



**BRASÍLIA (AFP)** – The government of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has fired 13 more soldiers from his security detail as it tightens protection following violent anti-government riots on January 8. A notice in the official gazette Wednesday said the 13 troops were dismissed from the institutional security office attached to the presidency. On Tuesday, it was announced another 40 soldiers had been removed from the presidential detail at Alvorada palace, where Brazil's presidents live.

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — Key roadways remained closed and officials estimated thousands of homes were seriously damaged in California as weeks of wild weather that flooded roadways, collapsed hillsides and toppled countless trees finally became calm Tuesday. Tallying the damage will take time, but the number of houses and other structures that will be red-tagged as uninhabitable could be in the "low thousands," said Brian Ferguson, spokesperson for the Governor's Office of Emergency Services. The damage is spread across 41 of California's 58 counties, Ferguson said. In unincorporated Santa Barbara County, after more than 60 inspections at properties that sustained damage from mudslides and downed trees, four homes were red-tagged and 32 were yellow-tagged as needing extensive repairs, said Kelsey Buttitta, the county's communications manager.

**KIVU Province, DRC (Al-Jazeera)** - Police have fired tear gas to disperse demonstrators in the Democratic Republic of Congo's eastern city of Goma. Protesters on Wednesday were calling for authorities to enforce an agreed withdrawal of M23 rebels from occupied territory in the region. Regional leaders brokered a ceasefire in November, under which the Tutsi-led M23 group — which launched a full offensive last year — was meant to pull out of recently captured positions. The deadline for this was January 15, according to the DRC's presidency. But M23 has been accused of flouting the deal and occupying territory elsewhere to compensate for withdrawals that critics have argued were mainly ceremonial. President Felix Tshisekedi made similar accusations on Tuesday.

**CALIFORNIA (AFP)** -Law enforcement officials in California have offered a \$10,000 reward and asked for the public's help in solving the "deliberate, intentional and horrific" murders of six people at a home in the state's Central Valley. Investigators believe a gang or drug cartel targeted the family, Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux told a news conference on Tuesday. Deputies had conducted a drug-related search warrant at the same home recently. Among the dead in the 3:30am (11:30 GMT) shooting on Monday were a 17-year-old and her 10-month-old son.

**WALES, Alaska (AP)** — A polar bear has attacked and killed two people in a remote village in western Alaska, according to state troopers. Alaska State Troopers said they received the report of the attack at 2:30 p.m. Tuesday in Wales, on the western tip of the Seward Peninsula, KTUU reported. "Initial reports indicate that a polar bear had entered the community and had chased multiple residents," troopers wrote. "The bear fatally attacked an adult female and juvenile male." The bear was shot and killed by a local resident as it attacked the pair, troopers said.

**PARIS (AP)** — A French nun who was believed to be the world's oldest person has died a few weeks before her 119th birthday, the spokesperson for her nursing home in southern France said Wednesday. Lucile Randon, known as Sister André, was born in the town of Ales, southern France, on Feb. 11, 1904. She was also one of the world's oldest survivors of COVID-19. Spokesman David Tavella said she died at 2 a.m. on Tuesday at the Sainte-Catherine-Laboure nursing home in the town of Toulon. The Gerontology Research Group, which validates details of people thought to be 110 or older, listed her as the oldest known person in the world after the death of Japan's Kane Tanaka, aged 119, last year.

## Lavrov Says Russia, China Alert to Western 'Games'



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov speaks during his annual news conference in Moscow, Russia, January 18, 2023.

**MOSCOW (Reuters)** - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday that the United States was attempting to "contain" both Russia and China with the help of other countries, but they were alert to its "games".

Lavrov told a news conference that the West saw both countries as a threat - Russia right now, and China in the longer term as a systemic rival.

He said Washington was not powerful enough to keep in check both countries at once, so was mobilizing Europe, Japan and others to join it.

At the same time, he said, the West was trying to drive a wedge between Russia and China. "The West is trying to sow discord in our relations... We and China see all these games," he said.

His comments underlined the strategic importance to Moscow of its relationship with China at a time when its army is struggling in Ukraine and its economic links with the West have been sustained by successive waves of sanctions.

Ties with Beijing had never been stronger, Lavrov said, and the two countries were shifting an increasing amount of their trade into their national currencies to reduce dependence on the West and exposure to sanctions.

Russia and China signed a "no limits" partnership last February, and their economic links have boomed as Russia's connections with the West have shrivelled.

Lavrov said the West was looking for more and more ways to annoy China.

"They have already outlined their positions on Taiwan, which are absolutely unacceptable for China and for international law, they are looking for more and more opportunities to irritate China in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong," he said.

"Therefore, China is well aware that remaining in the Western system and completely dependent on the West is fraught with very serious risks for the fundamental national interests of China's development."

## Australia to Spend \$2 Billion on 40 U.S. Black Hawk Choppers



U.S. Black Hawk helicopters attend Silver Arrow 2020 military exercise in Adazi, Latvia October 2, 2020.

**SYDNEY (Reuters)** - Australia confirmed on Wednesday it would buy 40 Black Hawk military helicopters from the United States for an estimated A\$2.8 billion (\$1.96 billion), finalizing a sale signed off by the U.S. State Department last August.

The Lockheed Martin Corp UH-60M Black Hawks will replace the Army's fleet of MRH-90 Taipan choppers, which have been plagued for years by maintenance issues. Delivery of the new helicopters will begin this year.

"We've just not got the flying hours out of the Taipan that we would need," Defense Minister Richard Marles told ABC news on Wednesday. "We're confident that we can get that from the Black Hawks. It's a platform we're

familiar with." Australia has been boosting its defense spending over the past few years as China looks to step up its presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

A 2021 decision to ditch French-made submarines for nuclear submarines to be built by the United States and Britain sparked a bitter diplomatic dispute with France.

Marles said he had spoken with his French counterpart several times and was confident the U.S. helicopter deal "won't interrupt" the renewed relationship with France. The Taipans are made by Airbus, partly owned by France.

Australian industry will be involved in logistics, warehousing, engineering as well as the helicopter's global supply chain, said the Defense Department in a statement.

# UN Secretary-General: World in 'Sorry State'



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks during the 53rd annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, WEF, in Davos, Switzerland, Wednesday, Jan. 18, 2023.

**DAVOS, Switzerland (AP)** — The world is in a "sorry state" because of myriad interlinked challenges including climate change and the war in Ukraine that are "piling up like cars in a chain reaction crash," the UN chief said at the World Economic Forum's meeting Wednesday.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres delivered his gloomy message on the second day of the elite gathering of world leaders and corporate executives in the Swiss ski resort of Davos. Sessions took a grim turn when news broke of a helicopter crash in Ukraine that killed more than a dozen people, including Ukraine's interior minister and other officials.

Forum President Borge Brende requested 15 seconds of silence and Ukrainian

first lady Olena Zelenska dabbed teary eyes, calling it "another very sad day," then telling attendees that "we can also change this negative situation for the better."

Guterres said the "gravest levels of geopolitical division and mistrust in generations are undermining efforts to tackle global problems, which also include widening inequality, a cost-of-living crisis sparked by soaring inflation and an energy crunch, lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, supply-chain disruptions and more.

He singled out climate change as an "existential challenge," and said a global commitment to limit the Earth's temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius "is nearly going up in smoke."

Guterres, who has been one of the most outspoken world figures on climate change, referenced a recent study that found scientists at Exxon Mobil made remarkably accurate predictions about the effects of climate change as far back as the 1970s, even as the company publicly doubted that warming was real.

"We learned last week that certain fossil fuel producers were fully aware in the 1970s that their core product was baking our planet," he said in his speech. "Some in Big Oil peddled the big lie."

Critics have questioned the impact of the four-day meeting where politicians, CEOs and other leaders discuss the world's problems — and make deals on the sidelines — but where concrete action is harder to measure. Environmentalists, for example, slam the carbon-spewing private jets that ferry in bigwigs to an event that prioritizes the battle against climate change.

On the second day, government officials, corporate titans, academics and activists were attending dozens of panel sessions on topics covering the metaverse, environmental green washing and artificial intelligence.

The German government has faced mounting pressure to make another significant step forward in military aid to Ukraine by agreeing to deliver Leopard 2 battle tanks. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is scheduled to visit Berlin this week and then host a meeting of allies at Ramstein Air Base in western Germany.

## French Union Threatens to Cut Electricity to MPs, Billionaires Amid Nationwide Strike



Protestors and French CGT labour union workers attend a demonstration as part of a nationwide day of strike and protests to push for government measures to address inflation, workers' rights and pension reforms, in Paris, France, September 29, 2022.

**PARIS (Reuters)** - France's hardline CGT union has threatened to cut off electricity supplies to lawmakers and billionaires before a nationwide strike on Thursday, in an increasingly acrimonious showdown over the government's plan to raise the retirement age.

The proposed bill, announced last week, would see the retirement age pushed to 64 from 62, a move opinion polls show is opposed by a vast majority of workers already facing a cost-of-living crisis.

Employees in sectors including transport, education and energy across

France will take part in Thursday's strike, with major protest marches expected in Paris and other cities.

The industrial action is seen as a test of whether unions, who in past years have struggled to convince people to strike, can transform this anger into mass social protest.

"I suggest they also go see the nice properties, the nice castles of billionaires," Philippe Martinez, leader of the CGT, France's second-largest trade union, told France 2 television on Wednesday.

"It would be good if we cut off their electricity so that they can put them-

selves, for a few days, in the shoes of ... French people who can't afford to pay their bill."

In recent days, Sebastian Menesplier, of the hardline CGT's energy and mine branch, has also threatened electricity cuts targeting the offices of MPs, local media quoted him as saying.

Government spokesman Olivier Veran said threats to cut electricity were "unacceptable."

Public transport will be the most affected on Thursday, with most trains as well as some flights cancelled, and Paris' subway heavily disrupted.

Seven out of 10 primary school teachers will walk off their job, as will many refinery workers, unions and transport operators said.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said there would be more than 10,000 police on the ground during the protest marches, a third of which will be held in Paris.

According to police intelligence, there could be about 1,000 potentially violent people present at Paris' rallies on Thursday, he told RTL radio, saying they were from the radical left or past Yellow Vest movement.

France has a decades-long history of attempts to reform its pension system - one of the most generous and costly in Europe - and of protests to try to stop them.

## Taipei Warns of 'Worst-Case Scenario' in Standoff With Beijing

**MOSCOW (RT)** - Beijing is now "more likely" to attack Taiwan in the years to come, Joseph Wu, the foreign minister of the self-governed island, warned on Wednesday.

Speaking to Sky News, Wu noted that the situation around the island "in the last year compared to the two previous years is much worse." However, he also pointed out that "to me, 2027 is the year that we need to watch out for."

The minister explained '27 is the year Xi Jinping would likely enter his fourth term. "If in his previous three terms he cannot claim any achievement during his office, he might need to think about something else for him to claim as his achievement or his legacy," Wu explained.

Against this backdrop, Wu added that "Taiwan might become his scapegoat." According to the minister, Xi "might want to resort to a use of force or creating a crisis externally to divert domestic attention or to show to the Chinese that he has accomplished something."

The Taiwanese Foreign Minister also stated that the "worst-case scenario" in terms of the standoff with Beijing

had become "more likely," citing the increased Chinese military activity around the island. "Very often, you see how the sum of a tiny little accident might spark into a major war," he admitted.

The minister's remarks come as last month Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen announced that the island would extend compulsory military service from four months to a year starting in 2024, blaming Beijing's "intimidation and threats against Taiwan" for the decision.

China denounced the move, warning that it would only lead to the island's population being used as "cannon fodder" to support Taipei's "separatist" ambitions.

In October, Xi stated that, although Beijing seeks peaceful reunification with Taiwan, it "will never promise to give up the use of force," while reserving the option to "take all necessary measures" to achieve this goal.

Beijing considers Taiwan to be sovereign Chinese territory under its One China policy. The island has been ruled by nationalists since 1949, when they fled the mainland with US help after losing the Chinese Civil War to the communists.