

KL, Jakarta to intensify efforts to de-escalate Mid-East war: Anwar

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JAKARTA – Malaysia and Indonesia have agreed to intensify diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the Middle East conflict, protect civilian lives and create space for negotiation towards a peaceful and lasting resolution, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said following a brief visit to Jakarta on March 27.

Datuk Seri Anwar met Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto for a closed-door session at the Indonesian State Palace in Central Jakarta. The leaders discussed recent geopolitical developments, including the ongoing conflict between Iran and US-Israeli forces.

Mr Anwar later wrote on Facebook that they had a “meaningful meeting” that “opened constructive space to find common ground” in addressing the conflict. “Amid growing global uncertain-

ty, Malaysia and Indonesia reaffirm the need to strengthen principled regional cohesion to preserve peace, ensure stability, and enhance economic resilience for the well-being of the people,” he said. “At the same time, the continuity of global supply chains and strategic trade routes, including the Strait of Hormuz, must be safeguarded from disruption.”

In a statement, Indonesian Cabinet Secretary Teddy Indra Wijaya said the meeting of around three

hours between two “old friends” was “warm”, but said little else about what was discussed.

Prior to the meeting, Mr Anwar posted on Instagram that he and Mr Prabowo had a phone call on March 23 to discuss the conflict, during which Mr Prabowo invited him to Jakarta for a face-to-face meeting.

Mr Anwar has taken a strident position on the Iran-Israel conflict, saying on March 25 that Iran has the right to defend its sovereignty

and condemning Israeli strikes on the country.

Mr Prabowo, who has been under fire for joining the US-led Board of Peace on Gaza, has been more circumspect. He has said that he would hold a national address about the conflict and its effects on Indonesia, but has yet to do so.

Mr Anwar's approach seems to have paid off, as he announced on March 26 that Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian had granted Malaysian vessels clearance to pass

through the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran has effectively closed the key waterway, through which about a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes.

Meanwhile, Indonesian Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Bahlil Lahadalia said on March 27 that two oil tankers owned by state-owned petroleum company Pertamina were still stuck in the strait.

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Iran's Guards warn civilians to avoid areas near US forces

Amid talk of a deal, Tehran says no let-up in reprisal attacks against Israel, Gulf targets

TEHRAN – Iran's Revolutionary Guards warned civilians across the Middle East on March 27 to stay away from areas near US forces, in a sign of defiance after US President Donald Trump claimed talks to end the month-long war were “going well”.

The Guards' warning came after Mr Trump again extended a deadline for Tehran to open the Strait of Hormuz or face the destruction of its energy assets, pushing it from March 27 to April 6.

With war engulfing the region four weeks after the US and Israel first attacked Iran on Feb 28, Tehran resident Ensieh said that every day she was “losing more hope”.

“We're caught between three mad powers, and war is terrifying,” the 46-year-old dentist told AFP journalists outside Iran. “I know I'll never be the same person again.”

Local media confirmed fresh strikes rained down overnight on Iran's capital – muffled by the sound of thunderstorms, according

to an AFP correspondent – as well as the holy city of Qom farther south and Urmia in the north-west.

A month of US and Israeli attacks have damaged at least 120 museums and cultural and historic sites nationwide, a top Tehran official said, including the UNESCO-listed Golestan Palace – sometimes likened to Versailles.

In announcing a new reprieve over the Hormuz blockade, which threatens lasting damage to the global economy, Mr Trump insisted the Islamic republic wanted to “make a deal”.

But the Iranian side, which made it clear it wants to end the fighting on its own terms, indicated no let-up in reprisal attacks against Israel and targets across the Gulf.

Accusing US-Israeli forces of resorting to “human shields”, Iran's Guards told civilians to “urgently leave locations where American forces are stationed so that no harm comes to you” – as the Iranian military threatened to target

hotels housing US soldiers across the region.

Markets have been upended by Iranian attacks on trade and energy targets in the Gulf, with Kuwait saying on March 27 that its main commercial port was damaged in a drone attack at dawn.

A top Iranian official threatened to attack Saudi Arabia's Red Sea port of Yanbu, home to the Samref oil refinery, as well as the coastal Fujairah oil complex in the United Arab Emirates, should a ground invasion take place.

“Step onto Iranian soil, and \$150 becomes the floor for oil,” Iranian Vice-President Esmael Saghbar Esfahani wrote on X. “Destruction of Fujairah and Yanbu are just our entry tickets.”

Iran's message on Hormuz was just as defiant, with the Guards saying the strait was “closed” to vessels travelling to and from enemy ports, and that they had turned back three ships seeking to cross.

Oil prices and stocks were mixed after Mr Trump pushed back for a second time his ultimatum for Iran to lift its choke on Hormuz shipping, while in the latest sign of the economic fallout, the Bank of Spain



People seeking shelter in an underground carpark as air raid sirens warn of incoming Iranian missiles in Tel Aviv on March 27. Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz later vowed to intensify strikes on Iran in retaliation. PHOTO: AMIT ELKAYAM/NYTIMES

warned that the country faced a “significant slowdown” due to the war.

With America's top diplomat Marco Rubio in France for Group of Seven talks, counterparts pressed him for clarity on American plans for Iran.

UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper called for a “swift” conflict resolution and an end to Iran's Hormuz blockade that was holding “the global economy hostage”.

Without revealing his source, Germany's top diplomat Johann Wadepuhl said a “direct meeting” between Washington and Tehran was expected “very soon” in Pakis-

tan, which is acting as a go-between.

Iran has reportedly replied to a 15-point US plan and is awaiting a response, having made its own demands including war reparations and recognition of its sovereignty over Hormuz.

The Tasnim news agency said Tehran also called for an end to US and Israeli attacks on its territory and on aligned regional groups – a reference to Lebanon's Hezbollah, among others.

But analysts at the Soufan Center warned the US cannot “make any guarantees on behalf of Israel”.

And in spite of the push for diplo-

macy, America's ally Israel showed no sign of wavering, with Defence Minister Israel Katz vowing to “intensify and expand” strikes on Iran in response to missile attacks on its soil.

“They will pay a heavy price, an increasingly heavy one, for this war crime,” Mr Katz said in a video message.

The escalation threat came despite opposition leader Yair Lapid warning that the Israeli military was “stretched to the limit and beyond”, especially on the front with Lebanon – drawn into the war after Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel.

AFP

NUH living-donor transplant patients live longer than those in other countries

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Kidney and liver transplant patients at the National University Hospital have gone on to live much longer than those in other countries, with some living-donor kidney patients surviving three or even four decades after surgery.

To commemorate their survivorship, the hospital's National University Centre for Organ Transplantation (NUCOT) held a celebration on March 27 at The Star Vista.

It was attended by 35 patients who have survived at least 25 years after their transplant, as well as their living donors, family members and healthcare professionals.

Among them were 70-year-old Leong Sai Fan and his wife, Madam Quek Seow Chiang, 69, who donated her right kidney to him in 1997.

Dr Leong, who worked in the services sector, developed hypertension in his late 20s, though it remained well-controlled for a good number of years, thanks to regular health check-ups.

However, his condition deteriorated rapidly in late 1996, when he was 40. He lost a significant amount of weight and was put on haemodialysis from February 1997.

The waiting list for a kidney transplant at that time was at least five years, and his doctors said a transplant from a living donor would be much faster.

Dr Leong's mother was too old, while his two sisters did not have good kidney function themselves.

His wife then stepped up and was found to be a compatible donor. The hospital then helped to obtain special approval for transplants from genetically unrelated individuals.

Madam Quek said it was her decision, and that even today, some people who learn that she had donated a kidney to her husband would praise her as though she did something great.

“To be frank, at that time there was no greatness to think about. He is the father of my children – of course, I want my husband and my kids' father to be around. I am a very pragmatic person. I do what needs to be done,” she said. “I love him a lot, and I love my kids a lot, and that is the only reason. So it was not a difficult decision.”

Madam Quek was discharged five days after the surgery, and Dr Leong about three weeks post-surgery. They had supportive friends who stayed over at their home to help care for their children aged eight, seven and five then.

As with other transplant patients, Dr Leong was put on a life-long regimen of daily immunosuppressants to prevent the body from rejecting or attacking the transplanted organ.

The family of five also accustomed themselves to meals prepared with as little sodium as possible, and typically less sugar and less oil too, which Dr Leong believes has helped in the transplanted kidney lasting so long.

“I was able to continue working, watch our children grow, and now enjoy being a grandfather of four. I'm deeply grateful to my wife, and to the doctors and transplant coordinators who have cared for me over the years,” he said.

Their current doctor, Professor Anantharaman Vathsala, commended the couple for their continued efforts and quipped that they had to withstand her “nagging” to stick to the medication regimen and go for regular screenings and vaccinations.



Transplant patient Leong Sai Fan, 70, and his wife, Madam Quek Seow Chiang, 69, who donated her right kidney to him in 1997. Madam Quek said that it was “not a difficult decision”. With them is their current doctor and National University Hospital's National University Centre for Organ Transplantation director, Professor Anantharaman Vathsala. ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

“They have gone through so much, and we want them to live a life that they deserve and what we expect for ourselves. We want to add years to their life, and we hope that we can achieve this,” said Prof Vathsala, who is NUCOT director.

Since 1987, NUCOT has performed more than 1,400 kidney, liver and pancreas transplants, with over 900 being kidney transplants. Globally, a kidney from a dead

donor lasts about eight to 12 years after a transplant, before the transplanted organ fails to function or the patient dies.

In comparison, such transplant patients at NUCOT survive an average of 15 years and continue to have a functional kidney.

And when it comes to kidney transplants from a living donor, NUCOT patients survive 31 years on average, with the transplanted kid-

ney still functional. In comparison, global data shows that such grafts typically fail after 15 to 20 years.

Similar positive outcomes were observed for NUCOT's adult liver transplants. Globally, liver grafts typically last 10 to 20 years.

The 10-year survival rate of a recipient who underwent a living-donor liver transplant at NUCOT was 78 per cent, higher than the 67.9 per cent in the US and 61 per cent in Eu-

rope. Prof Vathsala told The Straits Times that the positive outcomes for NUCOT's transplant patients could be attributed to the holistic and multidisciplinary care the centre delivered, as well as the efforts of the patients, donors and the Government.

These include monitoring patients regularly and closely, and annual screenings for common chronic conditions, as the immunosuppressants increase their risk of infections and complications such as diabetes, high blood pressure and kidney impairment.

As the donors were healthy individuals who took risks to donate an organ, “taking care of them for life is our commitment”, added Prof Vathsala.

She also credited NUCOT's surgeons, transplant coordinators, nurses, pharmacists, dietitians and social workers for their expertise and dedication in ensuring the best results for patients.

The Government subsidises virtually all immunosuppressants and antiviral drugs here, which has helped to ensure that patients do not discontinue the lifelong regimen – something not many countries provide.

Prof Vathsala said success rates and post-transplant survival will continue to improve with medical advances, with more than half of those who received an organ from a living donor at NUCOT able to survive at least 25 years post-transplant.

Speaking at the NUCOT event, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, who is Permanent Secretary for National Research and Development in the Prime Minister's Office, said thousands of Singaporeans are diagnosed with end-stage organ failure each year, and organ transplantation has become one of the most effective treatments.

Having seen first-hand, as a nephrologist or kidney specialist, how organ failure alters the course of life, Prof Tan said: “A successful transplant restores not only organ function, but it also helps to restore a sense of normalcy – the ability to return to work normally, to travel, to enjoy your family, and to look forward to the future with confidence.”

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