

UN fails to take action on order against Myanmar on Rohingya

Agencies

NEW YORK - The UN Security Council on Tuesday discussed the International Court of Justice's order that Myanmar do all it can to prevent genocide against the Rohingya Muslims, but failed to agree on a statement.

China, an ally of Myanmar, as well as Vietnam, which is a member of the regional Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) along with Myanmar, objected, diplomats said, speaking on condition of anonymity because it was a closed-door meeting.

Instead, the European Union members of the council urged Myanmar in a joint statement to reporters afterwards to comply with the measures ordered by

"Myanmar must address the root causes of its conflicts, in Rakhine State, but also in Kachin and Shan States," the EU members said.

"Accountability of perpetrators of human rights and humanitarian law violations is a necessary part of this process."

Some 740,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh after Myanmar security forces launched a crackdown on the Muslim minority in August 2017 in response to an attack by a Rohingya armed group. More than one million Rohingya refugees are currently living in Bangladesh.

Thousands of Rohingya are suspected to have been killed in the crackdown which has been described by UN investigators as a genocide.



the UN's top court, stressing that they were "compulsory under international law."

France, Germany, Belgium and Estonia along with former council member Poland also urged Myanmar "to take credible action to bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations."

Refugees reported widespread rape and arson in Rakhine state by Myanmar's military and local Buddhist militias. Myanmar has long claimed the Rohingya are "Bengali" migrants from Bangladesh, even though their families have lived in the country for generations.

More Chinese Cities Shut Down As Coronavirus Death Toll Nears 500

Agencies

BEIJING - Millions more people have been ordered to stay indoors as China battles to curb the spread of a new coronavirus that authorities said on Wednesday has already killed nearly 500 people.

With more than 24,000 cases in China, a growing number of cities have been imposing a range of restrictions in recent days far from central Hubei province, the epicentre of the outbreak, as authorities struggle to contain the virus.

Global concerns have risen as more countries found cases that were not imported from China and 10 people tested positive for the virus on a ship — carrying 3,711 people — quarantined off the coast of Japan.

Japanese authorities on Wednesday began testing those on board after a former passenger who disembarked in Hong Kong was diagnosed with the illness.

Some 56 million people in Hubei have been under virtual lockdown since last week, with its capital Wuhan at the heart of the health emergency.

In Hangzhou, some 175 kilo-

metres southwest of Shanghai, green fences blocked streets near the headquarters of Chinese tech giant Alibaba as a fighter jet circled overhead.

Alibaba, one of the world's most valuable companies, appeared shut down, while deliverymen moved in and out of the nearby fenced-in residential areas to drop off groceries. Many people were also seen going out.

The firm is inside one of three districts where some three million people were told this week that only one person per household would be allowed outside every two days to buy necessities.

"Please don't go out, don't go out, don't go out, don't go out," blared a message on a loudspeaker urging people to wear masks, wash their hands regularly and report any people who are from Hubei — a common fear in other parts of the country that people from the province might infect others.

At least three other cities in eastern Zhejiang province — Taizhou, Wenzhou and parts of Ningbo — have imposed the same measures, affecting some 18 million people.



Draft UN resolution condemns Israeli annexation in Trump Mideast plan

Agencies

NEW YORK - A draft United Nations Security Council resolution on Tuesday condemned an Israeli plan to annex its settlements in the West Bank in a rebuke of President Donald Trump's pro-Israel peace proposal.

The draft text, circulated to council members by Tunisia and Indonesia, would seemingly face a US veto, but nonetheless offered some members a dim view of the peace plan that Trump rolled out last week with great fanfare.

Diplomats said negotiations on the text would likely begin later this week. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is expected

to speak to the council next week about the plan, possibly coinciding with a vote on the draft resolution.

The resolution stresses the illegality of the annexation of any part of occupied Palestinian territories and condemns recent statements calling for annexation by Israel of these territories, according to the draft seen by Reuters.

Trump's plan, the product of three years effort by senior adviser Jared Kushner, would recognise Israel's authority over the settlements and would require the Palestinians to take a highly difficult series of conditions to be allowed to have a state, with its capital in a West Bank village east of Jerusalem.

Kushner is due to brief Security

Council ambassadors on the plan on Thursday.

While the Palestinians have rejected the plan, a number of Arab governments have said it represents a starting point for a renewal of long stalled negotiations.

The resolution stresses the need for an acceleration of international and regional efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final status issues in the Middle East peace process without exception.

A US veto at the council level would allow the Palestinians to take the draft text to the 193-member UN General Assembly, where a vote would publicly show how Trump's peace plan has been received internationally.

EU rejects Trump's Mideast plan amid annexation concerns

Press Trust Of India

BRUSSELS: The European Union has rejected US President Donald Trump's proposal for securing peace in the Middle East and expressed concern about Israel's plans to annex more Palestinian land.

Trump's plan, which was unveiled last week, would foresee the eventual creation of a Palestinian state, but it falls far short of minimal Palestinian demands and would leave sizable chunks of the occupied West Bank in Israeli hands.

In a statement, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell underlined the bloc's commitment to a two-state solution, based along the 1967 lines, with the possibility of mutually agreed land-swaps, made up of the state of Israel and "an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable state of Palestine."

Borrell said the US initia-



tive "departs from these internationally agreed parameters."

"To build a just and lasting peace, the unresolved final status issues must be decided through direct negotiations between both parties," Borrell said.

"This includes notably the issues related to borders, the status of Jerusalem, security and the refugee question," Trump's plan was welcomed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has dismissed it as nonsense.

Gulf Arab states also rejected the White House plan as

biased. While Israeli officials were present for its unveiling, no Palestinian representatives attended.

Netanyahu has said he wants to move forward with plans to annex West Bank territory.

We are especially concerned by statements on the prospect of annexation of the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank, Borrell said.

He suggested that the EU might consider legal action by saying that any "steps towards annexation, if implemented, could not pass unchallenged."

The Palestinians seek all of the West Bank and east Jerusalem areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war for an independent state and the removal of more than 700,000 Israeli settlers from these areas.

But the plan sides heavily with Netanyahu's hard-line nationalist vision for the region and shunts aside many of the Palestinians' core demands.

Trump Renews Vow To Withdraw From Afghanistan

Agencies

WASHINGTON - US President Donald Trump on Tuesday renewed his vow to negotiate a troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, saying he had no desire to kill "hundreds of thousands" in unending fighting.

In one of his few foreign-policy points in a highly partisan State of the Union address to Congress, Trump offered his blessing for ongoing negotiations with Taliban militants.

"I am not looking to kill hundreds of thousands of people in Afghanistan, many of them totally innocent," Trump told the joint session of Congress.

"It is also not our function to serve other nations as a law enforcement agency. These are war-fighters, the best in the world, and they either want to fight to win or not fight at all," he said.

"We are working to finally end America's longest war and bring our troops back home."

Trump has long questioned the wisdom of keeping troops overseas and has described the war in Afghanistan launched after the September 11, 2001 attacks as a drain on blood and treasure.

But last year he abruptly said that he had cancelled a previously unannounced summit at the Camp David presidential retreat with the Taliban because of an attack that killed an American.

He later allowed veteran US negotiator Zalmay Khalilzad to resume the talks, which had taken

place for months in Qatar.

Under a draft deal, the United States will withdraw troops, and the Taliban will promise not to allow extremists to use Afghanistan as a base as well as to open talks with the internationally recognized government in Kabul.

The Taliban has more recently proposed a limited reduction in violence, an easing of position after previously refusing any halt to attacks it sees as leverage.

- Little foreign focus -

Trump earlier spoke forcefully against Venezuela's leftist leader Nicolas Maduro, inviting his rival Juan Guaido to watch the speech from the gallery.

But his speech otherwise focused little on foreign policy, with no mention of North Korea, a year after Trump used the State of the Union to announce his second summit with the nuclear-armed state's leader, Kim Jong Un.

Trump only briefly mentioned his pro-Israel plan for the Middle East, which he unveiled last week next to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after more than a year of delay.

On Iran, Trump highlighted his pressure campaign against the clerical regime and boasted of the controversial strike he ordered last month that killed Iran's best-known general, Qassem Soleimani.

"Because of our powerful sanctions, the Iranian economy is doing very poorly," Trump said.

"We can help them make it very good in a short period of time, but perhaps they are too proud or too foolish to ask for that help."

Twitter To Label Doctored Media, Remove Material Likely To Cause Harm



Agencies

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter will begin to label and in some cases remove doctored or manipulated photos, audio and videos that are designed to mislead people.

The company said Tuesday that the new rules prohibit sharing synthetic or manipulated material that's likely to cause harm. Material that is manipulated but isn't necessarily harmful may get a warning label.

Under the new guidelines, the slowed-down video of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in which she appeared to slur her words could get the label if someone tweets it out after the rules go into effect March 5. If it was proven that it also causes harm, Twitter could also remove it.

But deciding what might cause harm could be difficult to define, and some material will likely fall into a gray area.

"This will be a challenge and we will make errors along the way — we appreciate the patience," Twitter said in a blog post. "However, we're committed to doing this right."

Twitter said it considers threats to the safety of a person or a group serious harm, along with risk of mass violence or widespread civil unrest. But harm could also mean threats to people's privacy or ability to freely express themselves, Twitter said. This could include stalking, voter suppression and intimidation epithets and "material that aims to silence someone."

NEWSMAKERS

US working with drug firm on new coronavirus treatment

WASHINGTON - The United States is working with a pharmaceutical company to develop a treatment for the 2019 Novel Coronavirus, using a class of drug that has boosted survival rates among Ebola patients, officials said Tuesday.

The partnership between the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Regeneron will develop monoclonal antibodies to fight the infection, a different line of treatment to the antiretrovirals and flu drugs that have also emerged as possible defenses against the disease.

Nearly 500 people have died as a result of the virus since it emerged in a Chinese live seafood and wild animal market at the end of last year.

"Emerging infectious diseases can present serious



threats to our nation's health security," said Rick Bright, an official at the HHS.

"Working as public-private partners like we have with Regeneron since 2014, we can move rapidly to respond to new global health threats."

Monoclonal antibodies are lab-produced copies of a single type of antibody and

are a form of immunotherapy. They lock on to certain proteins on a virus, neutralizing the pathogen's ability to infect human cells.

Regeneron's REGN-EB3, a cocktail of three monoclonal antibodies, was last year shown to significantly boost survival rates among Ebola patients in the Democratic Re-

public of Congo. The company has also developed a treatment for Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS) along similar lines.

"The life-saving results seen with our investigational Ebola therapy last year underscore the potential impact of Regeneron's rapid response platform for addressing emerging outbreaks," said George Yancopoulos, Regeneron's president and chief scientific officer.

Ultimately, the treatment for the novel coronavirus could involve a mixture of different classes of drugs.

Chinese doctors have been giving HIV drugs to coronavirus patients in Beijing, based on a 2004 study published after the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that showed "favorable" responses.

Malaysia's former first lady goes on trial for corruption

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's former first lady, who allegedly bankrolled a luxurious lifestyle with kickbacks and stolen public money, went on trial Wednesday for corruption for the first time since her husband lost power.

Rosmah Mansor, notorious for making overseas shopping trips and owning vast collections of handbags and jewellery, became a lightning rod for public anger as the government of prime minister Najib Razak was engulfed by corruption allegations.

Her husband's long-ruling coalition suffered a shock election defeat in 2018 in large part due to claims he and his officials plundered billions of dollars from sovereign wealth fund IMDB.



Both Najib and his wife have since been hit with multiple charges over the looting of the investment vehicle, but Rosmah's first trial centres on allegations she received bribes linked to a government project.

Prosecutors allege she pocketed 6.5 million ringgit (\$1.6 million) for helping a

company secure the project to provide solar power generators to schools on the Malaysian part of Borneo island.

The 68-year-old is also accused of soliciting a further 187.5 million ringgit. Rosmah faces three counts of corruption for the offences, which allegedly took place in 2016 and 2017.