

International

UAE, Bahrain: Normalizing ties with Israel

Abbas calls agreement with UAE an 'aggression' against Palestinians

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are due to sign at the White House historic deals normalizing ties with Israel, the third and fourth Arab countries to do so. Here is a recap of events in the last month leading to the signing of the landmark accords:

'HUGE breakthrough'

On August 13, 2020, the United Arab Emirates and Israel agree to normalize ties in a US-brokered deal. The bombshell news is broken by US President Donald Trump in a tweet hailing a "HUGE breakthrough" and a "Historic Peace Agreement between our two GREAT friends".

A joint statement by Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the UAE's Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan announces Israel will "suspend declaring sovereignty" over occupied Palestinian West Bank areas as had been slated after a controversial US-proposed Middle East peace plan.

But shortly afterwards, Netanyahu says in a televised address that he has only agreed to delay, not cancel, the annexations. He says the plans remain "on the table" and that he will "never give up our rights to our land".

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas calls the agreement with the UAE an "aggression" against the Palestinian people and a betrayal of their cause.

Direct phone line

On August 14, Netanyahu thanks the leaders of Egypt, Oman and Bahrain for their support of the agreement to normalise ties with the UAE.

Two days later, the Israeli and UAE foreign ministers inaugurate direct phone services between the

two countries in their first announced call after the agreement.

Israel's Mossad spy agency chief, Yossi Cohen, visits the UAE on August 18 for security talks, the first formal visit by an Israeli official since the deal.

'Stab in the back'

On August 19, hundreds of Palestinians hold a protest in the occupied West Bank against the announcement. Members of rival groups Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, and the Fatah faction of Abbas' West Bank-based Palestinian Authority, take part in the rally in a rare joint initiative.

Historic peace agreement

"Any normalisation legitimises the occupation of Palestinian territories," says Palestinian Authority prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh. "It's a stab in the back," he adds.

Mike Pompeo tour

From August 24 to 27, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo undertakes a Middle East tour in a bid to encourage other Arab states to follow in the footsteps of the UAE. However, his stops in Bahrain, Oman and Sudan fail to produce any public commitments to recognise the Jewish state.

Historic direct flight

On August 31, an Israeli-American delegation takes off on the first commercial flight from Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi.

Saudi Arabia allowed the flight to cross its airspace, according to White House advisor Jared Kushner, who thanks "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for making that possible" shortly after the flight lands in Abu Dhabi.

242, which involved recognition of the state of Israel. The Palestinians rejected it.

Fierce crackdown

In early September 1970, the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a Marxist faction led by George Habash, hijacked five planes, forcing three to land in the Jordan desert.

It blew them up once they had been emptied of several hundred passengers, taking dozens hostage.

On September 17 a deeply frustrated King Hussein responded by ordering his 50,000-strong army to kick the Palestinian fighters out of the Hashemite kingdom. Tank divisions, their faces blackened with soot, pushed into the centre of Amman, refugee camps on the outskirts of the capital and Palestinian training centres.

The next day clashes extended to Irbid, Zarka and al-Ramtha in northern Jordan, which were pounded with heavy artillery by Jordanian troops.

On September 20, Syria intervened to back the Palestinians, sending armoured vehicles into northern Jordan, forcing the Jordanian army to fight on two fronts. Journalists who had been stranded in their hotel overlooking Amman emerged three days later to a battle-scarred capital.

"No neighbourhood has been spared. All the houses show traces of the fighting, some have been gutted by a shell, others hit by volleys of heavy weapons fire," AFP's journalists wrote.

"The Palestinian Wahdat camp in Amman, the PFLP's stronghold, is just a pile of smoking rubble," they added.

In the fighting, 3,000 Palestinian fighters, Jordanian soldiers and civilians were killed according to

outward signs of dissent have evaporated, as fear silences many Inner Mongolians.

During a recent trip to the region, AFP reporters were tailed by a convoy of propaganda officials and unidentified men, leaving contacts jittery and afraid to be named.

In the footsteps of Xinjiang, Tibet

Hastily imposed for the start of term on September 1, the new rules say Mandarin must be taught from first grade — one year earlier than before — across the region's bilingual boarding schools.

History, politics and literature will also be taught in Mandarin now instead of Mongolian. Similar education policies have been introduced in Xinjiang and Tibet, other border regions that have faced government repression and extensive campaigns to rein in their minority education, religions and cultures.

"This is something we cannot accept," the father told AFP. "For young children who are now around seven or eight years old, in a decade or two they will not be able to speak with grandparents in their own language." — AFP

Afghan peace talk negotiators to hold first direct session

KABUL: Afghanistan and Taliban peace talk negotiators will hold their first direct session in Doha, officials said, as the warring sides try to work out an agenda and schedule for how to negotiate a peace deal as the United States withdraws troops.

A small group of negotiators from both sides had met in previous days to try to discuss how the substantive negotiations would take place.

"The contact group from both sides' delegations continued the discussion on rules and procedures and prepared to present it to the general meeting between the two negotiating teams (taking place on Tuesday)," senior Afghan government negotia-



WASHINGTON: File photo shows US President Donald Trump listens to applause in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, on September 11, 2020. Trump announced Friday a "peace deal" between Israel and Bahrain, which becomes the second Arab country to settle with its former foe in the last few weeks. — AFP

On September 2, Saudi Arabia agrees to permit UAE flights to all countries to overfly the kingdom. The next day, Bahrain announces a similar decision, saying it agrees to allow UAE flights to and from Israel to overfly its territory.

Bahrain and Israel deal

On September 11, Trump announces a "peace deal" between Israel and Bahrain. "Another HISTORIC breakthrough today!" Trump tweets. The Palestinian Authority and Hamas immediately slam the announcement. — AFP

Fifty years ago: Black September for PLO

PARIS: Fifty years ago, the Jordanian army launched a huge offensive that went down in history as "Black September" in a bid to retake control of territory occupied by the Palestine Liberation Organization in Jordan.

Here is an account of the bloody confrontation on September 17, 1970, based on AFP's copy at the time.

Palestinians radicalise

The Arab defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War in which Israel seized the West Bank and other land, resulted in the Palestinian resistance becoming more radical.

Yasser Arafat, who became PLO chief in 1969, set up training camps and military bases for his 40,000-strong army of fedayeen guerrillas in Jordan, to attack the neighbouring Jewish state.

Jordan had taken in hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees since the creation of Israel in 1948. But the power of the Palestinian armed groups developed into a state within a state.

Insecurity set in and shoot-outs became commonplace in the streets of Amman. King Hussein of Jordan, who struggled to control factions of his own army, narrowly survived a number of assassination attempts. In mid-1970, Egypt and Jordan accepted a US plan, based on UN Security Council Resolution

Inner Mongolia seethes as China presses Mandarin at school

TONGLIAO: As his son returned to school under the watchful eye of plainclothes police, an ethnic Mongolian father admitted defeat after days of fighting against a curriculum imposed by the Chinese state, which he fears will suffocate his culture.

"The spirit (of resistance) is still there, but we are scared," said the man, requesting anonymity as he watched other students lugging their suitcases back into Tongliao Mongolian Middle School after a week-long boycott.

"Little by little, parents are sending their kids back." Tens of thousands took part in demonstrations and school boycotts in Inner Mongolia — a vast expanse of northern China where herders marshall livestock across grasslands — to protest against an edict mandating Mandarin-language teaching, over fears it will wipe out their language.

The rare mass rallies held by ethnic Mongolians were the largest China has seen for decades, where authorities under Chinese President Xi Jinping brook no dissent. But then the crackdown came.

Armoured vehicles moved in to surround schools in Tongliao, a stronghold of resistance where ethnic Mongolians make up almost half of the population.

The clampdown echoes Beijing's moves in Xinjiang and Tibet, where similar policies to assimilate local minorities into the dominant Han population were implemented in line with Xi's vision of national and ideological unity through cultural identity.

Police offered cash bounties for leads on ringleaders and publicised the arrests of dozens of suspects accused of gathering signatures and sharing dissenting messages on WeChat. Parents who refused to send their children back to school were threatened with layoffs, fines and students' expulsion. In one district, officials offered cash to students who convinced their peers to return, according to official notices. The dragnet has cowed the most outspoken.

Petitions that circulated in early September and other

Jordan, while the PLO puts the toll in the tens of thousands.

Palestinians expelled

On September 27, after 10 days of bloody fighting, a ceasefire was signed in Cairo.

The last hostages held by the PFLP were freed two days later. But under the deal the Palestinian armed groups got to stay in Jordan, and new fighting took place in January and March 1971.

Prime minister Wasfi al-Tel eventually drove Arafat and the Palestinian fighters out in July 1971, forcing them to seek safe haven in Lebanon.

"It was inevitable, because it was either them or us," King Hussein later said.

In the 1980s Arafat and King Hussein reconciled, but their relationship remained tinged with suspicion.

'Black September' organisation

On November 28, 1971, Tel, regarded as King Hussein's confidant, was assassinated in Cairo by members of the new radical Palestinian "Black September" organisation.

The group would go on to claim numerous attacks, the most spectacular of which was the hostage-taking of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

On September 5, 1972, eight gunmen broke into the Israeli team's flat at the Olympic village, shooting dead two and taking nine more Israelis hostage, threatening to kill them all unless 232 Palestinian prisoners were released.

West German police responded with a bungled rescue operation in which all nine hostages were killed, along with five of the eight hostage-takers and a police officer. — AFP



TONGLIAO: This photo taken on September 10, 2020 shows policemen standing guard as students arrive at the entrance to the Tongliao Mongolian Middle School in Tongliao in China's northern Inner Mongolia region, following recent protests over a new bilingual education policy by the Chinese government. — AFP

tor Nader Nadery said.

The Taliban's political spokesman Muhammad Naem told Reuters by phone the meeting would be "general" and there were no specific agreed issues on the agenda.

An Afghan presidential palace official said a top priority was getting the Taliban to agree on a ceasefire or significant reduction in violence.

Violence has continued in the country even after the launch of historic peace talks at an opening ceremony in Doha on Saturday.

Talks between the two sides were to begin shortly after a U.S.-Taliban agreement in February, but started only after months of delays, caused in part by continuing Taliban offensives in the war-torn country as well as disagreement over the release of prisoners.

U.S. President Donald Trump has made ending the war in Afghanistan a key election promise and the United States is set to withdraw all its troops by May 2021, subject to the Taliban meeting certain security guarantees. — Reuters

Deadly consequences of Yemen aid obstruction: HRW

DUBAI: Human Rights Watch warned Monday of "deadly consequences" as a result of the obstruction of aid in war-torn Yemen, where the humanitarian effort has already been badly hit by the coronavirus crisis.

Interference by the government and Huthi rebels has hampered the delivery of aid in the country where the risk of famine looms large, the rights group wrote in a report.

Interviews with 35 humanitarian workers, 10 donor officials and 10 Yemeni health workers revealed a complex web of restrictions that hinder the flow of aid.

Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed in the Yemen conflict, which the United Nations describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The United Nations warned in July that Yemen was at risk of returning to "the brink of a full-scale famine" as calls intensified for a ceasefire to help combat the novel coronavirus.

Long delays in approving aid projects, obstruction of aid surveys, and efforts to dictate allocation, alongside violence towards aid workers, all frustrated the flow of essentials, the report said. Aid workers had to "push back" against Huthi insurgents who insisted they hand over cars, laptops and mobile phones when projects concluded in 2019 and 2020.

The UN's World Food Programme last year temporarily suspended deliveries to rebel-held areas following accusations of "diversion of food", after which the Huthis dropped a threat to impose a tax on aid.

Obstacles to aid delivery in government-held areas in the south and east were also on the rise, HRW said. The report also criticised aid agencies for giving in to illegitimate demands, potentially worsening the situation — particularly in Huthi-held areas.

Unnecessary obstacles

Their actions had "encouraged the authorities to seek ever-greater control... channelling vast amounts of money to clearly corrupt ministries", HRW said.

The report urged both the government and the Huthis to "immediately lift all unnecessary obstacles" to the delivery of life-saving aid, demand for which has exploded since the coronavirus pandemic.

Yemen has so far recorded more than 2,000 Covid-19 cases, including 583 deaths, but numbers are likely much higher, the UN says.

More than three million Yemenis have been displaced and three-quarters of Yemen's population of 29 million depend on some form of aid for survival, the UN says.

The UN humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, Lise Grande, said the UN was alert to the challenges of delivering aid in Yemen. "For every programme we have underway, we identify the risks to principled delivery," she told AFP.

"When those principles are breached, we adjust our delivery — this means that we sometimes have to stop aid." She warned last month millions of Yemenis will "suffer and could die" because of a funding crisis that has forced the UN to close or slash half of its major programmes in Yemen.

An aid conference held in Riyadh in June saw donors pledge just \$1.35 billion of the \$2.41 billion needed to cover essential humanitarian activities until the end of the year. — AFP