



ABUJA (AP) – Gunmen kidnapped at least 15 students from a school in Nigeria's northwestern Sokoto state in a dawn raid on Saturday, the school's owner and a resident said, days after some 300 students were abducted by a gang in northern Kaduna state. The gunmen forced their way into the school premises in the Sokoto village of Gidan Bakuso and started firing shots sporadically, waking and causing panic among the students, who ran for cover, said school owner Liman Abubakar Bakuso.

"They succeeded in abducting 15 of my students, the oldest being 20 and 15, but all the others are below 13," said Bakuso by phone, adding that a woman had also been kidnapped. "We are in a state of panic and have been praying hard for their safe release," he said. Police did not respond to requests for comment. Kidnappings at schools in Nigeria were first carried out by Boko Haram, which seized more than 200 students from a girls' school in Chibok in Borno state a decade ago, causing global outrage.

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ISLAMABAD (Xinhua) – Asif Ali Zardari took oath as the 14th president of Pakistan during a ceremony held at the President's House on Sunday, according to a statement from the President's Office. Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa administered the oath of office to the newly-elected president at the ceremony attended by the outgoing President Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, chiefs of the armed forces, politicians and foreign dignitaries. On Saturday, Zardari, co-chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, won the election by taking 411 against 181 votes from all the electoral colleges, including the parliament and four provincial assemblies, the Election Commission of Pakistan said. Ruling coalition candidate Zardari received 255 votes in a joint session of the two houses of the parliament, including the Senate and the National Assembly, 43 votes from the eastern Punjab province, eight from the northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, 47 votes from the southwest Balochistan province and 58 votes from the southern Sindh province. This is 68-year-old Zardari's second term as president after he served as the country's 11th president from 2008 to 2013. He is also the first civilian who reached this position for the second time in the country's history.

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JAKARTA (Reuters) – Days of torrential rain have brought floods and landslides in Indonesia's province of West Sumatra, forcing the evacuation of more than 70,000 people, while killing at least 19, with seven going missing, authorities said on Sunday. The havoc since last Thursday in the provincial capital of Padang and eight other areas has damaged nearly 700 homes, scores of bridges and schools and 113 hectares (280 acres) of farmland. Indonesia's rescue agency is hunting for those missing, officials said, with 150 rescuers drafted into the effort, hampered by blocked roads following the landslides. "Today's search involves 150 personnel from various disaster agencies," Abdul Malik, the chief of the provincial rescue team, said in a statement. Those evacuated gathered in the nearest mosques, said Abdul Muhari, the spokesperson of Indonesia's disaster agency BNPB, but no temporary shelters were set up. They received food, water and medicines, while others returned home as waters subsided. Most areas in Padang are still flooded, Abdul added, with roads blocked by a landslide extending 50 metres (164 ft) in the area of Padang Pariaman.

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PARIS (AFP) – French rescue workers were on Sunday searching for seven people, including two children, missing after violent storms swept the south of the country with most believed to have been swept away in cars on flooded bridges. A family of four, including two children aged four and 13, was caught in the floods while trying late Saturday evening to drive across a bridge over the river Gardon in the village of Dions, north of the city of Nîmes, the prefecture said. The father and the two children were still missing but the mother, 40, who was also in the car, was found by rescuers and taken to hospital, it added. In Dions on Sunday a helicopter flew over the village and the bursting waters of the Gardon while large numbers of firefighters engaged in search efforts, helped by drones and dogs. The bridge was still submerged. The prefecture in the Gard department expressed regret that despite multiple warnings about the incoming storm, "we still see behavior that is dangerous, first of all for the people themselves but also dangerous for the people whose duty it is to come to their aid."

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KUALA LUMPUR (AP) – Indonesian citizens living in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur retracted their ballots again in the country's presidential election on Sunday after allegations of voter fraud. Seven officials from the Kuala Lumpur election committee were named suspects on Feb. 29 for allegedly tampering with the region's voter list "because of the influence of lobbying from representatives of political parties," police said. Idris Holik, a commissioner at Indonesia's General Elections Commission – or KPU – said the agency was updating the list of Indonesian voters in Kuala Lumpur and that the total registered voters who are slated for the 2024 election revote was 62,217. Holik said some 42,372 voters will revote at a total of 22 polling stations located in Kuala Lumpur. The rest of 19,845 voters will revote through mobile ballot box across several states of Selangor, Perak, Terengganu, WP Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Kelantan, Holik added. Voting in Kuala Lumpur on Feb. 11 attracted particular attention after the Elections Supervisory Agency – or BAWASLU – announced it had found indications of administrative violations during the election process.

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LISBON/ESPINHO (Reuters) – Portuguese voters headed to the polls on Sunday, facing a choice between switching to a center-right government or keeping the center-left in power, although neither appears to have a clear path to a full majority. The far-right Chega party has been growing in clout and could play a role in post-election talks. The issues dominating the campaign in western Europe's poorest country include a crumbling housing crisis, low wages, sagging healthcare and corruption, seen by many as endemic to the mainstream parties. Polling stations opened at 8 a.m. (0800 GMT) and close at 7 p.m. in mainland Portugal and an hour later on the Azores archipelago. The early election, four months after Socialist Prime Minister Antonio Costa's sudden resignation amid a graft investigation, again pits against each other the two centrist parties – the Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD) – that have alternated in power since the end of a fascist dictatorship five decades ago.

## Haiti's Capital 'Under Siege' as Armed Gangs Attack Key Infrastructure



Charred vehicles are abandoned in an empty parking lot as gang violence escalates in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

PORT-AU-PRINCE (AFP) – Residents of Haiti's capital scrambled for safety on Saturday following the latest spasm of gang violence, with a UN group warning of a "city under siege" after armed attackers targeted the presidential palace and police headquarters.

Criminal groups, which already control much of Port-au-Prince as well as roads leading to the rest of the country, have unleashed havoc in recent days as they try to oust Prime Minister Ariel Henry as leader of the Western hemisphere's poorest country.

On Saturday, dozens of residents were seeking safety in public buildings, with some successfully breaking into one facility, according to an AFP correspondent.

The unrest has seen 362,000 Haitians internally displaced -- more than half of them children and some forced to move multiple times, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said Saturday.

"Haitians are unable to lead a decent life. They are living in fear, and every day, every hour this situation carries on, the trauma gets worse," Philippe Branchat, IOM's chief in Haiti, said in a statement.

"People living in the capital are locked in, they have nowhere to go," he said. "The capital is surrounded by armed groups and danger. It is a city under siege."

Police on Friday night repelled gang attacks, including on the presidential palace, and several "bandits" were killed, Lionel Lazzare of the Haitian police union said. No police were among the victims.

The violence left burned-out vehicles, still smoldering, outside the interior ministry and on nearby streets, an AFP correspondent said.

Gunshots rang out late Friday throughout Port-au-Prince and witnesses recounted clashes "between police officers and bandits" as gangs apparently tried to commandeer police stations in the city center.

Lazzare on Saturday pleaded for "means and equipment" to protect police buildings and other key facilities.

The well-armed gangs have attacked key infrastructure in recent days, including two prisons, allowing the majority of their 3,800 inmates to escape.

Along with some ordinary Haitians, the gangs are seeking the resignation of Prime Minister Henry, who was due to leave office in February but instead agreed to a power-sharing deal with the opposition until new elections are held.

After months of delays, the UN Security Council finally gave its green light in October for a multinational policing mission led by Kenya, but that deployment has been stalled by Kenyan courts.

## Sudan Army General Rules Out Ramadan Truce Unless RSF Leaves Civilian Sites



Supporters of the Sudanese armed popular resistance, which backs the army, ride on trucks in Gedaref in eastern Sudan, amid the ongoing conflict in Sudan between the army and paramilitaries.

CAIRO (Reuters) – There would be no truce in Sudan in the Islamic holy month of Ramadan unless the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group leaves the homes and sites of civilians, senior Sudanese armed forces General Yasser al-Atta said on Sunday.

The statement follows an appeal by the United Nations Security Council for a truce during Ramadan, which begins this week. The paramilitary RSF said it welcomed the ceasefire call.

Atta's statement, issued on the army's official Telegram channel, cited recent military advances by the army in Omdurman, part of Sudan's wider capital.

It said there could be no Ramadan ceasefire unless the RSF complied with a commitment made in May last year at Saudi and U.S.-mediated talks in Jeddah to withdraw from civilian homes and public facilities.

It also said there should be no role for Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the RSF leader commonly known as Hemedti, in Sudan's future politics or military.

War between Sudan's army and the RSF erupted in mid-April 2023 amid tensions over a plan for transition to civilian rule. The two factions staged a coup in 2021 that derailed a previous transition following the 2019 overthrow

of autocratic former leader Omar al-Bashir.

The UN says nearly 25 million people — half Sudan's population — need aid, some 8 million have fled their homes and hunger is rising. Washington says the parties to the conflict have committed war crimes.

On Friday the Security Council adopted a resolution for a cessation of hostilities in Ramadan, but the mechanism for implementing the resolution remains unclear.

Sudan's UN ambassador, al-Harith Id-riss al-Harith Mohamed, told the council on Thursday that the president of the country's transitional council commended the appeal of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for a Ramadan truce. However, he said the leader is "wondering about how to do this."

"In embracing the proposed humanitarian ceasefire, we express our readiness to partake in discussions concerning the establishment of mutually agreed upon monitoring mechanisms," the RSF said in its Saturday statement.

"These mechanisms are crucial for ensuring the effective implementation of the ceasefire and for achieving the humanitarian objectives intended by this resolution."

# Muslims Welcome Holy Month of Ramadan With Joy, Deep Concern



People shop for decorations for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan at a shop in Beirut, Lebanon.

CAIRO (AP) – Muslims around the world are welcoming the arrival of Ramadan, a month of dawn-to-dusk fasting, intense prayer, charity and feasts that begin for many Sunday night.

But as they savor the traditions of their own diverse communities — from holiday treats to evening diversions — the tribulations faced by fellow Muslims are never far from anyone's mind. This year, war and starvation in the Gaza Strip casts an especially dark shadow on the festivities.

Many are also struggling to buy food as inflation remains high in many countries and has worsened in some.

Still, even Muslims who are struggling economically or otherwise look forward to what are widely seen as the true blessings of the holy month — prayer and reflection, nurtured by the daylong fast, and time spent with loved ones.

From dawn to dusk, observant Muslims the world over will refrain from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual intercourse. Even the tiniest sip of water would invalidate the fast, which is intended to help focus the mind on prayer and charity.

"In Ramadan, our prayers are heard and the religious observance is day and night," Thanvi said. "People want to help others who are needier than them, even those who don't have much to give." His sermons will focus on "how people should behave with each other, including when Ramadan is over."

At sundown, many will break the fast with a date or two, as the Prophet Muhammad was said to have done, before attending evening prayers. Then they will gather for "iftar," a typically lavish feast shared with friends and family, and a festive atmosphere will prevail late into the night.

Muslims live up their iftar spreads with their own local deli-

ciacies. In Egypt, the shelves are lined with qamar el-din, a sticky apricot treat. In Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, sidewalk vendors make qatayef — tiny pancakes stuffed with cream and nuts and drizzled with syrup.

In Indonesia, with the world's largest Muslim population, Ramadan rituals vary by region, reflecting the country's rich and varied culture. Many celebrate with rendang — meat braised in coconut milk and local spices.

Mosques and charities across the Muslim world organize free iftars for the poorest.

In Cairo, the streets are decked with colorful Ramadan lanterns, bakeries are hawking holiday sweets and television networks are promoting prime-time soap operas, hoping to capitalize on nightly food comas.

Sonia Uddin, a second-generation Pakistani-American living in Orange County, California, said that her family sometimes enjoys hamburgers for iftar and coffee and donuts for suhoor, the pre-dawn meal right before the daily fast begins.

She strives to maintain the traditions of her immigrant parents.

She looks forward to attending nightly prayers, drinking tea with friends and catching up with people she hasn't seen for the past year.

But for her and many other Muslim Americans, those joyful moments will be shadowed by concern for Gaza, where a five-month Zionist carnage has killed more than 30,000 Palestinians, driven most of the population from their homes and pushed hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine.

## Report: France Gathering Alliance of Countries to Dispatch Forces to Ukraine

PARIS (Dispatches) – France is gathering an alliance of countries that may send troops to Ukraine, the Politico has reported, commenting on a visit of French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne to Lithuania.

"France is building an alliance of countries open to potentially sending Western troops to Ukraine — and in the process deepening its clash with a more cautious Berlin," the newspaper said.

The French foreign minister highlighted an opportunity at a press conference with his Lithuanian and Ukrainian counterparts on March 8 to send NATO troops to Ukraine that will deal with demining and will not participate in hostilities, the daily noted.

French President Emmanuel Macron raised the possibility earlier that the NATO military may be sent to Ukraine, the newspaper reminded.

The majority of European countries, including Germany, rejected the idea but the Baltic countries "are much more open to the idea", the Politico added.

UK Foreign Minister David Cameron has proclaimed that he is against the deployment of Western powers' troops in Ukraine, according to recent media reports.

During an interview with Sueddeutsche Zeitung published this

weekend, Cameron made an astute observation that Western military personnel sent to Ukraine might end up being targeted by Russian forces.

He also argued that Western training programs for Ukrainian soldiers should be carried out outside of Ukraine, pointing out that thousands of Kiev troops have been trained in this fashion in the United Kingdom.

### 'UK Pressures Germany on Long-Range Missile'

Meanwhile, British Foreign Secretary David Cameron told Germany's Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily in an interview that Western nations should enhance their military support to Ukraine and "invest" more in NATO.

London is ready to work with Berlin on "solving the issues" preventing Germany from providing Kiev with its long-range Taurus missiles, he added.

The potential supply of the German-made cruise missiles, which have a range of about 500 kilometers (300 miles), to Ukraine has drawn additional attention recently amid fallout from a leaked recording of top German military officials discussing the use of those weapons to destroy Russia's Crimean Bridge. In the audio recording and a transcript of the conversation published by RT, senior German military officers, including

the nation's Air Force commander, in particular spoke about maintaining plausible deniability in case of such an attack.

The leak prompted former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev to accuse Germany of preparing for a conflict with Russia, which Berlin has denied.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has been skeptical of the idea of sending Taurus missiles to Ukraine. He argued that the use of such weapons would require tighter control from Berlin and the presence of German specialists on the ground. Scholz also maintained that he would not allow the nation's troops to become directly involved in the Ukraine conflict.

"We are determined to work closely with our German partners on this issue as well as on all the other ones to help Ukraine," Cameron told Sueddeutsche Zeitung when asked whether London could aid Berlin in "solving the problems preventing a Taurus delivery" to Kiev.

When further pressed on potential solution scenarios, including a supply of more British Storm Shadow missiles to Ukraine in exchange for Taurus deliveries to the UK, Cameron said that "we are ready to look at all options to achieve the maximum effect for Ukraine". He refused to provide any further details on the issue.

## Bloomberg: U.S. to Blacklist Chinese Tech Companies to Curb Chip Advance

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – The United States is weighing sanctions on several Chinese tech companies, including chipmaker ChangXin Memory Technologies, in a bid to further restrain China's development of advanced semiconductors, Bloomberg News said.

Citing people familiar with the matter, it said the commerce department's bureau of industry and security was considering adding ChangXin to the so-called entity list that restricts access to U.S. technology, along with five more Chinese firms.

The department, and the bureau did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

ChangXin Memory Technologies said it "specializes in producing commodity DRAM memory chips for every-

day consumer products, with a specific focus on civilian and commercial applications."

The company complies with U.S export regulations, it said in a statement sent to Reuters on Sunday.

Reuters has reported that the United States moved last year to deny American imports to a major SMIC plant after it produced the chip powering Huawei's Mate 60 Pro phone.

The efforts halted millions of dollars worth of shipments of chipmaking materials and parts from at least one supplier, Entegris.

The United States has moved aggressively in recent months to halt shipments to China of more advanced AI chips, in its efforts to stop Beijing receiving cutting-edge U.S. technologies that could strengthen its military.