

# Trump, Pelosi again butt heads but others see possible paths

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump bitterly attacked top Democrat Nancy Pelosi yesterday and she again insisted that he end the government shutdown before border security talks can begin, but there were hints of possible movement in coming days. Trump lashed out on Twitter a day after Pelosi, speaker of the House of Representatives, dismissed as a "non-starter" his offer to extend temporary protection to about a million immigrants in return for \$5.7 billion for the wall he wants on the Mexican border.

"Nancy Pelosi has behaved so irrationally & has gone so far to the left that she has now officially become a Radical Democrat," the president tweeted. "She is so petrified of the 'lefties' in her party that she has lost control. ...And by the way, clean up the streets in San Francisco, they are disgusting!" he added, in a seemingly gratuitous aside, Pelosi's congressional district overlaps with San Francisco.

Pointedly ignoring his personal comments, Pelosi on Twitter emphasized the need to end the partial government shutdown, which has inflicted increasing pain around the country as it entered its 30th day. "800,000 Americans are going without pay," she tweeted. "Reopen the government, let workers get their paychecks and then we can discuss how we can come together to

protect the border. #EndTheShutdown."

## 'Good-faith compromise'

While Pelosi and other Democrats dismissed Trump's offer, Republicans insisted that it represented actual movement by the president. Vice President Mike Pence, who has been leading the administration's contacts with Congress, said the Senate would put the proposal to a vote as early as Tuesday. He called it "a good-faith compromise". The planned vote also reflects a shift by Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell. He insisted previously that he would not take up any shutdown bill unless both Trump and Democratic leaders backed it.

"In a very real sense, what President Trump did here was he set the table for a deal," Pence said on "Fox News Sunday". The bill's fate was far from clear. Republicans hope to lure the votes of a few Democrats from Trump-friendly states to reach the 60 votes needed, but they may lose some hard-line conservatives in the process.

## Most blame Republicans

The Trump administration - increasingly blamed by Americans for the shutdown - is trying to thread a needle between those hard-liners and Democrats who adamantly oppose

spending the \$5.7 billion Trump wants for a wall. They have offered something over \$2 billion for a range of other border-security measures. Democrats assailed Trump's new offer as cynical, noting that it was the president who - by moving earlier to end the DACA program protecting 700,000 young immigrants and to expel some 300,000 others in a separate program - had placed in jeopardy many of those for whom he now offers temporary protection.

But anti-immigrant voices also attacked Trump's offer as tantamount to amnesty for the undocumented - a toxic concept for many conservatives. "No, Amnesty is not a part of my offer. It is a 3 year extension of DACA," Trump said in another tweet. DACA was former president Barack Obama's program to shield undocumented immigrants who entered the country as children. Trump said that there would be "no big push" to remove the 11 million people in the country illegally, before warning: "but be careful, Nancy!"

Still, both sides appeared to be casting about cautiously for a road ahead. "The vote this week (in the Senate) is not to pass the bill," said Senator James Lankford, a Republican, "It's to open up and say, can we debate this? Can we amend it? Can we make changes? Let's find a way to get the



Nancy Pelosi



Donald Trump

government open." Representative Bennie Thompson, a Democrat who chairs the Homeland Security Committee, said that "I would not rule out a wall in certain circumstances."

He suggested that Democrats were amenable to negotiating if Trump would stop demonizing the party and its leaders and provide assurances that he would not suddenly shift positions. "The notion that we have come from a (focus on a) wall to some other thing is moving it along," he told ABC's "This Week," "but we have to sit down and talk."

Representative Tulsi Gabbard, who recently announced plans to seek the presidency in 2020, told CNN it was urgent that both sides "come together and have a real conversation and hash out the differences."

But Representative James Clyburn, the third-ranking House Democrat, insisted that the government must first be reopened. "I can't see us keeping federal employees, 800,000 people, out of work while we go back and forth on negotiations. "These negotiations could take three or four weeks," he said on Fox. — AFP

## Bomb blast rocks Damascus as Syria and Israel trade fire

DAMASCUS: A bomb blast hit the capital of war-torn Syria yesterday and a "terrorist" was arrested, state media said, in a rare attack in the city that has been largely insulated from violence. The explosion came as another bomb in the northern city of Afrin killed three people and wounded nine others, according to a war monitor, on the first anniversary of a Turkish offensive on the Kurdish-majority region. Also yesterday, Israel said it intercepted a rocket fired from Syria after Damascus accused the Jewish state of carrying out air raids on the south of the country.

State news agency SANA said a "bomb blast" had

hit southern Damascus "without leaving any victims". "There is confirmation of reports that a terrorist has been arrested," it said. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor reported, however, a "huge explosion" near a military intelligence office in southern Damascus that left a number of people dead and wounded.

"The explosion took place near a security branch in the south of the city," and was followed by shooting, said the monitor which relies on a network of sources inside the country. "There are some people killed and injured but we could not verify the toll immediately," it added. It was unclear if the blast was caused by a bomb that was planted or a suicide attack, according to the monitor. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Syria is locked in a civil war that has killed more than 360,000 people and displaced millions since a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests in 2011 spiralled into full conflict. With key military backing from Russia, President Bashar Al-Assad's forces have retaken large parts of Syria from rebels and jihadists,

and now control almost two-thirds of the country. The Syrian regime in May reclaimed a final scrap of territory held by the Islamic State group (IS) in southern Damascus, cementing total control over the capital for the first time in six years.

Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said yesterday's blast appeared to be the first attack in Damascus since a car bomb over a year ago that caused no casualties. Damascus has been largely spared the worst of the violence during the country's nearly eight-year war, but several bomb attacks have shaken the city. In March 2017 a double suicide attack claimed by Al-Qaeda's former affiliate in the country killed 74 people, including dozens of Iranian pilgrims visiting religious sites in the historic Old City. That was followed a few days later by bombings claimed by IS at a courthouse and restaurant that killed 32 people.

One of the most high-profile attacks in the capital saw a bomb kill Assad's brother-in-law Assef Shawkat - a top security official - and the minister of defense at a command center in July 2012. Since reclaiming con-

trol of Damascus and surrounding regions, security forces have removed many of the checkpoints that dotted the city. Government troops have largely pushed remaining rebel and jihadist forces into the northwestern province of Idlib, while IS holds a few dwindling pockets of territory.

The Afrin blast was the result of a bomb placed in a bus in the center of the city, according to the Observatory. Turkish troops and allied rebel groups seized the Afrin region from Kurdish forces in March last year after a two-month air and ground offensive.

Israel meanwhile said a rocket fired from Syria's Golan Heights had been intercepted by its "Iron Dome" air defense system. It came after SANA, quoting a Syrian military source, said anti-aircraft defenses went into action after Israel yesterday launched air strikes on the south of the country. Israel has pledged to stop arch foe Iran from entrenching itself militarily in neighboring Syria and says it has carried out hundreds of air strikes there against Iranian targets and those of Tehran's Lebanese ally Hezbollah. — AFP

## Israel and Chad renew ties as...

Continued from Page 1

"We are making history and we are turning Israel into a rising global power." Netanyahu's one-day visit follows Deby's November trip to Israel. Netanyahu is seeking re-election in April 9 polls. He also risks being indicted in corruption investigations in the coming weeks.

In comments to journalists after his meeting with Deby, Netanyahu said this was his fourth visit to Africa in the past two years. Deby said that despite the renewal of ties with Israel, "Chad remains attached to the peace process

between Israel and Palestine". Both sides should prioritize dialogue and negotiation towards a lasting peace "in conformity with United Nations resolutions", he added.

The two leaders signed defense and security cooperation agreements yesterday, but no details were released to the media. They have in the past declined to comment on whether their talks have included arms deals. But Chadian security sources say the country has acquired Israeli equipment to help battle rebels in the country's north. Chad is also one of several African states engaged in Western-backed operations against Boko Haram and Islamic State.

It forms part of the G5 force fighting jihadist fighters in the Sahel region, along with Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso. Deby is one of Africa's longest-serving leaders. He took over the arid, impoverished nation in 1990 and won a disputed fifth term in April 2016 to lead the country of some 15 million people. — AFP

forced returns while a Syrian peace deal remains elusive, and refugees often say they fear conscription into the army.

Lebanese leaders had hoped to reach a deal to form a new government before the summit after months of political gridlock. But talks have failed amid fears for the Lebanese economy. Several hundred people protested in the streets of Beirut yesterday, blaming politicians for growing economic troubles.

Secretary General of the Arab League Ahmad Abul-Gheit announced yesterday that speeding up the elimination of poverty is the optimal way to dry out the sources of terrorism and extremism. Speaking at the summit, he said 20 percent of the Arab population lives under poverty, indicating that the General Secretariat of the Arab League, in collaboration with the UN, has issued a report that includes an Arab strategy to eliminate poverty.

He believed that the Arab population includes large masses of youth who could pose burdens to their countries' economies and become easy victims of religious and political extremism, unless they are correctly exploited. Abul-Gheit said economic growth is still insufficient to achieve the desired change because of the political and security circumstances in the past few years. The summit declaration stressed the importance of continuing progress of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area hoping to reach a joint market and address all difficulties. The declaration announced the approval of a charter to develop small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and micro-enterprise to guarantee Arab economic integration in order to create a competitive environment that will contribute to terminating unemployment.

The Arab leaders meanwhile declared the approval of the Arab strategy for sustainable energy of 2030 to achieve sustainable development in economic, social and environmental dimensions. Arab leaders have stressed in the declaration on the importance of committing to the resolutions and programs that were adopted in the previous summits, affirming terrorism has negative impacts on Arab society.

They called for collaboration of efforts to defeat terrorism which led to the increase of refugees, in addition to unemployment, thus more focus was required to achieve UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. The Beirut summit declaration affirmed that investing in humans is the fastest way to achieve economic growth, noting that one of the SDGs was decreasing poverty by 50 percent by 2030. The declaration emphasized the importance of investing in potentials and encouraging creativity in order to build better and more productive human beings that will contribute to building a society compatible with sustainable development. Arab leader decided to hold the next Arab Economic and Social Summit in 2023 in Mauritania. — Agencies

## Graham calls for meeting between...

Continued from Page 1

"I'm going to urge him (Trump) to meet with the prime minister as soon as practical," Graham told reporters, saying he believed Khan and Trump would "hit it off" because they have "similar personalities". "Prime Minister Khan is the agent of change that I've been looking for," he added. Ties between Washington and Islamabad have soured recently, with US officials repeatedly accusing Pakistan of turning a blind eye to or even collaborating with the Afghan Taliban, which launch attacks in Afghanistan from alleged havens along the border between the two countries.

Trump has repeatedly lashed out at Pakistan's alleged duplicity, saying late last year that Islamabad does not do "a damn thing" for the US. Khan has been equally critical of Trump, saying before 2018's election in Pakistan that a potential meeting with the US president would be a "bitter pill" to swallow. The US lawmaker's trip to Pakistan comes as American officials

have held several rounds of talks with Taliban representatives. Graham said a meeting between the two leaders was vital to carve out a potential deal in Afghanistan. "They actually need to meet and come up with an agenda that will push a resolution to the war in Afghanistan," the senator added. Graham - once a potent critic of Trump - has transformed in recent months into an ardent defender and influential ally of the president. The senator's arrival also overlapped with an ongoing trip by US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, who has been shuttling around the region for months to build support for the peace initiative.

Khalilzad was in Kabul last week and then flew to Pakistan where he also met with the prime minister Friday as news reports in Pakistan suggested Islamabad was open to hosting the next round of talks with the insurgents. The Taliban, however, have threatened to suspend the fledgling peace efforts, accusing Washington of changing the agenda of the talks and "unilaterally" adding new subjects. Graham's trip also comes after US officials announced in December that Trump intends to withdraw as many as half of the 14,000 US troops deployed in Afghanistan. The meetings are the latest in a flurry of diplomatic efforts aimed at bringing the Taliban to the table for negotiations with the Afghan government on ending the conflict which began with the US invasion in 2001. — AFP

## In Jerusalem's Old City, conflict...

Continued from Page 1

from father to son since the 13th century - as proof of his innocence.

Joudeh says he sold the property to another Palestinian in 2016 for \$2.5 million and cannot be held responsible if it was passed on to settlers, who moved there in late 2018. But the building he once owned is not the only one triggering Palestinian concerns. The land conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is also a battle over Jerusalem and its Old City, home to sites holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians.

Israel took over mainly Palestinian east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it in a move never recognized by the international community. It now considers the entire city its capital, citing the Jewish historical and biblical connection there. The Palestinians see east Jerusalem, which includes the Old City, as the capital of their future state. They consider each property sale to Israeli settlers there as another blow to their cause.

Some 320,000 Palestinians live in east Jerusalem, while the Israeli settler population there has now grown to 210,000. Israel bars the Palestinian Authority from operating in Jerusalem, but it seeks to maintain influence, however limited. Such sales can in theory carry the death penalty under PA law. In one high-profile case in recent weeks, an American-Palestinian man, Issam Akef, was sentenced to life in prison by a PA court in the occupied West Bank over a property sale in the Old City.

Akef's lawyer, Oday Nawfel, said he was simply trying to help another Palestinian family sort out inheri-

tance issues with the building, down the street from the one Joudeh sold. Akef's case has drawn criticism from David Friedman, the US ambassador to Israel, who has been a supporter of settlements and has called for Akef's release. It also led to calls in Israel for authorities there to act. Following Akef's arrest, Israel detained the Palestinian governor of Jerusalem a number of times over suspicions of involvement in the affair.

Another 32 Palestinians were arrested by Israeli forces on similar grounds that they were supporting the PA in the matter, but eventually all were released. Akef was reported to have been released this past week on condition he leave for the US, though neither his lawyer or the US embassy confirmed the deal. In a separate case in November, the highest Muslim authority in Jerusalem, Grand Mufti Muhammad Ahmad Hussein, refused to allow a Palestinian killed in a car accident to be buried in a Muslim cemetery over suspicions he had once sold property to Jews.

Israeli settler groups push to make deals happen as part of their efforts to increase the Jewish population in east Jerusalem, sometimes offering exorbitant sums to pressure owners to sell. The groups use a variety of means such as middlemen or shell companies, anti-settlement activists say. "These are not open, transparent transactions," said Yudit Oppenheimer, who heads Ir Amim, an Israeli anti-settlement NGO focused on Jerusalem.

Daniel Luria of Ateret Cohanim, which works to increase the Jewish population of east Jerusalem, defended its actions. "Everyone should be able to buy and sell" in areas under Israeli sovereignty, said Luria. Joudeh displays documents that he says show the PA validated the sale of his home to another Palestinian. He says the buyer "betrayed me, betrayed the Palestinian Authority and Palestine". The Palestinian who in 2016 bought the house, Khaled Al-Atari, refused to speak with AFP citing an ongoing investigation on the Palestinian side. Regardless of who was responsible, neighbors fear more such sales are ahead. — AFP