



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi arrives for a press conference on the sideline of the National People's Congress in Beijing, China



Uruguay's incoming President Yamandu Orsi and Vice Prez Carolina Cosse wave as they ride in an open car on Inauguration Day, in Montevideo, Uruguay



Young people dance waltz during the opening ceremony of the Elmayer-Kränzchen, a Traditional Ball of the Elmayer Dance School in Vienna, Austria



Muslim men perform during the first Friday prayer of the fasting month of Ramadan at Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia

allovertheworld



The booster of SpaceX's mega rocket Starship is recaptured during a test flight from Starbase in Boca Chica, Texas

Three dead in South Africa restaurant shooting

JOHANNESBURG: Three people were shot dead in an altercation over firearms at an upmarket restaurant in South Africa's economic hub Johannesburg, police said Friday. It is the latest in a string of shootouts that reinforces the country's bleak status as a murder capital. Thursday night's incident was sparked when the restaurant in Sandton - Africa's richest square mile - told a businessman they did not allow guns on its premises. "A man with a firearm wanted to enter the restaurant which has a no firearm policy," police said in a statement. "That is when the altercation started leading to a shooting between the man's bodyguards and securities." Two of the bodyguards died at the scene and the man died of his injuries at the hospital. Four other people, including two restaurant customers, were nursing gunshot wounds, police said.

German airports to be hit by labour strike on Monday

BERLIN: Major disruptions loom at German airports on Monday, including a total shutdown of flights at Berlin, after a services union announced strike action for better pay for ground personnel. The industrial action will also hit the country's biggest airport in Frankfurt as well as hubs in Bremen, Cologne, Dortmund, Duesseldorf, Hamburg, Hanover, Leipzig, Munich and Stuttgart. The ver.di union said Friday it was calling on public sector workers and some 23,000 employees of ground handling service providers to go on an all-day warning strike on March 10. "There will be massive restrictions on departures and arrivals, including flight cancellations," ver.di said in a statement. "We regret the inconvenience that this strike will cause for passengers," said the union's deputy chair Christine Behle. "But without the pressure of industrial action, there will be no movement in the negotiations."

Philippines set to sign visiting forces deal with Canada

MANILA: The Philippines and Canada have negotiated a deal for the deployment of troops, Manila said Friday, it what will be once signed the latest security pact in the face of increasingly tense confrontations with China. Manila's defence department said it and Canada had "successfully concluded negotiations", but gave no timetable for when a deal would be signed. "This agreement will establish a framework for increased cooperation", the statement read, saying it would foster "closer collaboration between defence and military establishments". The deal "underscores the Philippines' commitment to bolstering international partnerships and promoting regional security", it added. Manila already has similar pacts with the United States, Australia and Japan, against a backdrop of China's actions in the disputed South China Sea.

Three dead, five missing in Indonesia floods and landslides

JAKARTA: Floods and landslides on Indonesia's main island of Java killed three people and left five more missing after heavy rains inundated two dozen towns, an official said Friday. Torrential rains this week hit capital Jakarta and its surrounding cities, forcing thousands of residents to evacuate and authorities to use weather modification technology. But the bad weather carried on in neighbouring West Java province Thursday, hitting most parts of its Sukabumi district, damaging houses and flooding hundreds of public facilities including schools and hospitals. At least three people, including a child, were found dead, and five people in two separate districts were still missing, according to the local disaster agency.

Nigerian senator suspended after filing sexual harassment claim

ABUJA: A lawmaker in Nigeria has been suspended from her office after she complained of sexual harassment by the Senate president, sparking protests and condemnation from feminist groups. Senator Natasha Akpoti Uduaghan accused the legislative body's president, Godswill Akpabio, of making unwanted advances towards her in an interview with Nigerian media last week and filed a petition against him. She was then suspended for six months, a move that was justified over an earlier argument that erupted in the Senate chambers about a change in her seating arrangement. Separately, the sexual harassment petition was rejected on procedural grounds.

Russia attacks Ukraine's energy supplies with dozens of missiles, drones

AP, KYIV: Russia attacked Ukrainian energy facilities with dozens of missiles and drones during the night, officials said Friday, hobbling the country's ability to deliver heat and light to its citizens and to power weapons factories vital to its defences. The overnight barrage - which also pounded residences and wounded at least 10 people - came days after the US suspended military aid and intelligence to Ukraine to pressure it into accepting a peace deal being pushed by the Trump administration.

Without US intelligence, Ukraine's ability to strike inside Russia and defend itself from bombardment is significantly diminished. Air-defence systems supplied by the West are crucial for Ukraine, but further US help is uncertain under President Donald Trump, who says he's determined to end the war.

European Union leaders, mindful they may need to shoulder more of the burden for arming Ukraine and strengthening their own defences, agreed on a plan Thursday to significantly build up their military spending. Ukraine is having a tough time on the battlefield. An onslaught by Russia's bigger army is straining short-handed Ukrainian



A firefighter extinguishes a burning car at a site of a Russian strike in Kharkiv, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine

forces at places along the 1,000-kilometre front line. Officials from the US and Ukraine will meet in Saudi Arabia next week to discuss ending the war, which began more than three years ago when Russia launched a full-scale invasion. On Friday, President Trump said on social media he was "strongly considering" placing additional sanc-



A local resident stands in front of a damaged car and house, a day after a Russian strike on a suburb of Odesa, Ukraine

tions on Russia to force it into peace talks with Ukraine. "To Russia and Ukraine, get to the table right now, before it is too late," Trump said. Ukraine came under a "massive missile and drone" attack overnight, Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko wrote on Facebook. "Russia is trying to hurt ordinary Ukrainians by striking energy and gas production facilities, without abandoning its goal of leaving us without light and heat, and causing the greatest harm to ordinary citizens," Halushchenko wrote. Russia has repeatedly targeted Ukraine's power grid during the war. The attacks have depleted electricity generation capacity and disrupted critical heating and water supplies.

Portugal may head for 3rd election in 3 years

AP, LISBON: Portugal could be headed for its third general election in three years after parliament on Friday scheduled a confidence vote on the centre-right minority government, which has been under pressure for weeks over the business ties of Prime Minister Luis Montenegro.

A large majority of opposition lawmakers say they will vote to remove the government from power. The government, made up of the Social Democratic Party and its smaller ally the Popular Party, has just 80 seats in the 230-seat legislature. It has been in office for less than a year. The government asked for parliament to schedule the confidence motion, saying it was needed to "dispel uncertainty" about the government's ability to put its policies into practice.

Sri Lankan Navy arrests 14 Indian fishermen

PTI, COLOMBO: The Sri Lankan Navy on Friday said it arrested 14 Indian fishermen and seized a fishing boat for allegedly poaching in the country's territorial waters.

The Navy arrested the Indian fishermen during a special operation conducted in the sea area south of Mannar on Thursday night. The seized boat and Indian fishermen were brought to the Talpadu Pier in Mannar and will be handed over to the Fisheries Inspector of Mannar for onward legal proceedings, the Navy said in a statement.

The Navy continues to conduct regular patrols and operations in Sri Lankan waters to curb illegal fishing practices of foreign fishing boats, taking into account the impact of those practices on the livelihood of local fishermen, the statement said.

Sri Lankan authorities on February 23 arrested 32 Indian fishermen and seized 5 fishing boats for allegedly venturing into the country's territorial waters.

WB estimates \$11 b needed for reconstruction of Lebanon

PTI, BEIRUT: The cost of reconstruction and recovery for Lebanon following the 14-month Israel-Hezbollah war is estimated at USD 11 billion, the World Bank said in a new report Friday.

ISRAEL HEZBOLLAH WAR

The war killed over 4,000 people in Lebanon, displaced hundreds of thousands and caused widespread destruction in the nation.

The report by the World

Bank's Lebanon Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment covered damage and losses in ten sectors across the country from Oct 8, 2023 until Dec 20, 2024. Hezbollah began firing rockets across the border on Oct 8, 2023, one day after a deadly Hamas-led incursion into southern Israel that sparked the war in Gaza. Israel responded with shelling and airstrikes in Lebanon, and the two sides became locked in an escalating conflict that became a

full-blown war in late September. A US-brokered ceasefire went into effect in late November. The World Bank report estimated that of the \$11 billion in reconstruction and recovery needs, \$3 to \$5 billion will need to be publicly financed, including for infrastructure sectors. It added that private financing is required for about \$6 to \$8 billion of the costs, mostly in the housing, commerce, industry, and tourism sectors.

Police in Bangladesh use batons, teargas to disperse rally by banned Islamist group

PTI, DHAKA: Police used batons and stun grenades on Friday to disperse thousands of members of the banned Hizbut Tahrir group as they marched near Bangladesh's main Baitul Mokarram Mosque in the country's capital.

Police said many people were injured and several protesters were arrested

during the violence which came after weekly prayers.

Masud Alam, a deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said attempts were made to disperse the rally after marchers broke away from the police barricade. Witnesses said scores of people were injured.

The incident happened as between 3,000 to 5,000

protesters joined the procession, chanting slogans such as Freedom has one path, Khilafat, Khilafat and Naraye Taqbir, Allahu Akbar.

The Islamist group had mounted a social media campaign in recent days and distributed leaflets and used posters across Dhaka urging people to join the procession, dubbed March for Khilafat.

Children get tooth brushing lessons as UK battles dental care crisis

AFP, LONDON: England on Friday launched a national campaign to teach children in schools and nurseries how to brush their teeth properly, as the nation grapples with a dental health crisis.

Up to six in 10 children in some deprived areas have rotting teeth by the age of five, according to official data.

Concern over the state of children's teeth comes amid a population-wide emergency in dental services that has seen people resorting to "Victorian-era" solutions such as pulling out their own teeth.

"1 in 5 five-year-olds have tooth decay in the UK," Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on X as the scheme - expected to reach 600,000 children aged between three and five years -- was rolled out.

The British Dental Association says around 12 million people are currently looking for an NHS dentist providing free care as increasing numbers of practi-

tioners turn their backs on the NHS in favour of more lucrative private practice.

According to OECD data, the UK has 49 dentists per 100,000 inhabitants -- the lowest rate among G7 countries.

Starmer's Labour government, elected in July, has promised to make 700,000 extra dental appointments available.

Dentists, however, said last month this will cover only a third of those who need urgent care.

"It is shocking that a third of five-year-olds in the most deprived areas have experience of tooth decay, something we know can have a lifelong impact on their health," Health Minister Stephen Kinnock said.

The £11 million (\$14.2 million) initiative for supervised tooth brushing will be targeted at the most deprived areas of the country.

But it was criticised by some for shifting a "parental responsibility" onto the shoulders of schools.

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VELSAO ON THE BOILS AS RLYS START WORK AGAIN

The panchayat had not lifted the stop-work order, despite requests from South Western Railway officials, who had met with locals earlier and promised to halt construction. The railway officials had agreed to first present revised plans addressing the traditional access issue and restoring the drainage system. However, they proceeded with the work without fulfilling their commitments, further aggravating tensions.

Railway officials defended their actions, asserting that they had sought clarification on land boundaries from the land and survey department, with hearings still ongoing. They claimed that the ongoing construction was vital for the region's double-tracking project, which they argued would bring long-term benefits. However, their explanation failed to pacify the villagers, who accused the railways of using police presence to intimidate the local population.

The situation took a more serious turn when South Goa MP Captain Viriato Fernandes arrived at the scene around noon. Fernandes engaged with RVNL contractors, local Police Inspector Melson Colaco, and panchayat officials to broker a resolution. He was later joined by the Talathi, Mamlatdar, and Vasco Deputy Superintendent of Police (DySP) Gurdas Kadam as discussions continued throughout the day. PI Kapil Naik from Vasco police station also arrived with a substantial police presence, escalating the already tense atmosphere.

During the discussions, Fernandes, Gouveia, Goencho Ekvott founder Orville Dourado Rodrigues and local Congress leader Olencio Simoes emphasised that the railways had failed to provide evidence of land ownership, while residents possessed Portuguese-era title documents proving their ownership of the land. "How can you proceed with construction in a disputed area without proper documentation? This is a clear violation of the villagers' rights," Fernandes argued.

Locals contended that the railway's actions were illegal, blocking their traditional access and leaving them landlocked. Several homes, some of which are heritage properties, have had their compound walls damaged, and the destruction of drainage systems has raised fears of waterlogging during the monsoon. "We are trapped in our own homes. This is not development; this is destruction," one

resident stated, reflecting the collective frustration of the community.

Despite the efforts of MP Fernandes and local leaders to resolve the situation, the railways resumed their mud dumping activities at around 4 pm, deepening the villagers' anger. "They are acting as if they are above the law. This is our land, and they have no right to destroy it," another resident said, as heavy machinery continued to disrupt the area.

2 IAF AIRCRAFTS CRASH IN SEPARATE INCIDENTS

The crash took place at around 3.45 pm. The aircraft had taken off from the Ambala airbase, according to officials. Police officials said the pilot maneuvered the aircraft away from any habitation on the ground, and there was no loss of life or injury reported to anyone on the ground.

The aircraft fell in a hilly forest area near Raipur Rani in Haryana's Panchkula district

"The IAF aircraft crashed in the hilly terrain of Panchkula district (near Morni hills). The pilot ejected safely," SHO of the Raipur Rani Police Station in Panchkula district told PTI over the phone.

In a separate incident, an AN-32 transport aircraft of the IAF crash-landed in Bagdogra, officials said.

The crew of the AN-32 aircraft are safe, and the aircraft is being recovered from the site, they said.

The AN-32 is a Russian-origin aircraft.

US WANTS FULL ACCESS TO INDIA MKT

"...it's time to do something big, something grand, something that connects India and the US together, but does it on a broad scale, not product-by-product, but rather the whole thing. Let's bring India's tariff policy towards America down," he said at the India Today Conclave.

In the agriculture sector, he said the Indian agriculture market has to open up, and it can not just stay closed.

"Now, how do you do that? And the scale by which you do that? Maybe you do quarters. Maybe do limits. You can be smarter when you have your most important trading partner on the other side of the table."

On India, US military, and diplomatic relations, he said that India has historically bought significant amounts of its military from Russia, and "we think" that is something that needs to end.

ing that quotas or limits can be used.

Lutnick also said that countries like India have one of the highest tariffs in the world, and that is why US President Donald Trump is talking about imposing reciprocal tariffs.

Tariffs are import duties imposed and collected by the government and paid by the companies to bring foreign goods into the country.

"How you treat us is how we would like to treat you. And I would like to tell you that India has some of the highest tariffs in the world, and that will require a rethinking of the relationship, the special relationship, between India and the United States," he said.

He suggested India to cut down the tariff levels and look at the trading opportunities with America in a special and unique way.

On whether it is possible to finalise the agreement by the fall of this year, he said, "If the time frame was designed to do motorcycles and bourbon and this product and that product...it would take forever."

Given the size of the two countries, America is interested in doing a broad-based trade agreement with India, he added.

On India's reservations for including the agri sector in the trade deal, the US Commerce Secretary said: "Your government truly understands your market, and we understand ours, and the key is to try to find that place. So, yes, the Indian market for agriculture, it has to open up. It can't just stay closed."

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"India is the eye in BRICS...trying to create a currency to replace the dollar as the global economic currency of the world...These kinds of things do not create the love and affection that we really deeply feel towards India."

"We would like those things to end, and we would like trade to be more fair, and we would like to create an incredible and strong and powerful relationship with India going forward. But those particular things, for example, are on the table for discussion, and your tariffs...are on the table for discussion," he added.