



An Iranian man walks past symbolic belongings laid on the ground at Valiasr Square in Tehran yesterday, in tribute to the schoolgirls in Minab killed in an airstrike. The airstrike hit a primary school in the southern Iranian city on the first day of the war, killing at least 170 people, including students and teachers.

PHOTO: AFP

## Only 5 ships pass through Strait of Hormuz in 24 hrs

REUTERS, London

Only five ships, including one Iranian oil products tanker, have passed through the Strait of Hormuz in the past 24 hours, shipping data showed yesterday, after Iran seized two container ships this week and the US continues to blockade Iranian ports.

Shipping traffic passing through the crucial waterway at the entrance to the Gulf during an uneasy ceasefire between Washington and Tehran represents a fraction of the average 140 daily passages before the Iran war began on February 28. "For most shipping companies, they will need a stable ceasefire and assurances from both sides of the conflict that the Strait of Hormuz is safe to transit," said Jakob Larsen, chief safety and security officer at shipping association BIMCO.

"In the meantime, shipping will be restricted to using routes close to Iran and Oman. Due to their confined nature, these routes cannot safely accommodate the normal volumes of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz," Larsen added.

Between April 22 and early April 23, seven vessels transited the strait, six of which were involved in Iran-related trade, analysis from Lloyd's List Intelligence showed.

The closure of the strait has disrupted a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies and triggered a global energy crisis.

Hundreds of ships and 20,000 seafarers remained stranded inside the Gulf with war risk insurers and oil companies watching for any sign that the risks may have eased so they can prepare to sail through.

## US THREAT TO OUST SPAIN Nato 'must remain united': Italy PM

AFP, Nicosia

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni yesterday urged Nato allies to stick together, after a report that the United States was mulling action against Spain over its refusal to support operations against Iran.

"Nato must remain united. I believe it is a source of strength," Meloni told reporters as she attended an EU summit in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The Reuters news agency cited an anonymous US official saying the Pentagon had outlined potential measures to punish allies over their response to the Iran war, including suspending Spain from the alliance.

There is no provision in the Nato treaty allowing for the suspension or expulsion of one of the alliance's members.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly railed against Nato allies for refusing to help out more with the Iran war, saying he viewed it as a betrayal.

Some of them — France, Spain and Italy — did not allow US military aircraft deployed for the war to overfly their territories or to use bases.

Britain initially also refused, but later allowed US flights from its bases for "defensive" missions in the conflict.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, whose country was reportedly singled out for suspension, said Friday he was "not worried", stressing his country was a "reliable member" of Nato.

Meanwhile, as Trump deepens questions over whether Washington would help defend Nato allies, the EU is set to lay out a "blueprint" for how its own mutual assistance clause works if a country is attacked.



## War, drought, aid shortfall to fuel hunger in 2026

Global report says 266m face acute hunger across 47 countries

REUTERS, Rome

Conflict, drought and shrinking aid will keep global hunger at critical levels in 2026, with food insecurity expected to worsen in some of the world's most fragile countries, according to the 2026 Global Report on Food Crises.

The 10th edition of the hunger monitor, published by a coalition of development and humanitarian organisations, said that acute hunger had doubled over the past decade, with two famines declared last year for the first time in the report's history — in Gaza and Sudan.

In total, 266 million people in 47 countries and territories faced high levels of acute food insecurity in 2025, while 1.4 million people faced catastrophic conditions in parts of Haiti, Mali, Gaza, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen.

In 2025 alone, 35.5 million children worldwide were acutely malnourished, including nearly 10 million suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

Looking at this year, the report said severity levels remained critical, with only Haiti expected to escape from the worst "catastrophic" band thanks to a slight improvement in security and increased humanitarian aid.

"We are no longer seeing just temporary shocks, but persistent shocks over time," said Alvaro Lario, head of the UN International Fund for Agricultural



Development, which helps draw up the annual report.

"The main message is that food insecurity is not an isolated issue anymore, but is putting pressure on global stability," he told Reuters.

The US-Israeli war on Iran has added to the alarm, Lario said, warning that prolonged disruption to energy and fertiliser trade could spill over into global food markets and worsen hunger in import-dependent countries already in crisis.

"Even if the conflict in the Middle East were to end right now, we know that a lot of the food price shocks and inflation will happen in the next six months," he said.

Even before the added stress of this latest war, West Africa and the Sahel looked likely to

remain under heavy pressure this year from conflict and persistent inflation, particularly in Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

In East Africa, failed rains across much of the Horn of Africa are expected to deepen suffering in Somalia and Kenya, where drought, insecurity, high food prices and reduced humanitarian aid are likely to drive worsening conditions.

The report also warned that humanitarian and development financing for food sectors in crisis fell sharply in 2025 and is projected to decline further.

Humanitarian food-sector funding is estimated to have dropped by some 39% last year from 2024 levels, while development assistance contracted by at least 15 percent.



## Putin's rating falls to lowest since 2022

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin's approval rating has fallen for a seventh week in a row to 65.6 percent, its lowest level since the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, according to state pollster VTsIOM.

Russia's paramount leader, who was appointed acting president by Boris Yeltsin just eight years after the fall of the Soviet Union, has ruled the country since 1999 either as president or prime minister.

A former KGB lieutenant colonel who watched the Soviet Union collapse while based in East Germany, Putin will overtake Josef Stalin and become Russia's longest-serving ruler since Empress Catherine the Great if he completes his current six-year term.

But his ratings, though still high by Western standards, have taken a hit in recent weeks. Putin's approval rating is down from 73.3% in March, while trust in him has slipped over the same period to 71% from above 77%, according to VTsIOM.

## Free Suu Kyi, more prisoners

Asean chair urges Myanmar

REUTERS, Manila

The Philippines, chair of the regional bloc Asean, yesterday encouraged more prisoner releases in Myanmar, including ousted former leader Aung San Suu Kyi and said a recent amnesty was a positive step towards inclusive national dialogue.

"We reaffirm our commitment to assisting Myanmar, as an integral part of Asean, to achieve a peaceful and durable solution to the political crisis in the country," the Philippines said in a statement as chair of the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been in detention since her elected government was toppled in a 2021 coup and her welfare was discussed this week by Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow when he met Myanmar's new President Min Aung Hlaing.

Sihasak said Min Aung Hlaing, who led the 2021 coup, told him Aung San Suu Kyi, 80, was being "well looked after" and "good things" for her were being considered, without elaborating. Sihasak said he had conveyed Asean's concerns about her welfare.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been serving a 27-year sentence after being convicted of multiple offences. Her allies say the charges are politically motivated to keep her at bay.

Her sentence was commuted by one-sixth as part of an amnesty last week for thousands of prisoners that included the release of her ally, Win Myint, the ousted former president. Min Aung Hlaing led the coup that ended a decade of tentative democracy in Myanmar and triggered mass protests and a civil war, prompting an intervention by Asean and its exclusion of the then ruling generals from its summits.



Residents look for their belongings in their flat, a three-storey residential building destroyed after a Russian drone attack in Odesa yesterday. Two people were killed and fifteen were wounded in the attack.

PHOTO: AFP

## El Nino set to return as early as May: WMO

REUTERS, Geneva

The return of El Nino weather conditions are expected from as early as May this year, potentially affecting global temperatures and rainfall patterns, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said.

A clear shift has been observed in the Equatorial Pacific, with sea-surface temperatures rising rapidly, suggesting a high likelihood of El Nino conditions developing between May and July this year, it said.

The weather pattern is known to disrupt regional climates, potentially bringing increased rainfall to southern South America, the southern United States, parts of the Horn of Africa, and central Asia, while causing drought in Australia, Indonesia, and sections of southern Asia.

According to WMO, El Nino typically lasts between nine to twelve months.