

Thought of the Day

And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.

- Paulo Coelho



PM Conducts Surprise Inspection at Suvarnabhumi Airport



Chandrayaan-4 1st Step Towards Landing Indian On Moon : ISRO Chief



China's Xi Says Nobody Can Stop 'Family Reunion' With Taiwan



EU Court Takes Russian Billionaires Fridman, Aven off Sanctions List



Israel Threatens to Strike Iran Directly if Iran Launches Attack From Its Territory

Jerusalem (Israel)

Israel's foreign minister threatened Wednesday that its country's forces would strike Iran directly if the Islamic Republic launched an attack from its territory against Israel, as tensions

between the rival powers flare following the killings of Iranian generals in a blast at the Iranian consulate in Syria. "If Iran attacks from its territory, Israel will respond and attack in Iran," Israel Katz said in a post on X in both Farsi and Hebrew.

The remarks came after Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reiterated early Wednesday a promise to retaliate against Israel over the attack on its consulate in Damascus earlier this month. Tehran holds Israel

responsible for the strike that leveled the building, killing 12 people. Israel has not acknowledged its involvement, though it has been bracing for an Iranian response to the attack, a significant escalation in their long-running shadow

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Biden Says Netanyahu's Approach to War in Gaza Is a 'Mistake'

Washington (U.S.A.)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's approach to the war in Gaza is a "mistake," U.S. President Joe Biden said in an interview published on Tuesday, offering further criticism of Israel's handling of the conflict. "I think what he's doing is a mistake. I don't agree with his approach," Biden said in comments to Univision, a U.S. Spanish-language TV network.



Biden has also previously called Israel's bombing in Gaza "indiscriminate" and its military actions "over the top." The White House said last week that the president, in a call with Netanyahu, threatened to make conditional U.S. support for Israel's offensive on it taking concrete steps to protect aid workers and civilians. That call followed an Israeli airstrike that killed seven staff of the aid group World Central Kitchen. "What I'm calling for is for the Israelis to just call for a

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Iran's Khamenei Says Israel 'Must Be Punished' for Syria Embassy Attack

Tehran (Iran)

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said on Wednesday that Israel "must be punished and it shall be" for attacking the Iranian embassy compound in Syria. In a major escalation of Israel's war with regional adversaries, suspected Israeli warplanes bombed Iran's consulate in the Syrian capital on April 1 in a strike that Iran said killed seven military advisers.



"When they attack the consulate, it is as if they have attacked our soil," Khamenei said in a speech marking the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. "The evil regime made a mistake and must be punished and it shall be," he added. In an apparent response to Khamenei, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said on Wednesday that Israel will respond if Iran attacks Israel from its own soil. "If Iran attacks from its own territory, Israel will respond

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'ASEAN + India Shoppers in Thailand' activity to boost Thai economy with soft power

Page 3 News

• Bangkok / 10 April

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and partners announced the 'ASEAN + India Shoppers in Thailand' activity, inviting ASEAN and Indian tourists to vote for their favourite Thai soft-power element and get a shopping voucher. The activity will run from 29 April to 15 June 2024.

TAT Governor, Ms. Thapanee Kiatphaibool, said "The project underscores the government's policy to establish Thailand as a tourism hub, while promoting ASEAN as a single tourism destination. It also supports the government's soft power promotion policy to raise awareness and boost sales for Thai products."

The activity is part of a broader effort to enhance Thailand's appeal to short-haul travellers. It will showcase Thailand's soft power through participating stores where tourists can shop for Thai aromatics, tasty treats, fashion clothes and accessories designed and made locally here.

"We have designed the online quiz and the gift voucher redemption process to be easy and inclusive for ASEAN and Indian tourists, and we hope that they will



take this opportunity to support Thai brands and products while exploring the influences of Thai soft power in tourism," Ms. Thapanee said.

Passport holders of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, and India can simply log on to the website aseanindiashoppers.com to vote for Thailand's rich cultural

resources according to the 5Fs: food, film, fashion, fight, and festivals. The website will be activated on 29 April 2024.

As a token of appreciation, participants will be given gift vouchers and special privileges, worth 500 Baht to 3,000 Baht each, that can be used to purchase Thai fashion and lifestyle brands as well as authentic Thai products at participating stores of King Power Cor-

poration, King Power Click (FIRSTER), Multiply by Eight (X8), Central Group, Tops Market, Big C Supercenter, Good Goods, and Erb.

The gift vouchers and special privileges can be used at the participating stores in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Chon Buri, Udon Thani, Ubon Ratchathani, Songkhla, and Nakhon Ratchasima.

The project is expected to attract 5,000 participants, helping to generate about 131 million Baht in tourism revenue.

The 'ASEAN + India Shoppers in Thailand' activity aims to promote short-haul tourism and stimulate travel and spending by tourists from ASEAN and India who see Thailand as a weekend destination and a popular shopping destination.

Given the geographical proximity of these countries, it takes no more than two hours to travel from the neighbouring countries to Thailand and about four hours from India. In addition, ASEAN tourists are not required to obtain a visa when entering Thailand, while Indian tourists can take advantage of the current temporary 30-day visa-free entry.

Convenient access and stimulus visa policy are among key factors contributing to 75 per cent of ASEAN tourists being repeated visitors and India being the fastest growing source market.

Thailand expects the number of visitor arrivals from ASEAN to bypass 10 million this year, while the number of Indian tourists is forecasted to reach 1.7 million. This constitutes 35 per cent of this year's target of 35 million arrivals.

Tourism Authority of Thailand invites travellers to experience the wonders of Songkran

Page 3 News

• Bangkok / 10 April

Beginning this week, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), is launching a campaign that aims to introduce the Thai New Year festival of Songkran to BBC audiences across the globe. Songkran has recently been nominated for UNESCO 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' status and will be celebrated 'more extravagantly than ever' throughout Thailand in April this year. A unique 30-second animated advertisement, produced by BBC Storyworks Commercial Productions in Singapore, will run from 10 April to 15 June 2024.

Creatively, it focuses on the wider social and cultural significance of Songkran. The creative features a bespoke animated character as the central storyteller – an international traveller who appeals to both the young and the young at heart. Viewers will follow his journey through Thailand as he is immersed in a variety of distinctly Thai experiences.

The rich visuals in the colourful clip also showcase Thai culture, people, food, nature, sights and scenery. The advertising campaign will run on the newly launched BBC app and BBC.com site as well as on the BBC News chan-

nel. John Williams, Vice President, Advertising Sales, Singapore & SEA, BBC Studios Global Media & Streaming, said "BBC News' TV and digital platforms are well-placed for reaching and engaging with travel-interested audiences, as BBC News is the number 1 news title to reach global travellers, as well as Thailand-bound travellers. This fun, innovative animation is also a great way to bring returning travellers to Thailand as it shows an abundant number of reasons they would want to visit again. The joyful tone and shareability have a youthful appeal that will sit well

in the newly designed online spaces the BBC is bringing its audiences." Mr. Nithee Seepree, TAT Deputy Governor for Marketing Communications, said "We are delighted to be working with the BBC again on this exciting campaign. Reaching their extensive and important international audiences and utilising their expertise is vital for us in promoting Thailand to visitors. We believe that at Songkran 'memories last forever' and it will be repeatedly told. This well-crafted campaign illustrates that perfectly for those not yet aware of the festival or with a limited knowledge of it."

New Zealand PM to Visit Thailand

Page 3 News

• Bangkok / 10 April

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon is scheduled to make an official visit to Thailand, following an invitation by Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin. The trip, set for April 16-18, is the first of its kind from a New Zealand premier to Thailand in over a decade.

Accompanied by a high-level delegation including Minister for Climate Change Simon Watts and Member of Parliament Paulo Garcia, Luxon's visit is anticipated to cover a broad spectrum of discussions involving defense and security, economic partnerships, clean energy initiatives, innovation, education, and cultural

exchanges.

During their time in Thailand, Luxon and his team are scheduled to take part in discussions with the Thai Prime Minister, sign multiple Memorandums of Understanding, and participate in a series of events designed to foster deeper bilateral cooperation. The New Zealand Prime Minister will also join a luncheon hosted by the Thai government, meet with prominent New Zealand expatriates, and host a reception for key figures from both countries' public and private sectors.

Following his engagements in Thailand, Luxon will continue his Southeast Asian tour, with stops in Singapore and the Philippines.

Government Mobilizes Forces to Tackle Air Pollution Crisis

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• Bangkok / 10 April

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment along with the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and related officials have met on tackling the severe issue of air pollution.

Pol. Gen. Patcharawat Wongsuwon, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, and Captain Thamanat Prompow, Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, shared the outcomes of the committee on sustainable air pollution management's recent meeting. Pol. Gen. Patcharawat disclosed that the Prime Minister has mandated stringent enforcement of laws

against illegal burning. He also instructed northern provincial governors to provide direct updates on their efforts. The nine strategies the government has recently implemented are making progress and are well-coordinated, showcasing the ministry's proactive approach rather than a reactionary stance.

Meanwhile, Captain Thamanat announced the operational center in Chiang Mai is equipped and ready, supported by multiple agencies. These units include the Royal Thai Army, the Royal Thai Air Force, the Royal Thai Police, the Department of Royal Rainmaking and Agricultural Aviation, and the Ministry of Agriculture

and Cooperatives. These organizations are reportedly prepared to deploy all military resources to Chiang Mai when needed.

On the issue of transboundary haze, Captain Thamanat noted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been in talks with neighboring countries to minimize and stop burning practices. Additionally, the army is facilitating discussions through the general border committee. He assured that these efforts would not disrupt the Songkran festival, emphasizing the commitment to combat pollution. Senior officials from various ministries will soon augment the operations in Chiang Mai.

PM Conducts Surprise Inspection at Suvarnabhumi Airport

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• Bangkok / 10 April

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin conducted a surprise visit to Suvarnabhumi Airport to assess the public and tourist service system during the ongoing Maha Songkran World Water Festival 2024 from now until April 21st. This was his third inspection since February, where he observed significant improvements in the check-in process, now expedited by allowing check-ins four hours in advance.

He commended the immigration system for its enhanced passenger convenience, notably the



waiver of facial scanning and fingerprinting for Thai nationals, trimming the process by up to 15 minutes. Upgrades and integration with the airport's operational system have resolved previous system

failures.

Prime Minister Srettha called for further advancements in the check-in system and encouraged airlines to expand the use of self-check-in to decrease wait times. He also reviewed staff accommodations and the airport's traffic system, aiming for better management and comfort.

The inspection is part of ongoing efforts to refine Suvarnabhumi Airport's services, ensuring passenger check-in and immigration clearance within 45 minutes. With improved management, the airport is expected to operate more smoothly and efficiently.

Chandrayaan-4 1st Step Towards Landing Indian On Moon: ISRO Chief

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• New Delhi / 10 April

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief S Somnath said that the next instalment of the Chandrayaan programme is under development, which will take forward the country's moon exploration. He stated that Chandrayaan-4 is the first step towards achieving the goal of India landing an astronaut on the moon in 2040. Addressing a press conference, S Somnath said, "Chandrayaan-4 is a concept that we are now developing as a continuation of the Chandrayaan series...our honourable Prime Minister has announced that an Indian will land on the moon in 2040. So, if that has to happen, we have to have continuous moon exploration of various kinds." "Chandrayaan-4 is the first step in the direction....to step a craft on the moon and collect sample



and bring it back to Earth. It demonstrates the full cycle of going to the moon and coming back to Earth," he added.

S Somnath further said that ISRO is working on plenty of other projects ranging from rocket and satellite projects to

technology development projects. "There are plenty. We have major projects, rocket projects,

we have satellite projects, application projects and technology development projects. Rocket projects are around 5-10, satellite projects are about 30-40, and application projects are in 100s and R&D projects are in 1000s," he added.

India took a giant leap as the Chandrayaan-3 lander module successfully landed on the moon's South Pole on August 23, making it the first country to have achieved the historic feat.

In January, India placed its first dedicated solar mission, the Aditya-L1 spacecraft, in the Halo orbit.

The Gaganyaan project is another major Indian mission that envisages a demonstration of human spaceflight capability by launching a crew of three members into an orbit of 400 km for a 3-day mission and bringing them safely back to earth by landing in Indian waters.

SVEEP Activity held for Voter Awareness for Lok Sabha Elections 2024 at BBPUCC, Balachaur

Page3News /

Jatinderpal Singh Kaler

• Nawanshahr / 10 April

Under the instructions of the District Election Officer, SBS Nagar and SDM cum Election Officer a SVEEP Activity was conducted at BBPUCC, Balachaur to bolster voter education and engagement ahead of the Lok Sabha Elections 2024. In this Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) activity SVEEP Nodal officer(048) and Sector Officer(Booth No. 136-149) Rajinder Kumar and Mr. Ramandeep Singh Nahar, delivered insightful lec-



tures aimed at explaining the intricacies of the electoral process to students. The focus of these sessions was to impart comprehensive knowledge about Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) and Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) systems. Furthermore, participants were guided

about the toll-free helpline number, 1950, established to address any inquiries or concerns pertaining to electoral procedures and voting mechanisms. This SVEEP Activity aimed to cultivate an informed and engaged electorate, thereby fortifying the foundation of democratic governance.

Annual Mela and Wrestling Dangal at Dera Baba Tibbi Sahib today: Sevadar Sai Kale Shah

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Jatinderpal Singh Kaler

• Kathgarh / 10 April

At Dera Baba Tibbi Sahib, a famous religious place in village Kathgarh, an annual fair dedicated to Baisakhi and Kushti Dangal, two days fair under the patronage of Dera Tibbi Sahib's Gadinshin Baba Sakhi Ram ji and Kushti Dangal is being organized with great fanfare from today. Sai Kale Shah ji said that this fair and wrestling Dangal are being organized with the support of all Sangats living in the



area and abroad. Named wrestlers will participate in this fair on April 11. The winning wrestlers will be awarded with cash while 12

There will be a big cultural and religious program on April in which famous artists Darshan Lakha, Tipu Sultan, Manjit Sahota, Pamma Dumewal, Nooran Sisters, Masha Ali, Pamma Malli, Baaghi, Sunny Mittal, Anker Khali, Ballu Lancer, Ranjit Mann, are arriving. Yasir Hussain, G Khan, Avtar Musafir, Avtar Billa, Master Salim, Sunny Mittal, Sandeep Uधानowalia, Munawar Ali, Pamma Rattewal etc were present.

Caption Kale Shah giving information about the annual fair.

"Main Koi Murgi Ka Bachha Nahin Hoon...": Asaduddin Owaisi

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• New Delhi / 10 April

Claiming that he has been getting death threats since he visited the house of gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, who died of a cardiac arrest late last month, AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi has said he is not a chicken ("main koi murgi ka bachha nahin hoon") and will not be scared so easily.

"Since I went to Mukhtar Ansari's house in Uttar Pradesh, all these people who are pretending to be strong started saying on social media that they will kill me. If you want to kill me, do it. If it is not my time,

I won't die; and if it is, I certainly will. I want to tell all these evil forces, I am no chicken ('main koi murgi ka bachha nahin hoon'). You handle what comes next," the four-time MP from Hyderabad, who is contesting from the same seat this time, said in Hindi.

"I am not going to go away so easily. I will not show you my back. I will remain standing whether you or anyone else comes to attack me," he thundered. Mr Owaisi had gone to Ansari's house in Uttar



Pradesh's Ghazipur on March 31, three days after his death, and paid tribute to the gangster-turned-politician, who was a five-time MLA and had been in prison since

2005. Ansari's family has claimed he was given poison in his food while in jail, but a postmortem report has said cardiac arrest was the cause of death. A judicial inquiry has now been ordered.

Responding to the AIMIM chief's claim of death threats, the BJP's Madhavi Latha, who is

contesting against him in Hyderabad, said there is no proof that the people issuing the threats are not from his own party. "How is he getting these threats? Has anything happened to him? How do I know that his own people are not issuing threats to him on social media? They are the ones who are known to attack others. People need security from them... He (Mr Owaisi) has friendships with people like Mukhtar Ansari, and he wants security," Ms Latha said. All 17 Lok Sabha constituencies will go to the polls in a single phase on May 13. Counting will be held on June 4.

"Entire BJP Said He was Corrupt": AAP On Raaj Kumar Anand, Minister Who Quit

Page3News

• New Delhi / 10 April

Delhi's ruling Aam Aadmi Party has said that its minister Raaj Kumar Anand, who stepped down today and quit the party, accusing it of corruption, was under pressure from investigative agencies. He was under the scanner of the central agencies and his house was

searched last year in connection with an alleged corruption case, the party pointed out.

Mr Anand resigned from the cabinet and the quit the party earlier today. "I joined AAP after seeing its strong message on fighting corruption. Today, the party has found itself in the middle of corrupt practices. That's why I have decided to quit," said the

leader, who handled the social welfare, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes portfolio.

AAP hit rewind. Senior AAP leader Saurabh Bhardwaj said the Enforcement Directorate raided Raaj Kumar Anand's house for 23 hours in November. "The entire BJP was then saying that Raaj Kumar Anand is corrupt," he said.

Elon Musk To Meet PM Modi In India, May Announce Tesla Factory: Report

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• New Delhi / 10 April

Tesla chief Elon Musk will visit India this month to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and is expected to make an announcement related to his plans to invest and open a new factory in India, two sources with direct knowledge said. The billionaire executive



will meet PM Modi in the week of April 22 in New Delhi, and will separately make an announcement about his India plans, said the two sources, who declined to be named as

the trip details are confidential. PM Modi's office and Tesla did not respond to a request for comment. Elon Musk's final India trip agenda could still change. Reuters has previously reported that Tesla officials are expected to visit India this month to look at sites for a manufacturing plant that would require an investment of about \$2 billion.

Ukraine Races to Angara Shield as Power Plants After Russian Onslaught

Page3News

• Moscow / 10 April

The test launch of Russia's Angara-A5 rocket from the Vostochny Cosmodrome was aborted on Wednesday for the second time this week.

"The command to cancel the launch has been issued," said an announcement made through loudspeakers mere seconds before takeoff at the launch site in Russia's Far East. It was not immediately clear why. On Tuesday, an issue with the pressurising system of the rocket's oxidiser tank forced a last-minute cancellation of the launch. It was delayed by 24 hours.

The two aborted launches are yet another setback in a project that has been dogged by manufacturing delays and technical issues.



President Vladimir Putin has planned construction of a new Russian space station by 2027, and has described the Angara project as having huge significance for national security. The launch was set to be the first

for this type of rocket at Russia's new launch site at the Vostochny Cosmodrome, located in the forests of the Amur region in Russia's Far East.

The 42.7-metre Angara launch vehicle is capable of carrying payloads bigger than 20 tonnes into orbit.

Due to its location closer to the equator, Angara-A5 can deliver a heavier payload to orbit if launched from Vostochny, Russia's first and only post-Soviet spacecraft launch site, than from Plesetsk, an Soviet-era facility where it has had three successful test launches of the Angara rocket.

The setback follows the failure of a Russian moon mission last August, its first in 47 years, when the spacecraft crashed into the moon.

Soccer - France Tightens Security at PSG Stadium After Islamic State Threats

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• Paris / 10 April

French police tightened security around Paris Saint-Germain's (PSG) Parc des Princes stadium on Wednesday following a threat of attacks by Islamic State that adds to security worries ahead of the upcoming summer Olympics.

PSG play Barcelona later in a Champions League soccer quarter-final to be viewed by millions around the world.

Spain and Britain also doubled down this week around their respective Champions League quarter-finals on Tuesday and Wednesday after the resurgent Islamic State militant group urged attacks against host venues, including with drones.

The threats are particularly concerning for France, a long-time target of militant

groups, as it gears up for the Paris Olympics in July and August.

At PSG's Parc des Princes stadium on Wednesday, police began towing away parked cars and installing concrete blocks.

Senior police officers directed operations.

However, fans at PSG's superstore in central Paris shrugged off concerns. "I'm not afraid," said Mathieu. "We can't live in fear. Instead, we have to show them that we can get through this."

On Tuesday, the Arsenal v Bayern Munich match in London and Real Madrid v Manchester City in Madrid went ahead without a hitch. Atletico Madrid play Borussia Dortmund in Spain in the fourth quarter-final on Wednesday evening.

Islamic State published a post urging followers to recreate a November 2015

attack on the Stade de France stadium, featuring an image of the Parc des Princes stadium, according to Site Intelligence group, which tracks Islamic militant postings.

Another image seen by Site Intelligence urged militants to use drones to attack the stadiums.

Spain said it had deployed more than 2,000 officers to boost security in Madrid for the games there. After being largely crushed by a U.S.-led coalition, Islamic State has been slowly rebuilding its capabilities via underground sleeper cells.

Its Afghan branch, known as ISIS-K, has been particularly active in recent months. The group claimed responsibility for a mass-fatality attack at a concert near Moscow last month, and also carried out twin bombings in Iran that killed nearly 100 people earlier this year.

China's Xi Says Nobody Can Stop 'Family Reunion' With Taiwan

Page3News

• Beijing / 10 April

Chinese President Xi Jinping told former Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou on Wednesday that outside inference could not stop the "family reunion" between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, and that there are no issues that cannot be discussed.

Since the defeated Republic of China government fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing a civil war to Mao Zedong's communists, no serving Taiwanese leader has visited China.

Ma had been widely expected to meet Xi this time around, having first met Xi in Singapore in late 2015 for a landmark summit shortly before the cur-

rent Taiwan president, Tsai Ing-wen, won election. Meeting Ma in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, where foreign



leaders normally hold talks with top Chinese officials, Xi said that people on both sides of the strait are Chinese. "External interference cannot stop the historical trend of reunion of the country and family," Xi said, in comments reported by Taiwanese media.

Xi did not elaborate but in Chinese terminology

referring to external interference over Taiwan is generally aimed at the support Taipei gets from Western countries like the

United States, especially arms sales which infuriate Beijing.

People on both sides of the strait are Chinese, Xi said.

"There is no rancour that cannot be resolved, no problem that cannot be discussed, and no force that can separate us."

China has never renounced the use of force to bring democratically-governed Taiwan under its control, and has ramped up military and political pressure to assert its sovereignty claims.

Ma told Xi that tensions have caused unease for many Taiwanese.

Are Iranian Drones Turning the Tide of Sudan's Civil War?

Page3News

• Tehran / 10 April

A year into Sudan's civil war, Iranian-made armed drones have helped the army turn the tide of the conflict, halting the progress of the rival paramilitary Rapid Support Force and regaining territory around the capital, a senior army source told Reuters.

Six Iranian sources, regional officials and diplomats - who, like the army source, asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the information - also told Reuters the military had acquired Iranian-made unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over the past few months.

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) used some older UAVs in the first months of the war alongside artillery batteries and fighter jets, but had little success in rooting out RSF fighters embedded in heavily populated neighbourhoods in Khartoum and other cities,

more than a dozen Khartoum residents said.

In January, nine months after fighting erupted, much more effective drones began operating from the army's Wadi Sayidna base to the north of Khartoum, according to five eyewitnesses living in the area. The residents said the drones appeared to monitor RSF movements, target their positions, and pinpoint artillery strikes in Omdurman, one of three cities on the banks of the Nile that comprise the capital Khartoum.

"In recent weeks, the army has begun to use precise drones in military operations, which forced the RSF to flee from many areas and allowed the army to deploy forces on the ground," said Mohamed Othman, a 59-year-old resident of Omdurman's Al-Thawra district.

The extent and manner of the army's deployment of Iranian UAVs in Omdurman and other

areas has not been previously reported. Bloomberg and Sudanese media have reported the presence of Iranian drones in the country.

The senior Sudanese army source denied that the Iranian-made drones came directly from Iran, and declined to say how they were procured or how many the army had received. Reuters was unable to determine those details independently.

The source said that while diplomatic cooperation between Sudan and Iran had been restored last year, official military cooperation was still pending.

Asked about Iranian drones, Sudan's acting foreign minister Ali Sadeq, who visited Iran last year and is aligned with the army, told Reuters: "Sudan did not obtain any weapons from Iran." The army's media department and Iran's foreign ministry did not respond to requests for

comment.

The RSF acknowledged it had suffered setbacks in Omdurman. Its media office said the army had received Iranian drones and other weapons, citing intelligence it had gathered. It did not respond to requests to provide evidence.

Tehran's backing for Sudan's army is aimed at strengthening ties with the strategically located country, the Iranian and regional sources said.

Sudan lies on the coast of the Red Sea, a key site of competition between global powers, including Iran, as war rages in the Middle East. From the other side of the Red Sea, Yemen's Houthis, armed in part by Iran, have launched attacks in support of Hamas in Gaza.

"What does Iran get in return? They now have a staging post on the Red Sea and on the African side," said a Western diplomat, who asked not to be named.

EU Court Takes Russian Billionaires Fridman, Aven off Sanctions List

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• Brussels / 10 April

The European Union Court of Justice ruled on Wednesday to remove Russian billionaires Mikhail Fridman and Petr Aven from a list of individuals facing European Union sanctions after Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022.

"The General Court considers that none of the reasons set out in the initial acts is sufficiently substantiated and that the inclusion of Mr Aven and Mr Fridman on the lists at issue was therefore not justified," the Luxembourg-based court said in a statement.

The funds and economic resources of both men were frozen after the European Council imposed restrictions following the Russian invasion. Both are major shareholders of

conglomerate Alfa Group, which includes Russia's top private bank Alfa Bank and its biggest food retailer X5 Retail Group.

The court ruled the billionaires should not have been included on the list between February 2022 and

March 2023. An EU decision in March 2023 reimposed the restrictive measures on the two men, who have lodged a separate appeal against that action.

The court said the Council may have grounds to establish that Fridman and Aven have close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, but it does not demonstrate the men have supported actions or policies against Ukraine, or that they have supported Russian decision makers financially.



Biden Welcomes 'Global Partner,' Japan's Kishida, at White House Summit

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• Washington / 10 April

U.S. President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will showcase a strong and growing partnership during a White House state visit on Wednesday focused on joint defense cooperation to deter an aggressive China.

The summit kicks off with an official arrival ceremony on the White House South Lawn, followed by a closed-door meeting, a joint news conference planned for the Rose Garden, a state dinner and a performance by musician Paul Simon.

Kishida will address the U.S. Congress on Thursday and join Biden and Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for a meeting expected to focus on Beijing's South China Sea incursions.

The U.S. and Japan have hammered out about 70 agreements on defense cooperation, including moves to upgrade the U.S. military command structure in Japan to make it better able to work with Japanese forces in a crisis.



Biden and Kishida are also expected to announce steps to allow more joint development of military and defense equipment. The two leaders will announce plans for a joint lunar space mission and projects to work together on artificial intelligence research, U.S. officials said.

Japan will now be a "full global partner" with the United States, with influence far beyond its region and into Europe and the Middle East a senior Biden administration official told reporters on Tuesday, summing up the deals.

China is attempting to isolate

Japan and the Philippines. By meeting the leaders of those two nations this week in Washington, Biden is aiming to "flip the script and isolate China," the official said. On Thursday, Biden will hold a bilateral meeting with Marcos, whom he welcomed in Washington just last year, before the pair

will join Kishida for a trilateral summit.

The visit may give a political boost to Kishida, whose popularity has waned at home. He is being greeted with great fanfare, with Japanese flags on display throughout Washington.

Besides the state dinner, Biden and his wife Jill took Kishida and his wife Yuko to a private dinner at a local restaurant on Tuesday night.

On Thursday, Kishida will become only the second Japanese leader to address a joint meeting of Congress after his assassinated predecessor, Shinzo Abe, gave a speech in 2015.

Overshadowing the visit is a controversy over the planned \$15 billion acquisition of American steel maker U.S. Steel by Japan's Nippon Steel, a deal some say is "on life support" after criticism by Biden and former President Donald Trump, his rival in November's U.S. election.

Also looming are Japanese concerns that if Trump wins a second term he might seek a deal with China that could destabilize the region.

Swiss Press Say 'Absurd' European Climate Ruling Could Harm Democracy

Page3News

• Zurich / 10 April

Influential newspapers in Switzerland on Wednesday criticised a climate change ruling against the Swiss government by Europe's top human rights court, saying it risked undermining democracy and the political clout of environmental groups.

Tuesday's ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in favour of over 2,000 Swiss women who said Switzerland had not done enough to combat climate change is expected to embolden more people to bring climate cases against governments.

As environmental groups celebrated the ruling by the Strasbourg court, newspaper editorials said the decision would fan fears that the judiciary

was getting involved in politics.

"Absurd verdict against Switzerland: Strasbourg pursues climate policy from the judges bench," the center-right Neue Zuercher Zeitung (NZZ) newspaper wrote. Describing the ruling as "activist jurisprudence" that could pave the way for "all kinds of claims", the paper said the elderly plaintiffs were ultimately pawns of environmental lobbies that used the court to circumvent democratic debate.

Switzerland, where referendums regularly test the limits of national policymaking, has committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030, from 1990 levels. The government had proposed stronger measures to deliver the goal, but voters rebuffed

them in a 2021 referendum. Under the headline "We don't want climate justice", national daily Blick called the court's ruling "questionable" and warned it was likely to deepen divisions over climate policy. "And in European politics, it should be noted, this plays into the hands of those who smell foreign judges everywhere," the paper wrote. The center-left daily Tages-Anzeiger meanwhile said in an editorial that while the court had highlighted the limitations of Switzerland's climate agenda, democracy would come under pressure if courts began to shape policy. Making reference to the 2021 referendum, the paper said the ruling risked confirming widely held views that the court was meddling with national decision-making.

Philippines President Says Summit With U.S., Japan to Include South China Sea Cooperation

Page3News

• Manila / 10 April

The upcoming trilateral summit between the United States, Philippines and Japan will include an agreement to maintain security and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said on Wednesday.

Marcos left for Washington on Wednesday afternoon for talks with U.S. President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

The Philippine leader told reporters earlier in the day that there will be an agreement on South China Sea issues, but emphasised that the summit is mainly aimed at boosting economic ties between the three allies.

"The main intent of this trilateral agreement is for us to be able to continue to flourish, to be able to help one another,

and of course to keep the peace in the South China Sea and the freedom of navigation," Marcos said in a separate speech ahead of his departure to Washington. Marcos said he aims to explore ways to advance cooperation with Japan and the United States on key areas that include infrastructure, semiconductors, cyber security, critical minerals, renewable energy and defence and maritime cooperation. Marcos is also set to hold discussions with Biden ahead of the meeting among the three leaders.

The Philippines under Marcos has deepened military ties with both the United States and Japan as maritime run-ins with China in the South China Sea have escalated.

Marcos has allowed to nearly double Philippine bases American soldiers can access under the Enhanced Defence Coopera-

tion Agreement, and talks are underway with Japan for a reciprocal access agreement that will allow the presence of Japanese forces on Philippine soil.

At the same time, Marcos has also denied the existence of a so-called "gentleman's agreement" reportedly struck under predecessor Rodrigo Duterte with Beijing to "keep the status quo" in Second Thomas Shoal, a disputed maritime feature in the South China Sea.

A spokesperson during Duterte's term which ended in 2022 confirmed last month that such an agreement was made. Under that deal, the Philippines agreed not to bring construction materials to repair a rusting warship Manila deliberately grounded in 1999 to bolster its maritime claims. Marcos reiterated to reporters that there are no records of the deal.

Italy Opens New Slander Trial Against Amanda Knox. She Was Exonerated 9 Years Ago in Friend's Murder

Page3News

• Florence / 10 April

Amanda Knox was back on trial for slander Wednesday for wrongly accusing a Congolese man of murdering her roommate while the young women were exchange students in Italy. Knox herself was convicted of the slaying before being exonerated in a case that grabbed the global spotlight. Knox was a 20-year-old student with rudimentary Italian who had recently arrived in Perugia, when she endured a long night of questioning in the murder of Meredith Kercher. She ended up accusing the owner of a bar where she worked part-time of killing the 21-year-old British stu-



dent. In 2016, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the interrogation violated her rights because she was questioned without a lawyer or official translator. In November, Italy's highest Cassation Court threw out the slander conviction — the only remaining guilty verdict against Knox after the same court definitively

threw out convictions for Kercher's murder against Knox and her Italian boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito, nine years ago. That conviction has remained a legal stain against her, especially in Italy, as she pursues a new life in the United States campaigning for judicial reform. Another man was con-

victed in Kercher's 2007 murder.

Knox, now 36, was not expected at Wednesday's hearing in Florence, and judges declared she would be tried in absentia. She remains in the United States, where she has a variety of media projects including a podcast and a limited series on her case in development with Hulu.

Knox's accusation against bar owner Patrick Lumumba appeared in statements typed by police that she signed, but which have been ruled inadmissible in this new trial. She recanted the accusation in a four-page handwritten note in English penned the following afternoon — the only evidence the court can rule on, her lawyer said.

EU Finance Ministers to Discuss Ukraine Reform Plans, Sources Say



Page3News

• Belrin / 10 April

EU finance ministers will discuss in Luxemburg this week reform plans and an investment agenda submitted by Ukraine in a bid by Kyiv to secure funding, sources in the German finance ministry said on Wednesday.

The ministry sources said they welcomed that Ukraine was "so ambitious" in its approach. Ukraine has identified 15

key areas and 69 reform plans, according to the sources, who did not go into further detail.

The European Union's Ukraine Facility has a total budget of 50 billion euros (\$54.29 billion) for the period from 2024 to 2027. Financial support in the form of grants, which make up one third of the facility, and loans, the remaining two thirds, are to be provided based on the implementation of reforms in Ukraine.

Biden Says Netanyahu's Approach to the War Is a Mistake, Deepening a Rift Between the Two Allies

Page3News

• Tel Aviv / 10 April

U.S. President Joe Biden called Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's handling of the war in Gaza a mistake and called for his government to flood Gaza with aid, ramping up pressure on Israel to reach a cease-fire and widening a rift between the two staunch allies that has worsened as the war has dragged on. Biden has been an outspoken supporter of Israel's war against Hamas since the militant group launched a deadly assault on Oct. 7. But in recent weeks his patience with Netanyahu has appeared to be waning and his administration has taken a more stern line with Israel, rattling the countries' decades-old alliance and deepening Israel's international isolation over the war.

The most serious disagreement has been over Israel's plans for an offensive in the southernmost Gaza city of Rafah and the rift has spiraled since, worsened by an Israeli airstrike last week on an aid convoy, which killed seven workers with the food charity World Central Kitchen, most of them foreigners. Israel said the deaths were unintentional but Biden was outraged. Biden's comments, made in an interview that aired late Tuesday after being recorded two days after the WCK strike, highlight the differences between Israel and the U.S. over humanitarian aid to people in Gaza, where a months-long war has led to warnings of imminent famine. "What he's doing is a mistake. I



don't agree with his approach," Biden told Spanish-language broadcaster Univision.

He was responding to being asked if Netanyahu is prioritizing his political survival over the national interest.

Biden said Israel should agree to a cease-fire, flood beleaguered Gaza with aid for the next six to eight weeks and allow other countries in the region to help distribute the aid. "It should be done now," he said.

Hunger in Gaza is overshadowing the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, a typically joyous festival during which families celebrate the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Israel halted aid deliveries to Gaza in the early days of the war, but under U.S. pressure has slowly increased trucks allowed

to enter the territory. Still, aid groups have complained that supplies are not reaching desperate people quickly enough, blaming Israeli restrictions, and countries have attempted other ways to deliver them including air drops and by sea.

Israel says its has steadily ramped up aid throughout the war, opening up more entry points for trucks to enter and to reach especially hard-hit areas like northern Gaza, an early target of Israel's in the war.

Israel blames aid groups for being too slow to deliver aid once it's inside Gaza. Those groups say logistical issues and the precarious security situation — underscored by the WCK strike — complicate aid deliveries.

Israel and Hamas are currently engaged in talks meant to bring

about a cease-fire in exchange for the release of hostages captured by Hamas and others who stormed across the border on Oct. 7. But the sides remain far apart on key issues, including the return of Palestinians to hard-hit northern Gaza. Netanyahu's Security Cabinet met late Tuesday to discuss the hostage negotiations, but did not appear to make any decisions.

Netanyahu has vowed to achieve "total victory" in the war, pledging to destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities to prevent a repeat of the Oct. 7 attacks and to return the hostages. He says that victory must include an offensive in Rafah, which Israel says is Hamas' last major stronghold, but more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people

are currently seeking shelter there.

Six months into the war, Israel is growing ever more isolated, with even its closest partner increasingly vocal about its discontent in the war's direction and longtime trading partners like Turkey taking potentially painful economic steps to express dismay.

Netanyahu, who is on trial for alleged corruption, is under pressure to decide on a postwar vision for Gaza. But critics say he is delaying because he doesn't want to anger his ultranationalist governing partners, who support resettling the Gaza Strip, which Israel withdrew from in 2005 and an idea Netanyahu has ruled out.

Netanyahu's governing partners also oppose making significant concessions to Hamas in the ongoing negotiations. They have threatened to exit the government -- a step that would cause the ruling coalition to collapse and trigger new elections.

"If the prime minister thinks that there's going to be a reckless deal here, it isn't going to pass," Limor Sonn Har Melech, a lawmaker in the hard-line Jewish Power party, said in an interview to an Israeli radio station. "If we realize that the meaning of stopping this war is capitulation to Hamas, we won't be there."

Israel launched the war in response to Hamas' cross-border assault, where militants killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took roughly 250 people hostage, according to Israeli authorities.

Greece Rescues 14 Migrants off Chios Island, Searches for More

Page3News

• Athens / 10 April

Greece rescued 14 migrants including eight children from a rocky shore on the island of Chios, the coastguard said on Wednesday, adding that search-and-rescue operations were ongoing.

The migrants were believed to have reached the island in the Aegean Sea near Turkey on a dinghy, a coastguard official said. It was not immedi-

ately clear how many had been on board.

Greece has been a favoured gateway to the European Union for migrants and refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Asia since 2015 when nearly 1 million people landed on its islands. Numbers dropped significantly before rising again last year to 41,561 arrivals by sea. Some 10,163 migrants have reached Greece by sea so far this year.

Russian Air Strikes Keep up Pressure on Energy System in Mykolaiv, Odesa

Page3News

• Kyiv / 10 April

A Russian missile and drone attack damaged a Ukrainian energy facility in the Black Sea region of Odesa and energy infrastructure in the city of Mykolaiv on Wednesday, keeping up pressure on the embattled power grid, officials said.

Russia renewed its aerial assault on the energy system last month, devastating at least eight power plants and several dozen substations more than two years since the February 2022 invasion. The Ukrainian grid operator



said there were emergency blackouts in the southern regions of Mykolaiv and Kherson because of the damage, and that they were working to repair it. The air force said Russia launched 17 attack drones and three missiles at

Ukraine in its latest overnight attacks and that air defences downed 14 of the drones and two of the missiles.

The strikes on Odesa region targeted critical and logistics infrastructure, regional governor Oleh Kiper said. He did not name the damaged energy facility and said nobody was hurt.

The military said energy infrastructure in the southern city of Mykolaiv was damaged as a result of the attack and power supply was disrupted for several hours. There were no casualties, it added.

China Labels US Comments on Taiwan and AUKUS 'Dangerous'

Page3News

• Beijing / 10 April

China's government on Wednesday labelled as "dangerous" comments by a senior U.S. diplomat that the AUKUS submarine project between Australia, Britain and the United States could help deter any Chinese move against Taiwan. The project, finalised by the three countries last year, involves Australia acquiring nuclear-powered attack submarines as part of the allies' efforts to push back against China's growing power in the Indo-Pacific region.

Speaking last week, the U.S. State Department's No. 2 diplomat, Deputy

Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, said the new submarine capabilities would enhance peace and stability, including in the strait that separates China and Taiwan. China claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, despite the objections of the government in Taipei, and is regularly angered by what it views as foreign interference in a domestic issue. "His remarks are very dangerous," Zhu Fenglian, a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, told reporters in Beijing when asked about what Campbell had said. "The establishment of the so-called trilateral security partnership between the

United States, Britain and Australia is essentially to provoke military confrontation in the region through military cooperation in small circles," she added. 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.

The U.S., Britain and Australia formed AUKUS in 2021, part of their efforts to push back against China's growing power in the Indo-Pacific region. China has called the AUKUS pact dangerous and warned it could spur a regional arms race.

Fire in Packed Hong Kong Building Kills Five, dozens in Hospital

Page3News

• Hong Kong / 10 April

A fire broke out in a densely populated residential building in Hong Kong's bustling Kowloon district on Wednesday, killing five people and injuring 35 others, the city's hospital authority and fire services said.

People inside the 16-storey building waved towels at windows to signal for rescue, broadcaster RTHK said, adding that the fire had started at a gym there. Some surrounding roads had to be sealed off, disrupting morning rush hour traffic. Around 150 people were evacuated to safety, the



city's government said, while 40 people were sent to public hospitals.

Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee said he had instructed authorities to make an "all-out" effort to treat the injured, while different government departments were investigating the cause of the fire.

The blaze, rated three in the city's five-grade system, was brought under control by 8:54 a.m. (0054 GMT), an hour after fire services were alerted to the fire in Jordan, an area teeming with homes and offices across the harbour from the financial centre.

At least six of the injured were in serious condition, the hospital authority said, with one critical.

Fire fighters were still battling on Wednesday to put out a separate massive blaze 15 hours after it erupted at a building site in the northern New Territories, a fire services spokesperson said, but no casualties were reported.

US Coast Guard Says Boardings of Chinese Fishing Vessels in South Pacific Legal

Page3News

• Sydney / 10 April

The U.S. Coast Guard has rejected comments by a Chinese diplomat that its recent boardings of Chinese fishing boats in the Pacific Islands alongside local police are illegal, saying the joint patrols are at the behest of Pacific nations to protect coastal fisheries.

Reuters reported last month that six Chinese fishing boats were found to be violating Vanuatu's fisheries law after being inspected by local police who were on board the first U.S. Coast Guard boat to patrol the waters of the Pacific Islands nation.

China's Ambassador to New Zealand Wang Xiaolong, in a letter circulated by the Chinese embassy on Friday, said the use of shiprider agreements between the U.S. and Vanuatu, Kiribati and Papua New Guinea to "carry out law enforcement activities against China's fishing vessels" was a violation of international law.

In the letter, Wang claimed the agreements are not binding on China's fishing fleet.

"China is not obliged to accept



the law enforcement of countries other than coastal states for fishing activities in their exclusive economic zones," the letter said.

U.S. Coast Guard Rear Admiral Michael Day on Wednesday said the Chinese ambassador's statement was inaccurate and the bilateral shiprider agreements complied with international law.

"We do these boardings at the behest of those host nations who invite us to board, to work with them collaboratively in protecting their Exclusive Economic Zones," he said at a

press conference in Honolulu to mark the return of the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Harriet Lane after its Pacific Islands patrol.

"A free and open Indo-Pacific is predicated upon the following of international rules and norms and laws, and I am happy to say the coast guard is complying with all international law and these are legal boardings."

Commander Nicole Tesoniero said shiprider agreements with Samoa, Fiji, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea had resulted in 23 boardings of fishing boats operating in the "far reaches of the

respective countries' exclusive economic zones", with 12 violations found by local police.

"The targeting of vessels within the exclusive economic zones as well as the enforcement actions were all dictated by our partners," she said.

In an interview in Sydney, Admiral John Aquilino, Commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, said China's fishing fleet in the South Pacific should be viewed as a "maritime militia", based on its activities in the South China Sea and East China Sea.

"Those fishing vessels are the

maritime militia," Aquilino said.

"If it were to get to a time or place where we have a crisis, and you look at Scarborough Shoal or the Senkakus, those fishing vessels are fishing and then they will take on a mission of pressurizing the host nation or the nation whose exclusive economic zone they are operating in," he said.

In the letter, Ambassador Wang said China exercised strict supervision over its distant water fishing fleets, had "a zero tolerance attitude towards illegal fishing", and respected the sovereign rights of coastal states.

The U.S. Coast Guard patrols come after Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, Pacific Island nations with close ties to China, blocked a U.S. Coast Guard vessel from coming to port to refuel in 2022 and 2023 as it undertook a patrol for illegal fishing on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum regional block.

Australia, New Zealand and Britain have also stepped up navy patrols for illegal fishing in partnership with Pacific Islands nations, many of whom do not have militaries or boats to monitor coastal waters and exclusive economic zones spanning millions of kilometres.

China Labels US Comments on Taiwan and AUKUS 'Dangerous'

Page3News

• Beijing / 10 April

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including in the strait that separates China and Taiwan.

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"The establishment of the so-called trilateral security partnership between the United States, Britain and Australia is essentially to provoke military confrontation in the region through military cooperation in small circles," she added.

Muslims Worldwide Celebrate Eid Al-Fitr, but the Festivities Are Marred by the War in Gaza

Page3News

• Jakarta / 10 April

Muslims around the world celebrated the Eid al-Fitr holiday Wednesday, marking the end of the Islamic holy month with family reunions, new clothes and sweet treats.

But the celebrations were overshadowed by the worsening humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and Israel's expected offensive in the city of Rafah despite efforts from its Western allies to halt the fighting after six months of war.

In Istanbul, thousands of worshippers gathered at the Aya Sofya Mosque for morning Eid prayers, some carrying Palestinian flags and chanting slogans in support of people in Gaza. Many laid their prayer rugs



in the square in front of the former Byzantine cathedral, which was reconverted to a mosque four years ago, as space inside quickly filled. In a holiday message, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sent support to Gaza, which he called a "bleeding wound on the conscience of humanity." "I hope that the Eid will lead

to peace, tranquillity and wellbeing for our country, our nation, the Islamic world and all humanity," he added.

The war in Gaza was also the focus of prayers at the Rahma Mosque in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi.

"We should not forget our brothers and sisters in Palestine," Imam Abdulrahman Musa said.

"They have been subjected to unjustified aggression and a lot of violence (as) the world is watching in silence."

In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, nearly three-quarters of the population were traveling for the annual homecoming known locally as "mudik" that is always welcomed with excitement.

"Mudik is not just an annual ritual or tradition for us," said civil servant Ridho Alfian, who lives in the Jakarta area and was traveling to Lampung province at the southern tip of Sumatra island. "This is a right moment to reconnect, like recharging energy that has been drained almost a year away from home."

Floods Swamp Swathes of Russia and Kazakhstan but Worse Still to Come

Page3News

• Orenburg / 10 April

Floods engulfed cities and towns across Russia and Kazakhstan on Wednesday after Europe's third-longest river burst its banks, forcing over 110,000 people to evacuate and swamping parts of the Russian city of Orenburg. The deluge of melt water overwhelmed scores of settlements in Russia's Ural Mountains, Siberia, Volga and areas of Kazakhstan after major rivers such as the Ural, which flows into the Caspian, rose more 70

cm (2 foot 3 inches) beyond its bursting point to over 10 metres.

In Orenburg, a city with a population of 550,000 about 1,200 km (750 miles) east of Moscow, hundreds of homes were flooded and at least 7,700 people were evacuated as the Ural river rose swiftly beyond the critical level of 9.3 metres.

Reuters footage showed areas near the city under water. In Kurgan, a region which straddles the Tobol river, 4,500 people were evacuated and fears grew that thousands - or even tens

of thousands - more would need to be evacuated. "The forecast is unfavourable," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "The water level continues to rise in flood zones, large amounts of water are coming to new regions."

The flood situation was acute in parts of Western Siberia, the largest hydrocarbon basin in the world, where the peak is expected in three to five days, and some areas around the Volga, Europe's largest river, the emergencies ministry said.

Taiwan Appoints Ruling Party's Former Chairman as New Premier

Page3News

• Taipei / 10 April

Taiwan President-elect Lai Ching-te appointed Cho Jung-tai, a former chairman of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), to be his premier on Wednesday, with appointments for other roles such as foreign minister due to be announced soon.

The new premier and his cabinet will not assume their roles until Lai is inaugurated on May 20. Under Taiwan's system of government, the president appoints the premier, who then appoints cabinet

members with final approval from the president. It is the cabinet which enacts policy and proposes legislation.

Cho told reporters that he will announce his other cabinet members soon, adding that he will reach across party lines.

"I hope this active, innovative...cabinet, will as in the past uphold the spirit of a great democratic alliance, using people based on their talents without distinction to party affiliations and proactively training a younger generation," he said.

Taiwan media has reported that National

Security Council Secretary-General Wellington Koo, a lawyer by training, would likely take over as defence minister from Chiu Kuo-cheng, a former army commander.

Current Foreign Minister Joseph Wu will likely succeed Koo as head of the National Security Council, the media reported.

The National Security Bureau's Director-General Tsai Ming-yen, who had previously served as Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the European Union, will stay on as head of the intelligence agency, the reports added.