



A picture taken yesterday shows the sunset during winter storm Eleanor in the French Riviera city of Nice. — AFP

## Palestinians slam 'blackmail' after...

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Trump came to office boasting that he could achieve the "ultimate deal" that secures peace in the Middle East, something that has eluded presidents since the late 1960s. For most of the past half century the United States has been seen as the indispensable - if sometimes imperfect - arbiter of the peace process. Trump's actions are likely to cast that further in doubt. He has heaped pressure on Palestinians to do a deal, threatening to close the de facto "embassy" in Washington in addition to recognizing Israel's contested claim on Jerusalem and now threatening aid.

Efforts to harness improved Arab-Israel relations to push a peace deal have been at least temporarily

derailed by Trump's Jerusalem recognition, breaking with decades of US policy. The decision sparked almost universal diplomatic condemnation and deadly protests in the Palestinian territories. Yesterday, a 17-year-old Palestinian was shot dead in clashes with the Israeli army near Ramallah, according to the Palestinian health ministry. Fourteen Palestinians have been killed since Trump's Jerusalem declaration, mainly in clashes with Israeli forces.

The declaration also prompted Abbas - 82 and facing the prospect of entering the history books as the leader who "lost Jerusalem" - to cancel a planned meeting with Vice President Mike Pence. Christian and Muslim leaders in Egypt took similar steps. Pence was forced to delay a December visit to the Middle East until later this month, and aides on Tuesday rejected rumors of further delays. "As we've said all along, the vice president is going to the Middle East in January," said Pence spokeswoman Alyssa Farah. "We're finalizing details and will announce specifics of the full trip in the coming days." — AFP

## Iran general declares 'end...

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of Revolutionary Guards. General Jafari added those behind the protests had "intervened massively on social media" but that "once restrictions were started, the troubles reduced". Telegram and Instagram were blocked on cellphones soon after the protests began on Dec 28. Telecoms Minister Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi said Telegram would only be unblocked if it removed "terrorist" content. "I had mail exchanges with the head of Telegram and I told him that the continuation of Telegram's activities is conditioned on the suppression of terrorist content," he said.

There were few reports of anti-regime protests overnight, although it remained difficult to verify information from the provinces. President Hassan Rouhani expressed hope in a phone call with Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan that the protests would end in a few days, a Turkish presidential source said. The political establishment has closed ranks against the unrest, saying the protests were part of a foreign plot to destabilize the regime. "The enemy is always looking for an opportunity and any crevice to infiltrate and strike the Iranian nation," Khamenei said on Tuesday.

US President Donald Trump said Iranians were trying to "take back" their government, extending a drumbeat of encouragement for the protests. "You will see great support from the United States at the appropriate time!" he tweeted, without offering any specifics. UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein called on the Iranian authorities to defuse tensions and investigate the deaths. "It is incumbent on the authorities that their actions do not provoke a downward spiral of violence, as occurred in 2009," he said in reference to the last major protest movement against alleged election-rigging.

Even reformists in Iran, who backed the 2009 protests, have condemned the violence and the support the demonstrations have received from the United

States. But they also urged the authorities to address economic grievances. "Officials must acknowledge the deplorable situation of the country as the first step to hearing the protesters," tweeted Mohammad Taghi Karroubi, whose father Mehdi Karroubi has been under house arrest for almost seven years for helping lead the 2009 demonstrations.

Many have been turned off by the violence, which has contrasted with the largely peaceful marches in 2009. But on the streets of the capital, there is widespread sympathy with the economic grievances driving the unrest, particularly an unemployment rate as high as 40 percent for young people. "The poorer section of society is really under pressure," Sakineh Eidi, a 37-year-old pharmacist in Tehran, told AFP. "But I don't think it will continue. Even those who maybe acted emotionally, vandalizing things and setting fire to public property, know that the smoke will get into everyone's eyes and that insecurity in the country is not in anyone's interest."

Others rejected the official line that foreign powers were behind the unrest. "People have reached a stage where they can no longer tolerate this pressure from the authorities," said Soraya Saadaat, a 54-year-old jobless woman. Mojtaba Mousavi, a Tehran-based political analyst, said Iranians do not generally support violence, no matter how unhappy they are with their government. "There are certainly Iranians who aren't happy with certain policies, frustrated people who would like to protest against their economic situation, but history shows none of these people support violence and subversion," he said. But "this week's protests turned into riots".

Rouhani came to power in 2013 promising to mend the economy and ease social tensions, but high living costs and unemployment have left many feeling that progress is too slow. Rural areas, hit by years of drought and under-investment, are particularly hard-hit. Rouhani on Sunday acknowledged there was "no problem bigger than unemployment", and also promised a more balanced media and more transparency. In 2009, authorities ruthlessly put down protests against the re-election of hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. At least 36 people were killed, according to an official toll, while the opposition says 72 died. — AFP



Palestinian artists paint a portrait of Ahed Tamimi, 16-year-old prominent campaigner against Israel's occupation, and Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh, who was shot dead in clashes between Israeli forces and protesters, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. — AFP

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