

## TRUMP CRITICISM

## Pope blasts 'neocolonial' conflicts

Plans to continue speaking out against war

REUTERS, Algiers

Pope Leo blasted violations of international law by "neocolonial" world powers in a forceful speech yesterday during an Africa tour, hours after US President Donald Trump's direct attack on the leader of the 1.4-billion-member Church.

Leo is travelling to Africa "as a witness to the peace and hope that the world so ardently desires," he told political leaders in Algeria, his first stop on a whirlwind four-nation trip.

"The future belongs (to) those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by power or wealth," the first US pope said. "Africa knows all too well that



people and organizations that dominate others destroy the world."

Leo, originally from Chicago, did not single out specific countries for criticism, but he has emerged as an outspoken critic of the Iran war in recent weeks and decried the "madness of war" in a peace appeal on Saturday.

Trump, in an apparent response to the pope's statements about the conflict and the White House's hard-line immigration policies, said late on Sunday that Leo was "terrible," in remarks that drew immediate rebuke from US believers.

Leo told Reuters on the papal flight from Rome to Algiers yesterday morning that he planned to continue speaking out against war, despite Trump's comments. "I don't want to get into a debate with him," said the Pope. "I will continue to speak out loudly against war, looking to promote peace, promoting dialogue and multilateral relationships."

Leo is undertaking one of the most complicated papal trips arranged in decades. It will take him to 11 cities and towns across Algeria, Cameroon, Angola and Equatorial Guinea, traversing nearly 18,000 km (11,185 miles) over 18 flights.



Lebanese Red Cross volunteers inspect the damage to their rescue ambulances at the site of an Israeli drone strike that targeted their headquarters in the southern city of Tyre yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## US blockade of Iran a major military effort

Experts warn it's an act of war, requiring open-ended naval commitment

REUTERS, Washington

A US naval blockade of Iran is a major, open-ended military endeavor that could trigger fresh retaliation from Tehran and put tremendous strain on an already fragile ceasefire, experts say.

President Trump, in a social media post after no deal emerged from peace talks this weekend in Islamabad, said the US Navy "will begin the process of BLOCKADING any and all Ships trying to enter, or leave, the Strait of Hormuz."

The US military's Central

**With enough warships, the US Navy could set up a blockade that intimidates many commercial tankers from trying to power through with Iranian oil: experts**

Command later said the blockade will only apply to ships going to or from Iran, including all Iranian ports on the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. It was due to take effect yesterday at 10:00 am in Washington (1400 GMT).

Trump also said US forces would interdict vessels that have paid tolls to Iran, even if those ships



are now in international waters. The ultimate goal, Trump said, would be to pressure Iran to end its effective closure of the strait to all but the countries that secure safe passage from Tehran.

If Trump's strategy succeeds, he would eliminate Iran's greatest point of leverage in negotiations with the US and clear the strait again for global trade, potentially lowering oil prices. But a blockade, experts say, is an act of war that requires an open-ended commitment of a significant number of warships.

"Trump wants a quick fix. The reality is, this mission is difficult to execute alone and likely unsustainable over the medium to long term," said Dana Stroul, a former senior Pentagon official during the Biden administration

now at The Washington Institute

for Near East Policy. The US military has not offered basic details yet about the blockade, including how many US warships will enforce it.

But would the United States be prepared to board and seize — or even damage or sink — ships that try to break the blockade? What if they carry oil for China, a major power, or US partners such as India or South Korea?

And what would Iran do? Retd Admiral Gary Roughead, a former chief of US navy, cautioned that Iran could fire on ships in the Gulf or attack infrastructure of the Gulf states that host US forces.

"I honestly believe that if we begin to do it, that Iran will have some kind of a reaction," Roughead said. Iran's threats to shipping caused oil prices to skyrocket by about 50 percent since war broke out on February 28.

## Netanyahu's call changed everything

Iranian FM alleges after Vance leaves Pakistan without an agreement

AGENCIES

A phone call from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to US Vice President JD Vance made in the middle of negotiations derailed what could have been a breakthrough in the Iran-US standoff, Tehran has claimed.

Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi made the allegation on X, hours after Vance left Islamabad without an agreement following over 21 hours of talks in the Pakistani capital.

"Netanyahu's call to Vance during the meeting shifted the focus from US-Iran negotiations to Israel's interests," Araghchi wrote. "The US tried to achieve at the negotiating table what it could not achieve through war."

He said Iran had entered the Pakistan-hosted negotiations in good faith, adding Vance's press conference before his departure was "unnecessary." He said Iran remained "committed and prepared to safeguard our nation's interest and sovereignty."

Washington has not confirmed or denied the Netanyahu call.

## WEST BENGAL POLLS

## No SC relief for voters deleted in SIR process

AGENCIES

India's Supreme Court (SC) has declined to grant interim voting rights to those whose names were deleted during the voter roll clean-up process special intensive revision (SIR) and whose appeals are still pending before the appellate tribunals.

During the proceedings, Trinamool Congress leader Kalyan Banerjee said that at least 1.6 million appeals have been filed, and they should be allowed to vote in the two-phase assembly election due later this month.

In response, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said, "That is entirely out of the question. If we were to permit this, then the voting rights of the individuals involved would have to be suspended."

Justice Joymalya Bagchi said there are 3.4 million appeals in the SIR exercise, and added that a report submitted by the Calcutta High Court Chief Justice clearly stated this data, reports NDTV online.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has already frozen the West Bengal voter list and no new name can be included before the election, unless the Supreme Court gives a specific direction on this count, which did not happen yesterday.

Nineteen appellate tribunals have been set up in the state bordering Bangladesh to decide the fate of 27 lakh cases that have been deleted in the judicial adjudication cases.

## END OF EASTER TRUCE

## Ukraine, Russia renew drone strikes

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine and Russia renewed overnight drone strikes yesterday, after the end of a 32-hour Orthodox Easter truce marred by accusations of mass violations, both countries said.

The Ukrainian air force said Russia had launched 98 drones, adding that its air defence units had downed 87 of them.

An infrastructure facility was hit in the central-eastern Dnipropetrovsk region, Ukrainian authorities said, adding that information about casualties was being clarified.

Russia meanwhile reported that "on April 13, air defence forces on duty intercepted and destroyed 33 Ukrainian aircraft-type unmanned aerial vehicles."

Last week, Moscow and Kyiv agreed to observe the ceasefire, which lasted from 4:00 pm on Saturday until the end of the day on Sunday.

But as with a similar agreement last year, only relative calm reigned along the 1,200 kilometre (745-mile) front line.

The Ukrainian army said it had counted more than 10,000 violations by the Russian army, most of which were front-line skirmishes.

However, it said that "during the declared ceasefire period, no missile strikes, air strikes, or attack drone strikes (of the Shahed/Gerbera type) were recorded." Russia's defence ministry accused Kyiv of nearly 2,000 breaches of the truce.

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will visit China this week, Beijing said on Monday, as the two sides hope to boost cooperation.



## Australia names first woman army chief

REUTERS, Sydney

Australia yesterday said a woman would lead its army for the first time in history, as part of a reshuffle of the country's defence force leadership.

Lieutenant General Susan Coyle, the current chief of joint capabilities, will become chief of army in July, the government said in a statement. She will replace Lieutenant General Simon Stuart.

Coyle's appointment comes as Australia's military seeks to boost the number of female officers in its ranks. It faces a wave of allegations of systematic sexual harassment and discrimination.

"From July, we will have the first ever female chief of army in the Australian Army's 125-year history," Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said in a statement.

Defence Minister Richard Marles called Coyle's appointment a "deeply historic moment."

"As Susan said to me, you cannot be what you cannot see," he said.

"Susan's achievement will be deeply significant to women who are serving in the Australian Defence Force today and women who are thinking about serving in the Australian Defence Force in the future."

Coyle, 55, enlisted in the military in 1987 and has held a number of senior command roles. She will be the first woman to lead any service branch of the military, Marles said.



People push an overturned vehicle damaged during a workers' protest in Noida, India, yesterday, after factory employees demanded wage hikes amid soaring living costs linked to the US-Israeli conflict with Iran.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Israeli strike kills 3 outside Gaza school

REUTERS, Gaza

An Israeli airstrike killed at least three Palestinians in the Gaza Strip yesterday, health officials said, as mediators met leaders from Hamas in an effort to shore up a US-brokered ceasefire deal.

Medics said the strike had hit a group of men outside a school in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip. There was no immediate comment by the Israeli military.

At Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah, the bodies of those killed lay on the ground in white shrouds outside the morgue as relatives and friends arrived to bid them farewell. Some kissed the victims' foreheads before holding special prayers.

"This isn't a truce; it's a trap for our young men. Every day there are martyrs, every single day. How long can this continue?" said Umm Hussam Abu El-Rous, a female relative of one of the victims.