

Egypt rejects suggestion to run Gaza

CAIRO: (News Desk) Egypt rejected on Wednesday an Israeli opposition leader's proposal that it take over the administration of Gaza, calling the idea "unacceptable" and contrary to longstanding Egyptian and Arab policy. "Any notions or proposals that circumvent the constants of the Egyptian and Arab stance (on Gaza)... are rejected and unacceptable," the official MENA news agency quoted foreign ministry spokesman Tamim Khallaf as saying, a day after Israel's Yair Lapid floated the idea. In press remarks, Khallaf said any suggestions bypassing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state were "half-solutions" that risk prolonging the conflict rather than solving it. He said the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, were integral parts of the Palestinian territories that must be under "full Palestinian sovereignty and management". On Tuesday, Lapid said Egypt should run the Gaza Strip for at least eight years after the war is over, in exchange for massive debt relief. "The solution is Egypt will take responsibility for the management of the Gaza Strip for eight years with an option to extend to 15 years," he told the hawkish Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD) think tank in Washington.

Global stability threatened by declining cooperation: G20

CAPE TOWN: (News Desk) The erosion of multilateralism threatens global growth and stability, President Cyril Ramaphosa warned on Wednesday at a G20 finance meeting in South Africa marked by the absence of the US treasury secretary.

Two days of talks by finance ministers and central bank governors from the world's leading economies opened a week after a meeting of G20 foreign ministers was snubbed by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who complained of its "anti-Americanism".

"The erosion of multilateralism presents a threat to global growth and stability," Ramaphosa said in his opening address. "At this time of heightened geopolitical contestation, a rules-based order is particularly important as a mechanism for managing disputes and resolving conflict," he said. The G20, a grouping of 19 countries as well as the European Union and the African Union, is divided on key issues, from Russia's war in Ukraine to climate change, with world leaders scrambling to respond to drastic policy shifts from Washington since the return of US President Donald Trump. "Multilateral cooperation is our only hope of overcoming unprecedented challenges, including slow and uneven growth, rising debt burdens, persistent poverty and inequality, and the existential threat of climate change," Ramaphosa said.

US says Gaza ceasefire talks on track

JERUSALEM: (News Desk) The United States said talks for a second phase of a Gaza ceasefire deal were on track, as Hamas said Israel agreed to release Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the bodies of four Israeli prisoners.

The ceasefire has largely halted the Israel-Hamas raid sparked by the Oct 7, 2023 raid, and has seen 25 Israeli prisoners released so far in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. But its complexity and long-drawn-out implementation have highlighted its fragility in a conflict that has shattered millions of lives on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In Washington, US President Donald Trump's top envoy on the Middle East said Israeli representatives were en route to talks on the next phase of the ceasefire deal. "We're making a lot of progress. Israel is sending a team right now as we speak," Steve Witkoff told an event for the American Jewish Committee.

"It's either going to be in Doha or in Cairo, where negotiations will begin again with the Egyptians and the Qataris," he said.

Hamas says it is ready to release 'in one go' all the prisoners remaining during the second phase.

Hamas said an agreement was reached on the delayed release of Palestinian prisoners. "It was decided that they would be released simultaneously with the bodies of the Israeli prisoners, which had been agreed upon for handover during the first phase," Hamas said in a statement on Tuesday.

Israel has yet to confirm its release, and has not commented on whether it is sending a delegation to discuss the second phase of the truce. This first phase is supposed to end on Saturday, but negotiations planned for the rest of the process — which were to begin in early February — have not yet started. Hamas has said it is ready to release "in one go" all the prisoners remaining during the second phase. On Sunday, the group accused Israel of endangering the Gaza truce by delaying the release of 620 Palestinian prisoners. Dignified swaps Since the ceasefire took effect on Jan 19, Hamas has released 25 living prisoners in public ceremonies across Gaza, where masked, armed fighters have escorted the captives onto stages decorated with slogans. Israel has released more than 1,100 Palestinian prisoners. The International Committee of the Red Cross has urged all parties to carry out prisoner swaps "in a dignified and private manner". In Israel, the prisoners are largely viewed as "terrorists" for the violent attacks they have carried out against civilians and security forces. For Palestinians, however, the releases are viewed as long-delayed justice with the prisoners often regarded as symbols of resistance against Israeli occupation.



WASHINGTON: The world's richest man, Elon Musk, sports a T-shirt that reads 'Tech Support' during a cabinet meeting chaired by President Donald Trump at the White House, on Wednesday

Trump refuses security guarantees, Nato membership for Ukraine

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) President Donald Trump on Wednesday ruled out offering US security guarantees or Nato membership for Ukraine, while his adviser Elon Musk revealed plans to cut the \$6.7 trillion budget by \$1 trillion this year.

Addressing reporters at a cabinet meeting, Trump said Zelensky would visit Friday and sign on hand-

ing over natural resources, after intense US pressure to hand over rare minerals used in aerospace and other technology.

"It's a great deal for Ukraine, too, because they get us over there," Trump said.

"We'll be on the land and, you know, in that way, it's this sort of automatic security, because nobody's going to be messing

around with our people when we're there," Trump said. But Trump ruled out the United States providing more formal security guarantees, as sought by Kyiv. "We're going to have Europe do that," Trump said. "Europe is their next-door neighbor, but we're going to make sure everything goes well." Asked what concessions would need to be made to

end the war, he ruled out Ukrainian membership in Nato, again repeating Russia's stance that the issue was behind its invasion. "Nato — you can forget about," Trump said. "I think that's probably the reason the whole thing started." Former president Joe Biden backed Ukraine's eventual membership in Nato without offering a concrete timeframe.

US cuts overseas development programme budgets by more than 90pc: State Dept

Washington (News Desk) The United States has dramatically cut the budgets of overseas development and aid programmes, with multi-year contracts pared down by 92 per cent, or \$54 billion, the State Department said Wednesday.

On his first day in office, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order demanding a freeze on all US foreign aid for 90 days. The pause aimed to allow

the administration to review overseas spending with an eye to gutting programmes not aligned with Trump's "America First" agenda.

The review in part targeted multi-year foreign assistance contracts awarded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), with the vast majority eliminated during its course. "At the conclusion of a process led by USAID leadership, including tranches

personally reviewed by Secretary (Marco) Rubio, nearly 5,800 awards with \$54bn in value remaining were identified for elimination as part of the America First agenda — a 92pc reduction," a State Department spokesperson said in a statement. The review also looked at more than 9,100 grants involving foreign assistance, valued at more than \$15.9bn. At the conclusion of the

review, 4,100 grants worth almost \$4.4bn were targeted to be eliminated, a 28pc reduction. "These common-sense eliminations will allow the bureaus, along with their contracting and grants officers, to focus on remaining programs, find additional efficiencies and tailor subsequent programs more closely to the Administration's America First priorities," the State Department statement said.



A freed Palestinian prisoner receives medical attention after being released from an Israeli jail as part of a ceasefire and a hostages-prisoners swap deal between Hamas and Israel, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, February 27, 2025.

Abu Dhabi crown prince lands in Pakistan on first official visit

Rawalpindi (News Desk) Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan arrived in Rawalpindi on Thursday on a one-day official visit focused on investment and economic cooperation.

Pakistan and the UAE share close diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties. The UAE is one of

Pakistan's largest trading partners in the Middle East and a major source of remittances, with a large Pakistani expatriate population living and working there. As the crown prince landed at Rawalpindi's Nur Khan Airbase today, he was received by President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Deputy PM Ishaq Dar.

Other cabinet members along with senior diplomatic and government officials were present as well, including MNA Aseefa Zardari-Bhutto. Prince Khalid shook hands with the president, the premier, and the deputy PM as they greeted him. Officials said several agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) would

be signed during the visit to enhance collaboration in multiple sectors, fostering long-term economic partnerships. "This visit underscores the deep-rooted fraternal ties between Pakistan and the UAE and reflects the shared commitment to further strengthen bilateral economic partnership," the FO had said yesterday.

Over 100 US intelligence staff fired over sexually explicit chats

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard said that more than 100 US employees from across the intelligence community had been fired for using a secure government chat normally used to share sensitive information to participate in sexually explicit conversations. In an interview with Fox News on Tuesday night, Gabbard described their use of the National Security Administration tool as an egregious violation of trust that went against basic rules and standards around professionalism. "I put out a directive today that they will all be terminated and their security clearances will be revoked," Gabbard said. Conservative activist Chris Rufo, who writes for City Journal, first disclosed the news on Tuesday. A spokesperson for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence said on X that Gabbard had sent a memo directing all intelligence agencies to identify the employees who participated in the obscene, pornographic, and sexually explicit chatrooms by Friday.

'Extremely rare' cycle of paintings unearthed in Pompeii

ROME: (News Desk) An extremely rare cycle of paintings depicting a raucous ritual involving the god of wine has been unearthed in the ancient Roman city of Pompeii, the archaeological site said on Wednesday. The world-famous site said it had excavated in recent weeks a nearly life-size frieze depicting the procession of Dionysus, the god of wine, painted on three sides of a large banquet room. Known as a "megalography" from the Greek for "large painting", the frieze depicts a procession, with Dionysus joined by the bacchantes, his female followers. They are portrayed both as dancers or as hunters, with slaughtered animals on their shoulders. "Young satyrs with pointed ears play the double flute, while another performs a sacrifice of wine in acrobatic style, squirting wine behind him from a drinking horn into a patera (shallow bowl)," Pompeii said in a statement.

The frieze is painted in the Second Style of Pompeian painting, which is known for its addition of architectural details like pillars. It dates from about 40 to 30 BC, making it over 100 years old by the time of the eruption of Vesuvius 79 AD that destroyed the city.

A woman at the centre of the frieze "is about to be initiated into the mysteries of Dionysus, the god who dies and is reborn and who promises the same destiny to his followers", it said. These initiation rituals, required in antiquity to join such cults, often promised "a new blissful life, both in this world and in the afterlife."

Buoyant Afghans plot Australia downfall after dumping out England in Champions Trophy

Lahore (News Desk) Afghanistan skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi on Thursday targeted another big scalp in the form of Australia after knocking England out of the Champions Trophy, with a semi-final spot the prize. The Champions Trophy debutants sent England crashing out of the 50-over tournament with a thrilling eight-run victory in Lahore on Wednesday.

Afghanistan similarly stunned then holders England at the 2023 World Cup in India.

Next they play world champions Australia at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium on Friday in their final group match and must win to reach the last four of the eight-nation tournament. "Obviously a win like this boosts every team's confidence and strengthens them," Shahidi said after Afghanistan sent England packing. "Our morale has increased even more."

The skipper added: "The upcoming match will be crucial for both teams in the race for the semi-finals."

"Australia is a tough and good team. I have said this in previous conferences as well — that we came here to play good cricket."

Team focusing on Pakistan match, says Bangladesh assistant coach

RAWALPINDI: (News Desk) Bangladesh's assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin on Wednesday emphasised the importance of living in the moment, rather than dwelling on past performances, as his team prepare to face Pakistan in a dead rubber of the Champions Trophy in Rawalpindi on Thursday.

Speaking at a press conference at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Salahuddin stressed that the team's current squad was his primary concern.

"I don't believe in history. What's important is how we play on Thursday. We have 15 players in our squad, and we need to focus on them," he said.

Salahuddin expressed confidence in Bangladesh's fast bowling arsenal, citing the talents of Taskin Ahmed, Nahid Rana and Mustafizur Rahman.

"We have one of the best bowling attacks, but our bowlers are still learning. We have many young players coming up through the ranks," he stated.

The coach also acknowledged that while his team's bowling has been impressive, a balanced performance is necessary to secure victories.

"If we can score 300 runs on this track, our bowlers can defend it," the coach said, highlighting the importance of a strong batting display.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh team also cancelled their practice session at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. Like Pakistan, Bangladesh — who fell to India in their opener before losing to New Zealand — are looking for something positive to take back home.

"We've done some things good and some not so much," Salahuddin said. "We'll try to fix them tomorrow."

"We don't have much to gain in terms of the tournament. But since we are here to compete, it's important that our players show improvement and avoid repeating the mistakes we made in the last two matches."

"You never know when inspiration might strike. That's why every match is important. There is a lot of cricket ahead for these players, and if someone performs well here, it could be a turning point in their career."

Transgender US service members to be removed from military, Pentagon memo shows

Washington (News Desk) Transgender service members will be separated from the US military unless they receive an exemption, according to a Pentagon memo filed in court on Wednesday, essentially banning them from joining or serving in the military.

The move, which goes further than restrictions placed on transgender service members during his first administration, was described as unprec-

edented by advocates. Trump signed an executive order last month that took aim at transgender troops in a personal way — at one point saying that a man identifying as a woman was "not consistent with the humility and selflessness required of a service member."

This month, the Pentagon had said that the US military will no longer allow transgender individuals to join and will stop performing or facilitating procedures associated

with gender transition for service members. Wednesday's late-evening memo expands the ban to currently serving members of the military.

The memo said that the Pentagon must create a procedure to identify troops who are transgender within 30 days and then within 30 days of that, must start to discharge them from the military.

"It is the policy of the United States Government to establish high

standards for service member readiness, lethality, cohesion, honesty, humility, uniformity, and integrity," said the memo, dated February 26. "This policy is inconsistent with the medical, surgical, and mental health constraints on individuals with gender dysphoria or who have a current diagnosis or history of, or exhibit symptoms consistent with, gender dysphoria," it added. There is no requirement for transgender troops to self-identify

and the Pentagon doesn't have a precise number. The Pentagon said waivers would be granted only "provided there is a compelling government interest in retaining the service member that directly supports warfighting capabilities." It added that for a waiver, troops must also be able to meet a number of criteria, including that the service member "demonstrates 36 consecutive months of stability in the service member's sex without clinically

significant distress." During his first term, Trump announced that he would ban transgender people from serving in the military. He didn't fully follow through, freezing their recruitment while allowing serving personnel to remain. "The scope and severity of this ban is unprecedented. It is a complete purge of all transgender individuals from military service," said Shannon Minter of the National Centre For Lesbian Rights (NCLR).