

800+ US, Europe officials sign letter criticising Gaza policy

More than 800 officials in the US, the UK and the EU released a public letter of dissent Friday against their governments' support of Israel in its war in the Gaza Strip. The letter is the first instance of officials in allied nations across the Atlantic coming together to openly criticise their governments over the war, say current and former officials who are organising or supporting the effort.

The officials say that it is their duty as civil servants to help improve policy and to work in their nations' interests, and that they are speaking up because they believe their governments need to change direction on the war. The signers say they have raised concerns



30% OF GAZA INFRA DESTROYED
Satellite imagery analysed by the UN shows that 30% of Gaza's buildings have also been destroyed or damaged in the Israeli offensive

through internal channels but have been ignored.

"Our governments' current policies weaken their moral standing and undermine their ability to stand up for freedom, justice and human rights globally," the letter says, ac-

ording to a copy obtained Thursday by the New York Times. It adds that "there is a plausible risk that our governments' policies are contributing to grave violations of international humanitarian law, war crimes and even ethnic cleansing or genocide."

The document does not include the names of signers because they fear reprisal, said one organiser, an official who has worked in the state department for more than two decades. But about 800 current officials have given approval to the letter as it has quietly circulated among employees at the national level in multiple countries, the official said.

The effort reveals the extent to which pro-Israel polici-

es among American, British and European leaders have stirred dissent among civil servants, including many who carry out the foreign policies of their governments.

About 80 of the signers are from US agencies, with the biggest group being from the state department, one organiser said. The governing authority most represented among the signers is the collective EU institutions, followed by the Netherlands and the US. National-level officials from eight other member nations of Nato, as well as Sweden and Switzerland, have approved the letter, said another person familiar with the letter. Most of those supporters work in the foreign ministries of those nations. NYT

US bolsters its defences around Jordan base as it readies strikes

Iraq's Strongest Iran-Backed Militias Say They'll Continue To Target US Troops

Washington: The US has bolstered defences at a base in Jordan that was attacked by Iran-backed militants as it prepares for a wider US response to a drone attack that killed three service members, a US official said Friday. Even as a larger US military response seemed imminent, some Iran-backed factions pledged to continue to attack US forces in the region. In a statement, one of Iraq's strongest Iran-backed militias, Harakat al-Nujaba, announced its plans to continue military operations against US troops, despite other allied factions having called off their attacks in the wake of a Sunday drone strike in Jordan.

The US response against threats by Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen, who have been firing drones and missiles at commercial and military ships in the Red Sea, continued on Friday as well. A second US official confirmed the military had taken self-defence strikes inside Yemen against Houthi military targets deemed an imminent threat. Al-Masirah, a Houthi-run satellite news channel, said British and American forces conducted three strikes in the northern Yemeni province of Hajjah—a Houthi stronghold.

While previous US responses in Iraq and Syria have been more limited, the attack on Tower 22, as the Jordan outpost is known, and the deaths of the three service members has crossed a line, the official said. In response, the US is weighing a much wider response to include striking militia leaders. The US options under consideration include targets in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, where the Ira-



ALONE & LOST: The Unicef said Friday that at least 17,000 children in Gaza have been left unaccompanied. And, more than 1 million children in the conflict zone are in need of mental health support, it estimated

Israel eyes advancing into Gazans' last refuge: Rafah

Gaza: Israeli forces shelled the outskirts of the last refuge on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip on Friday, where the displaced, penned against the border fence in their hundreds of thousands, said they feared a new assault with nowhere left to flee. More than half of Gaza's 2.3 million residents are now homeless and crammed into Rafah. Tens of thousands more have arrived in recent days, carrying belongings in their arms and pulling children on carts, since Israeli forces launched one of the biggest assaults of the war last week to capture adjacent Khan Younis, the main southern city.

If the Israeli tanks keep coming, "we will be left with two choices: stay and die or climb the walls into Egypt", said Emad, 55, a businessman and father of six. "Most of Gaza's population are in Rafah. If the tanks storm in, it will be a mas-

sacre like never before."

Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant said late on Thursday that troops would now turn to Rafah. "We are achieving our missions in Khan Younis, and we will also reach Rafah and eliminate terror elements that threaten us," Gallant said.

As the only part of Gaza with access to the limited food and medical aid trickling across the border, Rafah and nearby parts of Khan Younis have become a warren of makeshift tents. Wind and cold weather have added to Palestinians' misery. The UN says rescuers can no longer reach the sick and wounded in Khan Younis, and the prospect of combat reaching Rafah is almost unthinkable. "Rafah is a pressure cooker of despair, and we fear for what comes next," Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said. REUTERS & NYT

nian-made drone that killed the service members was fired from, the official said.

The attack on Tower 22 led to the first deaths of US service members since the war between Israel and Hamas broke out. US response options were being weighed as President Joe Biden, defence secretary Lloyd Austin and chairman of the joint chiefs Gen. CQ Brown travelled to Dover air force base in Delaware to be with the families of those fallen soldiers as they are honoured at a transfer ceremony. The US has blamed the Jordan attack on the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-backed militias. In the days since the attack, the US has bolstered the defenses around Tower 22, which houses about 350 US troops and sits near the demilitarized zone on the border between Jordan and Syria. The Iraqi border is only 10km away.

On Thursday, Austin indicated that the US response against the militias would widen. "At this point, it's time to take away even more capability than we've taken in the past," Austin said. Austin said that Iran has had a hand in the attacks by supplying and training the militias. The US has tried to communicate through backchannels to Iran over the last few months to get them to rein in the militant groups, another US official said.

The US has also tried more limited military responses against weapons storage sites and training areas. So far, the US response has not deterred the groups, which have attacked US facilities at least 166 times since Oct. AP

Over 130 planes to take part in IAF's Vayu Shakti-2024 on 17th

NEW DELHI, Feb 2 (ANI)

ALL frontline aircraft, including the Rafale fighter jets and Prachand attack choppers, will take part in the Indian Air Force's Exercise Vayushakti, Air Force Vice Chief-Air Marshal AP Singh said on Friday. The exercise is scheduled to be held on February 17 in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer.

"All frontline aircraft, including the Rafale fighter jets and Prachand attack choppers, would be taking part in Exercise Vayushakti. We would also be airlifting Army guns in the exercise," AP Singh said here. The exercise Vayushakti has been

going on since 1954.

The Air Force Vice Chief said that the IAF would be showcasing its capability to carry out accurate bombing on targets in the exercise.

"The Made in India LCA Tejas, Prachand attack helicopters and ALH Dhruv would be taking part. In a span of two hours, we would be dropping around 40-50 tonnes of ordnance in a one- to two-kilometer radius," he said. "Army to fire weapons from Rudra choppers during the exercise and the Ultra Light Howitzer of the Army would be showcased underslung a Chinook chopper," he added.

UCC draft submitted to U'khand CM

DEHRADUN, Feb 2 (PTI)

A GOVERNMENT-appointed panel to prepare a draft of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) on Friday submitted a voluminous document to Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, who said the "long-awaited moment has arrived".

The draft will be examined, studied and discussed before it is tabled in the assembly on February 6, he said. A special four-day session of the assembly has already been convened from February 5-8 to pass a legislation on the UCC.

The draft in four volumes

containing 740 pages was handed over to Dhami by the five-member committee headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai.

All the panel members came to the Chief Minister's residence to submit the draft. Apart from Desai, other members of the panel are retired chief justice of Sikkim High Court Pramod Kohli, social activist Manu Gaur, former Uttarakhand chief secretary Shatrughan Singh and Vice Chancellor of Doon University Surekha Dangwal.

Receiving the draft, Dhami said, "It is yet another step towards the fulfillment of a commitment made to the people

before the Assembly polls of 2022." Dhami also released a music video titled "Aa Raha Hai UCC" (UCC is coming). The title song has been written and sung by Bhupendra Baseda and its tune composed by Rakesh Bhatt.

After getting a mandate for a second consecutive term in office, his Cabinet at its very first meeting decided to constitute the committee.

"The panel, which consists of erudite people, held a comprehensive dialogue with people representing different sections of the society, including the tribal people of the country's first village of Mana, before finalising the draft," he said.

India certain to become 3rd largest economy in our third term: Modi

NEW DELHI, Feb 2 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said India is moving fast and will become



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024 at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Friday. (PTI)

the world's third largest economy in the third term of his Government.

The general elections are due in April-May this year.

Addressing the Bharat Mobility Global Expo here, the prime minister also announced that 1,000 modern rest houses in Phase-1 will be constructed along national highways for truck and taxi drivers.

"India is certain to become the third largest economy in the

world in the third term of our Government," he said.

Further, Modi said that in the 10 years before 2014, around 12 crore vehicles were sold in the country. However, since 2014 more than 21 crore vehicles have been sold in the country, he added.

"We are challenging seas and mountains, and building engineering marvels in record time. From Atal Tunnel to Atal Setu, India's infrastructural development is creating new records. In the last 10 years, 75 new airports have been built. Around 4 lakh rural roads have been constructed," he said.

PM MODI INTERACTS WITH INDUSTRIALISTS AT BHARAT MOBILITY GLOBAL EXPO: PRIME Minister Narendra Modi will shortly address a programme at India's largest and first-of-its-kind mobility exhibition, Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024, at the newly constructed 'Bharat Mandapam' in the national capital.

Modi on Friday said the Government is working on a new scheme to develop modern facilities for truck and taxi drivers on the highways and construct 1,000 centres in the first phase. These facilities on the national highways would offer resting place, toilet, and drinking water for the drivers.

India to replace military personnel in 3 aviation platforms in Maldives by May 10

Around 80 Indian military personnel are in the Maldives primarily to operate two helicopters and an aircraft which carried out hundreds of medical evacuations and humanitarian missions

NEW DELHI, Feb 2 (PTI)

INDIA will replace its military personnel in the three aviation platforms in the Maldives by May 10 and the first phase of the process would be completed by March 10, the Maldivian Foreign Ministry said on Friday after a high-level meeting between the two sides on the contentious issue.

The Maldivian foreign Ministry's comments came hours after the India-Maldives core group con-

cluded a meeting in Delhi that primarily focused on withdrawal of Indian military personnel from the island nation.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said both sides agreed on a "set of mutually workable solutions" to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms in the island nation.

Last month, Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu asked India to withdraw all its military personnel from the island nation

by March 15.

"Both sides agreed that the Government of India will replace the military personnel in one of the three aviation platform by March 10 and will complete replacing military personnel in the other two platforms by May 10," the Maldivian Foreign Ministry said.

At present, around 80 Indian military personnel are in the Maldives primarily to operate two helicopters and an aircraft which carried out hundreds of medical evacuations and humanitarian missions.

The ties between the two countries came under some strain since Muizzu came to power in November.

North Korea tests more cruise missiles as Kim calls for war readiness

SEOUL, Feb 2 (AP)

NORTH Korean on Friday extended a provocative run in weapons tests by firing cruise missiles into the sea, as leader Kim Jong Un called for his military to step up war preparations while touring a shipyard.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the US and South Korean militaries were analysing the North Korean launches into its western sea. It said the South's military

detected multiple missiles but it did not immediately provide a specific number or an assessment of their flight characteristics.

The launches, which were the North's fourth round of cruise missile tests in 2024, came hours after state media reported that Kim reiterated his focus on strengthening his naval forces as he inspected unspecified naval projects at a shipyard in Nampho, on the west coast.

BHARAT RICE at Rs 29/kg in retail

NEW DELHI, Feb 2 (PTI)

THE Centre on Friday said it will sell 'Bharat Rice' in the retail market at Rs 29 per kg



from next week to give relief to the common man and has also directed traders to disclose rice/paddy stock, as

part of its efforts to control prices that have risen by around 15 per cent in the last one year. In a press conference, Union Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra exuded confidence that these two measures along with the various restrictions of exports will help

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