

News in brief

Australia to deploy fleet of underwater strike drones



Australia said yesterday it will deploy a US\$1.1 billion fleet of “Ghost Shark” underwater attack drones to bolster its firepower in a “threatening” regional landscape. The Royal Australian Navy will arm itself with dozens of the home-developed, cutting-edge autonomous drones, with the first entering service in January, it said. Australia is in the midst of a major military restructure, equipping its navy with long-range strike capabilities in an effort to balance China’s expanding military might in the Pacific.

A US federal judge on Tuesday temporarily blocked President Donald Trump’s move to fire Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook as she challenges her ouster from the central bank. Judge Jia Cobb granted Cook’s request for an order to remain on the bank’s board while her lawsuit plays out -- just a week before a highly anticipated Fed rate meeting. In her opinion, judge Cobb found that Cook was “substantially likely” to succeed in certain claims, including her argument that Trump violated the Federal Reserve Act as her removal did not comply with the statute’s “for cause” requirement.



Sri Lanka votes to eject former leader Rajapaksa from state mansion



Sri Lanka’s parliament voted yesterday to evict former president Mahinda Rajapaksa and two others from state-owned mansions under austerity measures introduced by the new leftist government. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake’s party voted en masse to endorse a bill that will repeal a 1986 law that granted former leaders luxury accommodation and secretarial services. Only one opposition MP voted against the bill, which was passed with a two-thirds majority of 150 in the 225-member assembly. The bill was cleared a day after the Supreme Court ruled that stripping former heads of state of their privileges did not violate the Constitution.

SPOTLIGHT

Nepal army bids to restore order after deadly protests oust PM



Smoke billows from the burning Hilton Hotels, a day after it was set ablaze by protesters in Kathmandu
AFP | Kathmandu

Nepal’s army took back control of Kathmandu yesterday after the worst violence in two decades ousted the prime minister and left the parliament ablaze, enforcing a curfew and starting talks with protest leaders. Soldiers patrolled the streets of the capital seeking to end the deadly protests this week, chaos during which police said more than 13,500 prisoners escaped jail countrywide. Armoured personnel carriers rumbled past the carcasses of burnt vehicles and buildings on the largely quiet streets, with officers issuing orders via loudspeakers calling for calm during the political vacuum. Nepali Army chief General Ashok Raj Sigdel held “consultations with related stakeholders and held a meeting with rep-resentatives of Gen Z,” Rajaram Basnet said, referring to the loose umbrella title of the young protesters, but

without giving further details. Shushila Karki, 73, a former Supreme Court chief justice who many see as a potential interim leader, said the dialogue between parties was critical. “Experts need to come together to figure out the way forward”, Karki told AFP. “The parliament still stands.” Demonstrations began Monday in the capital against the government’s ban on social media and over corruption, driven by angry young protesters who dubbed themselves the “Gen Z” movement. But they escalated into an outpouring of rage nationwide with government buildings set on fire after at least 19 people were killed in a deadly crackdown. The rapid descent into chaos shocked many, and Nepal’s military warned against “activities that could lead the country into unrest and instability”. Two policemen were killed on Tuesday, as well as the mass jailbreak, police spokesman Binod Ghimire said.

Israel warns enemies after Qatar strikes

Israel vows to hunt Hamas leaders worldwide after Qatar strike draws US rebuke



A picture taken from a distance shows the damaged building (L) in the compound housing members of Palestinian militant group Hamas’s political bureau which was targeted the previous day by an Israeli strike in Qatar’s capital Doha

- Trump says he did not approve strikes
- Qatar claims no advance warning received
- Gaza tower destroyed amid ongoing offensive
- EU threatens sanctions over humanitarian crisis

AFP | Jerusalem

Israel yesterday warned its enemies they were not safe anywhere, a day after strikes targeting Hamas leaders in Qatar -- a US ally -- drew a rare rebuke from President Donald Trump. Defence Minister Israel Katz vowed that “Israel’s long arm will act against its enemies anywhere”, following Tuesday’s deadly attack on the Gulf state, which hosts a large US military base and has spearheaded repeated rounds of Gaza truce efforts. “There is no place where they can hide,” Katz wrote on X, adding: “Everyone who took part in the October 7 massacre will be held fully accountable,” referring to Hamas’s October 2023 attack on Israel that sparked the nearly two-year Gaza war. Palestinian armed group Hamas said six people were killed in the strikes, including an aide and an adult son of its top negotiator Khalil al-Hayya, as well as three bodyguards and a Qatari security officer. But the group said its senior

leaders had survived, affirming “the enemy’s failure to assassinate our brothers in the negotiating delegation”. The White House said Trump did not agree with Israel’s decision to take military action and had warned Qatar in advance of the incoming strikes. But Doha said it had not received the warning from Washington until the attack was already under way. Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, sought to justify the decision, telling an Israeli radio station: “We don’t always act in the interests of the United States.” “It was not an attack on Qatar; it was an attack on Hamas,” Danon told 103FM, adding: “It is too early to comment on the outcome, but the decision is the right one.” According to sources close to Hamas, six Hamas leaders including Hayya and former top leader Khaled Meshaal were in the targeted building at the time. AFP has been unable to reach any of them since then. ‘Shaken conscience of world’ Along with the United States and Egypt, Qatar has led multiple attempts to end the Israel-Hamas war and secure the release of the remaining hostages. In Gaza City yesterday, the Israeli military destroyed another high-rise building as it intensifies its assault on the territory’s largest urban centre despite mounting calls to end its campaign. The military’s Arabic-language spokesman, Avichay Adraee, had earlier issued an evacuation warning to those living in and around the Tiba 2 tower. The military said later it had



Israel’s action marks an extremely rare direct strike on Qatari soil—host to major US military assets and past peace negotiations—intensifying international unease over Israel’s willingness to target alleged enemies anywhere

lifeless babies. These images are simply catastrophic,” she said. Israel’s foreign minister, Gideon Saar, hit back, writing on X that Europe was sending “the wrong message that strengthens Hamas and the radical axis in the Middle East”. ‘Not thrilled’ Following Israel’s targeting of Hamas leaders in the Gulf, Qatar’s prime minister said it reserved the right to respond to the attack, which it said constituted a “pivotal moment” for region. Trump said he was not notified in advance of the Israeli strikes and was “not thrilled about the whole situation”. In a post on social media, he insisted that “this was a decision made by Prime Minister (Benjamin) Netanyahu, it was not a decision made by me”. “I view Qatar as a strong Ally and friend of the U.S., and feel very badly about the location of the attack,” he said, adding Hamas’s elimination was still a “worthy goal”. Russia and China joined an international chorus of condemnation, with Moscow saying the operation undermined peace efforts in the Middle East. Hamas’s October 7, 2023 attack resulted in the deaths of 1,219 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures. Of the 251 hostages seized during the assault, 47 remain in Gaza, including 25 the Israeli military says are dead. Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed at least 64,656 Palestinians, most of them civilians, according to figures from the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza that the UN considers reliable.