

USAID FREEZE Hundreds of US diplomats join letter to Rubio in protest

REUTERS, Washington

Hundreds of diplomats at the State Department and US Agency for International Development have written a letter addressed to Secretary of State Marco Rubio protesting the dismantling of USAID, saying its demise would undermine US leadership and security and create a power vacuum which China and Russia could exploit.

In a cable expected to be filed with the department's internal "dissent channel," which allows diplomats to raise concerns about policy anonymously, the diplomats said the Trump administration's January 20 freeze on almost all foreign aid also endangers American diplomats and forces overseas while putting at risk the lives of millions abroad that depend on US assistance.

FUNDING CUTS French univ opens doors to US scientists

AFP, Marseille

A French university announced Wednesday it would welcome scientists from the United States working in areas threatened by funding cuts under President Donald Trump's administration.

Mass firings and sweeping cuts overseen by Trump's senior advisor Elon Musk in recent weeks have targeted research in a range of areas including climate and health.

In response, France's Aix-Marseille University announced a new programme to welcome scientists who "may feel threatened or hindered" in the United States and want "to continue their work in an environment conducive to innovation, excellence and academic freedom".

University president Eric Berton told AFP-TV that he would have preferred to not to have had to issue this "recruitment call".

"It is a real danger," he emphasised.



A Spanish Coast Guard vessel tows a fiberglass boat with migrants onboard to the port of Arguineguin on the island of Gran Canaria, Spain, on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump's threat to Gaza undermines truce

Says Hamas as US holds unprecedented direct talks for release of American hostages

AFP, Gaza City

Hamas said yesterday that Donald Trump's threats would encourage Israel to disregard the fragile ceasefire, after the US president said that unless hostages are freed, the people of Gaza would be "DEAD".

Trump's warning came hours after his administration revealed it held unprecedented direct talks with Hamas, which it proscribes as a "terrorist" group, focused on American hostages in Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office confirmed Israel was consulted and said in a statement that it "expressed its opinion" on the direct talks.

Trump said later he was "sending Israel everything it needs to finish the job" as his administration expedites billions of dollars in weapons.

"Release all of the Hostages now, not later, and immediately return all of the dead bodies of the people you murdered, or it is OVER for you," he wrote on his Truth Social platform after meeting freed hostages.

"This is your last warning! For

» **Trump said he was "sending Israel everything it needs to finish the job"**

» **Israel has halted the flow of goods, supplies into Gaza**

» **France, Britain, Germany jointly called the situation in Gaza "catastrophic"**

the leadership, now is the time to leave Gaza, while you still have a chance."

Trump also warned of repercussions for Gaza as a whole, where virtually the entire population has been displaced by Israel's relentless military campaign.

"To the People of Gaza: A beautiful Future awaits, but not if you hold Hostages. If you do, you are DEAD!"

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qasim said Trump's words pushed Israel to disregard the terms of a ceasefire in place since January 19.

"These threats complicate matters regarding the ceasefire agreement and encourage the occupation to avoid implementing its terms," Qasim said in a statement, urging the United States to pressure Israel to enter the ceasefire's second phase.

Israel has ramped up its rhetoric and halted the flow of goods and supplies into Gaza.

"Hamas has indeed suffered a severe blow, but it has not yet been defeated. The mission is not yet accomplished," Israel's new military chief Eyal Zamir warned Wednesday.

Also on Wednesday, France, Britain and Germany jointly called the "catastrophic" and urged Israel to ensure the "unhindered" delivery of aid.

South Africa said Israel's restriction of aid into Gaza amounted to using starvation as a weapon of war.

Sudan files case against UAE at ICJ Argues the country is complicit in genocide

AFP, The Hague

Sudan has filed a case against the United Arab Emirates (UAE) at the International Court of Justice, arguing the UAE is complicit in genocide over its alleged support for Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

Khartoum contends the UAE is "complicit in the genocide on the Masalit (community in Sudan) through its direction of and provision of extensive financial, political, and military support for the rebel RSF militia", the ICJ said yesterday.

The UAE has repeatedly denied supporting the RSF.

For nearly two years, the RSF and the regular army in Sudan have fought a devastating war that has killed tens of thousands and uprooted more than 12 million people. Famine has already been declared in parts of the country and is likely to spread.

Women's rights weakened in quarter of all countries: UN

AFP, United Nations

Women's rights regressed last year in a quarter of countries around the world, according to a report published by UN Women yesterday, due to factors ranging from climate change to democratic backsliding.

"The weakening of democratic institutions has gone hand in hand with backlash on gender equality," the report said, adding that "anti-rights actors are actively undermining long-standing consensus on key women's rights issues."

"Almost one quarter of countries reported that backlash on gender equality is hampering implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action," the report continued, referring to the document from the 1995 World Conference on Women.

Indian credits

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signed for 15 projects.

Of the 42 projects under the three LoCs, 14 have been completed at a cost of about \$410 million, or around 6 percent of the overall commitment under the first two credit deals.

According to the terms of the deals, all project-related materials must

be procured from India and all contractors and consultants must be hired from that country.

Mirana Mahrukh, additional secretary of ERD, and Suja K Menon, joint secretary of India's ministry of external affairs, led the meeting from their respective sides.

Warning army

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as the new chief adviser of the interim administration, he asked me immediately, "can you send us a fact-finding mission to put a spotlight on the situation to investigate what was happening", which is what we did and it actually helped."

He also said that when he was in Bangladesh last November, he was thanked for his role.

"The students were so grateful for us taking a stand and for us speaking out and for us supporting them."

In the interview, Volker Turk discussed various conflicts around the world and their devastating impact on millions of lives. He raised concerns about the possibility of humanity sleepwalking into a dystopian future if these issues are not addressed.

The conversation touched on the importance of human rights, the role of international organisations, and the need for global cooperation to prevent further sufferings.

In Bangladesh, amid a raging mass uprising led by the students, the army held a meeting called "Officers Address" on August 3 last year. There, it reportedly agreed not to fire on citizens.

A press release by the Inter Services Public Relations had said, "Bangladesh Army will always stand by the people in their interests and in the state's needs."

Reuters has reported that the night before Sheikh

Hasina fled, the Chief of Army Staff General Wakaruz Zaman held a meeting with his generals and decided that troops would not open fire on civilians to enforce a curfew. The agency quoted two serving army officers with knowledge of the discussions.

In its fact-finding report released last month, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had mentioned that as many as 1,400 people have been killed during the July-August uprising that culminated into the ouster of the Hasina regime.

It said serious human rights violations and abuses committed by the security forces and armed Awami League supporters between July 15 and August 5 stemmed from a calculated effort to retain power at all costs.

The UN mission interviewed 230 witnesses for the purposes of preparing the report.

The report said, "Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] has reasonable grounds to believe that these violations were carried out with the knowledge, coordination, and direction of the political leadership and senior security sector officials, in pursuance of a strategy to suppress the protests and related expressions of dissent."

Gas scarcity halves

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authorities through various channels but no solution has been found.

"They said it would take more time to resolve the gas shortage," he added.

In fiscal 2024-25, the demand for gas for industries is 976 mmcfd, according to Petrobangla's projection.

However, they are getting 560,600 mmcfd on an average, said Petrobangla official, preferring anonymity as he is not authorised to speak with the media.

The ceramic industry is facing a severe crisis due to the ongoing gas shortage, said Irfan Uddin, general secretary of the Bangladesh Ceramic Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

The desired level of gas pressure at the factories is 15 psi, but they have been getting 2 to 5 psi or sometimes even less, he said.

Subsequently, the ceramic factories' daily production losses have crossed 50 percent, he said, adding that many ceramic companies have been compelled to halt

investment plans, while newly established factories remain non-operational due to the crisis.

Narayanganj is facing a similar situation, said Ahmedur Rahaman Tanu, director of the Narayanganj Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Instead of the required 15 psi, gas pressure often drops to 3 to 5 psi, and sometimes even zero, causing daily production losses of 30 to 40 percent, according to him.

Petrobangla Chairman Md Rezanur Rahman and Titas Gas Managing Director Shahnewaz Parvez could not be reached for comment.

However, a top official of Petrobangla said the government has given the highest priority to power generation.

The power sector is getting the increased LNG supply, and production has increased. But other sectors will not get the benefit right now. It depends on more gas production and imports," he added.

Household users are also

facing gas shortage before iftar, a harsh turn during Ramadan, the month of fasting.

Gas pressure drops around 4:00pm and remains low until iftar, said residents in Dhaka's Mirpur, Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Ziggatola, Adabor, Khilgaon, Uttara, Banasree, Badda and areas in Old Dhaka.

As soon as the call to Maghrib prayer comes through the mosque loudspeakers, the gas pressure returns, said Shahnaz Rahmatullah, a resident of Banasree area.

During the day, the gas pressure remains stable, but it is not a convenient time to cook during Ramadan, she added.

Weak gas supply during iftar preparation means Lalbagh resident Shimu Rahman has to make do without homecooked items.

"We have no option but to go outside to get iftar," she said.

[Shaheen Mollah contributed to the report]

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Regarding the recent highway robberies, he said, "We are working to prevent such incidents from happening in the coming days."

The government has instructed law enforcement agencies in "high-risk" areas

to remain vigilant and take preventive measures, he said.

Regarding security measures ahead of Eid, he assured that authorities are taking steps to prevent crimes such as mugging, snatching, and extortion.

"We have implemented measures to ensure public safety during the festive period," he added.

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