

Impending attack will test Israel's alliances

U.S. calls for evacuation of Rafah as Egypt warns of suspending peace deal

BY STEVE HENDRIX,
CLAIRE PARKER
AND MIRIAM BERGER

JERUSALEM — With its troops poised to attack Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city and possibly Hamas's final stronghold, Israel is confronting a dilemma largely of its own making: what to do with nearly a million and a half displaced Palestinians whom its military has corralled along the Egyptian border.

Israel faces growing warnings from allies and critics that its promised ground offensive in Rafah — a place of last resort that has seen its population grow fivefold in a matter of months — will result in a civilian bloodbath. Already strained humanitarian pipelines running through the border would collapse, the United Nations has said.

The standoff is testing Israel's most important alliances. Egyptian officials have threatened to suspend the countries' 40-year peace accord if an attack on Rafah forces refugees across the border; new footage obtained by The Washington Post suggests Egypt is preparing for such a scenario. President Biden has said the United States will not support a full-scale assault on Rafah unless Israel can carry out a "credible plan" to evacuate civilians in the line of fire.

"Many people there have been displaced — displaced multiple times ... and now they're packed into Rafah — exposed and vulnerable," Biden said Monday. "They need to be protected."

Israel is struggling to reconcile international pleas to protect innocents with demands from hardliners at home to deliver a decisive blow to Hamas militants embedded in Gaza's last population center. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed again Wednesday to attack Rafah, saying that Hamas has woven its remaining brigades, weapons and smuggling routes throughout the city.

Yehiya Sinwar, the architect of SEE ISRAEL ON A10

Radwan force: Israel increasingly focuses on elite Hezbollah unit. A10



MARY ALTAFFER/AP

Trial for Trump, tribulation for DA

In N.Y., jury selection set for March on hush money charges

BY SHAYNA JACOBS
AND DEVLIN BARRETT

NEW YORK — A judge ruled Thursday that jury selection for Donald Trump's hush money trial would begin March 25, setting a date with history for what would be the first criminal prosecution of an ex-president — one who also leads the Republican field of 2024 candidates for the White House.

Trump watched impassively from a defense table in Manhattan criminal court as New York Supreme Court Justice Juan Merchan said he will go forward with the trial on charges that Trump falsified business records during the heat of the 2016 political campaign to keep secret a past sexual liaison with an adult-film star. The judge said he expects the trial to take about six weeks.

Under that schedule, in which the trial would stretch from late March to early May, this spring's presidential nominating SEE NEW YORK ON A4



ALYSSA POINTER/AP

TOP: Former president Donald Trump leaves a hearing about his hush money case. **ABOVE:** Fulton County District Attorney Fani T. Willis testifies Thursday about her relationship with prosecutor Nathan Wade.

The Fix: Four takeaways from the dueling court hearings in New York and Georgia. A4

Truth Social: In win for Trump, SEC approves proposed merger involving his platform. A13

Georgia prosecutor accuses defense of lying in testimony

BY HOLLY BAILEY
AND AMY GARDNER

ATLANTA — Fulton County District Attorney Fani T. Willis (D) made a fiery appearance on the witness stand Thursday, challenging defense attorneys who she said spread "lies" about a romantic relationship she had with the special prosecutor she appointed to lead the election interference case against Donald Trump.

In an extraordinary two-hour appearance, a visibly angry Willis sparred with defense counsel who have sought to disqualify her and her office over allegations that she engaged in an improper personal relationship with Nathan Wade, the outside lawyer she appointed to lead the case.

Willis, who initially fought to avoid sworn testimony, appeared during a day-long evidentiary hearing on the misconduct claims that currently threaten to disrupt the Georgia case against Trump, one of four criminal cases the former president SEE GEORGIA ON A5

Biden's lawyers bashed report

LETTERS LAY BARE
A FIGHT WITH DOJ

Comments on memory drew furious pushback

BY MATT VISER

President Biden's top attorneys exchanged confrontational letters with top Justice Department officials before and after last week's explosive report from special counsel Robert K. Hur, contending that Hur's comments "openly, obviously, and blatantly violate Department policy and practice."

The letters, obtained by The Washington Post, show that Biden's legal team was deeply upset over the tone of the report, which it reviewed before its public release. The document created political shock waves by describing Biden as "an elderly man with a poor memory" and calling his practice of keeping notebooks that contained sensitive information "totally irresponsible."

Among other things, Biden's lawyers argued that Hur had no reason to assemble a 388-page report in the first place. Justice Department regulations dictate that if no charges are filed, the special counsel should send a confidential report to the attorney general explaining that decision.

The letters highlight the conflict that has erupted between the president's team and Attorney General Merrick Garland, who is now accused by Biden's attorneys of breaking the department's norms after being appointed to reestablish them following the Trump presidency.

Garland did not respond directly to Biden's legal team. Instead, Associate Deputy Attorney General Bradley Weinsheimer, the Justice Department's senior career official, wrote back supporting the document's wording.

"The identified language is neither gratuitous nor unduly prejudicial because it is not offered to criticize or demean the President," Weinsheimer wrote to Biden's SEE BIDEN ON A7

Informant: Prosecutors say an FBI source lied about the Bidens. A6

In Myanmar, reports of a fracturing military

Defectors and captives tell of mass surrenders, overstretched logistics as rebels make key gains

BY REBECCA TAN, YAN NAING
AND ANDREW NACHEMSON

Accounts from Myanmar army soldiers who have surrendered or defected over the past three months reveal that the military is suffering from plunging morale and overstretched logistics amid a rebel offensive that has prompted mass surrenders.

These accounts, provided by more than 30 soldiers, suggest that the rebels' recent battlefield successes go beyond mere territorial gains and are undermining the cohesion of the forces defending Myanmar's military junta.

On the battlefield, where pro-democracy fighters and ethnic insurgents are waging a multi-front campaign, calls by army units for reinforcements and resupply of ammunition have frequently gone unanswered, former commanders said. One soldier said rations for his battalion ran so low that troops disguised themselves as civilians to buy SEE MYANMAR ON A18



AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Myanmar troops parade last March in the capital, Naypyidaw, to mark 78th Armed Forces Day.

Sad repetition of tragedy in a U.S. public square

Shooting at Chiefs rally raises concerns about safety at large gatherings

BY ANNIE GOWEN,
JOANNA SLATER
AND KARIN BRULLIARD

KANSAS CITY, MO. — Two longtime football fans climbed a hill Thursday to pray over the spot where shooting erupted after a rally to celebrate the Kansas City Chiefs' Super Bowl victory. Strewn confetti and overturned barricades were visual reminders of the deadly tragedy that unfolded Wednesday afternoon.

"My city, my town," Catrina Wiltz said with a sigh, surveying the damage.

"What's sad is that it's calling into question the way we live," said her husband, Elbert Wiltz. "Are we going to be a society that

can't gather? That's a tragedy."

Police said Thursday that they were sorting out why gunfire erupted between several people at the conclusion of Wednesday's rally for the Chiefs, leaving one Johnson County mother of two dead and more than 20 with gunshot wounds, at least half of them under age 16. Two juveniles were in police custody Thursday as the investigation continued, police said.

Police Chief Stacey Graves said the violence had "no nexus to terrorism or homegrown violent extremism."

But the tragic incident raised fresh questions over safety in the American public square — and whether the proliferation of gun violence is rendering large-scale gatherings untenable for many, especially parents fearful for their children's safety.

The city's mayor, Quenton Lucas (D), said in interviews that while a St. Patrick's Day parade SEE SHOOTING ON A6

IN THE NEWS

Historic launch A SpaceX rocket is headed to the moon, carrying what would be the first commercial vehicle on the lunar surface. A2

13-hour standoff More details emerged on the barricade situation in D.C. as prosecutors filed charges against a man they say fired on officers trying to take him into custody. B1

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An inspector general report portrayed a flawed Federal Bureau of Prisons. A7

THE WORLD Ukraine is on the verge of losing Avdiivka, a strategic city long targeted by Russia. A8
Supporters of Ukraine in the House are exploring options to force a vote on war aid. A9

THE ECONOMY The world's biggest builder of recycling plants is teaming up with an AI start-up to help the facilities better sort waste items. A12
The Senate is poised to pass major bipartisan legislation designed to help protect children online. A13

THE REGION D.C.'s first sobering center to ease drug and alcohol addiction exceeded 1,000 admissions in a little more than three months. B1
Two trans students sued the Virginia Department of Education over transgender policy in schools. B1

STYLE Charlie Wilson, singer for the Gap Band, faced tough obstacles on the route to getting his star on the Walk of Fame. C1
WEEKEND Looking for a nice, comforting bowl of ramen? We have 10 great places in the D.C. region to get your fill.

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