

Israeli forces kill 3 people in south Lebanon as residents try to return, Lebanese ministry says

Labonan(News Desk) Israeli forces killed three people and wounded 31 others trying to return to homes in south Lebanon where Israeli troops remained on the ground after a deadline for their withdrawal passed on Sunday, Lebanon's health ministry said.

Israel has said it intended to keep troops in the south beyond the Sunday deadline stipulated in the US-brokered ceasefire that halted last year's conflict with Hezbollah, and on Saturday ordered residents not to return until further notice.

The deal stipulated that Israeli forces should withdraw from the south as Hezbollah's weapons and fighters were removed from the area and the Lebanese army deployed, within a 60-day period which ended on Sunday morning.

Israel has, however, claimed the terms have not been fully enforced by the Lebanese state, while Lebanon's US-backed military on Saturday accused Israel of procrastinating in its withdrawal.

Hezbollah's Al-Manar television, broadcasting from several locations in the south, showed footage of residents moving towards villages in defiance of Israeli orders, some holding the group's flag and images of Hezbollah fighters killed in the conflict.

CIA says Covid 'more likely' to have leaked

Washington(News Desk) The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has shifted its official stance on the origin of Covid-19, saying on Saturday that the virus was "more likely" leaked from a Chinese lab than transmitted by animals.

The new assessment came after John Ratcliffe was confirmed on Thursday as the CIA director under the second White House administration of Donald Trump.

Ratcliffe, who served as the director of national intelligence from 2020-2021 during Trump's first term, said in an interview published on Friday that a "day-one" priority would be making an assessment on Covid's origins.

"The agency is going to get off the sidelines," Ratcliffe — who believes Covid-19 leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology — told right-wing outlet Breitbart.

"CIA assesses with low confidence that a research-related origin of the Covid-19 pandemic is more likely than a natural origin based on the available body of reporting," a CIA spokesperson said in a statement on Saturday.

The agency had not previously made any determination on whether Covid had been unleashed by a laboratory mishap or spilled over from animals.

"CIA continues to assess that both research-related and natural origin scenarios of the Covid-19 pandemic remain plausible," the spokesperson noted.

A US official told AFP the shift was based on a new analysis of existing intelligence ordered by previous CIA director William Burns, which was completed before Ratcliffe's arrival this week.

US may put 'very big bounty' on Taliban leaders, Secretary of State Rubio says

Washington(News Desk) The US may place a "very big bounty" on the top leaders of the Taliban, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Saturday, adding he was hearing that the Taliban held more American hostages than previously reported.

"Just hearing the Taliban is holding more American hostages than has been reported," Rubio said in a post on social media platform X.

"If this is true, we will have to immediately place a very big bounty on their top leaders, maybe even bigger than the one we had on Bin Laden," he added.

The post did not give further details or specify the number of Americans held by the Taliban.

Authorities in Kabul said in the past week that the United States freed an Afghan convicted by an American court on charges of drug smuggling and extremism in exchange for two US citizens held in Afghanistan.

Afghan officials said on Tuesday the man, Khan Mohammad, had landed in Kabul after being released. A spokesman for the Taliban administration confirmed that two Americans were released in the exchange.

One of the Americans released was Ryan Corbett, according to a statement by his family. Corbett had been in Taliban detention since 2022, according to the family. US media outlets said the other American released was named William McKenty. The Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021 following a chaotic US withdrawal from the country after 20 years of war.

The International Criminal Court prosecutor said on Thursday he had applied for arrest warrants for two Taliban leaders in Afghanistan including supreme spiritual leader Haibatullah Akhundzada, accusing them of the persecution of women and girls.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un looks on during the test of what KCNA described as a strategic cruise missile, at an undisclosed location in North Korea in this photo released by KCNA on January 26.

South Korea President Yoon indicted for insurrection over martial law decree

Seoul(News Desk) South Korea's prosecutors indicted impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol on Sunday on charges of leading an insurrection with his short-lived imposition of martial law on December 3, Yoon's lawyers and the main opposition party said.

Yoon's lawyers criticised the indictment as the "worst choice" made by

the prosecution service, while the main opposition party welcomed the decision. The charges are unprecedented for a South Korean president, and if convicted, Yoon could face years in prison for his shock martial law decree, which sought to ban political and parliamentary activity and control the media. His move set off a wave of political upheav-

al in Asia's fourth-largest economy and a top US ally, with the prime minister also impeached and suspended from power and a number of top military officials indicted for their roles in the alleged insurrection. "[The] president's declaration of emergency martial law was a desperate plea to the public over a national crisis caused by the opposition getting out

of control," Yoon's lawyers said in a statement. The prosecutor's office did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The indictment was also reported by South Korean media. Anti-ruption investigators last week recommended charging the jailed Yoon, who was impeached by parliament and suspended from his duties on December 14.

North Korea fires strategic cruise missiles, vows tough stance on US

Washington(News Desk) North Korea conducted a strategic cruise missile test on Saturday, state media KCNA reported on Sunday. According to the report, the country's leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the test, which described it as a test-fire of an "important weapon system".

The underwater-to-surface strategic cruise missiles travelled 1,500 kilometres and flew between

7,507 and 7,511 seconds before hitting their targets, KCNA reported. In a separate KCNA report on Sunday, North Korea's foreign ministry vowed the "toughest counteraction" against the United States as long as Washington "refuses" Pyongyang's sovereignty. The military alliance and joint drills between South Korea and the US were to blame for the growing tensions in

the region, the ministry said in a statement carried by KCNA. The statement came as US President Donald Trump said during an interview on Thursday that he would reach out to Kim again after the two developed a working relationship in Trump's first term. North Korea's war deterrence means were being "perfected more thoroughly", Kim was quoted as saying, while the leader

also vowed to continue efforts to strengthen the military. "Kim Jong Un affirmed that the DPRK (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) will always make strenuous efforts ... to perform its important mission and duty for defending sustainable and lasting peace and stability on the basis of more powerfully developed military muscle in the future," the statement read.



South Korea's impeached president Yoon Suk Yeol attends the fourth hearing of his impeachment trial over his short-lived imposition of martial law at the Constitutional Court in Seoul on January 23.

India shows military might and diversity at Republic Day parade

Delhi(News Desk) Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto looked on as guest of honour at India's annual military and cultural parade in New Delhi held to mark the country's 76th Republic Day on Sunday. Republic Day marks the adoption of India's post-independence constitution in 1950 with the parade being held at a revamped colo-

reographed spectacle featuring the country's missile systems, fighter jet fly pasts, motorbike stunts and floats representing different Indian states. An Indonesian military marching contingent also took part in the celebrations. The event coincided with Prabowo's two-day state visit to India, his first to the country since becoming president

in 2024. Indonesia was the guest nation at India's first Republic Day, Modi said Saturday, adding that it was a matter of "great pride" to have the country part of the parade again. India and Indonesia signed a series of agreements on cooperation on health, maritime security, digital technology with both leaders calling each other "brother".

ing centres to receive their visas, they said. Nearly 200,000 Afghans have been resettled in the US on SIVs or as refugees since the chaotic 2021 US withdrawal. In a separate executive order that he signed hours after his inauguration on Monday, Trump suspended all US refugee resettlement programs. That order resulted in hundreds of Afghan refugees losing their seats on flights, including family members of active-duty Afghan American military personnel, former Afghan soldiers and unaccompanied children.

Mexico refuses to allow US flight deporting migrants

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) Mexico has refused a request from President Donald Trump's administration to allow a US military aircraft deporting migrants to land in the country, a US official and a Mexican official said. The government was not able to move ahead with a plan to have a C-17 transport aircraft land in Mexico, however, after the country denied permission. A US official and a Mexican official confirmed the decision, which was first reported by NBC News. Mexico's foreign ministry, in a statement late on Friday, said the country had a "very great relationship" with the US and cooperated on issues such as immigration. "When it comes to repatriations, we will always accept the arrival of Mexicans to our territory with open arms," the ministry said. As Trump's initiative to crackdown on illegal migrants is on the move, several migrants were also sent to Guatemala.

US military planes carrying several expelled migrants arrived in Guatemala, authorities confirmed on Friday. Aircraft carrying expelled immigrants arrives in Guatemala

A total of 265 Guatemalans arrived on three flights — two operated by the military, and one a charter, the Central American country's migration institute said, updating earlier figures.

Four Israelis swapped for 200 Palestinians

JERUSALEM: (News Desk) Hamas freed four Israeli soldiers on Saturday in exchange for 200 Palestinian prisoners in the second swap under the Gaza truce, but a delay in releasing another Israeli prompted Tel Aviv to halt the return of Gazans to the enclave's bombed-out north.

The four freed Israelis, all of them women, were led onto a podium in Gaza City amid a large crowd of Palestinians and surrounded by dozens of armed Hamas men. They waved and smiled before being led off, entering Red Cross vehicles to be transported to the Israeli side.

Soon after, buses carrying released Palestinian prisoners were seen departing from Israel's Ofer military prison in the occupied West Bank. Israel's prison service said all 200 had been released. The releases were greeted by cheering crowds on both sides, including Israelis gathered in Tel Aviv and Palestinians in Ramallah. But the refusal of Hamas to release another Israeli prisoner, a civilian woman, led Israel to halt plans to let Palestinians return to northern parts of Gaza, the area almost wiped out in Israeli bombardment. Hamas said it would free her next week, and called the halt to the reopening of the north a violation of the truce. The truce calls for Hamas to release 33 Israeli women, children, elderly, sick and wounded over a six-week first phase, with Israel freeing 30 prisoners for each civilian and 50 for each soldier. The 200 Palestinians freed on Saturday include fighters, some serving life sentences delivered by Israeli courts, according to a list published by Hamas.

Asif maintains unbeaten run at National Snooker

KARACHI: (News Desk) Mohammad Asif's brilliant form was on full display on Saturday as he played a maximum break of 147 to defeat Ali Raza of Sindh 4-2 in the 49th National Snooker Championship here at the NBP Sports Complex.

The 44-year-old Asif, who recently won the Saarc title, maintained his unbeaten run in the championship, winning 4-1 (54-21, 98-0, 147-0, 17-90, 87-16).

Asif was already two-frame up when he stitched the maximum break of 147 in the third. Despite the massive break, Ali clawed a frame back but Asif wrapped the victory shortly.

Umair Khan of Sindh caused a major upset in another match, defeating current Sindh champion and former Asian team champion Zulfiqar A. Qadir 4-1 (77-11, 36-62, 62-39, 55-24, 54-31).

Sindh's Ian Mark John stretched his winning run with a narrow 4-3 (69-40, 60-36, 60-64, 14-58, 42-57, 66-04, 76-44) win over Abdullah.

Abdul Sattar of Sindh also had a good outing, defeating Ibrahim Khan of Balochistan 4-0 with two century breaks of 101 and 141. Several other players from Punjab dominated on Saturday. Waseem Abbas and Babar Masih registered thumping 4-1 victories over Sindh cueists Umair Alam and Khizar Aziz, respectively.

Keys dethrones Sabalenka to land first Grand Slam crown

MELBOURNE: (News Desk) An inspired Madison Keys ripped up the script with a bold and brilliant performance to end Aryna Sabalenka's Australian Open reign and win her maiden Grand Slam trophy on Saturday.

Keys' 6-3, 2-6, 7-5 victory stopped Belarusian Sabalenka's bid to become the first woman to claim three straight Melbourne Park titles since Swiss Martina Hingis from 1997-99 and ended her 20-match winning streak on Rod Laver Arena.

Victory made the 29-year-old the fourth-oldest first-time Grand Slam winner in the professional era, behind only Flavia Pennetta, Ann Jones and Francesca Schiavone.

"Everything happens for a reason," Keys said with champagne in her hand and the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup beside her.

"I had to go through some tough things. It forced me to look at myself in the mirror and try to work on the internal pressure that I was putting on myself ... I got to the point where I was proud of myself and my career with or without a Grand Slam.

"I didn't need it to feel like I had a good career or that I deserved to be talked about as a great tennis player.

"Finally letting go of that internal talk I had gave me the ability to actually go out and play some really good tennis, to actually win a Grand Slam."

Sabalenka made a couple of untimely double faults to drop serve in the opening game and looked slightly off colour in the early exchanges as Keys heaped pressure on the top seed with a dipping crosscourt winner en route to a double break. The 19th seed rode her luck after a net cord winner and went ahead 5-1 in 20 minutes, before conceding a break with a wayward backhand, but Sabalenka gifted Keys a set point with her fourth double fault. Hitting harder than her opponent on both flanks, Keys blasted the 11th of her 29 winners with a backhand down the line to take the set, but Sabalenka began to mix up her game in the next set and sliced her way through to level the match.

Flights halted for Afghans approved for special US visas, advocate and official say

Washington(News Desk) President Donald Trump's foreign aid pause has forced a suspension of flights for more than 40,000 Afghans approved for special US visas and at risk of Taliban retribution, a leading advocate and a US official said on Saturday.

Most of those stranded are in Afghanistan and the rest are in Pakistan, Qatar and Albania, said Shawn VanDiver, head of #AfghanEvac, the main coalition of veterans and advocacy groups working with the US government to evacuate and resettle

Afghans who worked for the United States during the 20-year war.

The stoppage was triggered by Trump's order to halt foreign development aid for 90 days pending a review of efficiencies and consistency with his "America First" foreign policy.

Experts and advocacy groups say the foreign aid pause has led to chaos in US and international aid operations and halted nutrition, health, vaccination and other programs. The order also triggered a suspension by the State Department of funds for

groups that help Afghans with Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) to find housing, schools and jobs in the US.

Trump promised an immigration crackdown during his victorious 2024 reelection campaign. VanDiver said he does not believe that the flight suspension was intentional.

"We think it was a mistake," he said. He said he hoped the administration would grant exemptions to the orders for Afghans approved for SIVs because they worked for the US government during the war that ended

in the final US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021.

"They fought alongside us. They bled alongside us," said VanDiver, who added that tens of thousands of other Afghans are waiting for SIV applications to be processed.

The White House and State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Reports by the UN mission in Afghanistan say the Taliban have detained, tortured and killed former soldiers and officials of the prior US-backed government. The Taliban

issued a general amnesty for former troops and government officials and deny the allegations.

The flight suspension has stranded more than 40,000 Afghans, including SIV holders who have been waiting to fly to the US from visa processing centres in Qatar and Albania, said VanDiver and the US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. That number also includes Afghans approved for SIVs who have been waiting in Afghanistan and Pakistan to be put on US-funded flights to the Doha and Tirana process-

ing centres to receive their visas, they said.

Nearly 200,000 Afghans have been resettled in the US on SIVs or as refugees since the chaotic 2021 US withdrawal. In a separate executive order that he signed hours after his inauguration on Monday, Trump suspended all US refugee resettlement programs. That order resulted in hundreds of Afghan refugees losing their seats on flights, including family members of active-duty Afghan American military personnel, former Afghan soldiers and unaccompanied children.