



Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese celebrates with his partner Jodie Haydon (R), son Nathan Albanese and Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong (L) after winning the general election at the Labor Party election night event in Sydney yesterday. Donald Trump's stinging trade tariffs may have helped Australia's left-leaning prime minister snatch the resounding election victory, analysts say.

US approves \$3.5b missile sale to Saudis

AFP, Washington

The United States on Friday approved a \$3.5 billion sale of missiles to Saudi Arabia, ahead of a visit to the kingdom by President Donald Trump.

The State Department said it notified Congress of the deal that will include Saudi Arabia's purchase of 1,000 medium-range air-to-air missiles.

The AIM-120 missiles, whose principal contractor is RTX Corp. in Arizona, are a mainstay of a number of militaries around the world.

The missiles are guided by active radar after fired by pilots.

Trump will visit Saudi Arabia followed by Qatar and the United Arab Emirates on May 13 to 16 on the first foreign trip of his second term -- other than a brief trip to Rome for the funeral of Pope Francis.

The decision came amid the ongoing conflict in the Middle East -- in Gaza, Yemen, Lebanon and Syria.

Since Israel launched its offensive in Gaza, it has killed more than 52,000 people, mostly children and women. It has also destroyed the tiny territory.

Trump has boasted of securing major commercial deals from oil-rich Saudi Arabia, which has also been a key go-between for the US diplomacy on Russia and Ukraine.

MOSCOW'S SHORT TRUCE OFFER
Zelensky says won't play Putin's 'games'
Kremlin fumes as Kyiv says it cannot guarantee safety of foreign leaders who are attending Russia's WWII event

AGENCIES

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky dismissed a three-day truce ordered by Russian leader Vladimir Putin as theatrics but said Kyiv was ready for a full ceasefire.

Russia has so far rejected an unconditional 30-day ceasefire pushed by Kyiv and Washington, which is trying to broker an end to the three-year Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"This is more of a theatrical performance on his part. Because in two or three days, it is impossible to develop a plan for the next steps to end the war," Zelensky said.

Zelensky was speaking on Friday to a small group of journalists including AFP, in remarks embargoed until yesterday.

Zelensky said Ukraine would not be "playing games to create a pleasant atmosphere to allow for Putin's exit from isolation on 9 May," when some foreign leaders are due in Moscow for Russian World War II commemorations.

Ukraine has hit Moscow several times during the invasion, as well as targets across Russia.

Leaders of around 20 countries, including China's Xi Jinping, have accepted invitations to join this year's celebration, according to the Kremlin.

Zelensky said some countries



had approached Kyiv, warning they were travelling to Russia and had requested safety.

"Our position is very simple towards all countries that have travelled or are travelling to Russia on May 9 -- we cannot take responsibility for what is happening on the territory of the Russian Federation," he answered.

"They are ensuring your safety," Zelensky said, adding that Russia "may take various steps on its part, such as arson, explosions, and so on and then blame us."

Russian officials have promised grand celebrations for the occasion, during which Putin will

seek to rally support for his troops fighting in Ukraine.

In reply, the Kremlin yesterday said it wanted a definitive response from Ukraine to Putin's offer of a three-day ceasefire next week, criticising the reaction so far as ambiguous and historically wrong.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said his comments amounted to a threat, while Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, said nobody could guarantee that the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv would survive to see May 10 if Ukraine attacked Moscow during the May 9 celebrations.

India temple stampede kills 6; 80 injured

AFP, New Delhi

Six people were crushed to death at a Hindu temple in India's coastal state of Goa, officials said yesterday, after thousands gathered for a popular fire-walking ritual.

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said in a statement that he was "deeply saddened by the tragic stampede" at Lairai Devi temple in the village of Shirgao in the early hours of Saturday morning.

"Six people died even before they could be brought to the hospital," Sawant told reporters.

He visited the hospital and said that "all possible support" would be given to the families of those killed or injured.

Vishwajit Rane, Goa state health minister said "approximately 80" people were injured.

"Five are critical and on ventilator support," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office expressed "condolences to those who lost their loved ones".

The Lairai Zatra is a key Hindu celebration in Goa and is marked by a fire-walking ceremony.

Deadly stampedes are notoriously common in Indian religious festivals.

Earlier this year, at least 30 people were killed in an early morning crush at the Kumbh Mela, a Hindu mega-festival in the northern city of Prayagraj.

Iran 'has every right' to enrich uranium: FM

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday defended its "right" to enrich uranium despite growing Western concern that Tehran may be seeking nuclear weapons, and as talks with the United States were delayed.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a post on X that "Iran has every right to possess the full nuclear fuel cycle," citing Tehran's long-standing membership of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

"There are several NPT members which enrich uranium while wholly rejecting nuclear weapons," Araghchi said.

Under the NPT, signatory states are obliged to declare their nuclear stockpiles and place them under the supervision of the UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The United States and other Western countries have long accused Iran of pursuing nuclear weapons -- a claim Tehran denies.

Iran and the United States have engaged in nuclear talks since April 12, their highest-level contact since Washington withdrew from a landmark deal with Tehran in 2018.

A fourth round of talks initially scheduled for yesterday has been postponed, mediator Oman said earlier this week, citing "logistical reasons".

In a Thursday interview with Fox News, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio called on Iran to "walk away" from enrichment.

Iran currently enriches uranium to 60-percent purity -- far above the 3.67-percent limit set in the 2015 deal with the United States and other world powers, but below the 90 percent needed for weapons-grade material.

S'pore votes with new PM seeking strong mandate

AFP, Singapore

Singaporeans yesterday cast their votes in an election where Prime Minister Lawrence Wong faces his first major test against a rejuvenated opposition in uncertain economic times for the trade-centred nation.

Wong's ruling People's Action Party (PAP), which has steered the island to prosperity while using an iron hand to suppress dissent, is expected to easily retain a clear majority in parliament.

Wong, wearing all white -- the PAP's colour -- arrived at a voting centre around noon, accompanied by his wife. After casting his ballot, he left without speaking to reporters.

Popular after leading Singapore's Covid task force, Wong took over last year from his predecessor Lee Hsien Loong, the son of founding premier Lee Kuan Yew who ruled the island state after its bitter break-up with Malaysia in 1965.

Wong repeatedly said he needed a strong mandate to navigate heavily trade-reliant Singapore through economic uncertainty in light of tariffs levied by US President Donald Trump.

He has warned Singapore would be hit hard if Trump went ahead with the tariffs he announced and then paused for most countries, except China.

Political analyst Nydia Ngiew said the PAP had long been seen as Singapore's steady hand in crises, but that the recent tariff turmoil may not be a big factor for voters yet.

The overwhelming PAP majority in Singapore's unicameral legislature is such a norm in the wealthy island's political landscape that the opposition and its supporters will consider a few more seats gained as a significant victory, observers said.



Trump posts spoof picture dressed as pope

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump posted on Friday a spoof picture of himself dressed as the pope on his Truth Social platform after joking that he would like to be the next Catholic pontiff.

The president is seen in what appears to be an AI-generated color image, with his right index finger pointed toward the sky, wearing papal regalia, including white robes, a gold crucifix pendant and the mitre hat.

It comes after Trump joked to reporters this week that he would like to be the next pope, just days before cardinals are due to start the conclave to elect the successor of Pope Francis who died on April 21.

Asked who he would like to succeed



Pope Francis, Trump said: "I'd like to be pope, that would be my number one choice."

Trump went on to say that he did not have a preference but said there was a cardinal in New York who was "very good."

He appeared to be referring to the archbishop of New York, Timothy Dolan, a theological conservative and fiercely opposed to

abortion.

Trump attended the funeral service of Pope Francis last week.

About 20 percent of Americans declare themselves Catholic, and exit polls indicated in November that they voted around 60% in favor of Trump.

Cardinals will gather on May 7 in a conclave in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel to elect a new pope.



Cosplay fans walk on a field of nemophila flowers at Hitachi Seaside Park in Hitachinaka, Ibaraki prefecture, during the "golden week" holiday yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP