

Israel to approve thousands of settlement units in West Bank

Israel's regime on Sunday tabled plans to approve thousands of building permits in the occupied West Bank, despite US pressure to halt settlement expansion that Washington sees as an obstacle to peace with Palestinians.

The plans for approval of 4,560 housing units in various areas of the West Bank were included on the agenda of Israel's Supreme Planning Council that meets next week, although only 1,332 are up for final approval, with the remainder still going through the preliminary clearance process, according to Reuters. "We will continue to develop the settlement of and strengthen the Israeli hold on the territory," said Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who also holds a defence portfolio that gives him a leading role in West Bank administration. Most countries deem the settlements, built on land captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war, as illegal. Their presence is one of the fundamental issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinians seek to establish an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza



Strip with East Al-Quds as their capital. Peace talks that had been brokered by the United States have been frozen since 2014. Since entering office in January, Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition has approved the promotion of more than 7,000 new housing units, most deep in the West Bank. It also amended a law to clear the way for settlers

to return to four settlements that had previously been evacuated.

In response to Sunday's Israeli decision, the Palestinian Authority said it would boycott a meeting of the Joint Economic Commit-

tee with Israel scheduled for Monday.

The Palestinian resistance group Hamas condemned the move, saying it will not give (Israel) legitimacy over our land. Our people will resist it by all means".



A barrier separating the Israeli settlement of Pisgat Zeev (1) from the eastern part of Al-Quds in the occupied West Bank is pictured on June 17, 2023.

● JEWEL SAMAD/AFP

Sudan's warring sides begin new 72-hour cease-fire



Sudan's warring parties began a cease-fire Sunday morning after two months of fighting pushed the African nation into chaos.

Residents in the capital, Khartoum, and its neighboring city of Omdurman reported "relative calm" in the first hours of the cease-fire Sunday morning, after fierce clashes were reported the previous day, according to AP.

The three-day truce came ahead of a pledging conference the U.N. and other

nations will organize Monday to raise funds to cover Sudan's humanitarian needs.

The U.N. says it received less than 16% of the \$2.57 billion required to help those in need in Sudan in 2023. Another \$470 million is needed to support refugees in the Horn of Africa region, it said.

The United States and Saudi Arabia, announced the cease-fire agreement Saturday. Both led concerted diplomatic efforts to stop the war over the past two months.

The U.S. and Saudi Arabia said in a joint statement that the military and its rival paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces, agreed to halt fighting and "refrain from seeking military advantage during the ceasefire." Sudan plunged into chaos after months of worsening tensions between the rival generals exploded into open fighting, in mid-April, across the country with the capital, Khartoum and the western Darfur region bearing the brunt of the armed conflict.

The fighting turned Khartoum and other urban areas into battlegrounds. More than 3,000 people lost their lives and over 6,000 others were wounded, according to Health Minister Haitham Mohammed Ibrahim. It forced more than 2.2 million people to flee their homes to safer areas inside Sudan and to neighboring nations.

The cease-fire was the latest in a series of attempted truces, brokered by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, all of which failed to stop fighting, with the mediators blaming the two warring sides for repeated violations.

The humanitarian situation in the war-ridden country has been worsening. At least 24.7 million people - more than half of the country's population - need humanitarian assistance. And over 100,000 children are projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition with medical complications by the end of the year, the World Health Organization warned on Friday.

Mali junta holds vote on new constitution



Malians voted Sunday on whether to back a draft constitution drawn up by the governing junta which has fuelled speculation that the country's strongman ruler will seek election.

The West African nation has been under military rule since an August 2020 coup, which followed years of instability marked by insurgencies and political and economic crisis, according to AFP.

Some 8.4 million citizens are eligible to vote in the referendum on the new text in the first electoral test for leader Colonel Assimi Goita, 40, who has vowed to return the country to civilian rule in 2024.

The vote was not held in some parts of the country due to the lack of security, including the town of Kidal, a stronghold of former rebels.

The junta has advertised the new constitution as the answer to Mali's inability to tackle its multiple crises. Mali's recent woes began in 2012, when separatist insurgents in the north - long seen as marginalized by the southern government - aligned with Al-Qaeda-linked terrorists to seize vast swathes of territory. Disputed parliamentary elections in



A Malian national living in Abidjan casts his ballot during voting for the referendum on the draft of the new Malian constitution in the district of Adjame, Ivory Coast on June 18, 2023.

● SIA KAMBOU/AFP

March 2020, followed by mass protests against a government unable to rein in the insurgency, corruption and economic crisis, ended in a coup. Goita initially appointed an interim president but kicked him out in a second coup in 2021 and stepped into the top job himself.

Now doubts are swirling over his commitment to step down after elections planned for next year.

The junta called on Friday for the immediate departure of the country's UN peacekeeping mission, a central and controversial actor in a security crisis that has claimed the lives of nearly 200 peacekeepers in the last decade.

Mali had increasingly imposed operational restrictions on the peacekeepers, ultimately accusing the mission on Friday of not only being a "failure", but even becoming "part of the problem".

NEWS IN BRIEF

Heat wave kills nearly 100 in India



AP - At least 96 people died in two of India's most populous states over the last several days, officials said Sunday, with swaths of the country reeling from a sweltering heat wave. The deaths happened in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh and eastern Bihar where authorities warned residents over 60 and others suffering various maladies to stay indoors during the daytime.

UK PM faces another by-election after ex-MP resigns



BBC - A British MP who was suspended from the country's Conservative Party over allegations of sexual misconduct has resigned.

David Warburton is the fourth British MP in eight days to announce their resignation.

His immediate departure means the Conservatives will now face a fourth by-election.

11 dead, 20 missing in Brazil Cyclone



AFP - At least 11 people were killed and 20 were missing after a cyclone tore through southern Brazil, local authorities said Saturday.

A total of 2,330 people were left with damaged houses and 602 were evacuated from areas at risk due to the passage of the cyclone between Thursday and Friday.

Brazil has been hit by a series of deadly weather disasters in recent years, which experts say are being made worse by climate change.