

Starmer says ‘coalition of willing’ expanding preparations for post-truce Ukraine

LONDON: (News Desk) British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Saturday European nations and Western allies were stepping up preparations to support Ukraine in the event a peace deal was struck with Russia, with defence chiefs to firm up “robust plans” next week.Starmer hosted a virtual meeting to win support from allies to increase pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin to accept a ceasefire deal being pushed by US President Donald Trump, and to gather commitments to help secure any agreement — something Trump has made clear he expects Europe to take on.Some 26 fellow leaders took part, including those from Germany, France, Italy, Canada and Australia as well as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Nato’s secretary general — but not the US. Starmer said the “coalition of the willing” had reaffirmed its commitment both to supporting Ukraine as it resists Russia’s three-year-old invasion.

Ex-Meta employee barred from promoting memoir

SAN FRANCISCO: (News Desk) Facebook parent company Meta is seeking to silence a former employee who has made scandalous allegations in a new tell-all book, obtaining a ruling to temporarily bar her from promoting the memoir or bad-mouthing the tech giant.In “Careless People: A Cautionary Tale of Power, Greed and Lost Idealism,” released on Tuesday, Sarah Wynn-Williams recounts working at the tech titan from 2011 to 2017.Her book includes claims of sexual harassment by longtime company executive Joel Kaplan, a prominent Republican and ally of President Donald Trump who took over as head of Meta’s international affairs team early this year. She also wrote of Meta, then known as Facebook, exploring the possibility of breaking into the lucrative China market by appealing government censors there.“The suggestion was that as part of the negotiations for the company to enter into China, the data of users in Hong Kong could be put in play,” Wynn-Williams said in an interview with NPR. An idea was to flag content in Hong Kong or Taiwan that went “viral” and refer it to a censorship body for review, according to Wynn-Williams. Meta quickly took the matter to arbitration, contending the book violates a non-disparagement contract signed by Wynn-Williams.

Two journalists, seven others killed as Israeli jets bomb north Gaza

CAIRO: (News Desk) At least nine Palestinians were killed, including two local journalists, and others wounded on Saturday in an Israeli airstrike on Gaza’s northern Beit Lahiya town, Gaza’s health ministry said, as Hamas’ leaders hold Gaza ceasefire talks with mediators in Cairo.

Several were critically injured as the strike hit a car, with casualties inside and outside the vehicle, health officials said.

Witnesses and fellow journalists said the people in the car were on a mission for a charity called Al-Khair Foundation in Beit Lahiya, and they were accompanied by journalists and photographers when the strike hit them. At least three local journalists were among the dead, according to Palestinian media.

The incident underscores the fragility of the Jan 19 ceasefire agreement that halted large-scale fighting in the Gaza Strip. Palestinian health officials say several people have been killed by Israeli fire despite the truce. Commenting on the latest deaths, Palestinian group Hamas accused Israel in a statement of attempting to renege on the ceasefire agreement, putting the number of Palestinians killed since Jan 19 at 150.

It urged mediators to compel Israel to move ahead with the implementation of the phased ceasefire deal, blaming Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the impasse.

Since a temporary first phase of the ceasefire expired on March 2, Israel has rejected opening the second phase of talks, which would require it to negotiate over a permanent end to the conflict, the main demand of Hamas. The incident coincided with a visit by Hamas’ exiled Gaza chief, Khalil Al-Hayya, to Cairo for further ceasefire talks aimed at resolving disputes with Israel that could risk a resumption of fighting in the enclave. On Friday, Hamas said it had agreed to free an American-Israeli dual national if Israel begins the next phase of ceasefire talks towards a permanent end to the conflict, an offer Israel dismissed as “psychological warfare.” Hamas said it had made the offer to release New Jersey native Edan Alexander, a 21-year-old soldier in the Israeli army, after receiving a proposal from mediators for negotiations on the second phase of a ceasefire deal. Israel says it wants to extend the ceasefire’s temporary first phase, a proposal backed by US envoy Steve Witkoff. Hamas says it will resume freeing prisoners only under the second phase.



Palestinians gather for a mass Iftar meal amid the rubble of destroyed buildings, and the ruins of the Salim Abu Muslim mosque (top-L) in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip on March 15, 2025.

At least 33 dead as tornadoes ravage central US

Texas (News Desk) At least 33 people have been killed and dozens more injured when tornadoes and violent storms raked across the central United States, as forecasters warned more severe weather was expected on Sunday. Local news showed roofs torn off homes and large trucks overturned. Eight people died in Kansas in a crash involving

more than 50 vehicles, caused by low visibility during a “severe dust storm”, local police said. Missouri State Highway Patrol confirmed 12 storm-related fatalities and shared images of boats piled on top of one another at a marina destroyed by the weather. The state police reported downed trees and power lines, as well as damage to

buildings, with some areas severely impacted by “tornadoes, thunderstorms and large hail.” “It was the scariest thing I’ve ever been through, it was so fast, our ears were all about to burst,” Alicia Wilson, who was evacuated from her home in Missouri, told TV station KSDK. Further south in Mississippi, the state’s governor said

six deaths were reported and that three people were missing late on Saturday. Meanwhile, in Texas, local authorities told AFP that four people had died in vehicle accidents linked to dust storms and fires that reduced visibility on the roads.In the neighboring state of Arkansas, officials said three people had died and 29 had been injured in the storm.

Millions of Cubans spend second night without electricity

Havana(News Desk) Millions of Cubans were without electricity for a second night on Saturday after a widespread blackout hit the island, the fourth in less than six months. Cubans have been facing a serious economic crisis marked by widespread food, fuel and medicine shortages, and the island’s ageing and often failing power system has made things worse.

The latest major outage began late on Friday at a substation near the capital Havana and then spread nationwide, affecting most of the cash-strapped island’s 9.7 million people. Authorities said on Saturday they were working to restore power, but acknowledged progress was slow.In the meantime, Cubans were doing their best to get along. Jorge Suarez, a 47-year-old

lawyer, was having a beer at a Havana bar where a small generator was helping keep the place open. “You get used to the conditions,” he told AFP. “It’s like the animals that live in the desert: they have to adapt to live without water. “We just have to adapt and wait for the government ... to resolve the problem.”Adela Alba, 37, owns the establishment, which also serves as a grocery

store.“It’s very difficult to work like this,” she said. Her generator allows her to “maintain a minimum of service, because we have to pay the rent and the taxes despite the situation”, she added.Elsewhere, people cooked meals using firewood due to the months-long gas shortage, while others gathered in homes or businesses with generators so they could charge their cell phones.



Cubans walk on a street during a general blackout in Havana on March 14.

Toll in N. Macedonia hip-hop gig blaze rises to 59: interior minister

Kocani (News Desk) The toll from a fire that ripped through a nightclub in North Macedonia hosting a locally popular hip-hop duo has risen to 59, the Balkan country’s interior minister said on Sunday. “According to the information that we have, there are 59 persons deceased of which 35 are identified,” Interior Min-

ister Pance Toskovski said at the scene in Kocani, adding that arrest warrants for four people had been issued over the blaze. Authorities had previously given a toll of 51. This aerial photograph shows a view of the burnt down nightclub in which revellers died, in Kocani, a town some 100 kilo-

metres east of the capital Skopje, on March 16, 2025. “The number of wounded according to latest information up to noon is 155 people,” Toskovski said. Thirty-one of the dead were residents of Kocani, the eastern town where the concert took place, or the town of Stip nearby, the minister added.

Toskovski said the wounded were taken to “hospitals around the country” According to Toskovski, the blaze began after the concert’s pyrotechnic displays set the ceiling, made of easily flammable material, on fire. “Central arrest warrants have been issued for four persons,” Toskovski said.

Stuck Nasa astronauts one step closer to home after SpaceX launch

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) Nasa and SpaceX on Friday launched a long-awaited crew to the International Space Station that opens the door to bringing home US astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams, who have been stuck on the orbital lab for nine months.

SpaceX’s Falcon 9 rocket lifted off at 7:03pm ET from Nasa’s Kennedy Space Centre in Florida carrying four astronauts who will replace Wilmore and Williams, both of whom are veteran Nasa astronauts and retired US Navy test pilots and were the first to fly Boeing’s faulty Starliner capsule to the ISS in June. Otherwise a routine crew rotation flight, Friday’s Crew-10 mission is a long-awaited first step to bring the astronaut duo back to Earth — part of a plan set by Nasa last year that more recently has been given greater urgency by President Donald Trump.

Sri Lanka counts nuisance wildlife in bid to protect crops

ANURADHAPURA: (News Desk) Sri Lanka carried out a nationwide census on Saturday of nuisance wildlife, including monkeys and peacocks, in a bid to prepare countermeasures to protect crops, officials said. Some 40,000 local officials were deployed to count wild boar, lorises, peacocks, and monkeys near farms and homes during a five-minute period on Saturday morning.

In the north-central district of Anuradhapura, farmer families gathered in open fields to count the animals and record them in sheets provided by the agriculture ministry. “We are having census during a very short time period to ensure there is no double counting,” ministry official Ajith Pushpakumara told reporters in the capital Colombo.“We are expecting that the results will be about 80 per cent accurate. After we have an idea of the number of these animals, we can plan out the next steps to deal with them.”

In Anuradhapura, 200 kilometres north of Colombo, residents were out early in the fields preparing for the census. “We had a very successful count from very enthusiastic participants. They are the farmers who continuously suffer crop damage. Our count was 227 toque monkeys and 65 purple faced langurs,” Chaminda Disanayake, an agriculture department bureaucrat who conducted the census at Anuradhapura’s Mihintale area said.Opposition legislator Nalin Bandara criticised the census, calling it a “waste of money”. “This is a complete failure, a waste of money.

Norris holds off Verstappen to win rain-hit Australian Grand Prix

Sydney(News Desk) Lando Norris kept his cool in a rain-hit and incident-packed season-opening Australian Grand Prix on Sunday to edge world champion Max Verstappen with Lewis Hamilton 10th on his Ferrari debut.

The pole-sitting Briton took the chequered flag by less than a second from the Dutchman, with Mercedes’ George Russell third after a chaotic race in Melbourne that saw three drivers crash before the end of the first lap.

With the safety car repeatedly forced into action after a slew of accidents on the wet Albert Park circuit, Norris held on to clock a fifth grand prix win and second in a row after topping the podium at the final race of 2024 in Abu Dhabi.

RB rookie Isack Hadjar, Alpine’s Jack Doohan and Williams’ Carlos Sainz — last year’s winner — all failed to finish the first lap on a track made treacherous by earlier torrential rain.

Pakistan wins bronze at Int’l Tennis Federation Masters 45+ World Championship

Lahore (News Desk) Pakistan won the bronze medal at the International Tennis Federation Masters 45+ World Championship after defeating Germany 2-1 on Sunday, according to a statement by the Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF).

A total of 21 nations participated in the men’s team event that was held in Manavgat, Türkiye in the 45+ age category known as the Dubler Cup.

Pakistan had dominated the group stage with emphatic 3-0 victories over Romania and the host nation, according to the PTF.

“Pakistan’s tennis team made history by securing a bronze medal at the ITF Masters 45+ World Championship in Manavgat, Turkey.

“Competing for the first time in this prestigious event, the team, led by captain Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi and featuring Aqeel Khan and Shehryar Salamat, delivered an outstanding performance against some of the world’s top tennis nations,” the statement said. In the quarterfinals, the team overcame Czech Republic 2-1 to secure a place in the final four, the statement added.

“In a hard-fought semifinal battle against France, Pakistan fell just short, losing 2-1, despite an epic singles victory by Aqeel Khan. The doubles match proved decisive, where France edged out Pakistan,” it continued. Team Pakistan then rebounded in the third-place match, defeating Germany 2-1 to clinch the bronze medal. In this crucial encounter, Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi had retired in his singles match whereas, Aqeel Khan had secured a commanding singles win, the statement continued.Consequently, Qureshi and Khan teamed up to win the decisive doubles match against Germany. Pakistan players will now compete in individual events in the second week of the championship, the statement concluded.Earlier in the week, Pakistan’s senior tennis player Talha Waheed aceed his way to a world record, smashing the mark for most tennis serves in a minute, Guinness World Records had said.Waheed destroyed American John Perry’s 2019 record of 42 by delivering 59 successful serves in a November attempt that was ratified this week.

US strikes in Yemen kill 31 as Trump vows to end Houthi attacks

Saada(News Desk) The first US strikes against Yemen’s Houthis since Donald Trump took office killed 31 people, the rebels said on Sunday, with the US president warning “hell will rain down upon” the group if it did not stop attacking shipping. The Houthis, who have attacked Israel and Red Sea shipping throughout the Israel’s bombardment of Gaza, said children were among those killed.An AFP photographer in the rebel-held capital Sanaa heard explosions and saw plumes of smoke rising,

Attacks on Sanaa, as well as on areas in Saada, Al-Bayda and Radaa, killed at least 31 people and wounded 101, “most of whom were children and women”, health ministry spokesperson Anis Al-Asbahi said. Footage on Houthi media showed children and a woman among those being treated in a hospital emergency room, including a dazed girl with blackened legs wrapped in bandages. Trump, in a post on social media, vowed to “use overwhelming lethal force” to end the Houthi attacks, which the rebels say are in

solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.US President Donald Trump looks on as military strikes are launched against Yemen’s Houthis over the group’s attacks against Red Sea shipping, at an unspecified location in this handout image released on March 15, 2025. — White House/Handout via Reuters“To all Houthi terrorists, your time is up, and your attacks must stop, starting today. If they don’t, hell will rain down upon you like nothing you have ever seen before!” Trump posted on his Truth Social platform.Trump also

warned Iran, the Houthis’ alleged main backer, that it needed to immediately halt support for the group. He said if Iran threatened the United States, “America will hold you fully accountable and, we won’t be nice about it!”The unfolding strikes — which one US official told Reuters might continue for weeks — represent the biggest US military operation in the Middle East since Trump took office in January. It came as the US ramps up sanctions pressure on Tehran while trying to bring it to the negotiating table over

its nuclear programme.The Houthis’ political bureau described the attacks as a “war crime”:“Our Yemeni armed forces are fully prepared to respond to escalation with escalation,” it said in a statement.Residents in Sanaa said the strikes hit a building in the Houthi stronghold.“The explosions were violent and shook the neighborhood like an earthquake. They terrified our women and children,” one of the residents, who gave his name as Abdullah Yahia, told Reuters.Another strike on a power station in the town

of Dahyan in Saada led to a power cut, Al-Masirah TV reported earlier today. Dahyan is where Abdul Malik al-Houthi, the enigmatic leader of the Houthis, often meets his visitors.The Houthis, an armed movement that took control of most of Yemen over the past decade, have launched scores of attacks on ships off its coast since November 2023, disrupting global commerce and setting the US military on a costly campaign to intercept missiles and drones that have burned through stocks of US air defences.