

News in brief

◆ **Defence Minister Israel**

Katz yesterday warned there would be "no calm" in Lebanon if Israel's security was not guaranteed, as Israeli forces intensify operations despite a year-old ceasefire with Hezbollah. "We will not allow any threats against the inhabitants of the north, and maximum enforcement will continue and even intensify," Katz told the Israeli parliament. He cited as proof the "elimination" of a top Hezbollah military chief in an Israeli strike on southern Beirut days earlier. "There will be no calm in Beirut, nor order and stability in Lebanon, until the security of the State of Israel is guaranteed," he said, vowing to disarm Hezbollah. An Israeli strike on Beirut's southern suburbs on Sunday killed Haytham Ali Tabatabai - the most senior Hezbollah commander to be killed by Israel since a November 2024 ceasefire sought to end over a year of hostilities between the two sides.



**Israel defence minister vows 'no calm' in Lebanon without security for Israel**

◆ **Iran bans access to most forests after fire in UNESCO-listed site**

Iranian authorities have imposed a temporary ban on public access to most forested areas, a local media outlet reported yesterday, as the country struggled to extinguish a fire in a UNESCO World Heritage-listed site. The fire in northern Iran's Hyrcanian forests, which started on November 1, was brought under control in a few days. However, it reignited on November 15, fuelled by strong winds and an unusually severe drought, according to Iranian media. "We have notified the provinces to ban entry into forest areas outside protected zones and parks before the autumn rains occur in order to prevent similar incidents from occurring," Majid Zakariaei, commander of the unit responsible for forest protection, told the Mehr news agency.

◆ **Lebanon and Cyprus** yesterday signed a new maritime border agreement to demarcate the countries' exclusive economic zones, the latest high-seas deal aiming to open up commerce in the eastern Mediterranean.

The agreement comes nearly two decades after the countries hammered out a deal to delineate their respective exclusive economic zones. The deal, however, was never ratified by the Lebanese parliament due to an unresolved dispute with Israel. In 2022, Lebanon signed a maritime boundary deal with Israel, allowing the country to move forward with maritime border talks with Cyprus. "We are here to celebrate the achievement of demarcating the exclusive economic zones between our two countries," Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said after the signing of the agreement alongside his Cypriot counterpart Nikos Christodoulides.

**Lebanon, Cyprus sign maritime border agreement**



SPOTLIGHT

**Humanoid robots to trial guiding crowds at Chinese border crossings**

AFP | Beijing, China

Humanoid robots could guide travellers and manage crowds at some Chinese border crossings after Shenzhen-based UBTECH Robotics said it had won a multimillion-dollar contract to supply its latest models for a trial project.

The company said Tuesday it had struck the \$37-million deal with a humanoid robotics testing centre based near China's border with Vietnam.

The project will use mainly the latest version of UBTECH's "Walker" robots to test practical humanoid applications such as helping border management, handling logistics or patrolling factories.

UBTECH said it would start delivering the robots, which can swap their own batteries, to the centre in December.

It did not say whether they would be powered by artificial intelligence or operated remotely.

China's government has encouraged domestic firms to develop humanoids in the hopes of leading the global robotics industry.

An April report published by Leaderobot, a specialist consulting firm, predicted that China's humanoid robotics industry would reach 82 billion yuan (\$11.6 billion) in 2025 -- accounting for half of global sales.

This month, a robot made by Shanghai's AgiBot set a



Representative picture

Guinness World Record for the longest reported distance ever walked by a humanoid machine, having completed a three-day, 100-kilometre trek.

Beijing hosted the world's first-ever humanoid robot games in August, where more than 500 "athletes" vied in disciplines ranging from basketball to competitive cleaning.

Large-scale real-life use cases remain elusive though.

Goldman Sachs warned recently that the sector risks overcapacity as production scales up rapidly without actual orders.

UBTECH said Tuesday its Walker series has generated 1.1 billion yuan in sales so far this year.

"The orders we have received far exceed the announced number," UBTECH executive Tan Min told local media this month, addressing the overcapacity concerns.

**Russia welcomes 'aspects' of new US plan to end Ukraine war**

The plan has not yet been published

● **"Fine-tuned" version of an earlier 28-point plan**

● **US officials were upbeat yesterday about the drive to end the war**

● **Ukraine said it had reached an "understanding" with the US**

AFP | Moscow, Russia

Russia has seen the latest copy of a draft US plan to end the Ukraine war and views some of it positively, but wants a discussion about the other parts, the Kremlin said yesterday.

In comments to a Russian state TV reporter, Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said the new draft required "truly serious analysis" and that Russia had not yet discussed it with anyone.

The plan has not yet been published. US President Donald Trump said Tuesday that it was a "fine-tuned" version of an earlier 28-point plan that Kyiv and Europe had rejected, and that he was sending officials to meet with both sides in the hopes of finalising it.

Ushakov said of the plan on Wednesday: "Some aspects can be viewed positively, but many require special discussions among experts."

The original plan, widely criticised in Europe as heeding Moscow's demands, would have seen Ukraine withdraw from its eastern Donetsk region and the US de facto recognise the Donetsk, Crimea and Lugansk regions as Russian.

Ukraine said later it had reached an "understanding" with the US and that the two sides had pared back some of the points Kyiv disagreed with following talks in



US President Donald Trump and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky meet in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC (file)

Geneva.

It is not clear which points were removed and which remain, and deep differences remain in Russia and Ukraine's negotiating positions.

Kyiv and its European allies say the war, the largest and deadliest on European soil since World War II, is an unprovoked and illegal land grab that has resulted in a tidal wave of violence and destruction.

Tens of thousands of civilians and military personnel have been killed since the war began, while millions of Ukrainians have been forced to leave their homes.

**Key sticking points**

US special envoy Steve Witkoff will meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow next week in a bid to finalise the US administration's plan, while US army secretary Dan Driscoll will meet the Ukrainian side, Trump said.

Ushakov, a senior Russian diplomat and aide to Putin, said

Wednesday that Russia needed "serious discussions" on the document.

"The peace plan hasn't been discussed in detail with anyone yet," he told a state TV reporter.

US officials were upbeat Tuesday about the drive to end the war, even as they acknowledged key sticking points remained over the plan.

But Ukraine's European allies, which regarded the original 28-point plan as a Kremlin wish list, have cautioned against conceding too much to Moscow.

They drafted their own counter-proposal to the original plan, which Russia immediately smacked down.

EU Commission Chief Ursula von der Leyen said Wednesday that days of negotiations to refine the US plan had begun to lay the groundwork for a possible settlement.

But she warned Russia showed no sign of really wanting to stop the fighting.

"I want to be clear from the

very outset: Europe will stand with Ukraine and support Ukraine every step of the way," she told EU lawmakers.

As diplomatic efforts to end the war rumbled on, Ukraine reported another night of air attacks. A Russian drone attack on the southern Ukrainian region of Zaporizhzhia overnight left more than a dozen wounded and damaged tens of homes, governor Ivan Fedorov said.



**Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a full-scale military assault on Ukraine in February 2022 -- calling it a "special military operation".**

**Trump rages at report that he is increasingly frail**

AFP | Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump raged yesterday at a New York Times report that focused on his age and growing signs of fatigue, insisting that he is full of energy and calling the woman author of the article "ugly."

"I have never worked so hard in my life. Yet despite all of this the Radical Left Lunatics in the soon to fold New York Times did a hit piece on me that I am perhaps losing my Energy, despite facts that show the exact opposite," the 79-year-old Republican posted on his Truth Social platform.

Trump is the oldest person ever to have assumed the US presidency and the job has clearly weighed on him since starting a second term in January.

But in the lengthy post, sprinkled with words in all-caps and a misspelling, Trump said the Times article published Tuesday was ignoring his output.

He listed what he said were his many accomplishments, ranging from the election victory last year to a strong US stock market and the settling of wars abroad.

He also boasted that he recently underwent a "PERFECT PHYSICAL EXAM AND A COMPREHENSIVE COGNITIVE TEST ('That was ace') JUST RECENTLY TAKEN."

Trump does remain an omnipresent figure in the media, frequently fielding questions from journalists for marathon sessions -- in sharp contrast to his predecessor Joe Biden, who left office at 81.

But while the White House public relations machine continues to portray Trump as improbably virile -- creating AI-generated pictures of him as muscle-bound superheroes and warriors -- the Republican is visibly slowing down.

The report in the influential Times noted that Trump has sharply reduced his public events and domestic travel, compared to his first term, and generally runs a public schedule between the hours of noon and 5:00 pm.

During one televised event in the Oval Office earlier this month, Trump appeared to fall asleep briefly.

There are unanswered questions about Trump's health, notably why he had an MRI scan in October and what it showed.

Photographs of his swollen ankles and a large bruise on his right hand have also triggered speculation.

Trump called the Times "truly an 'ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE.'"

And he branded the female reporter who wrote the Times report "ugly, both inside and out." Earlier this month, he called another woman journalist "piggy" and yet another "a terrible person."

The Times responded to Trump's post with a statement saying its "reporting is accurate and built on first hand reporting of the facts."

"Name-calling and personal insults don't change that, nor will our journalists hesitate to cover this administration in the face of intimidation tactics like this."