

# Trump says he will delay G7 summit, invite other countries

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Saturday he will delay the G7 summit scheduled to take place in June and invite other countries – including Russia – to join the meeting. “I don’t feel that as a G7 it properly represents what’s going on in the world. It’s a very outdated group of countries,” Trump told reporters on Air Force One. He said he would like to invite Russia, South Korea, Australia and India to join an expanded summit in the fall.

It could happen in September, either before or after the UN General Assembly, Trump said, adding that “maybe I’ll do it after the election”. Americans head to the polls in early November to choose a new president, with Trump keen for a return to normalcy from the coronavirus pandemic and a healthy economy as voters cast their ballots. Describing the event as a “G-10 or G-11”, Trump said he had “roughly” broached the topic with leaders of the four other countries.

Leaders from the Group of Seven, which the United States heads this year, had been scheduled to meet by video-conference in late June after COVID-19 scuttled plans to gather in-person at Camp David, the US presidential retreat outside Washington. Trump created suspense just over a week ago, however, when he announced that he might hold the huge gathering in-person after all, “primarily at the White House” but also potentially parts of it at Camp David.

“Cannot agree” to it at Camp David. German Chancellor Angela Merkel became the first leader to decline the in-

person invitation outright. “Considering the overall pandemic situation, she cannot agree to her personal participation, to a journey to Washington,” her spokesman said Saturday. Her response followed ambivalent to vaguely positive reactions to the invitation from Britain, Canada and France.

The 65-year-old chancellor is the oldest G7 leader after Trump, who is 73. Japan’s Shinzo Abe, also 65, is several months younger than Merkel. Their age puts them at higher risk from the coronavirus. The G7 major advanced countries – Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States – hold annual meetings to discuss international economic coordination.

Russia was thrown out of what was the G8 in 2014 after it seized Ukraine’s Black Sea peninsula of Crimea, an annexation never recognized by the international community. The work of the G7 is now more important than ever as countries struggle to repair coronavirus-inflicted damage.

## Virus crisis

The White House had previously said the huge diplomatic gathering would be a “show of strength” when world economies are gradually reemerging from shutdowns. The virus is progressing at different speeds across the globe, with infection numbers falling in many of Europe’s most affected countries. Trump’s announcement came after he flew to Florida earlier in the day to watch the first launch of a commercial company rocket to carry humans into orbit, usher-



In this file photo taken on August 26, 2019 German Chancellor Angela Merkel (L) and US President Donald Trump speak during a bilateral meeting in Biarritz, south-west France. — AFP

ing in a new era in space travel.

The launch was a rare bright spot in the United States Saturday as clashes broke out and major cities imposed curfews amid ongoing protests over the death of George Floyd, an African

American who died after a police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes. The demonstrations are taking place against the ongoing US coronavirus crisis: The United States is the worst-hit country for COVID-19 infec-

tions, recording more than 1.7 million cases and over 103,680 deaths. Meanwhile the number of workers filing for jobless benefits since the virus arrived in country passed 40 million earlier in the week. — AFP

## Curfews, clashes as race protests...

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stun grenades at protesters venting fury at the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, during an arrest in the city on Monday.

Los Angeles, Chicago and Atlanta were among two dozen cities ordering people to stay indoors overnight as more states called in National Guard soldiers to help control the civil unrest not seen in the United States for years. From Seattle to New York, tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets demanding tougher murder charges and more arrests over the death of Floyd, who stopped breathing after Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

In Los Angeles, officers fired rubber bullets and swung batons during a testy standoff with demonstrators who set fire to a police car. Police and protesters clashed in numerous cities including Chicago and New York, with officers responding to projectiles with pepper spray while shop windows were smashed in Philadelphia. Trump blamed the extreme left for the violence, including widespread looting and arson in Minneapolis, saying rioters were dishonoring the memory of Floyd.

“We cannot and must not allow a small group of criminals and vandals to wreck our cities and lay waste to our communities,” the president said. “My administration will stop mob violence. And we’ll stop it cold,” he added, accusing the loose-knit militant anti-fascist network Antifa of orchestrating the violence.

Democratic candidate Joe Biden condemned the violence of the protests, but said on Sunday that US citizens had every right to demonstrate. “Protesting such brutality is right and necessary,” he said. “But burning down communities and needless destruction is not.”

Peaceful protests occurred too, including in Toronto as

the movement spread beyond America’s borders. Demonstrators nationwide chanted slogans such as “Black Lives Matter” and “I can’t breathe”, which Floyd, who has become a fresh symbol of police brutality, was heard saying repeatedly before he died. “We’re not turning the cheek anymore. Black lives matter. They will always matter. And we’re here today to show that,” said makeup artist Melissa Mock, who joined several thousand in a daytime protest in Miami.

Minnesota Governor Tim Walz said he was mobilizing the state’s entire 13,000-strong National Guard to deal with rioters who have looted shops and set fires in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. All major freeways leading into Minneapolis were closed Saturday night with military helicopters overhead as the state braced for more rioting, arson and looting, with locals saying much of the violence was being perpetrated by outsiders.

Earlier, people congregated and chanted peacefully in Minneapolis, carrying brooms to help clean up damaged shops and streets. Some placed flowers in front of the shop where Floyd was arrested on Monday, before his death in the hands of police was recorded in a horrifying cellphone video since seen around the world.

In Houston – where Floyd was born and raised – an old friend of his, Sam Osborne, said as an African American he feared for his life. “I’m really messed up they killed him up, I’m wondering like, what could possibly happen to me?” he told AFP. Houston’s mayor announced at a press conference that Floyd’s body would be brought back to the Texas city. At least eight states – including Texas, Colorado and Georgia – activated the National Guard, who were also deployed around the White House to help handle the protests there.

In Washington, protesters faced off with secret service agents outside the White House for a second straight night as Trump faces the most serious spate of civil unrest of his presidency, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. Looting occurred in Miami, where a curfew was also announced, while in New York mayor Bill de Blasio said a video appearing to show an NYPD police car drive into protesters in Brooklyn was “upsetting” but that he did not blame the officers. — AFP

International Criminal Court. The incident happened in the alleys of the walled Old City near Lions’ Gate, an access point mainly used by Palestinians, and police said they had opened an investigation.

Hundreds of people protested on Saturday evening outside the Jerusalem police headquarters and in Tel Aviv, carrying placards in Hebrew reading “Police violence kills” and “Justice for Iyad”. Photos of Hallak were published online alongside the hashtags #PalestinianLivesMatter and #Icantbreathe, in reference to the American Black Lives Matter movement and US protests against racism and police violence. There have been fears that Israeli plans to take advantage of a controversial green light from US President Donald Trump to annex swaths of the West Bank could stoke further violence. — AFP

stake because of a number of international scandals.

The government however has said that it has referred the case to the public prosecution for investigation, but MP Riyadh Al-Adasani said the government action was incomplete and he will provide full details during a planned grilling of the finance minister. Former MP Abdulrahman Al-Anjari claimed on Twitter that forming a parliamentary investigation panel is an attempt to “cover up” the case and involve suspicious maneuvering. He said that the entire case is with the prime minister and wondered why no MP has demanded to hand it over to the Assembly.

Meanwhile, the elder son of the former senior official categorically denied allegations that he was involved in any money laundering operations and profiteering, saying he is ready to be investigated by the Assembly and the public prosecution. He welcomed in a statement the government decision to send the entire case to the public prosecution. He said he issued the statement after he and some of his relatives were being targeted by foreign reports and social media posts about his alleged involvement in money laundering and corruption.

## Ambulance start-up joins...

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20s, Makkar raised money to retrofit mostly rented vans to function as ambulances which hit the streets last year. Before the pandemic, HelpNow received around 800 calls a month and charged anything between 600 rupees (\$8) to 5,000 rupees, depending on the distance and equipment needed, just to cover costs.

But once the pandemic struck, demand skyrocketed, reflecting widespread shortages across the city’s overburdened health infrastructure, with morgues, wards and ambulances running at full capacity. The jump in calls to HelpNow – more than 4,000 last week alone – has been “way beyond our expectation and our preparedness”, said Makkar, energetic and quick to smile despite surviving on less than five hours of sleep a night.

He has hired 10 more staff to man the phones, and plans to add another 25 vehicles to their 347-strong fleet, with the aim of getting an ambulance to its destination anywhere in Mumbai within 15 minutes or less. Few have felt the brunt of rising demand as intensely as the drivers – in head-to-toe protective suits – who keep HelpNow’s red-and-white ambulances running.

“Ever since coronavirus hit I work 14-16 hour days. Earlier my shifts used to be eight hours long,” said driver Alam Shaikh, who described the job as “exhausting, but fulfilling”. Frontline workers like

## Astronauts head to ISS on historic...

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ended in 2011 and the first crewed flight ever by a private company.

“I’m really quite overcome with emotion,” Musk said. “It’s been 18 years working towards this goal. This is hopefully the first step on a journey towards civilization on Mars,” the SpaceX founder said. NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine said it was a “great day” for NASA and SpaceX and an “important milestone for the nation”. “We’re not celebrating yet,” Bridenstine cautioned. “We will celebrate when they’re home safely.”

In a brief interview from space, Hurley said that in keeping with the tradition of having astronauts name their spacecraft, he and Behnken had named the Crew Dragon capsule “Endeavour” after the retired space shuttle on which they both flew. Behnken said the SpaceX capsule is a “lot different than its namesake” in that “it has touch display screens.”

The mission, dubbed “Demo-2”, ends a government monopoly on space flight and is the final test flight before NASA certifies SpaceX’s capsule for regular crewed missions. Behnken, 49, and Hurley, 53, former military test pilots who joined NASA in 2000, were scheduled to dock with the space station at 10:29 am (1429 GMT) yesterday. They will join US astronaut Chris Cassidy and Russian cosmonauts Anatoly Ivanishin and Ivan Vagner aboard the ISS.

SpaceX said Crew Dragon was on the correct trajectory to link up with the space station orbiting 400 km above the Earth. The reusable first booster stage of the Falcon 9 rocket separated cleanly about 2.5 minutes after liftoff and landed upright on a floating barge off the Atlantic coast. The second stage also separated smoothly. The launch had originally been scheduled for Wednesday but was delayed because of weather conditions, which also

him also face the highest risk of contracting the virus. The ambulances – equipped with ventilators and oxygen systems – are sanitized after every trip and all workers are instructed to wear protective suits, said Makkar.

But fears linger. Even Shaikh, who told AFP he never worried about his own safety, admitted that he had not seen his family in several weeks because he did not want to risk infecting them. “I just speak to them on the cellphone,” the 32-year-old said. “I try to explain to them that if I don’t help people then who will?” India has seen an upsurge in coronavirus cases in recent weeks, and has now recorded almost 5,000 deaths – more than China, where the contagion was first detected. On Saturday the government announced major relaxations of its lockdown, although in areas with large numbers of cases – such as Mumbai – activities will remain restricted.

Experts have long warned that Mumbai’s densely populated slums and tenements are a health catastrophe waiting to happen, with shared toilets, sometimes eight people to a room and no possibility of social distancing. “A poor person cannot afford this disease,” said one inhabitant, Imroz Mansoor Khan, who works as a food delivery driver and worries constantly about contracting an infection from a customer. If he were to fall sick, paying for a private ambulance would be out of the question, the 23-year-old told AFP.

With HelpNow offering just 10 free trips a day to patients who cannot afford to pay, its service remains out of reach for many. “That definitely is the end goal... to provide (a) completely free, quickest and safest medical response”, said Makkar, who is seeking donations to fund more complimentary services. — AFP

remained uncertain on Saturday right up until liftoff.

The mission comes amid the coronavirus crisis and protests in multiple US cities over the death of a black man in Minneapolis while he was being arrested by a white police officer. US President Donald Trump flew to Florida to watch the launch and delivered remarks to NASA and SpaceX employees on what he called a “special day”. Trump first addressed the protests, saying he understood “the pain people are feeling” but that he would not tolerate “mob violence”.

Trump praised Musk and said the launch “makes clear the commercial space industry is the future”. He also repeated his vow to send American astronauts back to the Moon in 2024 and eventually to Mars. Behnken and Hurley blasted off from Launch Pad 39A, the same one used by Neil Armstrong on Apollo 11’s 1969 journey to the Moon.

The pair, veterans of two space shuttle missions each, were in quarantine for more than two weeks ahead of the flight and were regularly tested for COVID-19. They went through the same preparations Saturday that they went through on Wednesday, donning their futuristic SpaceX-designed spacesuits four hours before launch.

After saying goodbye to their wives – both former astronauts – they were driven to the launch pad in an electric car built by Tesla, one of Musk’s other companies. The Crew Dragon mission is a defining moment for SpaceX, which Musk founded in 2002 with the goal of producing a lower-cost alternative to human spaceflight. The US space agency paid more than \$3 billion for SpaceX to design, build, test and operate its reusable Dragon capsule for six future space round trips.

NASA has had to pay Russia for its Soyuz rockets to take US astronauts to space ever since the shuttle program ended. SpaceX conducted a successful test flight of Crew Dragon to the ISS in March 2019 with a sensor-laden mannequin on board named Ripley, after the character played by Sigourney Weaver in the “Alien” movies. The project has experienced delays, explosions, and parachute problems – but even so, SpaceX has beaten its giant competitor Boeing to the punch. — AFP

## Aqsa mosque reopens after...

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territories have eased restrictions. Israel has reported more than 17,000 cases, including 284 deaths. Fewer than 500 infections and just three deaths have been confirmed in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, which have a combined population of around five million. Following the deadly shooting on Saturday, the Palestinian leadership demanded that whoever killed Iyad Khairi Hallak be brought before the

## Lockdown eased; Harbi resists...

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MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said yesterday that he will demand forming a parliamentary panel to investigate a former senior official and a number of former ministers over suspected corruption and money laundering operations worth billions of dollars that included funding North Korea’s nuclear program and corruption related to Malaysia’s sovereign wealth fund IMDB.

The lawmaker urged HHH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah to prove that his government fights corruption. Kandari said his move depends on a report published by the New York Times about a network involving Chinese and North Koreans running money laundering operations to finance North Korean nuclear activities, in which the name of Kuwait was mentioned. He said that the image of Kuwait and its financial institutions is at