

Blinken begins 7th diplomatic mission in Middle-East



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is welcomed by Saudi Foreign Ministry Director of Protocol Affairs Mohammed Al-Ghamdi as he arrives in Riyadh on Monday. (AP/PTI)

RIYADH, Apr 29 (AP)

US SECRETARY of State Antony Blinken on Monday begins his seventh diplomatic mission to the Middle East since the Israel-Hamas war began more than six months ago. He has his work cut out for him.

The war has ground on since Hamas' deadly October 7 attacks on Israel with little end in sight: More than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed, hundreds of thousands more are displaced and a humanitarian crisis in Gaza is worsening. The conflict has fuelled mass protests around the world that have spread to American college campuses. US support for Israel, particularly arms transfers, has come under particular criticism, something the administration is keenly aware poses potential problems for

President Joe Biden in an election year.

Just ahead of Blinken's visit - which includes a little more than a day in Saudi Arabia before stops in Jordan and Israel on Tuesday and Wednesday - Biden spoke by phone on Sunday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Blinken's trip comes amid renewed concerns about the conflict spreading in the Middle East and with once-promising prospects for Israeli-Saudi rapprochement effectively on hold as Israel refuses to consider one of the Saudis' main conditions for normalised relations: The creation of a Palestinian State.

The Biden administration has been working closely with Egypt and Qatar for months to negotiate a deal between Israel and Hamas.

Israeli airstrikes on Rafah kill 22

JERUSALEM, Apr 29 (AP)

ISRAELI airstrikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah have killed at least 22 people, including six women and five children, Palestinian health officials said. One of the children killed in the strikes overnight into Monday was just 5 days old.

Israel has regularly carried out airstrikes on Rafah since the start of the war and has threatened to send in ground troops, saying Rafah is the last major Hamas stronghold in the coastal enclave. Over a million Palestinians have sought refuge in the city on the Egyptian border. The United States and others have urged Israel not to invade, fearing a humanitari-

an catastrophe.

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The Israel-Hamas war was sparked by the unprecedented October 7 raid into southern Israel in which militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel says the militants are still holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others. The war has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, around two-thirds of them children and women.

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden has again spoken with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the White House said on Sunday, as pressure builds on Israel and Hamas to reach a deal that

would free some Israeli hostages and bring a cease-fire in the nearly seven-month-long war in Gaza.

The White House said that Biden reiterated his "clear position" as Israel plans to invade Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah despite global concern for more than one million Palestinians sheltering there. The US opposes the invasion on humanitarian grounds, straining relations between the allies. Israel is among the countries US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit as he returns to the Middle East on Monday. Biden also stressed that progress in delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza be "sustained and enhanced."

'India's future will be space industry, drones, semi conductors'

NEW DELHI, Apr 29 (ANI)

DURING an interactive session on Northeast India's integration with Southeast Asia and Japan at Kirori Mal College, Delhi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar emphasis on India's future, and said the future will be semiconductors, electric mobility, space industry and drones.

When asked about India's



External Affairs Minister
S Jaishankar in Delhi. (PTI)

future, Jaishankar responded, "To me, the future will

be semiconductors, it will be electric mobility, it will be space industry, it will be drones, it will be clean tech, it will be renewables. I would like the sunrise industries to be in the North-East."

Further, during the session on Monday many questions were raised by the students about border policing and connectivity.

Increasing global **UNCERTAINTIES** may impact demand, India's exports: FIEO

NEW DELHI, Apr 29 (PTI)

THE escalating geopolitical tension may have implications for the country's exports in the first quarter of 2024-25 as it is likely to impact global demand, apex exporters body FIEO said.

The global uncertainties caused by the continuing war between Russia and Ukraine have impacted India's outbound shipments in 2023-24, which recorded a decline of 3.11 per cent to USD 437 billion. Imports too dipped by over 8 per cent to USD 677.24 billion. "If the global situation continues to be like this, it will impact global demand. In the first quarter numbers, the demand slowdown may be visible," FIEO Director General Ajay Sahai said.

He added that despite all the challenges, freight rates are softening and it is giving an indication that demand may be



impacted in the times to come.

He cautioned that further escalation of the current situation could have serious implications on world trade.

"Besides geopolitical uncertainties, high inflation and high interest rates are also crucial reasons for demand slowdown," he said, adding certain advanced economies like Europe may witness more slowdown.

He also said that India's domestic currency depreciated only about 1.3 per cent during 2023-24 as against Chinese Yuan's 4.8 per cent; Thai Baht 6.3 per cent and Malaysian Ringgit's 7 per cent.

When asked about the impact of the Israel-Iran war, he said certain exporters from the engineering sector have stated that the demand for goods that are going to the UAE and then to Iran has come down. Jewellery demand may also come down, he said.

The Director General suggested the Government take certain steps for exporters on the liquidity front.

"Due to demand slowdown, offtake of goods will be low so foreign buyers will also take a longer period to make payments. So we require funds for a longer period. Exporters also need interest subvention support," Sahai said.

He asked for continuation of interest equalisation scheme.

On December 8, 2023, the Union Cabinet approved an additional allocation of Rs 2,500 crore for the continuation of the scheme up to June 30.