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Israel recognises Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara

By **Ahmed Eljehtimi**

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RABAT, July 17 (Reuters) - Israel has recognised Morocco's sovereignty over the disputed territory of Western Sahara and is mulling opening a consulate there, a statement from the Israeli prime minister's office said on Monday.

The announcement confirmed a statement earlier from Morocco's royal palace, which said Israel's position had been expressed in a letter to King Mohammed VI from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israel was considering opening a consulate in Dakhla, the statement said.

Morocco considers Western Sahara its own territory, but the Algerian-backed Polisario Front wants an independent state there. In 2020, then-U.S. President Donald Trump recognised Morocco's claim to the territory in return for Morocco's resumption of diplomatic ties with Israel.

The Israeli position "will be sent to the United Nations, regional and international organisations", the statement from Morocco's royal palace quotes the letter as saying.

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Twenty-eight other countries - mostly African and Arab - have opened consulates in Dakhla or the city of Laayoune, in what Morocco sees as tangible support for its Western Saharan rule.

Israel's position on Western Sahara was "clear-cut" and adds to the momentum in Morocco's favour, after Washington and Madrid, in addition to other European capitals, supported its plan for the territory, a senior Moroccan government official told Reuters.

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The Israeli recognition would not affect Morocco's "principles" in defending the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he added.

Morocco expects the decision to encourage Israeli investments in the territory, he said. As an indication of warming ties, the Israeli military earlier on Monday appointed a colonel as defence attaché to Morocco.

Since the resumption of ties, Morocco and Israel have signed cooperation agreements, including a defence pact.

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Israeli foreign minister Eli Cohen said the announcement by the prime minister would "strengthen the relations between the countries and between the peoples and the continuation of cooperation to deepen regional peace and stability".

Additional reporting by Nadine Awadalla; Editing by Andrew Heavens, Christina Fincher and Alex Richardson

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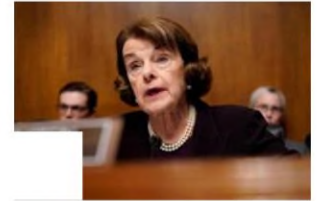
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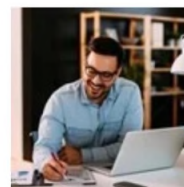
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