



150 prisoners of war exchanged by Russia and Ukraine on Saturday, first such exchange in five months

GLOBAL WEATHER table with columns for location, temperature, and weather conditions.

US defence secy Austin seeks talks with China

SINGAPORE

UNITED States Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin told a gathering of top security officials Saturday that war with China was neither imminent nor unavoidable...

Austin's comments at the Shangri-La defense forum in Singapore came the day after he met for more than an hour on the sidelines with Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun...

Neither side budged from their longstanding positions on Taiwan which China claims as its own and has not ruled out using force to take and on China's sweeping claims in the South China Sea...

Biden pushes for truce, says Hamas incapable of attacking Israel again

US prez details three-phase deal proposed by Israel to end war; Hamas says viewing it positively

WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden on Friday detailed a three-phase deal proposed by Israel to Hamas militants that he says would lead to the release of the remaining hostages in Gaza...

Biden added that Hamas is "no longer capable" of carrying out another large-scale attack on Israel as he urged Israeli and Hamas to come to a deal to release the remaining hostages for an extended cease-fire...

Biden said the first phase of the proposed deal would last for six weeks and would include a "full and complete cease-fire", a withdrawal of Israeli forces from all densely populated areas of Gaza...

American hostages would be released at this stage, and remains of hostages who have been killed would be returned to their families. Humanitarian assistance would surge during the first phase...

The second phase would include the release of all remaining living hostages, including male soldiers, and Israeli forces would withdraw from Gaza.



Remains of a UN-run school in the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip that was damaged in Israeli strikes | AFP



TOLL SO FAR 38,037

34 arrested after protest at US museum

New York City police said Saturday that they had 34 people in custody following a pro-Palestinian protest at the Brooklyn Museum...

ing living hostages, including temporary cease-fire would become, in the words of the Israeli proposal, the cessation of hostilities permanently," Biden said.

The third phase calls for the start of a major reconstruction of Gaza, which faces decades of rebuilding from devastation caused by the war. The 4-1/2 page Israeli proposal was transmitted to Hamas on Thursday.

Meanwhile, congressional leaders on Friday invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to deliver an address at the US Capitol.

One roadblock to overcome during the first phase would involve the two sides agreeing on the ratio of hostages to prisoners to be released during the next phase, according to a senior Biden administration official who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity.

Hamas, meanwhile, said it "views positively" the Israeli plan laid out by Biden.

Biden's remarks came as the Israeli military confirmed that its forces are now operating in central parts of Rafah in its expanding offensive in the southern Gaza city.

S Africa's ANC looks for allies to form govt after losing majority

JOHANNESBURG

SOUTH Africa's ruling ANC faced a search for allies to help it form a new government on Saturday after it lost its three-decade-old absolute majority in a watershed election.

With 99% of the votes from Wednesday's election counted, President Cyril Ramaphosa's African National Congress had only 40%, a catastrophic slump from the 57.5% it won in 2019.

The ANC must now either negotiate a coalition government, or at least persuade other parties to back Ramaphosa's re-election in parliament to allow him to form a minority government...

"We have been talking with everybody even before the election," ANC's deputy secretary general Nomvula Mokonyane said, saying the party's NEC decision-making body would meet to decide on a course of action after final results are announced.

record poor showing, saying: "For now, it's not an issue." As votes continued to be validated, data from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) showed the centre-right Democratic Alliance (DA) held second place with 21.71%, slightly up on its 20.77% showing in 2019 election.

The party, which governs Western Cape province and has promised a free market agenda at odds with the ANC's left-wing traditions.

Asked about the chances of a coalition with the ANC, Helen Zille, the DA party chairwoman, said: "Negotiations haven't started but some channels have been opened, individuals talking to individuals."

She also did not rule out allowing the ANC to attempt to rule alone, telling AFP: "A minority government would be something completely new in South Africa but it is an option amongst others".

But it was not a surge by the DA that cut into the ANC's vote share. In third place was former president Jacob Zuma's uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) on 12.6%, a surprise score for a party founded just months ago as a vehicle for the former ANC chief.

Malema and Zuma are former ANC members and some observers have suggested that they would be more natural partners for the ruling coalition.

Russia targets Ukrainian energy sites in massive overnight attack

SINGAPORE

RUSSIA fired a combined 100 missiles and drones at Ukraine overnight in a barrage that targeted energy sites across the country, Ukrainian officials said on Saturday.

Russia has launched dozens of aerial attacks at Ukraine's power facilities throughout the war, causing significant damage and energy shortages as Ukraine's stretched air defences struggle to repel the waves of drones and missiles.

"The enemy launched 53 missiles of various types and 47 attack drones," the air force said, adding that it shot down 35 of the missiles and all but one of the drones.

Two thermal power plants were damaged in the attack, the DTEK operator said, without specifying where they were located.

It was the sixth major attack on DTEK thermal power plants since mid-March, it added.

Ukraine's Energy Minister German Galushchenko said Russia had targeted sites in five regions — Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovograd, Ivano-Frankivsk and Zaporizhzhia — stretching from near the eastern frontlines to Ukraine's west, which borders the European Union.

The ministry warned that power restrictions were likely on Saturday evening as a result of the attacks. President Volodymyr Zelensky said Moscow was trying to "exploit" a lack of "determination" among Ukraine's key Western backers and repeated his call for more air defence systems.



A fire service personnel extinguishing a fire at an auto service station in Kyiv | AFP

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SL nabs handler of IS suspects sent to India

COLOMBO

SRI Lankan Police have arrested the suspected handler of the four of its nationals who were arrested at Ahmedabad airport in India for their alleged links with the banned Islamic State (ISIS) outfit.

The Criminal Investigation Department arrested Pushparaja Osman, 46, on Friday in Colombo. Sri Lanka Police recently announced a cash award of Rs 2 million for any credible information on his whereabouts.

Police had issued a wanted notice and a video of him seeking information from the public. The CID arrested him and he was believed to have made telephone contact with the four people arrested at the Ahmedabad airport, the police said.

The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad arrested four Sri Lankans with links to ISIS at the airport in Ahmedabad. The four men took an Indigo flight from Colombo to Chennai on May 19.

Commenting on the investigations so far the police spokesman Nihal Thaldudwa said that police were unable yet to verify that the four are linked to ISIS. "If they had promoted the ISIS ideology in Sri Lanka is yet to be established," he said.

Last month, the Sri Lankan authorities launched a high-powered operation to investigate the four Sri Lankans arrested in Gujarat.

Indian-origin boy eyes record with Rubik's Cube

LONDON

A British Indian schoolboy who created a giant artwork depicting Prime Minister Rishi Sunak by using his Rubik's Cube-solving skills is eyeing a speed record entry into the "Guinness World Records" this year.

The pupil of the Two Village C of E (VC) Primary School at Harwich in Essex, south-east England, is excited at the prospect of taking his cube-solving to the next level. "I am deeply honoured to receive the In-

spire Award at the British Parliament. BYITC's recognition has provided me with a platform to showcase my achievements, and winning the Rubik's Hero in the Academics Category has been a profound milestone in my journey," Soni said.

"I am eagerly anticipating the opportunity to attempt breaking the Guinness World Record on August 4 in India, where I will demonstrate my speed-solving prowess with the Rubik's Cube," added Soni. PTI

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