



World Wrestling Entertainment star The Undertaker makes his way to the ring during a match at the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) Super Showdown event in the Saudi Red Sea port city of Jeddah late on June 7, 2019. — AFP

US envoy's annexation comments show 'extremist' approach: Palestinian leaders

Germany says two states 'only solution' to conflict

RAMALLAH: Palestinian leaders say a US envoy's comments on Israel having the right to annex at least parts of the occupied West Bank show "extremists" are involved in White House policy on the issue. In a statement late Saturday in response to US ambassador to Israel David Friedman's comments in a New York Times interview, a Palestinian government spokesman said some leading US policy on the issue were "extremists" lacking in "political maturity".

The Palestinian foreign ministry said it was looking into filing a complaint with the International Criminal Court on the issue. Palestine Liberation Organization secretary general Saeb Erekat on Twitter called Friedman an "extreme ambassador of the settlers". "Their vision is about annexation of occupied territory, a war crime under international law," he said. Erekat also renewed a Palestinian call for countries to boycott a June 25-26 conference in Bahrain to discuss economic aspects of a peace deal the White House has been working on.

In the interview published Saturday, Friedman said

some degree of annexation of the West Bank would be legitimate. "Under certain circumstances, I think Israel has the right to retain some, but unlikely all, of the West Bank," he said. Israel occupied the West Bank in the 1967 Six-Day War and its construction of settlements there is viewed as a major stumbling block to peace as they are built on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state.

Friedman has in the past been a supporter of Israeli settlements as has the family of Jared Kushner, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser leading efforts to put together the peace deal. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged ahead of April elections to begin annexing West Bank settlements. Bringing settlements under Israeli sovereignty on a large-scale could end any remaining hopes for a two-state solution to Israel's conflict with the Palestinians.

More than 600,000 Jewish settlers now live in the West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem among some three million Palestinians. On the long-delayed peace plan, Friedman said it was aimed at improving the quali-

ty of life for Palestinians but would fall well short of a "permanent resolution to the conflict". Kushner has hinted that it will not endorse international calls for the creation of a Palestinian state.

Publication of the plan looks set to be further delayed after the Israeli parliament called a snap general election for September, the second this year. The plan is regarded as too sensitive to release during the campaign. The Palestinian leadership has already rejected the plan, saying Trump's moves so far show him to be blatantly biased in favor of Israel. Those moves include recognizing the disputed city of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and cutting hundreds of thousands of dollars in aid to the Palestinians.

Meanwhile, Germany's top diplomat yesterday reaffirmed his country's support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ahead of the long-awaited US peace plan. "We are still in agreement that reaching a two-state solution through negotiations is the only solution," Heiko Maas said during a press con-

ference in Amman with his Jordanian counterpart. "We and Germany agree that the two-state solution is the only way to end the conflict," Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said.

Several UN resolutions have enshrined the two-state solution, which envisages separate homelands for Jews and Palestinians, as the path to a peace settlement. Both ministers also stressed the importance of the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, just weeks after the US called for it to be dismantled after cutting its roughly \$300 million annual donation. Jordan is home to nearly 2.2 million Palestinian refugees, who make up almost half of the kingdom's population.

Separately, Maas said Germany would give Jordan a \$100 million loan to help cope with economic difficulties in the kingdom where IMF-backed fiscal reforms sparked mass protests last year. Jordan, whose stability is seen as vital for the volatile Middle East, also hosts some 1.3 million refugees from neighboring war-torn Syria. — Agencies

Civil disobedience campaign empties...

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overall toll to 118 since the June 3 crackdown to disperse the sit-in. The health ministry says 61 people died nationwide in Monday's crackdown, 49 of them by "live ammunition" in Khartoum.

In the capital's northern Bahari district, people gathered tyres, tree trunks and rocks to build new roadblocks as the campaign began yesterday. "Almost all internal roads of Bahari have roadblocks. Protesters are even stopping residents from going to work," a witness told AFP. But riot police swiftly moved in, firing gunshots in the air and tear gas at demonstrators before clearing the makeshift barriers, he said.

The Sudanese Professionals Association, which first launched protests against longtime ruler Omar Al-Bashir in December, said the campaign of civil disobedience would continue until the military rulers transfer power to a civilian government. In Bahari district, onlookers saw a police truck full of people in civilian clothing but it was not possible to confirm whether they were arrested demonstrators. "We blocked the streets to send a message to those trying to steal our revolution that they will fail," said Emad Ibrahim, 25, a protester from Bahari. "It is a long road ahead for us, but after the sacrifice made by our brothers who have been killed, we believe that we will achieve our goal."

Several protesters said they faced difficulties but were still backing the campaign. "The roadblocks prevented me from reaching the market to buy vegetables," said Hassan Abdelrahim, a vegetable vendor. "This will impact my income, but when I look at these youngsters who are on the streets since six months, I'm not angry even if I lose my income."

Khartoum residents have mostly remained indoors since Monday, when men in military fatigues raided the

protest camp. Several vehicles of the feared Rapid Support Forces, blamed by witnesses for the killings, were seen yesterday moving across some parts of the capital loaded with machineguns. RSF members were also seen surrounding the main electricity station.

Several airlines have scrapped their Sudan flights since the deadly raid and passengers were left waiting outside Khartoum airport's departures terminal yesterday, although it was unclear whether any flights would take off. The downtown business district was largely shut and buses were not running in several areas, but private vehicles were ferrying passengers in some locations. In Omdurman, many shops and markets remained closed but people were seen buying staples in some grocery stores. "Troops were also seen removing roadblocks from some streets in Omdurman," an onlooker said.

In the central city of Al-Obeid, the main market was shut and several bank employees did not report to work, residents said. In the town of Madani, southeast of the capital, people were seen queuing outside closed bakeries while the main market was also shut. "I went to three bakeries and have been unable to buy bread," a Madani resident told AFP by telephone, adding that protesters had built roadblocks on several streets making it difficult for vehicles to pass.

It was the tripling of bread prices that first triggered protests against Bashir in December, which later turned into a nationwide movement against his ironfisted rule. After the president was ousted in April, demonstrators remained camped out for weeks in Khartoum to pressure the ruling generals into transferring power. After several rounds of negotiations between protest leaders and the military, talks broke down in mid-May.

Witnesses say the subsequent assault on the sit-in was led by the RSF, who have their origins in the notorious Janjaweed militia, accused of abuses in the Darfur conflict between 2003 and 2004. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed travelled to Sudan on Friday in a bid to revive negotiations, holding separate meetings with the two sides after which he called for a "quick" democratic transition. — AFP

Iran leader pardons 691 on Eid, but Lebanese excluded

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader pardoned hundreds of prisoners on the occasion of the end of Ramadan, but a Lebanese national who Beirut expected to be released was not among them, authorities said yesterday. In total, the sentences of 691 prisoners were either commuted or deferred as decided by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as a gesture for the Eid al-Fitr holidays, said the judiciary's

Mizan Online news website. Last week, Lebanon said one of its nationals condemned in 2016 to 10 years' jail in Iran after being found guilty of spying for the United States would be on the pardon list.

The Lebanese foreign ministry, quoted by the country's official NNA news agency, said Nizar Zakka would be pardoned at the request of Beirut as a gesture for Eid. But Zakka's name was not on the list, said Iran's judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili. "The individual was sentenced and the president of Lebanon had - in letters to judicial officials - requested a conditional pardon," he said, quoted by Mizan. "This request has been in the judicial process and, in case any decision is taken by the judicial apparatus, information will be provided." — AFP

Modi visits bombed Sri Lankan church...

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It added that the two leaders held most of their talks in Modi's limousine while driving the 33 km between the capital and the airport. Modi stopped in Colombo on his return from an official visit to the Maldives, where he inaugurated a radar system and military training center. The two projects, costing \$26 million, were funded by India.

His brief but politically significant visit to the two neighbors came less than 10 days after Modi secured a second landslide election win and as New Delhi seeks to fend off Chinese influence in the region. The Maldives, an archipelago of more than 1,000 tiny coral islands, and Sri Lanka straddle the world's busiest east-west maritime route. India, the traditional ally of both Sri Lanka and the Maldives, had watched with unease

as former governments of strongman leader Abdulla Yameen in the Maldives and Sri Lanka's Mahinda Rajapakse leaned towards Beijing for political and financial support.

Yameen's election loss last September, however, has seen new leader President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih swing back towards New India. Sri Lanka too has moved back toward New Delhi since the defeat of Rajapakse in Jan 2015. Last month, authorities announced a partnership with India and Japan to develop a deep-sea container terminal in Colombo next to a controversial \$500-million Chinese-run facility. The three plan to develop what is known as the East Terminal of Colombo port.

China owns 85 percent of the adjoining Colombo International Container Terminal, which was commissioned in 2013. State-owned Sri Lanka Ports Authority owns the remaining 15 percent. More than two thirds of transshipment containers handled in Colombo originate from or head to India. Sri Lanka, unable to repay a huge Chinese loan, handed over another deep-sea port in the south of the island to a Beijing company in Dec 2017, in a deal that raised concerns at home and abroad. — AFP