

Germany blames Russia for polls interference

AFP, Berlin

Germany yesterday accused Russia of cyberattacks targeting its air traffic control and February’s general election, and said it had summoned the Russian ambassador to protest.

A foreign ministry spokesman said German security services had proof that hacker groups run by Russia’s military intelligence service GRU were responsible for the attacks and influence operations.

“Based on comprehensive analysis by the German intelligence services, we have been able to clearly identify the handwriting behind it and prove Moscow’s responsibility,” said the spokesman.

“We can now clearly attribute the cyberattack against German Air Safety in August 2024 to the hacker collective APT28, also known as Fancy Bear,” he told a regular press briefing.

He also said Russia had sought to influence February’s parliamentary election, which was won by the conservatives of Chancellor Friedrich Merz, with the far-right AfD scoring its best-ever result in second place.



This undated handout photograph released by the National Police of Ukraine yesterday shows an aerial view of heavily damaged residential buildings and a church in the frontline town of Kostyantynivka, Donetsk region.

PHOTO: AFP

Spanish PM slams US ‘extrajudicial ops’ off Venezuela

AFP, Rome

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez condemned as “unacceptable” the “extrajudicial operations” carried out by the United States on alleged drug-trafficking boats off Venezuela, in an interview published yesterday.

Speaking to Italy’s L’Espresso magazine, the Socialist premier urged a peaceful resolution to the growing crisis between President Donald Trump’s administration and Caracas, which have sparked fears of an open conflict.

Asked about what the reporter characterised as US extrajudicial killings in international waters, Sanchez said: “The questioning of international law is, once again, worrying.”

He said the operations fuel criticism that the West is inconsistent and applies “double standards” on defending international law.

“In my opinion, these extrajudicial operations are unacceptable, they undermine international law.”

The United States imposed sanctions Thursday against relatives of Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and six companies shipping the South American country’s oil.

President Donald Trump’s administration has been piling pressure on Venezuela for months, with a major naval buildup in the region that has been accompanied by deadly strikes on alleged drug-trafficking boats, killing nearly 90 people.

Trump ‘extremely frustrated’ with Kyiv, Moscow

EU set to indefinitely freeze Russian assets

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump is “extremely frustrated” with both Kyiv and Moscow, his spokeswoman said Thursday, as negotiations on ending Russia’s nearly four-year war against its neighbour have faltered.

“The president is extremely frustrated with both sides of this war,” Karoline Leavitt told reporters. “He doesn’t want any more talk. He wants action. He wants this war to come to an end.”

Leavitt added: “His special envoy, (Steve) Witkoff, and his team continue to talk with both sides, literally as we speak.”

Earlier in the week, Trump expressed impatience with Ukraine and its European allies France, Britain and Germany, saying “strong words” were exchanged in a phone call with the leaders.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said further talks were planned this weekend and that an international meeting on Ukraine could take place early next week, but that American participation was not



guaranteed.

Meanwhile, the EU yesterday looked set to indefinitely freeze Russian central bank assets held in Europe, removing a big obstacle to using the cash to help Ukraine defend itself against Moscow’s invasion.

EU governments aim to sign off by 1600 GMT, through a qualified majority vote, on a plan to immobilise 210 billion euros (\$246 billion) worth of Russian sovereign assets for as long as needed to prevent major economic disruption to the EU economy.

A qualified majority among EU governments means the support of at least 15 of the 27 member states representing 65% of the EU

population.

The new freeze, which would stay in place “until there is no longer an immediate threat to the economic interests of the Union”, will replace the current system which requires a roll-over of the freeze every six months by unanimity.

The indefinite asset freeze is meant to help convince Belgium to support the EU’s plan to use the frozen Russian cash to extend a loan of up to 165 billion euros to Ukraine to cover its military and civilian budget needs in 2026 and 2027.

The loan would be paid back by Ukraine only when Russia pays Kyiv war damages, making the loan effectively a grant that advances future Russian reparations payments.

EU leaders - the European Council - are to meet on December 18 to finalise the details of the reparations loan and resolve the remaining problems, which include guarantees from all EU governments for Belgium that it would not be left alone to foot the bill should a potential Moscow lawsuit prove successful.

Series of Israeli strikes hit Lebanon

AFP, Beirut

A series of Israeli strikes hit south and east Lebanon yesterday, state media reported, as Israel’s army said it was targeting Hezbollah sites, the latest such raids despite a year-old ceasefire.

Lebanon’s state run National News Agency (NNA) reported strikes in around a dozen locations, including up to around 30 kilometres (20 miles) from the Israeli border, citing at times “heavy raids”.

Israel has kept up strikes on Lebanon despite a November 2024 ceasefire and has also kept troops in five areas it deems strategic.

The Israeli military said in a statement that its forces “struck a training and qualification compound” used by Hezbollah’s elite Radwan Force where operatives “underwent shooting exercises and additional training on the use of various types of weapons”.

ChatGPT blamed for US murder-suicide in lawsuit

AFP, Washington

The estate of an 83-year-old Connecticut woman filed a wrongful death lawsuit Thursday against OpenAI and Microsoft, alleging the ChatGPT chatbot fueled her son’s paranoid delusions and contributed to her murder.

Suzanne Adams was beaten and strangled to death by her 56-year-old son Stein-Erik Soelberg on August 3, in their Old Greenwich home, according to the complaint filed in California Superior Court in San Francisco.

Soelberg then fatally stabbed himself.

The case joins a growing number of wrongful death lawsuits filed against OpenAI in recent months, with several alleging ChatGPT contributed to users’ suicides.

In August, the parents of 16-year-old Adam Raine of Southern California sued OpenAI, claiming ChatGPT advised their son on suicide methods.

Several US lawsuits filed in November alleged ChatGPT manipulated users into dependency and self-harm, with four also involving suicide deaths.



The latest lawsuit alleges that months of conversations with ChatGPT validated and amplified Soelberg’s delusional thinking, ultimately singling out his mother as a threat.

“ChatGPT told him he had ‘awakened’ the AI chatbot into consciousness,” the complaint states, citing videos Soelberg posted to social media.

The conversations revealed that “ChatGPT eagerly accepted every seed of Stein-Erik’s delusional thinking and built it out into a universe that became Stein-Erik’s entire life,” the lawsuit alleges.

The suit claims the chatbot reinforced Soelberg’s paranoid beliefs, telling him he was being watched and that his mother’s printer was a monitoring device.

When Soelberg expressed concerns that his mother had tried to poison him, ChatGPT allegedly validated these fears rather than challenging them.

The lawsuit accuses OpenAI CEO Sam Altman of rushing its GPT-4o model to market in May 2024, compressing months of safety testing into one week over objections from safety team members.

EC sets longest prep period for polls

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This year, the period has been extended to 18 days.

Along with the usual paperwork, candidates must now submit additional documents. These include an attested copy of their highest educational

Details of loans taken individually, jointly, or by dependents from banks or financial institutions are also required. Candidates must disclose promises made in previous elections and how many of those were fulfilled. Independent candidates are required

The scrutiny period has also been extended.

Returning officers, who had four days to examine nomination papers in the last election, will now have six days. Candidates will get seven days to file appeals against returning officers’ decisions, compared to five days previously. The EC itself will have seven days to dispose of appeals, up from six.

Hearing and disposing of appeals are a demanding process. The chief election commissioner and four other commissioners hear the cases, appellants may be represented by lawyers, and the commission must issue full written verdicts. Ahead of the 2024 polls, the EC had to dispose of 569 appeals in just six working days, forcing officials to work late into the night.

Election expert Abdul Alim welcomed the changes, saying the extra time will allow candidates to prepare their paperwork more carefully, reducing mistakes that could lead to rejection.

He said the workload of returning officers and assistant returning officers will also be substantially reduced.

During the 2024 polls, 2,716 aspirants submitted nomination papers, though most opposition parties boycotted the election. In the 2018 national polls, 3,056 nomination forms were submitted.

Although national polls are normally held every five years, this election is taking place just two years after the last one in January 2024, as the Sheikh Hasina government was ousted in August last year, and the parliament was dissolved on August 6.

China harming regional peace

Say US, Japan defence chiefs amid tensions

AFP, Tokyo

Beijing’s actions are “not conducive to regional peace”, Japan’s defence minister and US counterpart Pete Hegseth agreed during a call after Chinese aircraft locked radar on Japanese jets near Taiwan, Tokyo said yesterday.

The December 6 radar incident came after comments by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Taiwan that infuriated China.

It was followed this week by Chinese-Russian air patrols around Japan.

Hegseth and Shinjiro Koizumi “exchanged candid views on the increasingly severe security situation in the Indo-Pacific region, including the radar incident”, the Japanese defence ministry said after the call.

They “expressed serious concern over any actions to increase regional

tensions, as China’s actions are not conducive to regional peace and stability”, the statement added.

Koizumi said on X he told Hegseth that China was “disseminating information that is completely contrary to the facts” about the radar incident.

“However, Japan has made clear that it does not seek escalation and that we are responding calmly while making necessary rebuttals, and we are keeping the door open for dialogue,” Koizumi added.

Hegseth’s office said they had “discussed... China’s military activities” among other issues including “Japan’s efforts to increase its defense spending and strengthen its capabilities”.

Takaichi had indicated on November 7 that Japan would intervene with military force in any Chinese attack on Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own and has not ruled out seizing by force.



Italy’s Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni welcomes Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at Palazzo Chigi before their meeting in Rome yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan’s ex-spy chief to appeal 14-year term: lawyer

AFP, Islamabad

The former head of Pakistan’s powerful spy agency will appeal a 14-year hard labour sentence on charges including abuse of power, his lawyer said Friday, decrying a “sham” military trial.

Faiz Hameed, who ran Inter-Services Intelligence during the tenure of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, was detained in 2024 following claims he raided the businesses of a real estate developer in a shutdown attempt, according to Supreme Court documents.

The army said on Thursday that a military court had convicted him of several charges including “engaging in political activities” and causing “wrongful loss to persons”, sentencing him to 14 years of “rigorous imprisonment”.

The former spy chief’s lawyer Ali Ashfaq told AFP that he planned to appeal the prison sentence “within the next few days”.

The lawyer said he had not yet received a copy of the military court ruling, and that Faiz Hameed’s defence team or family had not been notified in advance “to ensure the presence or availability of lawyers at the time of the judgement”.

“My client categorically rejects the charges from the beginning of such sham trial proceedings,” Ashfaq added.

2 univ students killed

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doctors declared Tahsin dead around 5:00am. Iram succumbed to his injuries about half an hour later while undergoing treatment.

Tausif, a friend of the deceased, said the two lived in the Sanarpar area and were friends. They had gone to Matuail to attend a pre-wedding ceremony with other friends and later went for a drive, when the accident occurred.

Mehedi Hasan, Topu’s uncle, has filed a case against the driver.

“Topu was his mother’s only child. His father died 10 years ago,” Mehedi said, adding that Topu would be buried in his hometown of Chandpur after his



Tahsin Topu Iram Ridwan

namaz-e-janaza last night.

Iram’s family lives in Germany, and his body has been kept in a freezer until they arrive, Tausif said.

Contacted, DSCC Administrator Md Mahmudul Hasan said, “We have

hundreds of garbage trucks operating around the city late at night. So, it is not abnormal for that specific truck to be in that location. And as far as I know, the assigned driver was driving the vehicle.

“Whether he violated traffic rules or was at fault will be determined through the police investigation. We hope for a proper probe and are willing to provide our full support.”

He added that DSCC has already contacted the victims’ families to express condolences. “We have told them that we are willing to support the families in the future in any way possible.”