

Thought of the Day
And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.
- Paulo Coelho



PM Inspects Mo Chit 2 Station Ahead of Songkran

Page 3



AAP has forgotten the promises it failed to fulfill : Prof. Chandumajra

Page 4



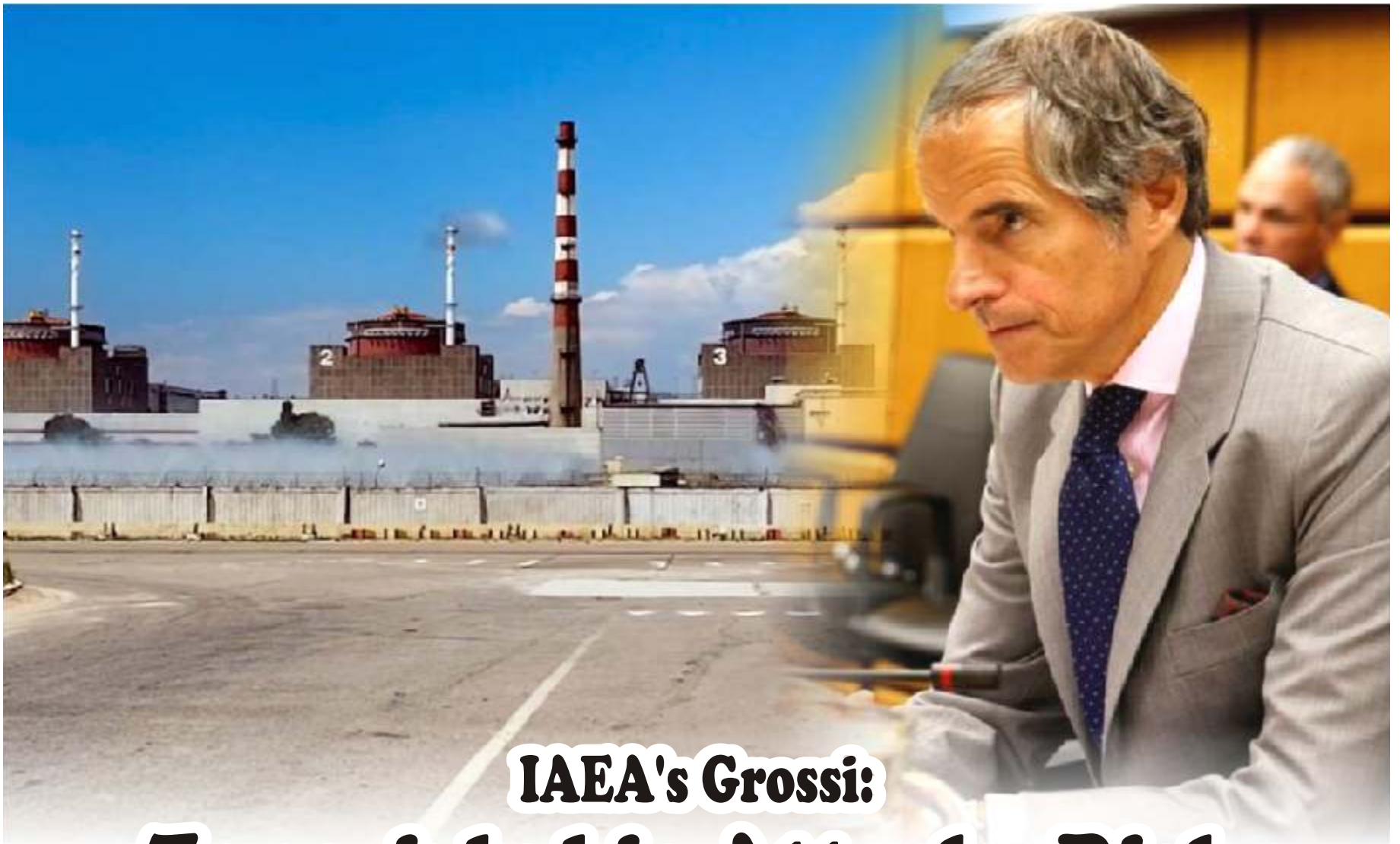
Chile President Recalls Ambassador in Venezuela for Consultations

Page 10



Support From 'Indispensable' US Vital for Ukraine's Survival, Japan PM Tells Congress

Page 11



IAEA's Grossi:

Zaporizhzhia Attacks Risk

'Dangerous' Shift in Ukraine War

• **Vienna (Austria)**

Drone attacks on the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine must stop as they could pose "a new and gravely dangerous" stage in the war, the U.N.

nuclear watchdog chief told his agency's 35-nation Board of Governors on Thursday.

Drones attacked Zaporizhzhia, Europe's biggest nuclear power plant, on Sunday, hitting a reactor building in the worst such incident since November

2022, though nuclear safety was not compromised, the International Atomic Energy Agency has said.

Moscow and Kyiv have repeatedly accused one another of targeting the plant since Russia seized it weeks after it invaded Ukraine. Both countries

requested an emergency meeting of the IAEA's Board soon after Sunday's attack. "The most recent attacks ... have shifted us into an acutely consequential juncture in this war," IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said in a statement to the Board gathering.

Rest on Page 2

China Sanctions Two US Defence Firms for Selling Taiwan Weapons

• **Beijing (China)**

China has banned the senior executives of two U.S. defence companies from entering the country and frozen their property in response to their arms sales to Taiwan, the foreign ministry said on Thursday.

The measures effective from Thursday were against General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, which manufactures unmanned aerial systems, and military vehicle maker General Dynamics Land Systems, a unit of General Dynamics.

China said the arms sales "seriously interferes" in its internal affairs and "damages" China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"The continued sale of arms by the United States to China's Taiwan region is a serious violation of the one-China principle and the provisions of the three joint communiqués of the United States and China," it said.

China said it has frozen the firms' properties in China



Contd. on Page 2

EU Lawmakers Urge Von Der Leyen to Drop Business Envoy in Cronyism Row

• **Brussels (Belgium)**

The European Union's parliament called on the bloc's top executive, Ursula von der Leyen, on Thursday to rescind the appointment of a business envoy that critics have linked to cronyism.

The European Commission, the EU's executive body, reiterated that it followed all the rules in picking Markus Pieper, a lawmaker from von der Leyen's German centre-right party, as a special envoy for small- and medium-sized businesses.

The appointment has become a subject of fierce debate in Brussels ahead of elections to the European Parliament in June. Von der Leyen is seeking a second term as European Commission president as the candidate of the EU's centre-right parties.

Von der Leyen's opponents in other parties have pointed to media reports that the Commission rejected two other candidates who scored



Contd. on Page 2

Maha Songkran World Water Festival 2024 Unveiled with Epic Spectacle

Page 3 News

• Bangkok / 11 April

The "Maha Songkran World Water Festival 2024" opened today with an epic cultural spectacle, bringing the glory of Thai traditions and cultures as well as historical significance from all regions of the country to Bangkok within one evening in a one-kilometre stretch of 20 grand processions and over 1,000 performers showcasing the pride of the nation.

Tourism and Sports Minister, Ms. Sudawan Wangsuphakijkosol, said "This extravagant parade is a rare spectacle in the heart of Bangkok. It celebrates the time-honoured traditions of 'Songkran in Thailand, the traditional Thai New Year festival' that is listed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. Everyone is welcome to be a part of celebrating the traditional beliefs and local traditions that set Songkran in Thailand apart from all other countries."

Heading the Maha Songkran World Water Festival 2024 parade was the Procession of the Golden Buddha image, and the Maha Songkran Procession with exquisite float carrying the Nang Songkran goddess of 2024 – Mahodhara Devi, presented by Miss Antonia Porsild, Miss Universe 2023 first runner-up.

The second section of the parade was the vibrant Songkran proces-



sions, showcasing grand festivities from 16 provinces: Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Chon Buri, Samut Prakan, and Nakhon Si Thammarat, whose unique traditions Thailand is preparing to enlist as 'Intellectual Property Festivals.'

Chiang Rai, Nong Khai, Phitsanulok, Songkhla, and Buri Ram, where Songkran festivities are recognised as distinctive. Ayutthaya, Nakhon Phanom, Lampang, Loei, Sukhothai and Phuket where Songkran traditions are to be further promoted. The last section of the parade com-

prised the procession of soft powers – games, festivals, and films and series, the KOL procession, and the LGBTQ procession.

The opening parade on 11 April started from the Phan Fa Lilat Bridge, marching along Ratchadamnoen Klang Avenue and in circle around Sanam Luang. The march covered about 2.5 kilometres.

Another parade is scheduled on 12 April, starting at 17.30 Hrs. and will march in circle around Sanam Luang only.

Throughout five days, Sanam Luang will be the main location for

the Maha Songkran World Water Festival 2024.

Cultural and musical performances as well as contemporary and orchestra performances will be taking place at the main stage. Songkran traditions and festivities unique to the Northern, North-eastern, Eastern, Central and Southern regions of Thailand will be on display at a dedicated zone. In relation to these activities and showcases as well as DIY workshops of local arts and handicrafts from the five regions.

There will also be displays and activities related to Thai soft

power including Muay Thai Maha Songkran and Thai summer dishes.

Amazing splash activities will be at the water zone with musical dancing fountain, water tunnel, gigantic wading pool, and water station.

Other activities include a drone show and a fair selling local products from across the country.

On 13 April, the traditional Thai New Year, there will be a merit-making ceremony and other activities promoting Thai traditions, including the Song Nam Phra ritual of purifying a Buddha image with scented water as a way of paying respect to the Lord Buddha and bringing good fortune to the person and the Rot Nam Dam Hua ritual – where young people prepare scented water with which to wash their parents' or elders' hands to ask for blessing.

Recognising the importance of organising an environmentally sustainable event, TAT, in partnership with PTT Global Chemical, organises a GCYOU Turn activity for plastic waste management. Visitors are encouraged to discard waste plastic bottles at any of the 20 'YOU Turn Drop Points' for a souvenir or join in DIY upcycling activities such as turning plastic bottle caps into a keychain and bottle opener or buy upcycling products such as floral printed shirts made of plastic waste.

Ministry of Labour Advocates for Standardized Muay Thai Instructor Skills

Page 3 News

• Bangkok / 11 April

Minister of Labour Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn has assigned the Secretariat to the Labour Minister, Aree Krainara, to visit and observe the national occupational skill testing for the service sector, specifically the Muay Thai instructor level 1. This initiative is part of the government's soft power policy. The testing took place at the Muay Thai training facility at the indoor sports training center of the Sports Authority of Thailand in Bangkok. The Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) has been authorized by the Department of Skill Development, the Min-

istry of Labour, to serve as a testing center for the national skill standard for Muay Thai instructors at Level 1, among a total of 16 other authorized centers nationwide.

In this round of testing, there were 12 participants, including 8 who had completed the C-License Muay Thai qualified Trainer program of the SAT, one trainer who was preparing to work as a Thai boxing instructor abroad, and 3 Thai boxing instructors from local camps in Thailand.

Aree stated that the testing center designated by the Sports Authority of Thailand is ready in terms of facilities, equipment, and amenities that meet the required stan-

dard. Additionally, there is a committee to oversee the testing process, along with training programs provided to impart knowledge in Thai boxing. Moreover, there exists a vast network within the Thai boxing community. Therefore, the Sports Authority of Thailand has been recognized as a testing center for the national skill standard for Muay Thai instructors at Level 1. It can accommodate the needs of businesses and professionals in the Thai boxing industry, including those who wish to work domestically or internationally as instructors or open their own Thai boxing schools. Services extend from training to the testing process for

occupational skill standards.

Additionally, the Department of Skill Development, in partnership with the Sports Authority of Thailand, is testing Level 1 Muay Thai instructors' occupational skill standards for Thai workers abroad. This initiative aims to improve Thai workers' Muay Thai instruction skills overseas and establish internationally recognized standards for employers and businesses. Testing for Level 1 Muay Thai instructor standards is planned in cities including Shanghai, China, England, and the United Arab Emirates, targeting a minimum of 80 participants.

TAT launches new campaign targeting shoppers from ASEAN, India

Page 3 News

• Bangkok / 11 April

The Tourism Authority of Thailand has launched a new campaign targeting shoppers from Southeast Asia and India, as part of its effort to boost the Thai economy and make Thailand the tourism destination for Southeast Asia. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has launched a campaign called "ASEAN+India Shoppers in Thailand," hoping to encourage more spending and repeat visits. The TAT has joined hands with business partners to provide



special privileges to visitors shopping or using services

at participating stores, from 29 April to 15 June. TAT Governor Thapanee Kiatphaibool said this campaign will position Thailand as the regional tourism destination of Southeast Asia, in

line with the government's Single Destination vision for Thailand. The TAT expects to see 10 million visitors from Southeast Asia this year. The number of visitors from India alone is anticipated to reach 1.7 million, thanks to the visa exemption policy granted to short-term Indian passport holders.

Thailand, EU Discuss Bilateral Relations and Cooperation

Page 3 News

• Bangkok / 11 April

Director-General of the Department of European Affairs Krongkanit Rakcharoen extended a warm welcome to H.E. Mr. David Daly, the Ambassador of the EU to Thailand. Both sides engaged in discussions regarding Thailand-EU relations and a path forward for bilateral cooperation.

Topics included the expedition of the Thailand-EU FTA negotiations, just and fair green transition, Schengen visa waiver, and more frequent exchange of high-level visits, among others.

Both sides have prepared for the 17th Thai-EU Senior Officials' Meet-



ing (SOM), scheduled for June 4, 2024, in Bangkok. The objective of the meeting is to evaluate and establish the direction of Thailand-EU relations in accordance with the Thailand-EU Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). Represent-

tatives from both Thailand and the EU reaffirmed the importance of dialogue and communication, especially on combating IUU fishing and providing capacity-building and know-how to help Thai entrepreneurs better adapt to the EU green measures.

PM Inspects Mo Chit 2 Station Ahead of Songkran

Page 3 News

• Bangkok / 11 April

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin reviewed the facility's progress and readiness for the public's safe travel during the 2024 Songkran festival.

He suggested installing more LED screens for advertisements to increase revenue and entertain passengers awaiting buses. The Prime Minister also emphasized the importance of monitoring bus drivers' health and conducting thorough drug tests. Afterward, he inspected the newly renovated restrooms, noting the importance of maintaining cleanliness due to their frequent use by the public. He found the 10



baht charge for premium restroom services reasonable, given their quality. He also visited the upgraded passenger waiting areas, which now offer additional seating.

The Prime Minister mentioned that feedback from passengers was positive, with satisfaction regarding cleanliness and the improvements made in the last seven months.

He praised the ministers' commitment to improving public convenience, including the introduction of online booking services at fair prices. The food court, with its reasonable pricing, received an 8 out of 10 rating. He recognized that special efforts might have been made for his visit and hinted at the possibility of future, unannounced inspections.

Rashtriya Jan Jan Party (RJJ) aunched a transformative electoral campaign in Amritsar

Page3News

• Amritsar / 11 April

Today, the Rashtriya Jan Jan Party (RJJ), under the visionary leadership of Mr. Ashutosh Kumar, the National Party President, launched a transformative electoral campaign in Amritsar, blessed by the memory of Guru Ram Das Ji. With the formidable Dr. Rajiv Kaur, the President Punjab State, at the helm of this initiative, the RJJ presented a manifesto that promises to revolutionize education, healthcare, and employment under the guidance of their passionate leaders. Dr. Manjit Gill, the Youth President of All India, has announced that education will be free up to the Bachelor of Arts degree, symbolizing a gateway to empowerment and equity. Moreover, with leaders like Mr. Barinderpal Gill President Transport wing Punjab Mr. Sharnjit Singh, Vice Presidents of the Transport Wing in Punjab, and Mr. Kanwaljit Singh, the President of Agriculture wing Punjab, the party is offering a health card for a nominal INR 50 per year, ensuring healthcare is a right, not a privilege. In an empathetic outreach to the state's drivers, the RJJ, inspired by the grassroots wisdom of leaders like Karan, Prabh Shergill, and Akash



Randhawa, proposed a health card for only INR 2, ensuring comprehensive care and significant financial aid in the face of accidents. This initiative, along with the assurance of INR 100,000 to the families who

face the loss of a loved one, reflects the party's deep commitment to its citizens. Employment strategies, championed by the youthful exuberance of Ashu Shergill, Navtej Mahal, and Vansh Gill,

are set to catalyze a new era of economic prosperity. Additionally, Aman Gill, Amrit Cheema, and Vishal Randhawa's advocacy for international trade opportunities promises that farmers will be rewarded justly

for their harvests. Shiva Kochar, Karan Mahal, and Gurminder Singh echo the party's pledge to elevate Punjab's status on the global stage, ensuring that the agrarian community is uplifted through fair trade practices. The RJJ's groundbreaking manifesto challenges the status quo with a vision that melds progress with compassion. If realized, their promises could elevate them to power amidst resounding public support, marking the dawn of a new era for the state—a period of unprecedented welfare and prosperity for all. The RJJ stands in solidarity, ready to transform their words into action, and assure the citizens of an upcoming governance that prioritizes their well-being and the state's future.

Dr. Bhupinderjit Singh Suri was honored by the Baba Balraj Committee

Page3News /

Jatinderpal Singh Kaler
• Balachaur / 11 April

Baba Balraj Mandir committee today honored Dr. Bhupinderjit Singh Suri, a prominent social worker and messiah of the poor of Balachore at Suri Hospital Bhadi Road Balachore. On this occasion, Dr. Bhupinderjit Singh Suri said that it has always been an effort of his to help the needy families as much as possible. On this occasion, the committee of Baba Balraj Mandir has honored



him and said that the society of such a social worker. Much more is needed. Who always take the initiative and work in social work, on

this occasion the President of Baba Balraj Temple Committee Vishu Rana, Rana Randeep Consul, Vishal Rana etc. were present.

Medical and Blood Donation Camp on 13th April :Prem Hakkala

Page3News /

Jatinderpal Singh Kaler
• Nawanshahr / 11 April

Like every year, this year also on the auspicious day of Baisakhi, by the holy grace of Baba Saravan Das ji, with the blessings of Swami Dayal ji, by Awaz Sanstha.

5th Blood Donation Camp is being organized at Dera Bohri Sahib, Village Golumajra. Prem Hakla, patron of Awaz organization, Germani vil-



lage, Nawangan, while talking to reporters, said that this time, Awaz will also conduct a medical

camp, in which general disease specialists, bone disease specialists, women's disease specialists, ophthalmologists will treat the patients. will check up, after which free medicines will also be given. On this occasion, diabetes, BP and eye tests of the patients will also be done. On this occasion, Awaz organization requests all the needy to take advantage of the free medical camp as much as possible.

AAP has forgotten the promises it failed to fulfill: Prof. Chandumajra

Page3News

Jatinderpal Singh Kaler
• Nawanshahr / 11 April

Professor Prem Singh Chandumajra, former MP Constituency Sri Anandpur Sahib, talks to journalists after Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) asked its MLAs and workers to reveal the report card of the state government to the voters of Punjab. While doing so, he criticized the Aam Aadmi Party government and said that the Aam Aadmi Party has no achievements to highlight. It has asked to focus on four issues including the clinic and one crore compensation. Chandumajra said that the Aam Aadmi Party has completely forgotten the promises it made to the people which it has

failed to fulfill. Sata and Ta have definitely been occupied. But failed miserably to perform well. All the promises made before the Vidhan Sabha elections have proved hollow in two years. This has done nothing but increase the woes of various sections of the society. Chandumajra said that the people of Punjab were already fed up with the Aam Aadmi Party government. Chandumajra said that the government of Aam Aadmi Party some old schools The external appearance was changed and renamed as School of Emi-



nence. The old schools were already doing better. It neither recruited expert teachers nor improved infrastructure. Will it be called an achievement? Similarly Aam Aadmi Party claims to open Aam Aadmi Clinic. However, these clinics were opened in the premises of the primary health centers and all the staff were transferred to these clinics but now most of them are on the verge of closure as they do not follow the norms of the National Health Mission. Chandumajra said that the government has not yet started its flagship scheme of giving Rs

1,000 per month to women above 18 years of age. During his two years of rule, the economy of the state has been severely destroyed. Aam Aadmi' has failed to collect revenue from various sources including Rs 20,000 crore annually from mining and Rs 34,000 crore from eradicating corruption. Chandumajra said that Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, who also holds the Kolgraha department, has failed miserably in improving the law and order situation in the state. Chandumajra said that despite the promises, the Aam Aadmi Party could not end the drug problem within four months of forming the government. Chandumajra that the Lok Sabha elections

BJP Replaces Kirron Kher With Sanjay Tandon In Chandigarh Lok Sabha Seat

Page3News

• Chandigarh / 11 April

The BJP today announced Sanjay Tandon as its candidate for the lone Lok Sabha seat of Chandigarh, replacing two-time MP Kirron Kher.

Mr Tandon, 60, is the party's co-incharge for Himachal Pradesh and is the son of former Chhattisgarh Governor Balramji Das Tandon - one of the founding members of the Jana Sangh and later the BJP's Punjab chief. He thanked the party leadership for the ticket from Chandigarh, which will go to polls in the last phase of the elections on June 1, and discounted the electoral challenge posed by the INDIA bloc,

saying, "Politics works on chemistry, not on mathematics." Actor Kirron Kher, who was elected as MP from Chandigarh in 2014 and again from the constituency in 2019, congratulated Mr Tandon on his nomination. "Congratulations Sanjay Tandon ji on being selected as the BJP candidate for the Chandigarh constituency. Wishing you all the best in your campaign ahead," she posted on X sharing a photo with him. Mr Tandon, who was earlier the Chandigarh BJP chief for nearly a decade, said he has always been committed to the welfare of the Union Territory. "I have been connected with the people of

Ukraine Races to Fix and Shield Its Power Plants After Russian 'Onslaught'

Page3News

• Washington / 11 April

Two large stars residing inside a spectacular cloud of gas and dust nicknamed the "Dragon's Egg" nebula have presented a puzzle to astronomers. One of them has a magnetic field, as does our sun. Its companion does not. And such massive stars are not usually associated with nebulae.

Researchers now appear to have resolved this mystery while also explaining how the relatively few massive stars that are magnetic got that way. Blame it on stellar fratricide, they said. In this case, the bigger star apparently gobbled up a smaller sibling star, and the mixing of their stellar material during this hostile takeover created a magnetic field.

"This merger was likely very violent. When two stars merge, material can be thrown out, and this likely created the nebula we see today," said Chile-based European Southern Observatory astronomer Abigail Frost, lead author of the study published on Thursday in the journal *Science*.

Computer simulations previously had predicted that the blending of stellar material during such a merger could create a magnetic field in the combined star born in this



process.

"Our study is the observational smoking gun confirming this scenario," said astronomer Hugues Sana of KU Leuven in Belgium, the study's senior author.

These two stars - gravitationally bound to each other in what is called a binary system - are located in our Milky Way galaxy about 3,700 light-years from Earth in the constellation Norma. A light-year is the distance light travels in a year, 5.9 trillion miles (9.5 trillion km).

The researchers used nine years of observations by the Chile-based Very Large Telescope.

The magnetic star is about 30 times more massive than the sun. Its remaining companion is about 26.5 times more massive than the sun. They orbit at a distance from each other varying from seven to 60 times the distance between Earth and the sun.

The Dragon's Egg is so named because it is located relatively near a larger nebula complex called the Fighting Dragons of Ara. The stars inside the Dragon's Egg appear to have started out 4-6 million years ago as a triple system - three stars born at the same time and gravitationally bound.

The triple system's two

innermost members included a larger star - perhaps 25 to 30 times the mass of the sun - and a smaller one - maybe five to 10 times the sun's mass.

The more massive one evolved more quickly than the other, with its outer layer engulfing the smaller star and triggering a merger that ejected into space the gas and dust that make up the nebula, the researchers said.

This occurred very recently in a cosmic time scale - about 7,500 years ago, based on the expansion velocity of the material in the nebula. It consists of mostly hydrogen and helium, but also an

unusually large amount of nitrogen, thanks to the merger. Many sun-sized stars generate magnetic fields.

"For low-mass stars like our sun, convective heating - like the movement of hot water in a radiator in your home - creates a movement of stellar material. This in turn creates a dynamo effect which induces a magnetic field," Frost said.

"However, for massive stars - greater than eight times the mass of our sun - different heating effects are in play, and so explaining the presence of magnetic fields for these types of stars is more tricky. This merger scenario ticks all the boxes," Frost added.

About 7% of massive stars are known to have a magnetic field. The second star in this binary system, uninvolved in the violent merger, does not.

Stellar magnetic fields store immense amounts of energy. The sun's magnetic storms can interact with Earth's atmosphere and create our planet's thrilling auroras, but also can disrupt radio signals and navigation systems.

An image of the nebula released with the study is visually striking.

"The richness of the physics and chemistry at play gave rise to a beautiful structure," Sana said.

Three Castaways Rescued After a Week on Remote Pacific Islet, US Coast Guard Says

Page3News

• Paris / 11 April

Three castaways stranded for a week on a desert island in the western Pacific Ocean were rescued after a U.S. Navy aircraft searching for them spotted palm fronds that the trio used to spell out the word "H-E-L-P" on a sandy beach.

The men, all in their 40s, were found in good health on Tuesday on Pikelot Island, an uninhabited, 32-acre islet covered by palm trees about 415 miles (667 km) southeast of Guam, the U.S. Coast Guard said in a statement on Thursday. Their identities and nationalities were not released.

The trio's saga began on Easter Sunday when they embarked on a voyage in a 20-foot open skiff equipped with an



outboard motor from Polowat atoll, some 100 nautical miles east of where the men were found, the Coast Guard said.

Six days later, after the experienced mariners failed to return, their niece alerted authorities and the Coast Guard and Navy began a search and rescue operation. The initial search area spanned more than 78,000 square nautical miles.

A day later, the U.S. Navy P-8 Poseidon aircraft spotted the makeshift

"HELP" sign written out with palm leaves and began the rescue effort, the Coast Guard said.

"This act of ingenuity was pivotal in guiding rescue efforts directly to their location," U.S. Coast Guard Lieutenant Chelsea Garcia said in the statement.

While stranded on the island, which is part of the Federated States of Micronesia, the men had access to food and water. They also recovered their damaged skiff.

A Coast Guard photograph showed two small covered shelters near the "H-E-L-P" sign. The *New York Times* reported this was not the first time castaways have been rescued from the island. About four years ago, three missing sailors were found after they wrote "SOS" in the sand.

Massive Attack Destroys One of Ukraine's Largest Power Plants

Page3News

• Kyiv / 11 April

A massive missile and drone attack destroyed one of Ukraine's largest power plants and damaged others, officials said Thursday, part of a renewed Russian campaign targeting energy infrastructure.

The Trypiliska plant, which was the biggest energy supplier for the Kyiv, Cherkasy and Zhytomyr regions, was struck numerous times, destroying the transformer, turbines and generators and leaving the plant ablaze. As the first drone approached, workers hid in a shelter, saving their lives, said Andrii Hota, director of the state company that runs the plant, Centrenergy.

They watched the plant

burn, surrounded by dense smoke and engulfed in flames. "It's terrifying," said Hota. Hours later, rescuers were still dismantling the rubble.

The plant supplied electricity to 3 million customers - but none lost power because the grid was able to compensate since demands are low at this time of year. Still, the consequences of the strikes could be felt in the coming months, as air conditioning use ramps up with summer. At least 10 other strikes overnight damaged energy infrastructure in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said more than 200,000 people in the region, which has been struck repeatedly, were without power.

Ukraine's largest private

energy operator, DTEK, described the slew of strikes as one of the most powerful attacks this year, while Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko told reporters it was a "large scale, enormous, missile attack that affected our energy sector very badly."

Russia has recently renewed strikes on Ukrainian energy facilities, and attacks last month blacked out large parts of the country - a level of darkness not seen since the first days of the full-scale invasion in 2022.

The volume and accuracy of the attacks have alarmed the country's defenders and left officials scrambling for better ways to defend energy assets. The strikes have also tested Ukraine's ability to make quick repairs.

Afghanistan's Taliban Leaders Issued Different Messages for Eid. Experts Say That Shows Tensions

Page3News

• Karachi / 11 April

Messages by two influential Taliban leaders in Afghanistan this week showed tensions between hardliners and more moderate elements who want to scrap harsher policies and attract more outside support, experts said Thursday.

The messages for Eid al-Fitr marking the end of Ramadan were delivered by supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, who defended the imposition of Islamic law

and railed against the international community for its criticism, and Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, who called on the Taliban to be humble and avoid behaving in ways that make Afghans unhappy. The Taliban seized power in 2021 amid the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces after two decades of war. Their rule, especially bans affecting women and girls, has triggered widespread condemnation and deepened their international isolation.

The reclusive Akhundzada

released two messages for Eid. In the first, a written statement issued on Saturday in seven languages including Arabic, English, Turkmen and Uzbek, he was conciliatory and pragmatic, with measured advice for officials in the Taliban-controlled administration. He issued the second in a rare public appearance on Wednesday at Eidgah Mosque in the Taliban heartland of Kandahar in the south. His Eid sermon, a half-hour address in Pashto, was more in keeping with the tone and

content of his past fiery messages.

"If anyone has any issues with us, we are open to resolving them, but we will never compromise on our principles or Islam," he said. "At the same time, we don't expect Islam to be disrespected. I won't even take a step away from Shariah (Islamic law). They (the international community) object to it, saying public stoning and amputation are against their laws and human rights. You expect us to follow your laws while imposing them on us."

Netherlands to Pledge Additional 400 Million Euros in Aid for Ukraine

Page3News

• Amsterdam / 11 April

The Dutch caretaker government will pledge an additional 400 million euros (\$428.64 million) in financial support to Ukraine, taking the total for 2024 to more than 2.4 billion euros, broadcaster RTL reported on Thursday, citing government sources. The government is also planning to earmark at least 1.5 billion euros for aid to Ukraine in 2025, Dutch news agency ANP reported.

The funds are part of a drive to increase Dutch

defence spending to 2% of the country's gross domestic product, the level agreed as a minimum by NATO members, ANP said.

The Dutch government had said it expected spending to hit that level this year, but economic growth, staffing problems and supply chain issues have made it difficult to reach the target.

Dutch defence spending has always fallen short of the NATO target and was cut in the decade before Russia's invasion of Ukraine during years of austerity.

Portugal's Catholic Church to Compensate Sexual Abuse Victims

Page3News

• Fatima / 11 April

Portugal's Catholic Church said on Thursday it will financially compensate victims of child sexual abuse within the Church, setting the amounts to be paid on a case-by-case basis, an approach survivors' groups have criticised.

Members of Portugal's Bishops' Conference (CEP) have been meeting since Monday at the Shrine of Fatima in central Portugal to discuss the compensation, among other issues.

A report in February 2023 by a Church-funded Portuguese commission found that at least 4,815 minors had been sexually abused by clergy - mostly priests - over seven decades.

The report's authors said their findings were the "tip of the iceberg", and commission head Pedro Strecht added that more than 100 priests suspected of child sexual abuse remained active in Church roles.

The following month, the Church announced a handful of steps to tackle child sexual



abuse, but it was heavily criticised for not adopting tougher measures.

CEP head Bishop Jose Ornelas said the organisation's assembly unanimously approved the granting of compensation, with requests to be filed from June to December this year. Twenty-

one people have already requested compensation.

A committee will then determine the amount to be given to each victim and a newly created CEP fund will be used to make the payments, Ornelas said.

The criteria for deciding the amounts is still being worked on,

Ornelas said, explaining that no maximum amount has been set and the gravity of cases would be taken into consideration.

Antonio Grosso, co-founder of church sexual abuse survivors' group Coracao Silenciado (Silenced Heart), pointed a finger at CEP's case-by-case approach.

"I don't know what measuring tape they will use to evaluate people's suffering, people who will have to tell their stories again to see if they deserve more or less cents," he told Reuters, arguing all victims should receive the same.

Grosso also said CEP should be proactive and reach out to the victims directly instead of waiting for them to request compensation.

"By waiting for requests, CEP is showing a passive attitude," Grosso said. "We are not beggars."

Sexual abuse scandals have rocked the Catholic Church in a number of other countries, including the United States, Ireland and France.

In neighbouring Spain, the Church said in November it would compensate victims of sexual abuse even in cases that have not been concluded because the offending priest has died, in a shift from its previous position on the matter.

Ornelas said compensation would also be given to Portuguese victims accusing priests who are now dead.

Ghana Ruling Party Presidential Candidate Says He Opposes Same-Sex Relations

Page3News

• Accra / 11 April

The presidential candidate of Ghana's ruling party, Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia, said on Thursday he was opposed to "the practice of homosexuality", a stance he promised to maintain if elected in December.

President Nana Akufo-Addo faces pressure to sign into law one of Africa's most severe anti-LGBT bills, which has been criticised by rights advocates and the United Nations.

Speaking at prayers marking the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Bawumia did not refer to the bill but said: "It is important to note that our cultural and societal norms and values as Ghanaians frown on the practice of ho-

mosexuality.

"All the major religious traditions in Ghana are opposed to this practice and I stand opposed to it now and I will stand opposed to it as president," he said, setting out his position for the first time as a candidate.

Bawumia's main presidential rival, former president John Dramani Mahama, made similar comments in January.

Their views will find favour with many in the culturally conservative West African nation, where gay sex is already punishable by up to three years in prison and LGBT people routinely face harassment and abuse.

Ghanaian activist Angel Maxine, who is a transgender woman, said Bawumia's stance was "very dangerous and homophobic".

"This is ... political propaganda and LGBTQ+ lives should not be used as a tool of distraction and scoring political point(s)," she said in a message.

In February, parliament unanimously passed a bill that will intensify the suppression of LGBT rights and punish those promoting lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identities.

Supporters of the bill have been pushing for its promulgation despite a finance ministry warning that it could jeopardise \$3.8 million in World Bank financing and derail a \$3-billion International Monetary Fund loan package.

The president's office has said it is waiting for the outcome of two legal challenges before passing the law to Akufo-Addo for approval.

Chile President Recalls Ambassador in Venezuela for Consultations

Page3News

• Santiago / 11 April

Chilean President Gabriel Boric recalled his country's ambassador in Caracas for consultations, he said in a post on X on Thursday, citing remarks by Venezuela's foreign minister about criminal organization Tren de Aragua. On Monday, Venezuela's top diplomat Yvan Gil described the notorious Venezuelan criminal gang, which Venezuela had previously accused of assassinations, drug trafficking and kidnapping, as a "fiction created by the international media," during an event alongside his Colombian counterpart.

"The irresponsible statements of Venezuela's foreign minister, ignoring the existence of the Tren de Aragua, are worrying and constitute a serious insult to those who have been



victims of this organization," said Boric.

Venezuela's information ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Chile - one of Latin America's safest and most stable countries - has been experiencing a surge in violent crime, a top concern among voters and a thorn in the side for the Boric administration.

The Tren de Aragua has been a strong focus of crit-

ics due to its alleged involvement in human smuggling, kidnapping and drug trafficking in the country. Venezuela in September 2023 claimed it had dismantled the Tren de Aragua after a government operation to regain control of its prison system. Boric said he would seek information from Chilean Ambassador Jaime Gazmuri and "instruct him to take all necessary actions."

In Kyiv, UN Migration Chief Warns Donor Fatigue Could Compound Problems

Page3News

• Kyiv / 11 April

Fatigue among donors could compound the issues created by the mass displacement of Ukrainians after Russia's invasion, making the problem more expensive to deal with in the long run, the U.N. migration agency chief said in Kyiv on Thursday.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered the biggest refugee crisis in Europe this century, with 6.5 million Ukrainian refugees having been recorded globally and 3.7 million displaced within Ukraine, according to U.N. data.

The U.N. also says that over 14 million Ukraini-

ans are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance.

"If the donor community walks away right now, it's not going to fix the problem - actually the problem could become compounded, and become more expensive," International Organization for Migration Director General Amy Pope told Reuters at a joint interview with local media in Kyiv.

"Ultimately, we are not only talking about a much more significant response, but (also) about greater loss of life, greater instability, greater regional instability." Pope cited as an example the current delays over provision of aid to Ukraine by the United

States, the biggest single state donor to Kyiv since Russia's invasion.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said during a trip to Kyiv last month that the U.S. aid package that has been blocked by Republicans for months would "get to Ukraine" and vowed that Washington's support would continue.

"It's absolutely wrong to think the situation has stabilised by any stretch," Pope said at the end of a five-day trip across Ukraine, during which she met officials in regions affected by Russian airstrikes, as well as meeting President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in Kyiv.

The IOM chief said that during their conversation

Zelenskiy had been particularly interested in guaranteeing the provision of education, and particularly in ensuring that schools had enough bomb shelters for their children.

She said that people were still leaving areas which had come under more intense bombardment recently, citing the southern port city of Odesa as an example.

Pope encouraged the creation of favourable conditions to attract refugees back to Ukraine. She said ensuring safety was the primary criterion for this, but that solutions such as identifying business opportunities for returnees and encouraging firms to employ them could also help.

Portuguese Catholic Church Announces It Will Compensate Victims of Sex Abuse

Page3News

• Madrid / 11 April

The Portuguese Catholic Church said Thursday it has unanimously agreed to pay some form of compensation to victims of sex abuse by clergy.

The country's Bishops' Conference said after a four-day general assembly meeting at the Fatima shrine that it will set up a fund with contributions from all the Portuguese dioceses to meet the eventual payments.

"In communion with the suffering of the victims, the Portuguese Bishops reaffirm their total commitment to do everything in their power to make reparations, and express their hope that this process of

welcoming, accompanying and preventing will be a contribution to the actions of society," the Bishops' Conference said. Church officials have said 20 victims so far have asked for compensation. A 2023 report by the Independent Committee for the Study of Child Abuse in the Catholic Church said more than 4,800 people may have been victims of child sex abuse in the Portuguese Catholic Church. More than 500 alleged victims have come forward with their stories.

The Committee, set up by Portuguese bishops, looked into alleged cases from 1950 onwards. In most of the alleged cases, the statute of limitations has expired.

IMF Chief Says Pakistan Seeking Potential Follow-Up Loan Program

Page3News

• Washington / 11 April

Pakistan is in discussions with the International Monetary Fund on a potential follow-up program to its nine-month, \$3 billion stand-by arrangement, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said on Thursday, adding that it had important issues to solve. Georgieva told an event at the Atlantic Council think tank, that Pakistan was successfully completing its existing program with the IMF and its economy was performing somewhat better, with reserves now being built up. "There is a commitment to continue on this path, and the country is turning to the fund for potentially having a follow-up program," Georgieva said, flagging issues that the struggling South Asian nation still needed to address.



"There are very important issues to be solved in Pakistan: the tax base, how the richer part of society contributes to the economy, the way public spending is being directed and of course, creating ... a more transparent environment." Pakistan and the IMF last month reached a staff-level agreement on the second and last review of the \$3 billion stand-by arrangement, which, if cleared by the global lender's board, will release about \$1.1 billion to the struggling South Asian nation. The IMF's board is expected to review the matter in late April, but no firm date has been set, a spokesperson said. Both sides have also spoken about negotiating a longer-term bailout and continuing with necessary policy reforms to rein in deficits, build up reserves and manage soaring debt servicing.

UN Security Council Should Have Condemned Iran Embassy Attack in Syria - Iran's UN Mission



Page3News

• Washington / 11 April

The "imperative for Iran" to retaliate for the attack on its embassy compound in Damascus might have been avoided had the U.N. Security Council condemned the strike, Tehran's mission to the United Nations said on Thursday. "Had the UN Security Council condemned the

Zionist regime's reprehensible act of aggression on our diplomatic premises in Damascus and subsequently brought to justice its perpetrators, the imperative for Iran to punish this rogue regime might have been obviated," the mission said on the social media platform X. Iran uses the term "Zionist regime" to refer to Israel.

Support From 'Indispensable' US Vital for Ukraine's Survival, Japan PM Tells Congress

Page3News

• Washington / 11 April

Ukraine risks collapsing under Russia's onslaught without U.S. support, a disaster that could embolden China and spark a new crisis in East Asia, Japan's prime minister told U.S. lawmakers on Thursday, urging them to overcome "self-doubt" about the country's role on the world stage.

In the first speech to a joint meeting of Congress by a Japanese leader in nine years, Fumio Kishida urged Americans not to doubt the country's "indispensable" role in world affairs, and said Tokyo was undertaking historic military upgrades to support its ally.

He spoke amid deep divisions in U.S. politics over the country's role on the world stage in a presidential election year, including in the House of Representatives chamber where he gave his address.

President Joe Biden's request for \$60 billion in aid for Ukraine, which passed the Democratic-led Senate with 70% support in February, has been stalled in the Republican-controlled House as Speaker Mike Johnson has refused to allow a vote.

"I want to address those Americans who feel the



loneliness and exhaustion of being the country that has upheld the international order," Kishida said.

"The leadership of the United States is indispensable. Without U.S. support, the hopes of Ukraine would collapse under the onslaught from Moscow? Without the presence of the United States, how long before the Indo-Pacific would face even harsher realities?"

Addresses to joint meetings of the Senate and House are an honor generally reserved for the closest U.S. allies, typically no

more than once or twice a year. The last was by Israeli President Isaac Herzog on July 19, 2023. Kishida is only the second Japanese prime minister ever to address a joint meeting, after Shinzo Abe on April 29, 2015.

His remarks were greeted several times by standing ovations, especially as he recounted the years of his childhood spent in New York and close Japanese-U.S. ties.

Kishida said the world was at a "historic turning point," with freedom and democracy under threat, emerging countries holding more economic power and climate change and rapid advances in artificial intelligence disrupting peoples' lives.

Italy Government Chides Stellantis Over Polish-Made Alfa Romeo 'Milano'

Page3News

• Milan / 11 April

Italy's industry minister criticised Stellantis on Thursday for producing Alfa Romeo's first fully electric vehicle (EV) abroad, saying the automaker's decision violated Italian law.

Stellantis-owned Alfa Romeo, a brand steeped in Italian automotive history, unveiled on Wednesday its new Milano small SUV, named after the iconic northern Italian city of Milan, where Alfa Romeo was founded in 1910.

The car is being built at the Tychy plant in Poland, and is the first Alfa Romeo model entirely produced outside Italy.

"A car called Milano cannot be produced in Poland. This is forbidden by Italian law," Adolfo Urso said in Turin, referring to 2003 legislation that targets "Italian sounding" products that falsely claim to be Italian.

"This law stipulates that you cannot give indications that mislead consumers. So a car called



Milano must be produced in Italy. Otherwise, it gives a misleading indication which is not allowed under Italian law," Urso said. Stellantis declined to comment.

Urso's complaint is the latest in a war of words between Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's nationalist government and the Franco-Italian automaker, as the two sides hold talks on a plan to boost domestic auto production to one million units.

The law mentioned by Urso says it is illegal to

present a foreign-made product as coming from Italy. Typically, it has been invoked against food products, for example U.S.-made "parmesan" cheese resembling Italy's "parmigiano".

Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares was quoted by Automotive News as saying that producing the "Milano" in Poland rather than Italy will shave 10,000 euros off its retail price, which starts at under 30,000 euros (\$32,136.00) for its cheaper hybrid version.

Slovakia's Pro-Russia PM Deepens Energy and Transport Ties to Ukraine

Page3News

• Slovak / 11 April

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, whose pro-Russian views have put him at odds with allies, sought to deepen cooperation in energy, railway links and grain transport with war-hit neighbour Ukraine on Thursday.

After a joint meeting of the Slovak and Ukrainian governments, Fico said Slovakia wanted to be a "good, friendly" neighbour to Ukraine. Fico has led a shift in Slovakia's foreign policy since coming to power last October, halting state military aid to Kyiv and opening communication channels with Moscow, even as the EU has sought to isolate Russia's government.

Yet Fico has been keen to keep business ties with Kyiv, including continuing to allow commercial arms deals to go ahead.

"Ukraine needs help, and Ukraine needs to be shown solidarity," Fico said in broadcast remarks alongside Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal after meeting in eastern



Slovakia.

"There can of course be different opinions or views on that help or solidarity." Previous Slovak administrations had been staunch backers of Kyiv after Russia's invasion in 2022, providing fighter jets and air defence systems, among other equipment. Fico reiterated on Thursday that Slovakia would continue allowing commercial deals for military supplies despite stopping state military aid. He said the countries agreed that an old wide-gauge freight rail link from Slovakia's second biggest city of Kosice should begin passenger service to Kyiv. They will also modernise the main

road border crossing and boost cross-border electricity transmission networks in the coming years. Fico said Slovakia will continue to provide a corridor for the export of Ukrainian agricultural products, while Shmyhal said they agreed to work on lifting restrictions on Ukrainian products which Slovakia and other countries put in place to protect domestic markets. "We are aware that each of our states has its own national interests, its own priorities, which sometimes may not coincide," Shmyhal said. "But at the same time we have absolutely good will and a pragmatic attitude."

Treasury Wants to Boost Foreign Investment Review Powers, as Congress Dissects Nippon, TikTok Deals

Page3News

• Washington / 11 April

U.S. Treasury wants to enhance the power of a little-known, secretive government committee to review deals made between U.S. firms and foreign investors.

This comes as high-profile deals involving foreign investment in the U.S. — like Chinese firm ByteDance's ownership of popular social media app TikTok and Japanese firm Nippon Steel's bid to purchase Pittsburgh-based U.S. Steel Corp. receive increased scrutiny by lawmakers and even President Joe Biden.

A new proposed rulemaking would strengthen powers for the interagency Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States — known as CFIUS — which is tasked with investigating corporate deals for national security concerns and holds power to force the company to divest ownership or change major parts of the firm.

The rulemaking — if finalized — would expand the committee's subpoena authority, allow the committee to request more information from parties to a proposed sale and expand circumstances when fines can be imposed and their size — from \$250,000 to \$5 million, where there are misstatements, omissions and failure to file mandatory declarations.

The proposed change comes as the convergence of national secu-



urity concerns related to foreign investment have increased — as competition intensifies between the world's biggest powers and the U.S. focuses on growing its domestic supply chains.

President Joe Biden came out in opposition to the planned sale of U.S. Steel to Nippon Steel of Japan, saying in March that the U.S. needs to "maintain strong American steel companies powered by American steelworkers." Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Wednesday during a White House press conference that he hopes discussions on Nippon "will unfold in directions that would be positive for both sides."

Nippon Steel announced in December that it planned to buy the Pittsburgh-based steel producer for \$14.1 billion in cash, raising concerns about what the transaction could mean for unionized workers, supply chains and U.S. national security.

Treasury's Assistant Secretary for Investment Security Paul Rosen said the rulemaking is meant to "more effectively deter violations, promote compliance and swiftly address national security risks in connection with CFIUS reviews."

John Carlin, the former Justice Department national security chief and a partner at the Paul Weiss law firm, said the pro-

posed rule shows how "corporations are on the front lines of national security policy and how seriously the government is taking foreign investments."

"The announcement today is all about adding tools for them to investigate and more actively and aggressively enforce their authorities," he said. He added that it was going "to act as an incentive for people to really scrub deals to see whether or not they need to file."

"It really makes CFIUS more of an enforcement agency" by broadening their subpoena power, he said.

Another deal under CFIUS review is the ownership of popular

social media app, TikTok. CFIUS' review of the social media app goes back at least to 2019, though no movement has been made on that review. The U.S. House of Representatives has since passed a bill that would force ByteDance to either sell the app or have it banned in the U.S. Asked at a press conference in Beijing on Monday about TikTok, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that she supported the administration's efforts to address national security issues that relate to sensitive personal data. "This is a legitimate concern," she said.

"Many US social apps are not allowed to operate in China," Yellen said. "We would like to find a way forward."

J. Philip Ludvigson, a partner at the law firm King & Spalding, said the proposed regulations "are yet another indicator of an increasingly aggressive posture in protecting national security." Ludvigson is a former director for CFIUS Monitoring & Enforcement. "CFIUS clearly intends to issue more and bigger penalties than ever before, using an enhanced subpoena authority wherever necessary," he said.

The U.S. has also begun reviewing certain transactions made between U.S. firms and those in China.

President Joe Biden signed an executive order last August to block and regulate high-tech U.S.-based investments going toward China.

Meghan Markle and Prince Harry Producing Two New Netflix Shows

Page3News

• Los Angeles / 11 April

Prince Harry and wife Meghan are producing two upcoming Netflix shows that will focus on cooking and a U.S. polo championship, the streaming service said on Thursday.

The projects are part of a multi-year deal between Netflix and Archewell Productions, which was founded by the royal couple in 2020 after they stepped down as senior members of Britain's royal family and moved to the United States.

The first new series will focus on cooking, gardening, entertaining and friendship. The show is being "curated" by Markle, who is serving as an executive producer, Netflix said.

The second series will follow the U.S. Open Polo Championship in Wellington, Florida, and offer a look at the competition and the polo industry's social scene. Markle and Prince Harry are both executive producers of the polo show.

Both series are in early production and will have titles and release dates announced "in the coming months," Netflix said.

The new series follow other projects from the couple, including 2022 Netflix documentary "Harry & Meghan."

Any attempt to use military cooperation to "intervene in the Taiwan issue is to interfere in China's internal affairs" and is a threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait region, Zhu said.

Defense Relationship Part of US-Iraq Talks in Washington Next Week, US Official Says

Page3News

• Washington / 11 April

The security and defense relationship between the U.S. and Iraq will be an important part of talks when Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani visits Washington next week but is not the primary focus of the visit, a senior State Department official said on Thursday.

The official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity, said the emphasis of Sudani's visit would be economic ties, even as Washington and Baghdad are in talks over ending the U.S.-led military coalition in the country.

U.S. forces and Shi'ite Muslim armed groups have engaged in tit-for-tat



attacks in recent months amid regional conflict linked to Israel's war in Gaza, leading to Sudani in January announcing his intention to end the U.S. military presence.

The senior State Department official said the defense and security relationship will be part of the discussions during Sudani's visit, when he

will meet both with President Joe Biden and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin as well as Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"(It is) likely to be a very important part of our — of the discussion," the official said. "It is not the primary focus of the visit... but it is almost certainly going to come up."

The visit's focus will instead be the economy and issues including education, environment and U.S. support for development, the official said, without providing details.

"We're going to have a full range of discussions about our relationship and where it's going," the official said.

The U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 to topple Saddam Hussein and withdrew in 2011, only for troops to return in 2014 to help fight Islamic State (IS) after the extremist Sunni Muslim militant group overran large parts of the country. Washington and Baghdad began talks in January to reassess the U.S.-led military coalition presence there.

Putin Mocks Planned Ukraine Conference and Says Russia Won't Accept Any Enforced Peace Plans

Page3News

• Moscow / 11 April

Russia's President Vladimir Putin on Thursday mocked a scheduled round of Ukraine peace talks in Switzerland, warning that Moscow will not accept any enforced plans that ignore its interests.

Switzerland's government said Wednesday it will host a high-level international conference in June to help chart a

path toward peace in Ukraine after more than two years of fighting, and expressed hope that Russia might join in the peace process someday. Putin charged that Russia hadn't been invited to join June's talks, while pointing at Swiss recognition that a peace process can't happen without Russia.

"They aren't inviting us there," Putin said. "Moreover, they think

there is nothing for us to do there, but at the same time they say that's it's impossible to decide anything without us. It would have been funny if it weren't so sad."

Russia has dismissed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's peace formula requiring Moscow to pull back its troops, pay compensation to Ukraine and face an international tribunal for its action.

Russia Sends Military Trainers and Air-Defence System to Niger, Says Niger State TV

Page3News

• Niamey / 11 April

Military instructors and personnel from Russia's defence ministry arrived in Niger on Wednesday, Niger state television RTN said, in a further sign the West African country is building closer relations with Moscow like its junta-led neighbours. In a Thursday broadcast, RTN showed footage of a military cargo plane

unloading gear as people in fatigues stood by. It said the deployment followed a recent agreement between Niger's junta and Russian President Vladimir Putin to boost cooperation. "We are here to train the Nigerien army... (and) to develop military cooperation between Russia and Niger," said a man in camouflage uniform, who RTN said was one of the instructors. The man had a neck gaiter pulled up

over most of his face while he spoke on camera. RTN also said Russia had agreed to install an anti-aircraft system in Niger. "Our airspace will now be better protected," the broadcaster said. There was no immediate comment from Russia, which has been seeking to boost its influence in Africa, promoting itself as a friendly country without a colonial background on the continent.