

## Trump seems to be softening stand on Gaza takeover

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) US President Donald Trump has appeared to soften his plan to take control of war-torn Gaza and relocate its more than two million residents to nearby countries, saying he was only recommending the idea. Trump triggered shock earlier this month when he presented his plan, in which Washington would take over the territory and rebuild it while pressuring Egypt and Jordan to accept displaced Palestinians. But in an interview on Friday, the Republican president conceded that the leaders of Jordan and Egypt had rejected the plan, calling the displacement of Palestinians against their will unjust. "I was a little surprised they'd say that, but they did," Trump told Fox News Radio's "The Brian Kilmeade Show," adding that the United States was paying those countries "billions of dollars a year" in aid. "The way to do it is my plan. I think that's a plan that really works, but I'm not forcing it," Trump said. "I'm just gonna sit back and recommend it." Trump's comments came as Arab leaders met in Riyadh on Friday to craft a proposal for Gaza's post-conflict reconstruction to counter Trump's plan.

## Iran's speaker to attend Nasrallah funeral

TEHRAN: (News Desk) Iran's parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, will travel to Lebanon for the funeral of long-time Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah on Sunday, Iranian media reported.

Tens of thousands of people are expected to turn out in Beirut to farewell the Iran-backed group's leader. An Israeli air strike killed Nasrallah on Sept 27 last year at the start of an all-out war between his group and Israel after roughly a year of lower-level conflict. The massive air strike on Hezbollah's south Beirut stronghold also killed Abbas Nilforoushan, a senior commander in Iran's Quds Force — the foreign operations arm of its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Hezbollah is part of Iran's "Axis of Resistance", an alliance of regional forces united in their opposition to Israel.

In Oct 2023, Hezbollah began firing rockets at Israel in solidarity with fellow axis member Hamas during the Gaza conflict. Those exchanges escalated into more than two months of full-scale war before a ceasefire came into effect in November last year.

Ghalibaf "along with a number of parliamentarians and state officials will leave on Sunday for Lebanon to attend Nasrallah's funeral", member of parliament Alireza Salimi told the official IRNA news agency on Saturday. On Friday evening, the Fars news agency reported that Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi would also attend the ceremony.

## US claims killing Al Qaeda leader in Syria strike

BEIRUT: (News Desk) The US military said on Saturday it had killed a senior member of Al Qaeda's Syrian branch Hurras al-Din, which announced its dissolution last month, in an air strike in the country's northwest.

It is the latest US strike this year against the group in Syria. Along with its Western and Arab allies, the United States has emphasised that Syria must not serve as a base for "terrorist" groups after the toppling of president Bashar al-Assad in December.

On Friday, US Central Command (CENTCOM) forces "conducted a precision air strike in northwest Syria, killing Wasim Tahsin Bayraqdar, a senior leadership facilitator of the terrorist organisation Hurras al-Din," the military said in a statement. Also Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group before it led the rebel offensive that toppled Assad in December.

The northwest was the stronghold of interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa's Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group before it led the rebel offensive that toppled Assad in December. The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said a drone strike on a car killed Bayraqdar. Military said on Saturday it had killed a senior member of Al Qaeda's Syrian branch Hurras al-Din, which announced its dissolution last month, in an air strike in the country's northwest.

Last Sunday, CENTCOM said it killed "a senior finance and logistics official" in Hurras al-Din. That came after CENTCOM last month reported killing another senior Hurras al-Din operative, Muhammad Salah al-Zabir, in an air strike also in the northwest. The US-based SITE Intelligence Group said Hurras al-Din was founded in Feb 2018. The group did not publicly confirm its allegiance to Al Qaeda until its dissolution announcement. Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group before it led the rebel offensive that toppled Assad in December and in January. The northwest was the stronghold of interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa's Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group before it led the rebel offensive that toppled Assad in December. The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said a drone strike on a car killed Bayraqdar. Hurras al-Din dissolved in line with orders from Sharaa, who has called on all armed groups to disband. The United States designated Hurras al-Din as a "terrorist" organisation in 2019.



A person holds up a flag with an image of the late Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike last year, on the day of his public funeral ceremony, in Camille Chamoun Sports City Stadium, Beirut, Lebanon February 23, 2025.

## Tens of thousands pour in for Beirut funeral of slain Hezbollah leader

Tehran (News Desk) Tens of thousands of mourners dressed in black, some waving Hezbollah flags or carrying portraits of the group's slain leader Hassan Nasrallah, flocked to his funeral on Sunday in a stadium on the outskirts of Beirut.

The killing of the charismatic leader, who guided the Lebanese movement for more than three de-

cadec, dealt a heavy blow to the Iran-backed group's reputation as a fighting force.

But Hezbollah, which also played a major role in the country's politics for decades, has long had a support base in the country's majority Shia Muslim community by providing social and economic services. Many men, women and

children from Lebanon and beyond walked on foot in the biting cold to reach the site of the ceremony, delayed for security reasons after Nasrallah died in a massive Israeli strike on Hezbollah's south Beirut bastion in September.

One of them was Umm Mahdi, 55, who had come "to see him (Nasrallah) one last time and see his

shrine".

"Of course, we feel sadness", she said. "This is the least we can do for Sayyed who gave up everything," she added, using an honorific.

As the crowds gathered, Lebanese state media reported Israeli strikes on areas in Lebanon's south, including a location about 20 kilometres from the border.

## 14 die in central Nigeria road crash: official

Niger (News desk) Fourteen people were killed on Saturday when a bus collided with a petrol tanker in central Nigerian Niger state, a road safety official told AFP on Sunday.

The passenger bus rammed into the on-coming petrol tanker as the driver tried to overtake another bus outside Kusobogi village, 80 km from the state capital Minna,

Kumar Tsukwan, head of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) in Niger state, said.

"Fourteen people died in the head-on collision while six others were injured and taken to hospital for medical attention," Tsukwan said.

He blamed "speeding and wrongful overtaking" by the bus driver for the accident. speeding and wrongful overtaking" by the bus driver

for the accident.

The bus was heading to the northern city of Kaduna from the Nigerian economic capital Lagos, Tsukwan said.

Road accidents are common on Nigeria's poorly maintained roads due largely to speeding and disregard for traffic rules.

Last week, 23 people died when a truck laden with goods and passengers overturned in the northern city of Kano.

Road accidents are common on Nigeria's poorly maintained roads due largely to speeding and disregard for traffic rules.

Last year Nigeria recorded 9,570 road accidents which resulted in 5,421 deaths, according to FRSC data.



Elon Musk holds a chainsaw reading "Long live freedom, damn it" during the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center at National Harbor in Oxon Hill, Maryland, on February 20, 2025.

## Swiss police arrest Australian man over stabbing in Zurich

Zurich (News Desk) Swiss police have arrested a 28-year-old Australian man suspected of stabbing and seriously injuring a 41-year-old man in a shop in central Zurich, authorities said. The motive for Saturday's attack is still under investigation, police said in a statement. The

Australian was arrested at the scene while the victim was taken to hospital.

Police declined to give further details on the identity of the victim and the suspect. Prosecutors could provide more information on Monday, a police spokesperson said.

A number of stabbings have caused alarm in Europe in recent days, with an Algerian man arrested on Saturday in Mulhouse, France over a deadly knife attack, while a Syrian refugee was detained over a stabbing at Berlin's Holocaust memorial.

On Thursday, a teenage

attacker killed two women with a knife in a shopping centre in the Czech city of Hradec Kralove. Last Saturday, eastern Swiss Alps, Lake Zurich and the city of Zurich in Switzerland. A Syrian asylum seeker was arrested on suspicion of going on a stabbing rampage in southern Austria.

## Zelensky 'not ready' to sign minerals deal with US

KYIV: (News Desk) Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is "not ready" to sign a minerals deal with the United States, a source said on Saturday, raising doubts about the proposed agreement as a rift between the two countries deepened.

Since taking office last month, President Donald Trump has upended US foreign policy, making diplomatic overtures towards the Kremlin while demanding Ukraine give up its rare minerals to compensate for the wartime aid it received under Joe Biden.

Trump's national security adviser predicted on Friday that Zelensky would sign a minerals deal soon, but its contours have not been made public and Zelensky has pushed back at any arrangement that would mean "selling" his country.

"In the form in which the draft is now, the president is not ready to accept, we are still trying to make changes and add constructiveness," a Ukrainian source close to the matter said.

## Polio vaccination drive begins in Gaza

JABALIA: (News Desk) A third mass polio vaccination campaign began in Gaza on Saturday, journalists reported, with the aim of delivering the first dose to nearly 600,000 children across the Palestinian territory. Scores of children under the age of 10 received the dose at a mosque in Jabalia, in northern Gaza, where a blistering Israeli military assault last year reduced many buildings to rubble.

The vaccination campaign involves multiple UN agencies, including the Israeli-boycotted UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA), and comes at a time when Israel and Hamas are observing a ceasefire that has largely halted the fighting.

The World Health Organisation said the campaign aims to vaccinate more than 591,000 children by Feb 26. "Over 1,700 UNRWA team members will take part in this campaign," UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini wrote on X. "This campaign follows a recent detection of polio in wastewater, putting the lives of children at risk." The previous two drives were conducted in late 2024 after the highly contagious disease resurfaced in Gaza for the first time in over 20 years.

After more than 16 months of conflict between Israel and Hamas, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is dire. Even before the hostilities began, the territory had been struggling under an Israeli-imposed blockade for more than 15 years. Much of the water infrastructure has been destroyed, leaving sewage to stagnate in open pools near densely populated neighbourhoods — conditions that contributed to the reemergence of the virus last autumn.

## Israel suspends release of Palestinian prisoners

JERUSALEM: (News Desk) Israeli officials said the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners due on Saturday has been delayed, after six prisoners were freed under a fragile Gaza truce that is nearing the end of its first phase. While Israel was meant to release Palestinians in its custody in exchange for the six Israelis taken back home, Israeli officials said it may only happen after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convenes a security consultation. "Once the security consultation concludes, a decision will be made regarding the next steps" of the ceasefire agreement with Hamas, said one Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity. The sources did not provide a clear reason for the delay. Hamas frees six Israelis; terms Tel Aviv move "blatant violation" of Gaza truce. Hamas accused Israel of a "blatant violation" of the Gaza ceasefire deal over the delay in the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners due on Saturday. "The (Israeli) occupation's failure to comply with the release of the seventh batch of prisoners in the exchange deal at the agreed-upon time constitutes a blatant violation of the agreement," Hamas spokesman Abdel Latif Al-Qanou said in a statement, accusing Netanyahu of "procrastination and stalling tactics".

## We knew we had a chance, says Australia's Inglis

LAHORE: (News Desk) Alex Carey was on 49 when his pull off Adil Rashid seemed destined for Jofra Archer. The strapping England fast bowler spilled it; the anguish of the missing the chance seeing him drown in his thoughts.

England had for long sought that breakthrough in their Champions Trophy opener at the Gaddafi Stadium on Saturday.

Carey and Josh Inglis, having come together with Australia at 136-4, were threatening to take the game away. To add insult to injury, Inglis went after Archer in the very next over, hitting back-to-back fours.

The momentum had swung in Australia's favour; with six wickets in hand, they needed 87 to win off the last 10.

Ben Duckett's personal high of 165, that had powered England to an imposing 351-8, seemed a long time ago. England captain Jos Buttler could only grind his teeth. Buttler, though, was soon up in celebration when Brydon Carse removed Carey for 69. A glimmer of hope but England now had to contend with "The Big Show". The stage was set for Glenn Maxwell to provide a grandstand finish; the capacity crowd brimming with anticipation.

Inside out on his knee, Maxwell carted Mark Wood for four through the covers before belting him down the ground for another to end the 43rd over. Inglis pulled and scooped Carse for consecutive sixes in the next over to push Australia closer.

He would complete his maiden century — what a time to get it — with another six in the next over by Archer. Australia had reduced it to almost run-a-ball and Maxwell would bring it down to even less with a hooked six off Wood. Inglis would finish England off with a six, ending unbeaten on 120 off 86; Australia winning by five wickets with 15 balls to spare, putting their name in the record books with the highest-ever chase at the Gaddafi. "A lot of things have to go right [to chase down 350]," player-of-the-match Inglis told reporters. "Alex [Carey] doesn't say anything when he bats, [we knew] we needed to keep chipping away with Maxi [Maxwell] still there, we could leave it to him in the last 10 overs and we'd have a chance.

## Musk says all US govt staff must justify their work or lose jobs

Washington (News Desk) Elon Musk, the billionaire advisor to Donald Trump, said on Saturday that all US federal employees must justify their work or lose their jobs, hours after the president pushed him to be "more aggressive" in slashing government spending. Musk — the world's richest person and Trump's biggest donor — has led the effort to fire swaths of the government workforce. "All federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week. Failure

to respond will be taken as a resignation," Musk wrote. According to a copy of the email provided to AFP, federal workers were asked to submit "approximately 5 bullets of what you accomplished last week." The email came from the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM), with the subject line "What did you do last week?". The deadline to reply was 11:59pm Monday, though the message did not say failure to do so would lead to termination. The OPM did not immediately reply to AFP's

request for evening. The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the largest federal employee union, vowed to challenge any unlawful terminations in a statement from national president Everett Kelley. Kelley slammed Musk and the Trump administration, saying the move showed "their utter disdain for federal employees and the critical services they provide to the American people." "It is cruel and disrespectful to hundreds of thousands of veterans who are wearing their sec-

ond uniform in the civil service to be forced to justify their job duties to this out-of-touch, privileged, unelected billionaire who has never performed one single hour of honest public service in his life," he said. Several federal employees told AFP that they were advised by their agencies not to respond to the email and wait for further instruction, a recommendation echoed by the National Treasury Employees Union. "I have so much work to do, I am not going to neglect actual patient care for this

drama," a physician at the Department of Veterans Affairs, who received the email, told AFP. Musk later appeared to downplay the requirements of the request, writing on X that the bar is "very low" and saying, "An email with some bullet points that make any sense at all is acceptable!" More aggressive. Earlier on Saturday, Trump said on his Truth Social platform that Musk was "doing a great job, but I would like to see him get more aggressive." "Remember, we have a country to save," the

Republican leader added. Trump has put the tech entrepreneur in charge of the new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) advisory body, tasking him with slashing public spending and tackling alleged waste and corruption. In the latest cuts announced Friday, the US Defence Department is to reduce its civilian workforce by at least five per cent starting next week. Trump's administration has already begun firing many other federal workers who are on probationary status.