



A woman walks in a park in Frankfurt yesterday on a cold and grey day. — AP

MAY TO HELP GULF 'PUSH BACK' IRAN

DUBAI: British Prime Minister Theresa May told Gulf leaders yesterday that Britain would help "push back" against Iranian aggression as they agreed on a strategic partnership to deepen ties. Addressing a summit of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council in Bahrain, May reaffirmed British support for traditional allies in the region, while also seeking to strengthen post-Brexit trade.

"I want to assure you that I am clear-eyed about the threat that Iran poses to the Gulf and to the wider Middle East," she told leaders of the GCC, which brings together Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The Arab Gulf monarchies and Iran are bitter regional rivals, at odds over a range of issues including the wars in Syria and Yemen. GCC countries are concerned about Iran's growing influence in the region, especially after last year's nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers took a step towards ending its international isolation.

The Iran agreement was "vitaly important for regional security", May told the summit. "But we must also work together to push back against Iran's aggressive regional actions." In a joint statement after the summit, Britain and the GCC agreed to a "strategic partnership" that would foster "political, defence, security and trade" ties, while "developing collective approaches to regional issues". In their statement, GCC states and Britain said they "oppose and will work together to counter Iran's destabilizing activities".

As part of strengthening military cooperation, Britain will maintain a presence "throughout the Gulf," the statement said, including through British defense staff to be based in Dubai. The statement said Britain and GCC countries were "committed to continue working towards a sustainable political resolution in Syria", where President

Bashar Al-Assad "has lost all legitimacy and has no role in Syria's future".

It called for Assad's backers including Russia and Iran "to support a meaningful end to the violence, sustained humanitarian access and an inclusive political process" in Syria. During her speech, May said the two sides would study liberalizing trade as Britain prepares to leave the European Union after the shock referendum vote to quit the bloc. "I want these talks... to pave the way for an ambitious trade arrangement" after Brexit, she said in Bahrain, which was a British protectorate for 100 years and gained full independence in 1971.

May was the first woman and first British leader to address a GCC summit, as Gulf countries deepen ties with major powers beyond longtime ally the United States. In May last year, France's President Francois Hollande became the first Western head of state to attend a GCC summit. US President Barack Obama followed in April this year, seeking to reassure Gulf monarchs about US overtures to Iran.

GCC leaders have expressed concern over the international agreement that lifted sanctions on Iran this year in exchange for guarantees it would not pursue a nuclear weapons capability. Riyadh and its allies fear the pact will lead to more Iranian intervention in a region which, they feel, has suffered from a lack of American involvement under Obama. The EU including Britain is the Gulf's biggest trading partner, with trade flows of more than €130 billion (\$140 billion) annually. But almost 30 years after the Gulf states and EU began talks on free trade, still no deal has been reached. Bilateral trade between Britain and the GCC was worth more than £30 billion (\$38 billion) last year. — Agencies

SUITORS, HUSBANDS SPURN MIDDLE EAST WOMEN DISFIGURED BY WAR

AMMAN: Ahzan was shopping in a market in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad when an explosion ripped through the street, lifting her off her feet and shattering her lower body. As the dust settled, Ahzan saw parts of her body strewn across the ground. The 33-year-old's left leg was so badly injured, the doctors had no choice but to amputate. It was the start of more pain and misery, she said. Ruptures in her abdomen and leg never healed, and offers of marriage quickly dried up.

"I had suicidal thoughts, I wanted to die. I just wanted to stay at home all day doing nothing," Ahzan said through a translator at a Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) hospital in Jordan's capital Amman. As an amputee requiring ongoing medical assistance, which has brought her to the MSF hospital, Ahzan is seen as a burden on her community. For women young and old, being disfigured or maimed by conflicts in Middle East is a stain that stigmatizes them for life, health workers say. Many are shunned by society, divorced by their husbands or deemed unfit for marriage and motherhood.

"People make me feel disabled, like I'm not a whole person who can be depended on," said Ahzan, who asked that her full name be withheld for privacy. Ten years after the bombing, Ahzan, now 43, remains single and childless. A mark of shame for women in her culture, her status is also a source of depression, she said.

MSF staff at the only hospital in the Middle East to perform complex reconstructive surgery on victims who have been blown apart and disfigured by conflicts, say the stigma female patients endure when they return home is far worse than for men. Some young women will drop out of school or university out of embarrassment, others are ostracized by family and friends. This isolation, compounded by their physical ailments, can seriously affect their mental health, MSF says.

Since it opened in 2006, the hospital has transported and treated almost 4,400 patients from Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Gaza, free of charge. Around 60 people, mainly young men, undergo complex orthopaedic, facial and burn reconstructive surgery at the hospital each month,

according to MSF. They also receive psychological care and counseling during their stay. Clinical psychologist Yafa Jaffal, who is treating Ahzan for depression as she recovers from surgery to treat the wound on her leg, said patients who have undergone amputations can at least hide their missing limbs with clothing. They can learn to use prosthetic arms or legs to gain autonomy again.

But convincing women with severely disfigured faces to move on with their lives is near impossible, she said. "Many of them have trouble dealing with their children after the injury ... because sometimes the children don't recognize them," Jaffal told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "This is so difficult for a mother - to say 'hello' to your child and they reply, 'No you're not my mother'."

It is also common for husbands to divorce their wives, taking their children with him, or to marry a second wife, said MSF mental health worker Muntaha Mashayekh. "I can count on my fingers the females who stay with their husbands after she is injured, especially those who have been burnt. They lose their lives," said Mashayekh, who counsels females patients at the hospital.

As part of their recovery, women at the hospital are offered classes in applying make-up to help cover their facial scars and burns, as well as dance therapy to boost their self-esteem and confidence. Mashayekh takes the women to local markets so they can start integrating into society again. "You have to be confident in yourself, you are a human being and you should be respected," she said. "It will take time for society to accept them, but we are trying."

It will be a few more weeks until Ahzan is physically well enough to return to Baghdad from the hospital in Amman. But as the primary carer of two older brothers with mental disabilities, she said she will not have time to rest and recover from the operation. It is a strange blessing in disguise, she said, as their condition has helped her feel useful again and accepted by her family. "I forced myself to walk again, to do things on my own and be independent to look after my brothers," she said. "I feel like I've gone from being a disabled person to someone who functions wholly." — Reuters

SAUDI KING SALMAN ARRIVES IN KUWAIT...

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Elaborating, HH the Amir in his statement welcoming the Saudi monarch noted the great achievements that have been made during King Salman's era, bolstering the kingdom's regional and international status. He also hailed King Salman's firm and brave policies at the Arab and Gulf levels and his foresightedness for bolstering regional security,

peace and prosperity.

Elaborating on King Salman's traits, HH the Amir noted contributions by the "great guest" for strengthening the GCC march and his keenness on achieving "further integration" among the GCC countries at various levels. Sheikh Sabah said he is looking forward to this "exemplary and distinctive visit, forecast to result in further cementing the distinguished ties" between the two GCC countries. — KUNA

JUNAID JAMSHED AMONG 48 DEAD IN PAK...

Continued from Page 1

"There is no survivor," a senior government official at the Interior Ministry said. "All those on board the plane were killed," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to release details about the crash to the media.

Azam Sehgal, PIA's chairman, said the pilot of plane told the control tower 4:09 pm that an engine had developed a technical fault and moments later he made a "mayday call" shortly before the plane disappeared. Sehgal said the plane was fit to fly but that it was unclear what caused the crash. Pervez George, the spokesman for the Civil Aviation Authority, told AP that a team of experts would determine the cause after retrieving the plane's black box recorder.

TV footage showed debris from the plane and a massive fire at the site of the crash. The footage showed local villagers collecting the remains of the passengers and covering the bodies with cloths. In a statement, the military said that 40 bodies had been retrieved. Several bodies were later transported to the Ayub Medical Complex, where mourning relatives began arriving to receive the remains.

Among such mourners was tearful Ghulam Rasool Khan, 24, who said his brother Umair Khan was on board the plane. Ghulam asked police to allow him to identify his brother's body. However, police officer Iqbal Khan told him there was no point in going to the mor-

tuary as, "there is nothing left which you can recognize." Khan said he had heard that the plane was not fit to fly. "It is a murder and I want to know who killed my brother," he said.

Altaf Hussain, a rescue worker who transported the remains of passengers in an ambulance, told the AP that the crash site smelled of burnt flesh and oil and that body parts were scattered everywhere. "We collected the burned bones of the ill-fated passengers and wrapped them in cloth," he said. Ambulance driver Duray Hussain said the remains of the passengers were "beyond recognition".

One official, Farman Ghori, was crying outside the hospital, saying he saw the faces of two toddlers among the remains. "Oh God, I never saw such a tragedy," Ghori said. A spokesman for the Interior Ministry said at team had been dispatched to help identify the bodies through DNA tests. Authorities have released names of passengers - among them Jamshed and his wife.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif expressed his "deep grief and sorrow" over the crash. In a statement, he said "the entire nation is deeply saddened over today's unfortunate crash and shares the grief of the families who lost their dear ones". Plane crashes are not uncommon in Pakistan. About 150 people were killed in a crash in the hills of Islamabad in 2010. In 2015, a military helicopter carrying several diplomats also crashed in the country's north, killing eight people. A private plane also crashed near Islamabad due to bad weather in 2012, killing all 127 people on board. — Agencies

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