

News in brief

**Three killed in Taipei metro attacks, suspect dead: officials**



Attacks at metro stations in Taipei yesterday involving smoke bombs and stabbing killed at least three people, the fire department official said, adding that the suspect was also dead. Taiwan's Premier Cho Jung-tai said the attacks at Taipei Main Station and Zhongshan station were "a deliberate act", although the motive was not immediately clear. Cho said in a statement that the suspect wore a mask and threw "five or six gasoline bombs or smoke grenades" at Taipei Main Station. According to the Taipei City Fire Department, a total of four people were confirmed dead including the suspect, and five others were injured.

**Pakistan has captured a leader from an offshoot of the Islamic State jihadist group, a senior intelligence official said yesterday, after the arrest was reported by a UN sanctions monitoring group.**

Sultan Aziz Azam, who also acted as a spokesman for the Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K), was arrested on May 16, according to a UN committee's sanctions monitoring report submitted to the Security Council in November. "He was not just a spokesman but regarded as one of the top leaders for the group in the region," the Pakistani intelligence official told AFP on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to media.



**Trump govt calls on white men to file discrimination claims**



US President Donald Trump's administration is encouraging white men to file workplace discrimination claims - the latest salvo in its campaign to mothball diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. "Are you a white male who's experienced discrimination at work based on your race or sex?" the acting chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Ms Andrea Lucas, wrote on X this week. "You may have a claim to recover money under federal civil rights laws," she wrote..

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Trump shifts priority to Moon mission, not Mars



A so-called 'supermoon' is seen behind the Capitol and in Washington (file photo)

AFP | Washington

US President Donald Trump on Thursday confirmed that he wants to send astronauts back to the Moon as soon as possible, putting eventual Mars missions on the back burner.

In an executive order on his space policy, Trump said he wanted to get Americans to the Moon by 2028, under NASA's Artemis program launched during his first White House term.

Such a lunar landing would "assert American leadership in space, lay the foundations for lunar economic development, prepare for the journey to Mars, and inspire the next generation of American explorers," the order says.

It also says the US space agency NASA hopes to set up "initial elements of a permanent lunar outpost by 2030" and confirms plans to deploy nuclear reactors "on the Moon and in orbit."

Americans are currently

scheduled to return to the Moon's surface in mid-2027 on the Artemis 3 mission, but the timeline has been repeatedly pushed back.

And industry experts say it likely will be delayed again because the lunar lander in development at Elon Musk's SpaceX is not yet ready.

Trump's executive order puts increased pressure on both NASA and the private space sector to reach the administration's objectives.

The United States is keen to bypass China, which also intends to send a crew to the Moon by 2030 and set up a base there.

Putting the priority on a lunar mission represents a policy shift from what Trump had said earlier this year.

When he returned to the White House in January, the Republican said he wanted to put the American flag on Mars before the end of his four-year term, without mentioning any such plans for the Moon.

UN lifts Gaza famine label

Despite improved aid access, over 1.6 million people face critical food insecurity

- Entire population still in "Emergency" food phase
- Risk of famine returns if conflict resumes

AFP | Washington

A famine declared in Gaza in August is now over thanks to improved access for humanitarian aid, the United Nations said yesterday, but warned the food situation in the Palestinian territory remained dire.

More than 70 percent of the population are living in make-shift shelters, it said, with hunger exacerbated by winter floods and an increasing risk of hypothermia as temperatures plummet.

Although a ceasefire between Israel and militant group Hamas that took effect in October has partially eased restrictions on goods and aid, delivery fluctuates daily and is limited and uneven across the territory, it said.

"No areas are classified in Famine," said the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Initiative (IPC), a coalition of monitors tasked by the UN to warn of impending crises.

But it stressed that "the situation remains critical: the entire Gaza Strip is classified in Emergency".

The US-sponsored ceasefire halted two years of fighting, sparked by Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

Yet the deal remains fragile as Israel and Hamas accuse each other almost daily of violations.

"Following the ceasefire... the latest IPC analysis indicates notable improvements in food security and nutrition compared to the August 2025 analysis, which detected famine," the IPC said.



Displaced Palestinians gather to receive donated food portions at a charity kitchen in Khan Yunis

However, around 1.6 million people are still forecast to face "crisis" levels of food insecurity in the period running to April 15, it said.

And under a worst-case scenario involving renewed hostilities and a halt in humanitarian aid and commercial goods, the territories of North Gaza, Gaza Governorate, Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis risk famine, it said.

**'Appalling and preventable'**

The UN's declaration of famine in August -- the first time it has done so in the Middle East -- infuriated Israel, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu slamming the IPC report as "an outright lie".

Yesterday, foreign ministry spokesman Oren Marmorstein said on X that faced with "overwhelming and unequivocal evidence, even the IPC had to admit that there is no famine in Gaza".

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**Oxfam accused Israel of blocking aid, stating it has \$2.5 million worth of food parcels, including 4,000 packages, stuck in warehouses just across the border, unable to enter Gaza**

But he also accused the IPC of continuing to present a "distorted" picture by relying "primarily on data related to UN trucks, which account for only 20 percent of all aid trucks".

Oxfam said that despite the

end of the famine, the levels of hunger in Gaza remain "appalling and preventable", and accused Israel of blocking aid requests from dozens of well-established humanitarian agencies.

"Oxfam alone has \$2.5m worth of aid including 4,000 food parcels, sitting in warehouses just across the border. Israeli authorities refuse it all," Nicolas Vercken, Campaigns and Advocacy Director at Oxfam France, said in a statement.

The IPC said hunger was not the only challenge to those in the Palestinian territory.

Access to water, sanitation and hygiene are severely limited, it said, with open defecation and overcrowded living conditions increasing the risk of disease outbreaks.

Over 96 percent of cropland in the Gaza Strip is either damaged, inaccessible, or both, it said, while livestock has been decimated.

US suspends green card lottery after Brown, MIT professor shootings

AFP | Washington

The Trump administration announced on Thursday it will suspend a green card lottery that allowed a man believed to be behind both a mass shooting at Brown University and the killing of an MIT professor into the United States.

Claudio Neves Valente, a 48-year-old Portuguese national, is accused of bursting into a building at the Ivy League school on Saturday and opening fire on students, killing two and wounding nine.

He is also accused of killing a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) two days later.

Homeland security chief Kristi Noem wrote on social media on Thursday that Neves Valente "entered the United States through the diversity lottery immigrant visa program (DV1) in 2017 and was granted a green card."

The US green card lottery grants up to 55,000 permanent resident visas annually to people "from countries with low rates of immigration to the United



Brown University students and community members take a moment at a makeshift memorial for the victims of a December 13 mass shooting at the Van Winkle Gates outside Brown's college campus in Providence, Rhode Island

States," according to the State Department.

Noem described Neves Valente, who police said Thursday was found dead by suicide after a days-long manhunt, was a "heinous individual" who "should never have been allowed in our country."

"At President Trump's direc-

tion, I am immediately directing USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) to pause the DV1 program to ensure no more Americans are harmed by this disastrous program," Noem said.

In 2017, during US President Donald Trump's first term, the Republican leader vowed a bat-

tery of tough measures to curb immigration, including terminating the green card lottery, after a deadly terror attack in New York.

Noem pointed to this incident in her post on Thursday saying: "President Trump fought to end this program, following the devastating NYC truck ramming by an ISIS terrorist, who entered under the DV1 program, and murdered eight people."

US attorney Leah Foley said at a press briefing on Thursday that Neves Valente studied at Brown University "on an F1 (student) visa around 2000 to 2021" and that "he eventually obtained legal permanent resident status," but did not go into further detail.

Foley added that Neves Valente had also attended the "same academic program... in Portugal between 1995 and 2000" as the MIT professor, Nuno Loureiro, who was shot down in his home in Brookline, in the greater Boston metro area.

There is no immediate indication of a motive in the shootings, that rattled the elite New England campuses.