

## Talks for permanent Gaza truce inconclusive

GAZA CITY: (News Desk) While the first phase of the Gaza truce drew to a close on Saturday, negotiations on the next stage, which should secure a permanent ceasefire, have so far been inconclusive.

Hamas has made it clear that no Gaza ceasefire talks on the second phase were happening as it rejected "Israel's formulation" to extend the first stage, Al Jazeera reported. However, the Palestinian group reaffirmed keenness to complete the remaining stages of the ceasefire agreement, leading to "a permanent ceasefire, full withdrawal of the occupation forces from the Gaza Strip, reconstruction and lifting the siege". In a letter to the Arab League summit, due to be held on March 4, Hamas said: "We categorically reject the attempt to impose any non-Palestinian projects or forms of administration or the presence of any foreign forces on the territory of the Gaza Strip." Israel's negotiating delegation returned from Cairo on Saturday and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to meet his security team, according to local media. On the other hand, the US announced its approval of the sale of more than \$3bn in munitions, bulldozers and related military equipment to Israel.

## 37 killed in Bolivia after two buses collide

LA PAZ: (News Desk) Two passenger buses collided on Saturday on a highway in southern Bolivia, leaving at least 37 dead, including two children, and some 30 people injured, police said.

"So far we have 37 confirmed deaths," Colonel Wilson Flores said about the crash near the city of Uyuni in the department of Potosi. The accident, the country's most serious so far this year, occurred on a narrow two-way road early on Saturday.

One of the buses was heading to the city of Oruro, the scene this weekend of the Oruro Carnival, one of the largest festivals in Latin America that attracts tens of thousands of people.

It is still unclear what caused the accident, but police said that one of the buses had veered into the opposite lane. Officials also said one of the drivers, who survived the accident in grave condition, had "alcohol breath," so a blood test was performed.

Bolivia's winding mountain roads are notoriously deadly.

Road accidents kill an average of 1,400 people every year in the country of about 12 million inhabitants, according to government data.

## Serb leader suggests breakup of Bosnian federation

SARAJEVO: (News Desk) Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik on Saturday urged negotiations on the workings of the divided Balkan country, or an "amiable separation" from the Muslim-Croat portion should talks fail.

Dodik, who was sentenced on Wednesday to a year in prison for refusing to comply with decisions made by Bosnia's high representative, has promised to pull the Serb statelet out of Bosnia's central institutions.

His threats to ban the national police and judiciary from Serb territory led to accusations Dodik was flouting the Dayton accords that ended the 1992-1995 civil war in Bosnia. "We propose again to the (Muslim) Bosniaks to talk... to come back to the original Dayton accords and to find a new accord for Bosnia," Dodik told a press conference in Banja Luka, the capital of the Bosnian Serb statelet in Bosnia, Republika Srpska.

"If we cannot make it work, then let us agree on an amiable separation," the Republika Srpska president added. Since the end of the civil war, which claimed nearly 100,000 lives, Bosnia has been divided between two largely autonomous entities, one Serb and one Muslim-Croat. The case against Dodik, who has pursued a relentless Serb separatist agenda, has further tested the strength of the limited central institutions linking Bosnia's two halves. Besides a year in prison, the Serb leader was also banned from office for six years for ignoring decisions made by the country's top envoy charged with overseeing the Dayton accords, Christian Schmidt. The youngest of the 14 victims reburied on Thursday was a 17-year-old boy, the eldest was 68. Their remains, originally exhumed from mass graves, were laid to rest after a ceremony in a memorial cemetery outside Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia. The massacre unfolded after Srebrenica, a designated UN "safe area" for civilians in Bosnia's 1992-95 ethnic war that followed the disintegration of federal Yugoslavia, was overrun by nationalist Bosnian Serb forces. Bosnian Serb army commander Ratko Mladic and political leader Radovan Karadzic were arrested after the war and convicted of genocide by a UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague for their role in the killings. Dodik, 65, has the right to appeal the verdict, which he said was the result of a "political trial". In response to the sentence, the Serb entity's parliament passed a raft of bills prohibiting the national police from operating on its territory and rejecting jurisdiction from its central courts.



A person uses a megaphone as demonstrators gather during a protest in support of immigrants, in Atlantic City, New Jersey on Feb 3, 2025. — El Pueblo Unido de Atlantic City/Handout

## Trump designates English as official language of US

Washington (News desk) US President Donald Trump on Saturday designated English as the official language of the United States, saying it would bring cohesion to a country characterised by immigration from around the world.

The White House published an executive order by Trump which says it is "long past time" that En-

glish is declared as the nation's official language.

"A nationally designated language is at the core of a unified and cohesive society, and the United States is strengthened by a citizenry that can freely exchange ideas in one shared language," the document states.

The order revokes a presidential mandate from the 1990s under then-presi-

dent Bill Clinton requiring federal agencies and agencies receiving federal funding to provide assistance to non-English speakers. According to the new document, agencies will still have flexibility to decide how much help to offer in languages other than English. "Nothing in this order ... requires or directs any change in the services provided by

any agency," the executive order states. It adds that agency heads are empowered to determine what is necessary "to fulfill their respective agencies' mission and efficiently provide government services to the American people". Trump has issued a blizzard of executive orders in his first weeks in office, seeking to put his right-wing stamp on the country.

## Nations fail to break deadlock on UN climate report timing

New York (News Desk) Nations failed to break a deadlock over the timing of the UN's next blockbuster assessment of climate change science after a marathon meeting in China that US envoys skipped.

At issue was whether the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which informs policymakers, will deliver its next three-part assess-

ment before a 2028 United Nations "stocktake" of the global response to rising temperatures. Many wealthy countries and developing nations exposed to climate impacts wanted an accelerated timetable, arguing the reports would allow countries to be guided by the most up-to-date science. But they faced objections from some oil producers and major polluters with

rising emissions, such as India and China.

The talks in Hangzhou ran over by more than a day, wrapping up late Saturday night with an agreement to allow work to proceed without a definitive deadline for delivery.

The outcome was a "bitter disappointment", said Zhe Yao, global policy adviser at Greenpeace East Asia. The deadlock "only serves those who wish to hold

back climate action, but climate vulnerable countries cannot wait", Yao said.

"It's a bitter disappointment every time when division leads to a decision being postponed or kicked down the road." "Time is not on our side" The meeting was overshadowed by a US decision to stay away, as President Donald Trump unpicks his predecessor's climate actions.



Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik (C) delivers a speech flanked by Serbia's President, in Banja Luka, northern Bosnia and Herzegovina, on February 26, 2025, following Milorad Dodik's one year prison sentence

## Nato urges Zelensky to mend his relationship with Trump

BRUSSELS/WASHINGTON: (News Desk) Nato chief Mark Rutte said on Saturday he told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky that he needs to find a way to restore his relationship with US President Donald Trump after their clash at a White House meeting on Friday. The confrontation flared

over differing visions of how to end Russia's three-year-old invasion, with Zelensky seeking strong security guarantees from a Trump administration that has embraced diplomacy with Vladimir Putin's Russia.

The meeting, which Rutte described as "unfortunate", plunged ties between Kyiv

and its top military backer to a new low. "I said: I think you have to find a way, dear Volodymyr, to restore your relationship with Donald Trump and the American administration. That is important going forward," Rutte told the BBC, commenting on a call he had with Zelensky on Friday.

He said he told Zelensky that "we really have to respect what President Trump has done so far for Ukraine", reminding Zelensky that Trump was the one who provided Javelin anti-tank weapons to Ukraine in 2019 that had enabled the country's forces to fight back after Russia's invasion.

## Egg prices soar in New York as bird flu rages

NEW YORK: (News Desk) A box of 12 eggs reached an average price of \$8.47 in New York on Friday — much higher than consumers are used to even after years of inflation — as the avian flu pandemic ravages poultry in the United States.

In some stores, the price of the kitchen staple has jumped so much that they are now being sold per piece — as high as \$2.90 for one egg.

The pandemic has spread like wildfire, forcing poultry farmers to cull 26 million birds.

The idea of selling "singles", a practice more commonly associated with cigarettes, came to vendor Radhames Rodriguez when customers began to complain that they could no longer afford his eggs. "It's too expensive. I've never seen the price like that on the eggs. I've been in business for over 40 years," said Rodriguez.

## US plans emergency \$3bn arms sales to Israel

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) The US State Department has approved the potential sale of nearly \$3 billion worth of bombs, demolition kits and other weaponry to Israel, the Pentagon said in statements on Friday. The prospective weapons sales were notified to Congress on Friday afternoon on an emergency basis. That process sidesteps a long-standing practice of giving the chairs and ranking members of the House Foreign Affairs and Senate Foreign Relations Committees the opportunity to review the sale and ask for more information before making a formal notification to Congress. The sales included 35,529 general-purpose bomb bodies for 2,000-pound bombs and 4,000 bunker-busting 2,000-pound bombs made by General Dynamics. While the Pentagon said that deliveries would begin in 2026, it also said "there is a possibility that a portion of this procurement will come from US stock" which could mean immediate delivery for some of the weapons. Washington provided at least \$12.5bn in direct military aid to Tel Aviv since the start of Gaza conflict. A second package, valued at \$675 million, consisted of five thousand 1,000-pound bombs and corresponding kits to help guide the "dumb" bombs. Delivery for this package was estimated to be in 2028. A third notification consisted of \$295 million worth of Caterpillar D9 bulldozers. Friday's announcements marked the second time this month the Trump administration has declared an emergency to quickly approve weapons sales to Israel.

## US federal workers receive second email for justifying jobs

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) A second email asking US federal workers to justify their jobs was sent on Friday, as part of President Donald Trump's initiative to slash spending, media outlets reported. It came a week after Elon Musk, the billionaire appointed by Trump to downsize the government, engineered a first mass email to the federal government's two million employees, ordering them to justify their work or risk being fired. The message, sent from the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the government's HR department, had created confusion among an already anxious workforce, as multiple federal agencies told staff to ignore it. Friday's email once again asked staff to respond with around five bullet points describing what they accomplished in the past week and added that it would become a weekly task. The second round of emails started going out late Friday, The New York Times, NPR and CBS News reported, stating that they had seen copies of the second message. The email had the subject line, "What did you do last week? Part II" and went out to workers at various agencies, including the FBI.

## Champions Trophy: New Zealand strike early blows in encounter with India

Lahore (News Desk) New Zealand have struck early in their encounter with India in the final group match of the Champions Trophy to decide the semi-final lineup. Indian top order batters Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill are all back in the dugout with the score at just 30 after seven overs. Earlier New Zealand skipper Mitchell Santner won the toss and elected to field against India in this all-important encounter. Both teams came into the match in Dubai unbeaten, with the winners to top Group A and face Australia in the semi-finals. The match is Virat Kohli's 300th one-day international after the Indian batting great hit form with a century in the team's previous win over arch-rivals Pakistan. Irrespective of the placing and opponent, India will play the first semi-final in Dubai on Tuesday after they refused to travel to hosts Pakistan because of political tensions. New Zealand will leave for Lahore after the match, with the second semi-final to be played at the Gaddafi Stadium on Wednesday. The Black Caps have made one change after their win over Bangladesh, with Devon Conway making way for Daryl Mitchell. India have also made one change, with spinner Varun Chakravarthy coming in for pace bowler Harshit Rana. South Africa and Australia are the top two teams from Group B. The outcome of India's refusal to play Champions Trophy matches in Pakistan for Australia and South Africa is that they will not know until the final group game is completed on Sunday night whether they will face the Indians in Dubai on Tuesday or New Zealand in Lahore on Wednesday. South Africa will join Australia to wait in Dubai but one squad is destined to make the four-hour return journey back to Pakistan depending on whether India or New Zealand win on Sunday and top Group A. Teams: India: Rohit Sharma (capt), Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, Axar Patel, KL Rahul (wk), Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Shami, Kuldeep Yadav, Varun Chakravarthy.

## Australia, South Africa forced to wait on Champions Trophy semi-final venues

Lahore (News Desk) The full implications of India's refusal to play Champions Trophy matches in Pakistan were laid bare on Sunday as Australia and South Africa waited to find out whether they will play their semi-finals in Lahore or Dubai this week. Political tensions between the neighbours mean India have not played a cricket match in Pakistan since 2008 and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) were not

inclined to change the policy for the Champions Trophy, citing government advice over security issues. As a result, although the rest of the tournament is taking place in Pakistan, India played all of their group matches in Dubai and will stay put for Tuesday's semi-final as well as the final next Sunday, if they make it through. The outcome for Australia and South Africa is that they will not know until the final group game

is completed on Sunday night whether they will face the Indians in Dubai on Tuesday or New Zealand in Lahore on Wednesday. South Africa will join Australia to wait in Dubai but one squad is destined to make the four-hour return journey back to Pakistan depending on whether India or New Zealand win on Sunday and top Group A. "It is what it is," Rassie van der Dussen, who helped fire South Africa into the semis with a half-century

in the seven-wicket win over England in Karachi on Saturday, said this week. Van der Dussen said the arrangements were undoubtedly advantageous to the Indian team. "Physically, it's not that long a flight. It would be nice to just sit in one hotel the whole time on one ground like some teams, but that's not the reality for everyone." Travis Head said Australia, who finished second behind South Africa in Group B and will play the winners

of the India-New Zealand clash, were also taking the uncertainty in their stride and preparing to play on two very different surfaces. "We'll watch the next couple of days, stay relaxed and then get to work," the batter said in Lahore after Australia secured their semi-final spot on Friday when their final group game against Afghanistan was washed out. "I guess there'll be two different scenarios where it could be two different conditions. We'll pre-

pare for both ways and see how we go." Van der Dussen said the arrangements were undoubtedly advantageous to the Indian team. "If you can stay in one place, stay in one hotel, practice in the same facilities, play in the same stadium, on the same pitches every time, it's definitely an advantage," he added. "I don't think you have to be a rocket scientist to know that (but) the onus would be on them to use that advantage."