

Pak ex-PM Imran Khan calls off talks with govt

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan called off reconciliatory talks with the government yesterday, a week after a court handed him a 14-year jail term on graft charges, his party's chairman said.

Aimed at cooling political instability in the South Asian nation, the talks had started late last year ahead of the judgment in the land corruption case against the 72-year-old politician.

The graft case is the largest that Khan faces in terms of financial impropriety. It involves land given by a real estate tycoon to a welfare institution set up by Khan and his wife in return for illegal favours.

"Khan has called off negotiations," the party chairman, Gohar Khan, told reporters in comments telecast live by Geo News TV after he said he met the former premier in jail.

Rubio affirms 'ironclad' US commitment to Philippines

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Wednesday the US under President Donald Trump remained committed to the Philippines' defense, as tensions simmer with Beijing in the South China Sea.

In a call with his Philippine counterpart Enrique Manalo, Rubio "underscored the United States' ironclad commitments to the Philippines under our Mutual Defense Treaty," State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said.

Rubio, a longtime hawk on China, discussed the "dangerous and destabilizing actions in the South China Sea" by Beijing, formally known as the People's Republic of China.

"Secretary Rubio conveyed that the PRC's behavior undermines regional peace and stability and is inconsistent with international law," Bruce said.



Palestinians gather near damaged property after two Palestinian gunmen were killed in an Israeli raid in Burqin, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR Ready for 'mutually respectful' Trump talks

Says Kremlin; Russian strikes kill 3, wound 25 in Ukraine

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin said yesterday it saw nothing new in US President Donald Trump's calls for Russia to end its military offensive in Ukraine, and that Moscow was ready for "mutually respectful" dialogue with him.

The US leader had on Wednesday threatened fresh sanctions on Moscow if Russia did not strike a deal to end its nearly three-year campaign against Ukraine.

Expectations are high that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Trump will soon hold a phone call to discuss the conflict, after the Republican pledged on the campaign trail to bring a swift end to the fighting.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was "ready for equal, mutually respectful dialogue."

"We are waiting for signals, which we have not yet received," he added.

Trump has not said publicly how he sees the contours of a potential peace deal between Kyiv and Moscow. Putin has outlined maximalist demands that include the Ukrainian withdrawal from parts of its own territory still under Kyiv's control.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has meanwhile ruled out territorial concessions, though he said he would consider trying to secure the return

of land captured by Russia through "diplomatic" means.

Meanwhile, Russian aerial attacks on frontline towns in eastern and central Ukraine yesterday killed at least three people and wounded dozens, officials said.

The state emergency service posted images of a destroyed building and a damaged firetruck that were hit in the apparent double-tap attack.

"The attack left three people dead and wounded 25 people, including a two-month-old baby and four rescuers," the emergency services said in a statement.

They said Russian forces had launched a combined drone and missile attack at intervals, explaining that firefighters had been wounded in the "second" attack.

"We need more sanctions against Russia, more air defence systems to protect our cities and communities, and more weapons for our warriors on the front lines," President Zelensky said on social media.

The industrial city had an estimated population of more than 700,000 people before the Russian invasion in February 2022, and lies around 35 kilometres (20 miles) from the frontline.

South Korea's Yoon never intended full martial law

Ousted defence minister testifies before court

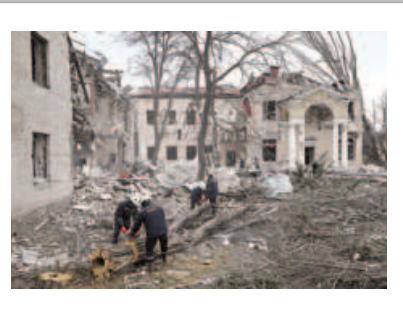
REUTERS, Seoul

A former South Korean defence minister charged with insurrection for his role in a short-lived martial law attempt told a court yesterday that he wanted a broader military deployment but was overruled by President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Kim Yong-hyun, who resigned after the December 3 martial law and is now jailed, testified before the nation's Constitutional Court, which is deciding whether to reinstate or fully remove Yoon from power after he was impeached.

Central to Yoon's defence is that he never intended to impose military rule. "Yes," said Kim when asked by Yoon's lawyers whether the president had shot down the defence minister's recommendation to mobilise all military units stationed in Seoul.

Kim confirmed he had also proposed sending some units to the opposition party headquarters and a left-wing polling firm.



A firefighting helicopter drops water over the Hughes Fire in Castaic, a northwestern neighbourhood of Los Angeles County, California, US, on Wednesday evening.

PHOTO: AFP

Seven Texas cops hurt in shooting, gunman dead

AFP, Washington

A man in the US state of Texas shot and wounded seven police officers at an apartment where he had barricaded himself inside, before later being found dead by SWAT members, authorities said yesterday.

San Antonio Police Chief William McManus said officers responded to a "suicide in progress" call late Wednesday at an apartment complex north of the city.

"The first officer who arrived was shot, and six others subsequent to that were shot as well," McManus said in a video post on Facebook.

A man in his 40s "barricaded himself

inside the apartment for several hours," he said. "At the end of the event the suspect was found to be deceased," McManus added, noting it was not immediately known whether the suspect took his own life or was shot by SWAT officers at the scene.

At least four officers were transported to hospital with injuries that were non-life-threatening, he said. The conditions of the other three were unclear.

Shootings are alarmingly commonplace in the US, where there are more guns than people. Since January 1 there have been at least 16 mass shootings -- defined as a shooting involving at least four victims, dead or wounded -- across the country.

PERSECUTION OF WOMEN

ICC prosecutor seeks arrest of Taliban leaders

AFP, The Hague

The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor yesterday said he was seeking arrest warrants against senior Taliban leaders in Afghanistan over the persecution of women, a crime against humanity.

Karim Khan said there were reasonable grounds to suspect that Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada and chief justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani "bear criminal responsibility for the crime against humanity of persecution on gender grounds".

Khan said that Afghan women and girls, as well as the LGBTQI community, were facing "an unprecedented, unconscionable and ongoing persecution by the Taliban."

"Our action signals that the status quo for women and girls in Afghanistan is not acceptable," added Khan.

ICC judges will now consider Khan's application before deciding whether to issue an arrest warrant -- a process that could take weeks or even months.

The court, based in The Hague, was set up to rule on the world's worst crimes such as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

It has no police force of its own and relies on its 125 member states to carry out its arrest warrants -- with mixed results. In theory this means that anyone subject to an ICC arrest warrant cannot travel to a member state for fear of being detained.

TRUMP WITHDRAWAL

Bloomberg steps in to help fund UN climate body

REUTERS, Washington

Former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's philanthropy arm said yesterday it will provide funding to help cover the US contribution to the UN climate body's budget, filling a gap left by President Donald Trump.

The new Republican president announced after taking office on Monday that he would withdraw the US from the Paris climate agreement and end the country's international climate funding. Trump had also withdrawn the US from the Paris deal in his first 2017-2021 White House term.

Bloomberg is a media billionaire who also serves as a UN special envoy on climate change.

"Bloomberg Philanthropies and other US climate funders will ensure the United States meets its global climate obligations," the organisation said in a statement, adding this included covering the amount the US owes each year to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Bloomberg Philanthropies did not give details of the amounts of funding or who the other climate funders are.

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KEY DATES/EVENTS

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