

China, Canada reach landmark deal on tariffs, visas

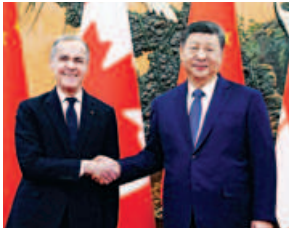
AFP, Beijing

Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed on a raft of measures from trade to tourism yesterday at the first meeting between the countries' leaders in Beijing in eight years.

The Canadian premier hailed a "landmark deal" under a "new strategic partnership" with China, turning the page on years of diplomatic spats, retaliatory arrests of each other's citizens and tariff disputes.

Carney has sought to reduce his country's reliance on the United States, its key economic partner and traditional ally, as President Donald Trump has aggressively raised tariffs on Canadian products.

"Canada and China have reached a preliminary but landmark trade agreement to remove trade barriers and reduce tariffs," Carney told a news conference after



meeting with Xi.

Under the deal, China -- which used to be Canada's largest market for canola seed -- is expected to reduce tariffs on canola products by March 1 to around 15 percent, down from the current 84 percent.

China will also allow Canadian visitors to enter the country visa-free.

In turn, Canada will import 49,000 Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) under new, preferential tariffs of 6.1 percent.

"This is a return to the levels that existed prior to recent trade frictions," Carney said of the EV deal.

Welcoming Carney in the Great Hall of the People, Xi said China-Canada relations reached a turning point at their last meeting on the sidelines of the APEC summit in October.



People attend a protest against deportation flights at King County International Airport, used by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), in Seattle, Washington, US on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Ukraine has fuel reserves for more than 20 days

Says energy minister after series of Russian strikes on power infrastructure; Ukrainian team heading to US for security guarantee talks

REUTERS, Kyiv

Ukraine has fuel reserves for more than 20 days, Energy Minister Denys Shmyhal told parliament yesterday, describing the overall energy situation in the country as very difficult following a series of Russian drone and missile attacks on power infrastructure.

Shmyhal, who took office earlier this week, said the most challenging situation remains in the capital Kyiv, the regions of Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv and Odesa, and in towns near the frontline, where thousands of homes have been without electricity and heating for days in subzero temperatures.

"In some cities and regions, winter preparations have failed. Over the past two days in office, I've seen that many things are clearly stalling," he said.

"There is not a single power plant left in Ukraine that the enemy has not attacked."

On Wednesday, President Volodymyr Zelensky said he would declare a state of emergency in the energy sector to make up for lost time and address issues of disrupted



power supplies following sustained Russian attacks.

Shmyhal, who previously served as prime minister and defence minister, ordered emergency imports of electricity. He said that Ukraine needs to install 2.2-2.7 GW of electricity generation capacity by the end of 2026 to meet its consumption needs.

Meanwhile, the European Commission is considering ways to allow Ukraine's quick accession to the EU as part of a peace deal

with Russia but without giving Kyiv full membership rights, which would only be "earned" after transition periods, EU officials said.

The idea, which is at a very early stage, is intended as a possible gesture to Ukrainians who are seeking EU membership as part of a post-war security guarantee from Europe and who after four years of fighting off a Russian invasion want a credible promise that they are on the path toward economic stability and integration with the West.

Ukrainian EU membership in 2027 was pencilled into a 20-point peace plan discussed between the United States, Ukraine and the European Union, diplomats said, as a measure to ensure Ukraine's economic prosperity after the war ends.

A Ukrainian delegation is en route to the US for talks on security guarantees and a post-war recovery package, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Friday, expressing hope the documents could be signed on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos next week.



Firefighters battle a blaze in Guryong village shantytown, Seoul's largest informal settlement, South Korea, yesterday. More than 250 people were evacuated after the fire tore through the impoverished area near the Gangnam district.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel sees spike in PTSD, suicide among troops

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel is grappling with a dramatic increase in post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide among its troops after its two-year assault on Gaza, precipitated by the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on southern Israel.

Recent reports by the Defence Ministry and by health providers have detailed the military's mental health crisis, which comes as fighting persists in Gaza and Lebanon and as tensions flare with Iran.

Israel's Defence Ministry says it has recorded a nearly 40 percent increase in PTSD cases amongst its soldiers since September 2023, and predicts the figure will increase by 180 percent by 2028. Of the 22,300 troops or personnel being treated for war wounds, 60 percent suffer from post-trauma, the ministry says.

The Gaza war quickly expanded with

cross-border fire between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah, and saw hundreds of thousands of soldiers and reservists deployed across both fronts in some of the heaviest fighting in the country's history.

Israeli forces have killed more than 71,000 Palestinians in Gaza and 4,400 in southern Lebanon, according to Gaza and Lebanese officials, and Israel says more than 1,100 service members have been killed since October 7.

The war has left much of Gaza destroyed and its 2 million people overwhelmingly lack proper shelter, food or access to medical and health services.

Palestinian mental health specialists have said Gazans are suffering "a volcano" of psychological trauma, with large numbers now seeking treatment, and children suffering symptoms such as night terrors and an inability to focus.

Israeli strike in south Lebanon kills one: ministry

AFP, Beirut

An Israeli strike on south Lebanon killed one person yesterday, the health ministry in Beirut said a day after raids that Israel said had targeted the Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Israel has kept up regular strikes in Lebanon despite a November 2024 ceasefire that sought to end more than a year of hostilities with Hezbollah, usually saying it is targeting members of the group or its infrastructure.

In a statement, the health ministry said an "Israeli enemy strike" on a vehicle in Mansuri in south Lebanon killed one person.



It also said that a strike on Mayfadun in south Lebanon the previous night killed one person.

Israeli said Thursday's attack killed "a Hezbollah member it alleged took part in attempts to reestablish Hezbollah's infrastructure in the Zawtar al Sharqiyah area".

The attacks come a week after Lebanon's military said it had completed disarming Hezbollah south of the Litani River, the first phase of a nationwide plan, although Israel has called those efforts insufficient.

On Thursday, Israel carried out several strikes against eastern Lebanon's Bekaa region, north of the Litani, after issuing warnings to evacuate.

United Nations peacekeepers, deployed in the south to separate Lebanon from Israel, said yesterday that an Israeli drone "dropped a grenade" on its troops.

On Monday, the peacekeeping force said an Israeli tank fired near its troops, and warned that such incidents were becoming "disturbingly common".

Israel and Lebanon agreed to a US-brokered ceasefire in 2024, ending more than a year of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah that had culminated in Israeli strikes that severely weakened the Iran-backed group. Since then, the sides have traded accusations over violations.

UN sounds alarm on hunger in west, central Africa

AFP, Geneva

Around 55 million people in violence-racked west and central Africa face acute food insecurity this year and some are on the verge of famine in northern Nigeria, the United Nations said yesterday.

Violence across the region has triggered a hunger crisis that is being exacerbated by aid cuts, the UN's World Food Programme said.

WFP said it had had to slash its food assistance in the area as funding dries up.

In west and central Africa, "a staggering 55 million people will be facing acute food insecurity in the upcoming lean season between June and August 2026", Jean-Martin Bauer, WFP's food security and nutrition analysis director, told reporters

in Geneva.

Those people are in the crisis, emergency and catastrophe phases of hunger -- the three worst of five levels used to assess food insecurity.

The number of people in emergency conditions has doubled since 2020, to three million, he said.

And 15,000 people in certain areas of Borno state in northeastern Nigeria are in the catastrophe phase -- the first time this level has been reached in a decade.

"This is a group that's one step away from famine," Bauer said, speaking from WFP's headquarters in Rome.

"That does mean that people are dying... people are starving."

Borno state is the epicentre of a jihadist insurgency that began in 2009.

BAN FOR UNDER-16S

Social media sites block 4.7m accounts in Australia

AFP, Sydney

Tech giants have blocked 4.7 million accounts under Australia's world-first social media ban for under-16s, the country's online safety watchdog said yesterday.

Initial figures showed platforms were taking meaningful action to remove underage users, Australia's eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said.

"It is clear that eSafety's regulatory guidance and engagement with platforms is already delivering significant outcomes," she said in a statement.

Australia has required big platforms including Meta, TikTok and YouTube to stop underage users from holding accounts since the legislation came into force on December 10 last year.

Companies face fines of Aus\$49.5 million (US\$33 million) if they fail to take "reasonable steps" to comply.

Billionaire Mark Zuckerberg's Meta said last week it had removed 331,000 underage accounts from Instagram, 173,000 from Facebook, and 40,000 from Threads in the week to December 11.

But Meta repeated its call for app stores to be required to verify people's ages and get parental approval before under-16s can download an app.

US approves \$1.5bn deal for Peru naval base

AFP, Washington

The United States said Thursday it had approved a \$1.5 billion deal for the expansion of a naval base in Peru, where China has funded a separate megaproject.

The State Department said that Peru requested to buy \$1.5 billion in equipment and services as part of its modernization in Callao, the country's main naval base which is near the international airport in Lima.

The project will bring up to 20 US personnel from the government or private sector to Peru for up to 10 years, the State Department said.

The sale will "improve the security of an important partner which is a force for political stability, peace and economic progress in South America," the State Department said in a statement.

The United States has a long security partnership with Peru, where lawmakers have authorized the presence of US troops.



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