

Zelensky suggests role for foreign troops in Ukraine

KYIV: President Volodymyr Zelensky made the case on Monday for a diplomatic settlement to Russia's 33-month-old war in Ukraine and raised the idea of foreign troops being deployed in his country until it could join the Nato military alliance.

The remarks at a joint press conference with German opposition leader Friedrich Merz were the latest to signal Kyiv's increasing openness to war negotiations, with Donald Trump preparing to return to the White House on Jan 20.

The US president-elect, who has said he wants to end the war quickly, called on Sunday for an immediate ceasefire and negotiations to end the "madness", after he met Zelensky and French President Emmanuel Macron for talks in Paris.

"Ukraine wants this war to end more than anyone else. No doubt, a diplomatic resolution would save more lives. We do seek it," Zelensky told reporters in Kyiv on Monday.

He said he discussed a "freezing" of the lines in the war when he met Macron and Trump. Russia controls nearly a fifth of Ukrainian territory after launching the 2022 invasion that unleashed the biggest conflict in Europe since World War Two.

2024 'certain' to be hottest year on record, says EU monitor

PARIS: (news desk) This year is "effectively certain" to be the hottest on record and the first above a critical threshold to protect the planet from dangerously overheating, Europe's climate monitor said on Monday.

The new benchmark affirmed by the Copernicus Climate Change Service caps a year in which countries rich and poor were hammered by disasters that scientists have linked to humanity's role in Earth's rapid warming.

Copernicus said an unprecedented spell of extraordinary heat had pushed average global temperatures so high between January and November that this year was sure to eclipse 2023 as the hottest yet.

"At this point, it is effectively certain that 2024 is going to be the warmest year on record," the EU agency said in its monthly bulletin. Copernicus scientist Julien Nicolas said that 2025 would start with global temperatures "at near-record level" and this could persist for the next few months. In another grim milestone, 2024 will be the first calendar year 1.5 degrees Celsius hotter than before the industrial revolution when humanity started burning large amounts of fossil fuels. According to provisional data, Copernicus said the year to date was almost 1.6C warmer than the pre-industrial era, taken as between 1850 and 1900.

Google says it has cracked a quantum computing challenge

SANTA BARBARA: (News desk) Google on Monday said that it has overcome a key challenge in quantum computing with a new generation of chip, solving a computing problem in five minutes that would take a classical computer more time than the history of the universe.

Like other tech giants such as Microsoft and International Business Machines, Alphabet's Google is chasing quantum computing because it promises computing speeds far faster than today's fastest systems. While the math problem solved by the company's Santa Barbara, California quantum lab does not have commercial applications, Google hopes quantum computers will one day solve problems in medicine, battery chemistry and artificial intelligence that are out of reach for today's computers.

The results released on Monday came from a new chip called Willow that has 105 "qubits," which are the building blocks of quantum computers. Qubits are fast but error-prone, because they can be jostled by something as small as a subatomic particle from events in outer space.

As more qubits are packed onto a chip, those errors can add up to make the chip no better than a conventional computer chip. So since the 1990s, scientists have been working on quantum error-correction.

In a paper published in the journal Nature on Monday, Google said that it has found a way to string together the Willow chip's qubits so that error rates go down as the number of qubits goes up.

The company also says it can correct errors in real time, a key step toward making its quantum machines practical.



This handout photograph taken on December 9, 2024 and released by Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows India's foreign secretary Vikram Misri (3R) and his Bangladesh's counterpart Mohammad Jashim Uddin (2L).

Macron eyes broad alliance to form new French govt

PARIS: (news desk) French President Emmanuel Macron has called for a "meeting of different political forces" to hammer out a programme for a new government, the Greens party leader said on Monday amid a political crisis triggered by Prime Minister Michel Barnier's ouster. Macron had suggested a "new method" to put to-

gether an executive, Greens chief Marine Tondelier said after meeting him at his Elysee Palace office. After July's snap elections produced no clear majority, Macron took almost two months to name conservative Barnier as premier. He was then toppled last week in a no-confidence vote over a cost-cutting draft budget for 2025

meant to tackle France's yawning deficit. New polls are ruled out until the summer, leaving Macron this time around to call for a "meeting of different political forces to discuss a platform" that could unite them in government, Tondelier said. Until now, Macron had only been meeting party leaders individually. But cobbling

together any majority will be tricky in a parliament almost evenly divided between the NFP left-wing alliance, Macron's centrists and conservatives, and the far-right National Rally (RN). Macron was "very clear about the fact that as far as he is concerned, the RN is not within the circle of parties willing to talk", Tondelier said on Monday.

Taiwan on high alert as Chinese warships sail near island

HSINCHU: (news desk) Taiwan's military was on high alert on Monday after detecting Chinese warships near the island, Taipei said, as it prepared for likely drills by Beijing in response to President Lai Ching-te's US visits. The Taiwanese defence ministry said it also spotted Chinese coast guard vessels and that Beijing's People's Liberation Army (PLA) had restricted the

airspace off the Chinese coast. There has been intense speculation about the possibility of China launching military exercises in response to Lai's trip to the Pacific last week which included stopovers in Hawaii and Guam. "In response to these actions by the PLA, the MND has initiated combat readiness drills, factoring in enemy threats,

weather conditions, and tactical positioning," the Ministry of National Defence in Taipei said in a statement. It added that military units were on "high" alert and those on outlying islands had "heightened their vigilance". The ministry said its forces had "identified PLA Eastern, Northern, and Southern Theater Command naval formations, along with Coast

Guard vessels, entering areas around the Taiwan Strait and the Western Pacific". There was no immediate public announcement by the PLA or Chinese state media about increased military activity around Taiwan. However, a Beijing foreign ministry spokeswoman said China would "firmly defend" its sovereignty, as Taiwan kicked off its drills.



GOOGLE Quantum AI's Hartmut Neven (left) and Anthony Megrant (right) examine a cryostat refrigerator for cooling quantum computing chips at Google's Quantum AI lab in Santa Barbara.

Gangster oversees killing of 200 in Haiti

PORT PRINCE: (news desk) Nearly 200 people in Haiti were killed in brutal weekend violence reportedly orchestrated against voodoo practitioners, with the government on Monday condemning an "abject massacre" of "unbearable cruelty." The killings were overseen by a powerful gang leader convinced that his son's illness was caused by followers

of the religion, according to civil organisation the Committee for Peace and Development (CPD). "He decided to cruelly punish all elderly people and voodoo practitioners who, in his imagination, would be capable of sending a bad spell on his son," a statement from the Haiti-based group said. UN rights commissioner Volker Turk said that at least 184 people

were killed in the weekend violence. Calling the bloody episode an "act of barbarity, of unbearable cruelty," the office of Prime Minister Alix Didier Filis-Aime said his government "condemns in the strongest terms the abject massacre." "This monstrous crime constitutes a direct attack on humanity and the republican order," it added. Both the CPD and

UN said that the massacre took place in the capital's western coastal neighbourhood of Cite Soleil. Haiti has suffered from decades of instability but the situation escalated in February when armed groups launched coordinated attacks in the capital Port-au-Prince to overthrow then-prime minister Ariel Henry. Gangs now control 80pc of the city.

Syrians search for loved ones missing in jails

DAMASCUS: (news desk) Syrian rescuers searched a jail synonymous with the worst atrocities of ousted president Bashar al-Assad's rule, as people in the capital flocked to a central square on Monday to celebrate their country's freedom.

Assad fled Syria as fighters swept into the capital, bringing to a spectacular end on Sunday five decades of brutal rule by his clan over a country ravaged by one of the deadliest wars of the century. He oversaw a crackdown on a democracy movement that erupted in 2011, sparking a war that killed 500,000 people and forced half the country to flee their homes. At the core of the system of rule that Assad inherited from his father Hafez was a brutal complex of prisons and detention centres used to eliminate dissent by jailing those suspected of stepping out of the ruling Baath party's line. Social media groups alight with Syrians sharing images of detainees reportedly brought out from the dungeons, some posting calls for help finding their missing relatives. On Monday, rescuers from the Syrian White Helmets group said they were searching for potential secret doors or basements in Saydnaya prison, though they said there was no immediate sign that anyone was trapped. "We are working with all our energy to reach a new hope, and we must be prepared for the worst."

Houthi drone hits residential building in Israel

YAVNE: (news desk) A drone claimed by Yemen's Houthi rebels exploded on the top floor of a residential building in the central Israeli city of Yavne on Monday, causing no injuries, the Israeli military and emergency services said.

Houthis have launched several attacks against Israel during Israel's conflict with Hamas that began more than a year ago in Gaza. The rebels say their attacks are in solidarity with Palestinians.

"Following the initial report, a UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) that likely originated in Yemen impacted in the area of Yavne," the military said.

The Houthis later claimed responsibility for the strike, with a rebels spokesman saying "the drone units targeted a sensitive target of the Israeli enemy in Yavne". A spokesperson for Israel's Magen David Adom emergency service said reports were received of "an explosion" on a balcony high up in the building in Yavne, and that after a search, no injuries were reported. Eti Avivi, whose home was damaged while she was at work, said she heard the explosion but thought it was "a sonic boom".

Turkiye to open border gate for safe return of Syrians, Erdogan says

ANKARA: (news desk) Turkiye is opening its Yayladagi border gate with Syria to manage the safe and voluntary return of the millions of Syrian migrants it hosts, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday, after President Bashar al-Assad's sudden ouster by rebels.

In one of the biggest turning points for the Middle East in generations, opposition forces seized the Syrian capital Damascus and Assad fled to Russia, following 13 years of civil war and more than 50 years of his family's brutal rule. "We are opening the Yayladagi border gate to crossings to prevent any congestion and ease traffic," Erdogan said, speaking after a cabinet meeting in Ankara. The Yayladagi crossing close to the northwest edge of Syria has been closed since 2013 due to fighting near the border. "We will also manage the processing of immigrants' voluntary returns in a way befitting our hosting," Erdogan said. Earlier on Monday, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Turkiye would work for the safe and voluntary return home of the Syrian migrants it hosts. Shares in Turkish construction and cement companies surged on Monday, buoyed by expectations that they will benefit from rebuilding in Syria.

Man held in connection with UnitedHealth CEO killing

NEW YORK: (news desk) Authorities on Monday detained a man in central Pennsylvania in connection with last week's murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson after finding him in possession of a gun, a silencer and false identification cards similar to those used by the killer, several media outlets reported.

Investigators received a tip about the man after he was spotted at a McDonald's in Altoona by someone who thought he looked like the suspected killer, CNN reported, citing unnamed officials.

The man being questioned had a handwritten "manifesto" criticising healthcare companies for prioritising profits over care, the New York Times reported, citing a law enforcement official. Luigi Mangione, 26, a suspect in the New York City killing of UnitedHealth executive Brian Thompson, arrives for his arraignment at Blair County Court House in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, U.S. December 9, 2024 in a still image from video

One of the false cards found on the man also matched the ID used by the suspect to check into a hostel in Manhattan before the shooting, the Times reported. The man has been arrested on local charges, possibly in connection with presenting a false ID to police, and New York detectives are headed to Altoona, according to the Times.

Neither the New York City Police Department nor the Altoona Police Department responded to a request for comment.

New Delhi sends envoy to Dhaka to defuse tension

DHAKA: (news desk) India's top career diplomat was in Bangladesh on Monday to defuse tensions between the two neighbours arising from the August overthrow of autocratic ex-premier Sheikh Hasina in a student-led revolution. Hasina's iron-fisted rule was strongly backed by India and the 77-year-old remains in New Delhi where she took refuge after her ouster, despite Bangladesh announcing it would seek her extradition. Nobel laureate Muham-

mad Yunus, leader of an interim government tasked with implementing democratic reforms, has condemned acts of "Indian aggression" that he alleged were intended to destabilise his administration. Vikram Misri, the secretary of India's foreign ministry, arrived in Dhaka on Monday for the first in-person meeting between top officials of both countries since Hasina's ouster. Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus, who met Misri on Monday, has said the

reports were exaggerated. Yunus "asked India to help clear the 'clouds' that have cast a shadow over the relationship between the two neighbours in recent times," according to a statement from his office. "India desires a positive, constructive, and mutually beneficial relationship with Bangladesh," Misri was quoted as saying in a transcript published by the Indian foreign ministry after the meeting. "There is no reason why this mutually beneficial cooperation should not

continue to deliver in the interest of both our peoples." Misri said he discussed "some regrettable incidents of attacks on cultural, religious, and diplomatic properties", adding that India expected a constructive approach on these issues from Bangladesh. He also met his Bangladeshi counterpart, Mohammad Jashim Uddin. Bangladesh has denied reports of attacks, asked India to stop sheltering Hasina and demanded her extradition. India, for its part, has

accused Muslim-majority Bangladesh of failing to adequately protect its minority Hindu community from reprisal attacks after Hasina's toppling. Yunus's administration has repeatedly acknowledged and condemned attacks on Hindus, but also insists that in many cases they were motivated by politics rather than religion. Yunus has accused India of exaggerating the scale of the violence and running a "propaganda campaign" against his government. Adding to potential tensions between the two neighbours is Hasina's decision to re-emerge from her exile in New Delhi to address supporters abroad by video link. On Sunday she spoke to several hundred of members of her Awami League party based in London, accusing Yunus' government of deliberately targeting minorities. Her supporters at the event insisted that Hasina remained the lawful head of Bangladesh despite the popular uprising that forced her to flee to India.