



Palestinian children play on the site of a destroyed building in the Nuseirat refugee camp, in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. As Muslims worldwide prepare to mark Eid-ul-Azha starting today, Gazans lamented the shortages of essential goods and the lack of an Eid spirit amid Israeli bombardment. PHOTO: AFP

UKRAINE-RUSSIA WAR

World leaders join Swiss peace summit for Ukraine

US VP announces \$1.5b Ukraine aid; Sweden accuses Russia of airspace violation

AGENCIES

World leaders were joining Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Switzerland yesterday for a summit on peace in his country, but with Russia staying away it is seen as the first step in a long process.

The Swiss hosts have sought to temper expectations at the two-day gathering, with an agenda laying the groundwork for a path to peace, with future summits envisioned, eventually involving Moscow.

The conference, convening exactly 100 countries and global institutions, comes at a perilous moment for exhausted Ukrainians and outgunned soldiers, more than two years since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

More than 50 heads of state and government figure among the attendees, including all of the G7 leaders who have been meeting in Italy, with the exception of Biden.

The leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan are attending, as is the European Union chief and the leaders of Colombia, Chile, Finland, Ghana, Kenya and Poland.

Argentinian President Javier Milei and the presidents of Ecuador and Fiji were among the early arrivals.

Russia's BRICS allies Brazil and South Africa are meanwhile only sending an envoy, and India will be represented at the ministerial level.

China is absent, insisting it will not take part without Moscow's presence.

The summit aims to find paths towards a lasting peace for Ukraine based on international law and the United Nations Charter; a possible framework to achieve this



US Vice President Kamala Harris shakes hands with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky during a meeting on the sideline of the Summit on peace in Ukraine in Stansstad yesterday.

goal; and a roadmap as to how both parties could come together in a future peace process.

US Vice President Kamala Harris announced more than \$1.5 billion in aid in part for Ukraine's energy sector and its humanitarian situation as a result of Russia's 27-month invasion of Ukraine.

The \$1.5 billion includes \$500 million in new funding for energy assistance and the redirecting of \$324 million in previously announced funds toward emergency energy infrastructure repair and other needs in Ukraine, the vice president's office said.

She also announced more than \$379 million in humanitarian assistance from the State Department and the US Agency for International Development to help refugees

and other people impacted by the war.

Harris, who will spend less than 24 hours at the gathering in Lucerne, Switzerland, will be standing in for President Biden at the event.

Elsewhere, a Russian SU-24 bomber violated Swedish airspace near the strategic Baltic Sea island of Gotland, leaving only after Sweden scrambled two JAS 39 fighter jets, Sweden's military said yesterday.

The incident on Friday occurred three months after the Scandinavian country became a full member of NATO, dropping two centuries of military non-alliance.

"The Russian actions are not acceptable and demonstrate a lack of respect for our territorial integrity," the head of Sweden's air force, Jonas Wikman, said.

China-Aussie ties 'back on track'

Says China PM Li

REUTERS, Sydney

Chinese Premier Li Qiang arrived in Australia yesterday, saying relations were "back on track" as he started the first visit by a Chinese premier to the major trading partner in seven years.

Australia is "uniquely positioned to connect the West and the East" and stands as "an important force of economic globalization and world multipolarity", Li said at Adelaide's airport, according to a statement from the Chinese embassy.

Bilateral relations are "back on track after a period of twists and turns", Li said.

During his four-day visit, Li will also visit the capital Canberra and mining states in Western Australia.

"A more mature, stable and fruitful comprehensive strategic partnership will be a treasure shared by the people of both countries," Li said.

The ebb in bilateral ties resulted in the suspension of AS20 billion (\$13 billion) in Australian agriculture and mineral exports to China through last year.

Li arrived from New Zealand, where he highlighted Chinese demand for New Zealand's agricultural products.

N Korea building roads, walls inside DMZ: report

AFP, Seoul

North Korea's (DPRK's) military has been building roads and walls inside the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that separates it from South Korea (ROK), the Yonhap news agency reported yesterday.

The construction activities are taking place north of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) that runs through the middle of the DMZ, the South Korean agency said, citing an military source.

The report follows an incident last week when South Korean forces fired warning shots after North Korean soldiers briefly crossed the MDL.

South Korean authorities said it was likely accidental, and Yonhap quoted a military spokesman as saying some of the North Koreans were carrying work tools.

"Recently, the North Korean military has been erecting walls, digging the ground and constructing roads in some areas between the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) and the Northern Limit Line in the DMZ," the military source said, according to Yonhap yesterday. It was not clear what they were building, the source told Yonhap.

When asked about the report, the South Korean military said in a statement that it was "closely tracking and monitoring the activities of the North Korean military", and that "further analysis is required".

South Korea's spy agency told AFP this week that it had detected signs that North Korea was demolishing sections of a railway line connecting the two countries.

S AFRICA ELECTIONS Ramaphosa re-elected after coalition deal

REUTERS, Cape Town

The African National Congress and its largest rival, the controversial white-led Democratic Alliance, agreed on Friday to work together in South Africa's new government of national unity, a step change after 30 years of ANC rule.

Once unthinkable, the accord allowed President Cyril Ramaphosa to win a second term in office. He was re-elected by lawmakers with 283 votes.

The deal between two sharply antagonistic parties is the most momentous political shift in South Africa since Nelson Mandela led the ANC to victory in the 1994 election that marked the end of apartheid.

The ANC lost its majority for the first time in an election on May 29 and spent two weeks in talks with other parties.

The National Assembly had earlier elected a DA lawmaker as deputy speaker, after choosing an ANC politician as speaker, the first concrete instance of power sharing between the two

parties. The DA wants to scrap some of the ANC's Black empowerment programmes, saying they have not worked and have mostly benefited a politically-connected elite. It says good governance and a strong economy would benefit all South Africans.

Ramaphosa first came to power in 2018 after his predecessor Zuma was forced out under the cloud of corruption allegations.

Under his watch South Africa suffered from record power cuts, the economy languished and crime remained rife. Unemployment is at almost 33 percent.



SOUTH CHINA SEA ROW New China rules allow detention of foreigners

AGENCIES

New Chinese coast guard rules took effect yesterday, under which it can detain foreigners for trespassing in the disputed South China Sea, where neighbours and the G7 have accused Beijing of intimidation and coercion.

Beijing claims almost the entirety of the South China Sea, brushing aside competing claims from several Southeast Asian nations including the Philippines and an international ruling that its stance has no legal basis.

From yesterday, China's coast guard can detain foreigners "suspected of violating management of border entry and exit", according to the new regulations published online. Detention is allowed up to 60 days in "complicated cases", they say.

Meanwhile, the Philippines filed a claim with the UN yesterday to an extended continental shelf (ECS) in the South China Sea, a waterway where it has had increasingly confrontational maritime disputes with China.

The Philippines sought to register its entitlement to an extended continental shelf in the West Palawan Region facing the South China Sea. The submission, cleared by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, follows a comprehensive technical and scientific study of continental shelf in the West Philippine Sea, the foreign ministry said.

Earlier, the Group of Seven bloc on Friday criticised what it called "dangerous" incursions by China in the waterway. "We oppose China's militarisation, and coercive and intimidation activities in the South China Sea," read a G7 statement at the end of a summit on Friday.



Demonstrators, including one with a placard, take part in an anti-far-right rally, after French President Emmanuel Macron called legislative elections following far-right parties' significant gains in European Parliament elections, in Strasbourg, eastern France, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Singapore oil slick closes beaches on resort island

REUTERS, Singapore

Beaches on Singapore's Sentosa island were closed yesterday after an oil spill spread from a nearby shipping terminal to the tourist haven south of the city-state.

The oil spill had spread from Pasir Panjang Terminal, less than 10 km from the island popular with tourists and locals, after a Netherlands-flagged dredger struck a stationary Singapore-flagged bunker vessel on Friday afternoon.

The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore said patches of oil were observed off Pasir Panjang Terminal and along Tanjong, Palawan, and Siloso beaches. It said it has deployed 16 oil spill response craft to contain the oil spill.

"There is no impact on navigational traffic. Berthing operations at Pasir Panjang Terminal remain unaffected," the authority said.