

International

Kushner suggests Palestinians not ready to govern themselves

Pompeo airs frank Mideast peace plan views in leak

JERUSALEM: US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner has suggested in an interview that the Palestinians are not ready to govern themselves ahead of the expected release of his peace plan. Speaking to US news site Axios, Kushner also said he was not concerned over whether the Palestinians do not trust him since they will base their decisions on whether the plan will improve their lives. "The hope is, is that over time, they can become capable of governing," Kushner said when asked if he believes the Palestinians can govern themselves without Israeli interference.

According to excerpts from the interview published late Sunday on the Axios website, Kushner said the Palestinians "need to have a fair judicial system... freedom of press, freedom of expression, tolerance for all religions" before the Palestinian territories can become "investable". Kushner told Axios that the Palestinians "should have self-determination", without saying whether that would mean an independent state or some lesser form of autonomy. He has previously hinted that the plan will not endorse creating a Palestinian state.

In the Axios interview, Kushner said "I think that it's a high bar" when asked if the Palestinians could expect freedom from any Israeli governmental or military interference. "If you don't have a proper government structure and proper security when people are living in fear of terror,

that hurts Palestinians," he said. The Palestinian leadership has already dismissed the upcoming peace plan, saying Trump's actions so far have shown him to be blatantly biased in favor of Israel. Those actions include declaring the disputed city of Jerusalem Israel's capital, cutting hundreds of millions of dollars in Palestinian aid and closing the Palestinians' de facto embassy in Washington.

"I'm not here to be trusted," Kushner told Axios, adding he differentiates between the Palestinians and their leaders. He said he believes the Palestinian people will look at "the facts and then make a determination: Do they think this will allow them to have a pathway to a better life or not?" The interview was recorded before Kushner's visit to Jerusalem last week, a trip that also included stops in Morocco and Jordan.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is worried the Trump administration's soon-to-be-released Middle East peace plan will be considered "unworkable," and might not gain traction. US media reported on Sunday, Pompeo's remarks to a private meeting of Jewish leaders, first reported by The Washington Post, show that even the plan's own backers expect the latest United States blueprint for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be met with deep skepticism. The economic components of the proposal are to be unveiled at a conference in



LONDON: Ivanka Trump and her husband special advisor to the US president Jared Kushner watch a welcome ceremony at Buckingham Palace yesterday. — AFP

Bahrain on June 25-26.

"It may be rejected. Could be in the end, folks will say. It's not particularly original, it doesn't particularly work for me," that is, "It's got two good things and nine bad things, I'm out," the Post reported, citing an audio recording of the meeting it had obtained. When asked about the recording in an interview in Switzerland yesterday with the Sinclair Broadcast Group, Pompeo did not deny its authenticity.

He acknowledged that, given the "important relationship" the US has with Israel, "I could see how someone might be concerned that a plan that this administration put forward might - without knowing the true facts of what is contained in the plan - they might perceive that it was going to be fundamentally one-sided." But, he stressed, "it is just simply not true. I think there will be things in this plan that lots of people like." — AFP

500 purged Turkish judges, prosecutors go to top rights court

STRASBOURG, France: Over 500 Turkish judges and prosecutors have applied to have cases heard at Europe's top rights court after they were caught up in the crackdown after the failed 2016 coup bid, the court said yesterday. The Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) said it had notified Turkey of applications from 546 judges and prosecutors protesting their provisional detention orders. Those who applied were suspended, detained and then arrested in pre-trial detention on charges of being members of the group of US-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen.

Gulen is accused by Turkey of leading a terror group behind the failed July 15, 2016 coup that aimed to unseat President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Gulen denies the charges. The legal professionals lodged unsuccessful appeals with the Turkish constitutional court and the criminal proceedings against them are still ongoing, the ECHR said. The plaintiffs have based their applications in particular on article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights concerning their right to liberty and security.

The hugely controversial crackdown that followed the coup bid has led to a vast backlog of Turkish cases at the ECHR as applicants run out of legal options in Turkey. Turkey is a member of the Council of Europe (CoE), the pan-European rights body of which the ECHR is part. The CoE has expressed concern in the past that the court is being swamped by Turkish cases. The ECHR said it had informed Turkey of the 546 applications on May 17 and Ankara can now give its observations in writing. The court will then decide if the cases are admissible and give rulings in the coming months. ECHR rulings have frequently angered Turkey, causing strains for its membership within the CoE, notably in November last year when it called on Ankara to release jailed Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtas. — AFP

Rouhani rules out talks until US acts 'normal'

TEHRAN: Iran's president yesterday ruled out negotiations with Washington until it acts "normal", after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the US is ready to talk to Tehran without preconditions. "The party that has left the negotiating table, the party that has

trampled the pact must return to a normal" behavior, Hassan Rouhani said in a televised speech. "If the enemy truly realizes that the path it took was wrong, that will be the day to sit at the negotiation table and fix any issue," the president added.

Tensions have spiked in recent weeks between Tehran and Washington, which last year pulled out of a landmark Iran nuclear accord and imposed tough sanctions on the Islamic republic. But Washington's top diplomat appeared to soften the US stance on Sunday, saying "we are prepared to engage in a con-

versation with no preconditions". Washington is "certainly prepared to have (a) conversation when the Iranians will prove they are behaving as a normal nation," Pompeo said in Switzerland, which represents Washington's interests in Iran in the absence of bilateral relations.

Pompeo however gave no indication that lifting sanctions would be on the table. On Saturday, Rouhani insisted that Iran would not be "bullied" into talks with the United States, saying "total respect" was needed for negotiations to take place. — AFP

800 Syrians start leaving Hol camp

AL-HOL CAMP, Syria: Some 800 Syrian women and children yesterday started leaving a Kurdish-run camp in northeast Syria crammed with tens of thousands including relatives of jihadists, heading to their hometowns. At least 17 buses were seen leaving the area in the first such transfer from Al-Hol camp which is home to nearly 74,000 people, among them wives and children of suspected Islamic State group fighters. Some children were seen with identification tags hanging around their necks, while others had their name and a phone number scribbled on their hands, an AFP correspondent said.

"800 civilians have started leaving the Al-Hol camp aboard buses taking them to their hometowns in Raqa and Tabqa," a town 70 km west of Raqa city, said an official with the Kurdish administration in northeast Syria. "In the coming days, there will be other batches of civilians who will (also) be taken to liberated and safe areas," Sheikhmous Ahmed told AFP, referring to towns and villages recaptured from IS.

Yesterday's transfer follows an agreement brokered by the Kurdish administration and Arab tribal leaders during a meeting in the town of Ain Issa last month. It is to be the first in a larger wave of releases that aim to empty Al-Hol of its Syrian residents, including relatives of alleged IS fighters. The next batch is expected to follow after the Eid al-Fitr holiday due to start sometime in the next few days marking the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Hoovered up during a final offensive against the jihadists by a US-backed Kurdish-led force, thousands of wives and children of IS fighters have been trucked



AL-HOL CAMP, Syria: A woman stands inside this camp for displaced people in Hasakeh governorate in north-eastern Syria on Sunday. — AFP

into Al-Hol from a string of Syrian villages south of the camp in recent months. Thousands more have flocked to the settlement from former jihadist strongholds, including the northern city of Raqa, once IS's Syria capital. Their numbers have created a major headache for the semi-autonomous Kurdish administration and have sparked concerns that the camp is emerging as a fresh jihadist powder keg.

Among the hordes of Syrians and Iraqis, some 12,000 foreigners are held in a fenced-off section of the Al-Hol camp, under the watch of Kurdish forces. Ahmed said that the Kurdish administration had decided to release the Syrian inhabitants of Al-Hol because "the situation in the camp is very difficult". He accused the international community of "neglecting its responsibilities towards the displaced" in the camp. Speaking of yesterday's batch, Ahmed said that some of those leaving Al-Hol had been "influenced" by IS' radical ideology. "They will be monitored and reintegrated into their societies," Ahmed said. — AFP

Car bombing kills 19 in Syria's Azaz

AZAZ, Syria: At least 19 people were killed Sunday in a car bomb near a bustling market and mosque in a rebel-held city in northwestern Syria, a war monitor said. Four children were among those killed in the explosion in Azaz, in the heart of a Turkish zone of influence in Aleppo province, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The attack also wounded more than 20 people, according to the Britain-based monitor. "Many people were leaving evening prayers when the explosion happened," Observatory head Rami Abdul Rahman told AFP.

Shoppers buying clothes and gifts ahead of the upcoming Eid al-Fitr holiday were among those killed, said Jihad Berro, a coroner at a local hospital. He said the medical facility was crammed with victims and their relatives. "The emergency rooms were full, we placed corpses on the floor," he said. "It is a real catastrophe before the Eid al-Fitr holiday," which marks the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, said Berro.

An AFP photographer saw a large crowd gathering at the scene of the attack, charred vehicles dotting the side of the road. Rescue workers searched through mounds of rubble, looking for bodies, he said. Resident Abu Youssef said the explosion torched the neighborhood. "The damage is severe: At least six stores were burned, the storefronts of dozens of other stores were blown



AZAZ, Syria: Syrians inspect a car that exploded in a market in this northern city in Aleppo province near the border with Turkey on Sunday. — AFP

out," he told AFP.

It was not clear who was behind the attack, which came a day after a similar explosion killed 10 people and wounded 20 in the northeastern city of Raqa. Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield in 2016 and seized more than 2,000 sq km of northern Syria including Azaz, clearing the area of Islamic State jihadists while preventing any Kurdish advance in the region. Ankara keeps Turkish troops and intelligence forces in the area, and still backs Syrian rebels serving as police officers. — AFP

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