meet their expectations," Erdogan said as he opened the summit in Istanbul. The talks come a day after seven civilians were killed by Syrian regime artillery fire in the northwestern province of Idlib, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the highest death toll since a ceasefire was reached there last month.

Russia, which supports the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, and Turkey, which backs the rebels, agreed to create a buffer zone around Idlib, but violence has escalated dramatically leading up to the summit. Turkey and Russia have held talks with Iran on the Syrian

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ISTANBUL: (From left) Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and French President Emmanuel Macron take part in the "Four-way Istanbul summit on Syria" at the Vahdettin Mansion yesterday. — AFP

## Several dead as gunman attacks US synagogue

WASHINGTON: A gunman opened fire on Jewish worshippers at a synagogue in the US city of Pittsburgh yesterday, reportedly killing at least four people and injuring half a dozen others before being taken into custody. Local media reported the shooter yelled anti-Jewish slurs during the attack at the Tree of Life synagogue, where dozens were understood to be gathered during Sabbath services, and which comes with the United States witnessing a sharp spike in anti-Semitic incidents.

As reports indicated as many as eight could be dead, President Donald Trump

hit out at what he called a climate of "hate" - while his daughter Ivanka, a convert to Judaism, denounced a "depraved" attack. "It's a terrible, terrible thing what's going on with hate in our country frankly, and all over the world," Trump told reporters. "Something has to be done," he continued, saying the perpetrators of such attacks "should get the death penalty".

Multiple US media identified the shooter as a 46-year-old man from Pittsburgh, Rob Bowers, whose online posts were reportedly rife with anti-Semitic comments. Wendell Hissrich, Pittsburgh's public safety director, confirmed there were "multiple fatalities" at the scene and at least six people injured including four police officers whose condition was not immediately clear. "The scene is very bad inside," Hissrich said. US television networks said at least four

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PITTSBURGH, Pennsylvania: Police rapid response team members respond to the site of a mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood yesterday. — AFP