

## Denmark sent Trump team private messages on Greenland

COPENHAGEN: Denmark sent private messages to US president-elect Donald Trump's team expressing willingness to discuss boosting security in Greenland or increasing the US military presence there without claiming the island, Axios reported on Saturday, citing two sources. Trump has described US control of Greenland, a semi-autonomous Danish territory, as an "absolute necessity". He did not dismiss the potential use of military or economic means, including tariffs against Denmark. Axios said that the Danish government wanted to convince Trump that his security concerns could be addressed without claiming Greenland. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said earlier this week that she had asked for a meeting with Trump, but did not expect it to happen before his inauguration. Greenland Prime Minister Mute Egede said he was ready to speak with Trump, but urged respect for the island's independence aspirations.

## Biden describes Meta decision to do away with fact-checking as

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) US President Joe Biden blasted Meta on Friday for scrapping fact-checking on Facebook and Instagram in the United States, calling the move "really shameful" after a global network warned of real-world harm if the tech giant expands its decision to other countries. Meta chief executive Mark Zuckerberg triggered alarm Tuesday when he announced the Palo Alto company was ditching third-party fact-checking in the United States and turning over the task of debunking falsehoods to ordinary users under a model known as "Community Notes," popularised by X. The decision was widely seen as an attempt to appease President-elect Donald Trump, whose conservative support base has long complained that fact-checking on tech platforms was a way to curtail free speech and censor right-wing content. "I think it's really shameful," Biden told reporters at the White House when asked about the announcement. "Telling the truth matters," he said, adding that the move was "completely contrary to everything America's about." The International Fact-Checking Network has warned of devastating consequences if Meta broadens its policy shift beyond US borders to the company's programs covering more than 100 countries.

## Trump's Ukraine envoy attends Iran opposition event

PARIS: (News Desk) US president-elect Donald Trump's incoming Ukraine envoy Keith Kellogg was in Paris on Saturday, attending the event of an Iranian opposition group National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), according to TV footage carried by the group. Retired Lt Gen Kellogg, who is set to serve as Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, postponed a trip to European capitals earlier this month until after Trump's inauguration on Jan 20. Kellogg was set to give a speech at the event later. He has previously spoken at NCRI events, most recently in November, but his presence in Paris, even if in a personal capacity, suggests the group has the ear of the new US administration. Incoming secretary of state Marco Rubio has also spoken at NCRI events in the past. The group has repeatedly called for the fall of the existing Iranian authorities, although it is unclear how much support it has within Iran. Speaking at the start of the event at Auvers-sur-Oise, the group's headquarters on the outskirts of Paris, NCRI president-elect Maryam Rajavi said the regional balance of power had shifted against Iran's leadership with the all of Syria's Bashar Al Assad. "It is time for Western governments to abandon past policies and stand with the Iranian people this time," she said. Trump has vowed to impose maximum pressure on Iran in a bid to force the country to negotiate a deal on its nuclear programme, ballistic missile programme and regional activities. It was unclear whether Kellogg would use his trip to Paris to meet French officials to discuss Ukraine. The NCRI, the political arm of the Peoples Mujahideen Organisation of Iran (PMOI), has held frequent rallies in France, often attended by high profile former US, European and Arab officials critical of Tehran.

## Four Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza

JERUSALEM: (News Desk) The Israeli military said on Saturday it had killed three Hamas fighters in a ground operation near Jabalia, in northern Gaza. The deaths brought to 403 the total number of soldiers killed in the Palestinian territory since Israel launched its ground offensive in retaliation for Hamas's Oct 7, 2023, raids in Israel. An officer and a reservist soldier were "seriously wounded" during the same incident and were taken to hospital, the military said in a state-

ment. The Israeli military said on Saturday it had killed three Hamas fighters in a ground operation near Jabalia, in northern Gaza. Delegation off to Qatar Netanyahu sent a delegation of senior officials to Qatar on Saturday for negotiations on a prisoner release and Gaza ceasefire deal, his office said. Netanyahu held a meeting in Jerusalem with US president-elect Donald Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, a representative of current US



Firefighters work to put out flames in the Mandeville Canyon neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, on January 11, 2025, as the Palisades Fire continues to burn.

## Firefighters race to beat LA blazes as winds grow and death toll hits 16

LA (News Desk) Firefighters fought on into the night on Saturday in a bid to get on top of massive wildfires around Los Angeles as winds ramped up, pushing the blazes towards previously untouched neighborhoods. At least 16 people were now confirmed dead from fires that have ripped through the city, leaving

communities in ruins and testing the mettle of thousands of firefighters — and millions of California residents. Despite heroic efforts, including precision sorties from aerial crews, the Palisades Fire continued to grow on Saturday, pushing east towards the priceless collections of the Getty Center art museum and

north to the densely populated San Fernando Valley. "We're a nervous wreck," Sarah Cohen told the Los Angeles Times of the threat to her Tarzana home. "Every time they drop water, it gets better. But then it gets worse again." Footage from the Mandeville Canyon area showed one home consumed, with a wall of flame licking up a hillside

to menace others. A brief lull in the wind was rapidly giving way to gusts that forecasters warned would feed the blazes for days to come. "Critical fire-weather conditions will unfortunately ramp up again today for southern California and last through at least early next week," the National Weather Service said.

## Trump calls California leaders 'incompetent' over fire response

LA (News Desk) US President-elect Donald Trump accused California officials on Sunday of incompetence over their handling of deadly wildfires raging around Los Angeles. "The fires are still raging in LA. The incompetent

pol (politicians) have no idea how to put them out," Trump said on his Truth Social platform. "This is one of the worst

disasters in the history of our Country. They just can't put out the fires. What's wrong with them?" he wrote. The speed and intensity of the blazes ravaging Los Angeles have tested its firefighting infrastructure and given rise to questions and criticism about the state's preparedness. Hydrants ran dry in the Pacific Palisades neighbourhood as it was rav-

aged by one of the region's five separate fires, while water shortages additionally hampered efforts elsewhere. With just over a week before he returns to the White House, Trump has launched a series of evidence-free broadsides accusing California's Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom of failings in response to the blazes. Newsom has meanwhile



HOSSEIN Salami (standing left), the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, and Amir Ali Hajizadeh, head of the Guard's air force, visit an underground missile base in an undisclosed location in Iran, on Friday.

## Iran conducts air defence exercises

DUBAI: (News Desk) Iran conducted air defence exercises on Saturday as the country braces for more friction with Israel and the United States under incoming US president Donald Trump. The war games take place as Iranian leaders face the risk that Trump could empower Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to attack Iran's nuclear

sites, while further tightening US sanctions on its oil industry through his "maximum pressure" policy. "In these exercises... defence systems will practise the fight against air, missile and electronic warfare threats in real battlefield conditions... to protect the country's skies and sensitive and vital areas," Iranian state television

said. Saturday's drills are part of two-months-long exercises launched on Jan 4 which have already included war games in which the elite Revolutionary Guards defended key nuclear installations in Natanz against mock attacks by missiles and drones, state media said. Iran's military has said it was using new drones

and missiles in the exercises and released footage of a new underground "missile city" being visited by Guards commander-in-chief Maj Gen Hossein Salami. Salami warned, in a speech carried by state TV, about a "false sense of delight" among Iran's enemies, saying Iran and particularly its missile forces were stronger than ever.

## Ukraine claims capturing two North Korean soldiers

KYIV: (News Desk) Ukraine has captured two North Korean soldiers in Russia's Kursk region, President Volodymyr Zelensky claimed on Saturday.

North Korean regular troops entered the war on Russia's side in October. Kyiv and its western allies initially estimated their numbers at above 10,000.

In a post on X, Zelensky said that the soldiers had been brought to Kyiv and were communicating with the Ukraine's security service. "As with all prisoners of war, these two North Korean soldiers are receiving the necessary medical assistance," Zelensky said. He said that journalists would be given access to speak to them.

Kyiv says that North Korean troops are fighting in the Kursk region, where Ukraine launched an incursion in August. Kyiv says it still controls several hundred square kilometres of territory there. Pyongyang has also been supplying Moscow with vast quantities of artillery shells, according to Kyiv and its western allies.

Ukraine had previously claimed it captured North Korean soldiers in combat, but that they had been badly wounded and died shortly afterward.

## India's cricket board elects Devajit Saikia as BCCI chief

DELHI (News Desk) India's powerful and hugely wealthy Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Sunday elected its new chief, former player and advocate Devajit Saikia, the only person nominated to the top post.

"Devajit Saikia is declared duly elected as the Secretary of BCCI", the Board of Control for Cricket in India said in a statement. Saikia, 55, succeeds Jay Shah who left the position to become chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC), the global governing body. Businessman and state cricket administrator Prabhjeet Singh Bhatia has been appointed BCCI treasurer, the board added. Shah's departure last month to become chairman of the ICC prompted the appointment of Saikia, who was already on the BCCI board as interim secretary. An unknown among fans after a modest playing career, Saikia has close ties with India's ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Saikia began in administration by serving as general secretary of a cricket club in the north-eastern state of Assam under the leadership of Himanta Biswa Sarma.

## Imam returns as Pakistan announce squad for West Indies Tests

LAHORE: (News Desk) Openers Imam-ul-Haq and Mohammad Huraiba have been called back into the Pakistan Test squad for the upcoming two-match series against the West Indies owing to fellow opener Saim Ayub's injury and Abdullah Shafique's dipping form.

The 15-member squad, announced by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Saturday, also includes two uncapped players in pacer Kashif Ali and wicket-keeper-batter Rohail Nazir.

Seasoned fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi also remained out of Test reckoning after missing the preceding series against South Africa.

The 29-year-old Imam's last Test outing was against Australia in the second of Pakistan's three-match series Down Under in December 2023. He was dropped for his defensive batting approach as skipper Shan Masood looked to influence a shift of mindset within the Pakistan dressing room.

## Sri Lanka bowlers skittle New Zealand in 140-run victory

AUCKLAND: (News Desk) Sri Lanka razed New Zealand's top-order Saturday to comfortably win the third one-day international in Auckland by 140 runs and salvage a lone victory in the series.

The home side's hopes of chasing down Sri Lanka's 290-8 nosided when they crumbled to 21-5 at Eden Park, before being dismissed for 150 off 29.4 overs. Sri Lanka rebounded after suffering heavy defeats in the first two games to cede the three-match series. It mirrored the pattern of the preceding T20 series, which New Zealand also won 2-1.

Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka was pleased his side could show what they are capable of.

"I think it's always great to make comeback like this but unfortunately, we lost first two of both series," he said. "But today, this was a pleasure to watch." The visitors were led by some lethal seam bowling from Asitha Fernando and Eshan Malinga, who claimed three wickets each, as did spinner Maheesh Theekshana.

Fernando (3-26) was the chief destroyer with the new ball as New Zealand's first five wickets tumbled inside the first seven overs.

The victory margin would have been greater, were it not for Mark Chapman's 81 off 81 balls, the number three New Zealand batsman the last out when he was bowled by Theekshana (3-35).

No other New Zealander reached 20, with five of the top six dismissed for two runs or less. Earlier, injured opener Pathum Nissanka top-scored for Sri Lanka with 66 off 42 balls. Nissanka was on 50 off 31 balls when he retired hurt after suffering an apparent hip injury, having got his team off to a flying start at 66 without loss in 10 overs.