

South Africa envoy to US back home to a raucous welcome

CAPE TOWN: (News Desk) The South African ambassador who was expelled from the United States in a row with President Donald Trump's government arrived home on Sunday to a raucous welcome and struck a defiant tone over the decision.Ties between Washington and Pretoria have slumped since Trump cut financial aid to South Africa over what he alleges is its anti-white land policy, its genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and other foreign policy clashes.“It was not our choice to come home, but we come home with no regrets,” expelled ambassador Ebrahim Rasool said in Cape Town after he was ousted from Washington on accusations of being “a race-baiting politician” who hates Trump.US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said last week Rasool was expelled after he described Trump's Make America Great Again movement as a supremacist reaction to diversity in the United States.

Climate disasters cost \$4.3tr since 1970: UN report

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) Climate-related disasters have caused economic losses exceeding \$4.3 trillion and claimed the lives of over two million people globally between 1970 and 2021, according to the UN agency World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). In a statement on the occasion of World Meteorological Day, observed on March 23, WMO Secretary-General Prof Celeste Saulo said economic costs continue to soar, but the death toll is falling. “We are better at saving lives than ever before,” he said.The WMO says the world just witnessed the hottest 10 years on record, and 2024 is likely to be the first calendar year to temporarily hit 1.5°C above the pre-industrial era.“Unfortunately, it will not be the last. This is more than just a statistic. Every fraction of a degree matters to our lives and our livelihoods. Extreme weather and climate impacts are becoming more intense. We are seeing more frequent and intense heatwaves, more devastating storms and floods, more rapidly intensifying tropical cyclones,” it said.The theme of this year's World Meteorological Day is, therefore, “Closing the Early Warnings Gap Together”. The day is observed on March 23 each year to showcase the essential contribution of national meteorological and hydrological services to society and to building a safer, more resilient world.

Israeli forces press ground offensive in Gaza

JERUSALEM: (News Desk) Israel's military pressed ground operations across the Gaza Strip on Sunday, urging Palestinians to flee an offensive in Rafah city nearly a week into a renewed assault on the territory. The Israeli troops are again deploying to parts of Gaza and conducting attacks despite calls by several countries, including Germany, UK and France, to revive a January truce.

In a statement on X on Sunday, military spokesman Avichay Adraee said the army launched an offensive to strike what he alleged terrorist organisations in a district of the southern city of Rafah.

In a message that appeared on leaflets dropped over the area by drone, Adraee called on Palestinians to leave the “dangerous combat zone” in Tal al-Sultan district and move further north.

At a charity kitchen in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza's main city just north of Rafah, 19-year-old Iman al-Bardawil said many displaced Palestinians like her struggle to “afford food and drink”.

“We are in the month of Ramadan, which is a blessed month, and people...find themselves obliged to come here,” Bardawil told AFP, lamenting “the suffering” she saw around her.

“I'm here to get rice for the children, but it's gone,” said Saed Abu al-Jidyan, who like Bardawil had fled his home in northern Gaza.

“The crossings are closed, and my salary has been suspended since the beginning of the war... there is no food in Gaza.”

Before its renewed assault, Israel in early March blocked the entry of humanitarian aid into war-ravaged Gaza and cut electricity supplies, in a bid to force Hamas to accept the Israeli terms for an extension of the ceasefire and release the 58 prisoners.

The electricity supplied by Israel had fed Gaza's main water desalination plant, and the decision to cut power has aggravated already dire conditions for Gaza's 2.4 million people.The Israeli military said troops were also operating in northern Gaza and working “to expand the security zone” there.Hamas has said that Israel is sacrificing the prisoners with its resumption of bombardments, while many of the families of the prisoners have called for a renewed ceasefire.Hamas official killedThe military said its fighter jets struck what it alleged several Hamas targets in northern Gaza on Sunday.An Israeli air strike on Saturday on a displacement camp in al-Mawasi near Khan Yunis killed senior Hamas political official Salah al-Bardawil and his wife, according to the Palestinian Islamist movement.



Palestinians gather at the site of an Israeli strike on a house, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on March 23, 2025

South Korea court reinstates impeached PM Han as acting president

Seoul(News Desk) South Korea's Constitutional Court dismissed the impeachment of Prime Minister Han Duck-soo on Monday, reinstating him as acting president — a role he took after the president was suspended for declaring martial law.

The court ruling is the latest development in South Korea's complex and sprawling political crisis, which Presi-

dent Yoon Suk Yeol started with a short-lived attempt to subvert civilian rule in December.Lawmakers defied armed soldiers at parliament to vote down Yoon's December 3 martial law declaration and impeached him soon after, with Han stepping in as acting president.But he was himself impeached by lawmakers just weeks later over his purported involvement in the martial law

debacle, plus a dispute over judicial appointments.“The Constitutional Court has rendered a decision to reject the impeachment trial request against Prime Minister Han Duck-soo,” the court said on Monday in a statement.The court ruled five-to-one against Han's impeachment, with two judges arguing the case should not have made it to court as lawmakers did not have a

super majority to impeach him in the first place.Han's actions while in office “cannot be seen as constituting a betrayal of the people's trust indirectly granted through the President” the court ruled. The decision is effective immediately and cannot be appealed.Han, who immediately resumed the acting presidency Monday, thanked the Constitutional Court for its “wise decision”.

Israel approves ‘independence’ for 13 West Bank settlements

JERUSALEM/RAMALLAH: (News Desk) Israel's security cabinet approved a plan to separate 13 Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank from their neighbouring communities, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said on Sunday. The settlements will ultimately be recognised as independent, he posted on X about the move, which follows the approval of tens of

thousands of housing units across the West Bank.“We continue to lead a revolution of normalisation and regulation in the settlements. Instead of hiding and apologising we raise the flag, build and settle. This is another important step on the path to actual sovereignty in Judea and Samaria,” Smotrich said, using Israel's term for the West Bank.The Palestinian Foreign Min-

istry criticised the approval of the separation of the neighbourhoods and their recognition as independent settlements as disregarding international legitimacy and resolutions.Hamas, the Palestinian group governing Gaza, condemned the move in the West Bank, describing it as a “desperate attempt to impose realities on the ground and consolidate colonial occupation on Pal-

estinian lands”.Palestinians denounce new occupation following the approval of tens of thousands of housing unitsAround 700,000 Israeli settlers live among 2.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, land Israel captured in 1967 during the six-day war. Most countries consider Israel's settlements on territory seized in the war to be illegal.



This handout photo taken on December 17, 2024 and released by the South Korean Prime Minister's Office shows South Korea Prime Minister and acting president Han Duck-soo speaking during a cabinet meeting at the government complex in Seoul.

Schumer rejects calls to quit as top Senate Democrat

WASHINGTON: (News Desk) US Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer on Sunday dismissed calls from some Democratic lawmakers for him to step down as leader in the Senate over his approach to a recently passed government funding bill. Schumer sparked anger among Democrats last week when he decided

not to block a Republican-drafted spending bill that many in the party said gave President Donald Trump, a Republican, too much power. “Look, I'm not stepping down,” Schumer told NBC's “Meet the Press.” Schumer said while the spending bill was “certainly bad” and that he had anticipated his support for

it would stir controversy, the other option had been to let the government shut down, which would have been “15 or 20 times worse.” Schumer said during a shutdown the executive branch had sole power to determine what government functions and employees were essential. In such a scenario, Schum-

er argued, Trump, his cost-cutting adviser Elon Musk and budget chief Russ Vought could “eviscerate the federal government.” Schumer's decision to side with Republicans outraged Democrats in Congress and progressive groups, and highlighted the party's struggles as it is shut out of power in Washington.

Bangladesh ex-captain Tamim Iqbal in hospital after heart attack

Dhaka(News Desk) Former Bangladesh one-day cricket captain Tamim Iqbal was taken to hospital on Monday after suffering a heart attack on the field during a domestic match.

Tamim, 36, was leading Mohammedan Sporting Club in a match of the 50-over Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League.

He participated in the toss but later complained of chest pain and after initial treatment on the field he was transported to a nearby hospital.“He suffered a heart attack. What I know so far is that his heart started to function better,” Debashis Chowdhury, a medical officer of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), told AFP.Tariqul Islam, a team official, told AFP that Tamim was being treated at a hospital in Savar on Dhaka's outskirts and urged the Bangladeshi public to pray for his quick recovery.

Unsuccessful Olympic bid water under the bridge, insists Coe

NANJING: (News Desk) World Athletics president Sebastian Coe insisted on Sunday that his unsuccessful challenge to succeed Thomas Bach as head of the International Olympic Committee was water under the bridge.

Coe had to be content with third place in the vote for the new IOC president in Greece this week.

Kirsty Coventry, a former Olympic gold medal-winning swimmer for Zimbabwe, won in the first round of voting with 49 of the 97 votes cast from IOC members to become the first African and the first woman to hold the post.

Kirsty Coventry, the newly elected International Olympics Committee (IOC) President, addresses the media upon her arrival at Robert Mugabe International Airport in Harare, Zimbabwe on March 23. — Reuters IOC veteran Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr received 28 votes, while Coe, twice Olympic 1500m champion for Britain, received just eight.

Asked whether he categorised his defeat as humiliating, Coe was adamant that that was not the case and that he was very much back to the day job.

“No, I mean, I don't think like that,” he told AFP on the sidelines of the world indoor championships in Nanjing.

“I'm here. This is the centrepiece of Olympic sport and I've got a job to do.

“The world goes on. I offered a vision, which I stand by, I'm very happy to have done.“I thought I could make a contribution, but that's not going to be the way.”

Piastri leads McLaren one-two in China, Ferrari disqualified

SHANGHAI: (News Desk) Australian Oscar Piastri roared back from season-opening disappointment to win the Chinese Formula One Grand Prix in a McLaren one-two on Sunday while Ferrari had both drivers disqualified.

Lando Norris held on with fading brakes for second place ahead of Mercedes rival George Russell to stretch his championship lead, over Red Bull's Max Verstappen, to eight points after two race weekends.

Verstappen was fourth with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Saturday sprint winner Lewis Hamilton finishing fifth and sixth before being disqualified when their cars failed post-race technical checks.

Leclerc's was underweight while Hamilton's had suffered excessive skid wear.Piastri's win from pole position denied Norris a third victory in a row, including last year's Abu Dhabi season-ender, but left champions McLaren still unbeaten this season.

Top seeds Zverev, Sabalenka advance at Miami Open

MIAMI: (News Desk) World number one Aryna Sabalenka reached the last 16 at the Miami Open when Elena-Gabriela Ruse retired injured on Saturday, while men's top seed Alexander Zverev beat Jacob Fearnley 6-2, 6-4 to reach the third round.

Sabalenka, who arrived in Miami fresh off a defeat in last week's Indian Wells final, wrapped up the first set 6-1 before Romanian Ruse was forced to retire with a right thigh injury.

Up next for three-times Grand Slam champion Sabalenka will be American defending Miami champion Danielle Collins, who beat Swiss qualifier Rebeka Masarova 6-4, 3-6, 6-3.

Former world number one Naomi Osaka prevailed 7-6(6), 3-6, 6-4 against American wildcard Hailey Baptiste and will play Italian sixth seed Jasmine Paolini, who advanced when Ons Jabeur retired with a left leg injury while trailing 4-3 in the first set.

Third seed Coco Gauff also progressed with a 6-2, 6-4 win over Greece's Maria Sakkari while Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen advanced with a 6-1, 7-6(3) win over Taylor Townsend.

Local hope Ashlyn Krueger stunned 26th seed and former US Open runner-up Leylah Fernandez to set up a meeting with Zheng.

On the men's side, Zverev looked comfortable against British qualifier Fearnley as the German mixed a solid serve with dominance from the baseline while saving the only two break points he faced during the 74-minute match.

For Zverev, who lost at the first hurdle in Indian Wells, the win gave him a German record 145th Masters 1000 win, one more than Tommy Haas. He now faces Australia's Jordan Thompson.

Happ's to kind of have improved a few things from Indian Wells where I didn't feel well on the court. I didn't feel like I played good,” Zverev told reporters. “Hopefully this is just the first of many matches for me here and I can continue playing well.”Indian Wells champion Jack Draper crashed out 7-6(2), 7-6(3) to Czech Jakub Mensik.The match was temporarily suspended when a large crowd of Brazilian spectators, who were waiting to watch Joao Fonseca's clash with Ugo Humbert due next at the same venue, expressed their anger when that match was shifted to the main stadium.

Trump's envoy says Putin not planning to invade ‘all of Europe’

WASHINGTON/RIYADH: (News Desk) US and Ukrainian officials were meeting in Saudi Arabia on Sunday for talks on a partial ceasefire in the war with Russia, with Washington hoping for “real progress” but the Kremlin warning of “difficult negotiations” and a long journey to peace.

US President Donald Trump is pushing for a rapid end to the three-year war and hopes talks in Riyadh, which will see US officials hold separate technical-level discussions with delegations

from Ukraine and Russia could pave the way to a breakthrough.Despite both sides proposing different plans for temporary ceasefires, attacks have continued unabated. Originally scheduled to take place simultaneously to enable shuttle diplomacy — with the US going back and forth between the delegations — the talks on a partial truce are now taking place one after the other.Washington hopes for ‘progress’ at Riyadh talks; Russia intends to discuss resumption of Black Sea grain initia-

tiveThe meeting between the Ukrainian team, led by defence minister Rustem Umerov and the Americans got underway in Riyadh on Sunday evening, Umerov said on Facebook. “The agenda includes proposals to protect energy facilities and critical infrastructure,” he said, adding the teams were “working through a number of complex technical issues.” Talks between the US and Russia were set for Monday.Real progressTrump's envoy Steve Witkoff voiced optimism that any agreement

struck would pave the way to a “full-on” ceasefire.“I think you're going to see in Saudi Arabia on Monday some real progress, particularly as it affects a Black Sea ceasefire on ships between both countries. And from that you'll naturally gravitate to a full-on shooting ceasefire,” he told Fox News.Trump's envoy said he does not see President Vladimir Putin wanting to invade beyond Ukraine. “I just don't see that he wants to take all of Europe. I take him at his word in this sense, so, and I think the Europeans

are beginning to come to that belief, too. But it sort of doesn't matter. That's an academic issue.... The agenda is, stop the killing, stop the carnage. Let's end this thing,” he said.But the Kremlin on Sunday downplayed expectations of a rapid resolution, saying talks were just beginning. “We are only at the beginning of this path,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian state TV.He said there were many outstanding “questions” and “nuances” over how a potential ceasefire might be imple-

mented.President Putin had already rejected a joint US-Ukrainian call for a full and immediate 30-day pause, proposing instead a halt in attacks only on energy facilities.“There are difficult negotiations ahead,” Peskov said in the interview, published on social media.Black Sea deal Peskov said the “main” focus in its talks with the United States would be a possible resumption of a 2022 Black Sea grain deal that ensured safe navigation for Ukrainian farm exports via the Black Sea.