



**BEIJING (AFP)** – The fifth anniversary of the first known death from Covid-19 passed seemingly unnoticed in China Saturday, with no official remembrances in a country where the pandemic is a taboo subject. On January 11, 2020, health officials in the central Chinese city of Wuhan announced that a 61-year-old man had died from complications of pneumonia caused by a previously unknown virus. The disclosure came after authorities had reported dozens of infections over several weeks by the pathogen later named SARS-CoV-2 and understood as the cause of Covid-19. It went on to spark a global pandemic that has so far killed over seven million people and profoundly altered ways of life around the world, including in China.

**SEOUL (Reuters)** – The two black boxes on the Boeing jet involved in the worst aviation disaster on South Korean soil stopped recording about four minutes before the accident, the transport ministry said on Saturday. South Korean investigators previously said the flight data and cockpit voice recorders were key to finding out the cause of last month's crash that killed 179 people. It happened about four minutes after the pilot of the airliner operated by Jeju Air reported a bird strike. Authorities investigating the crash plan to analyze what caused the black boxes to stop recording, the ministry said in a statement. The voice recorder was initially analyzed in South Korea, and, when data was found to be missing, sent to a U.S. National Transportation Safety Board laboratory, the ministry said.

**MOSCOW (AFP/Reuters)** – Ukraine launched drone attacks across several regions of Russia, striking two residential houses in the Tambov region and injuring at least three people, Russia said on Saturday. The regional head, Evgeny Pervyshev, said on the Telegram messaging app people were treated for injuries resulting from shattered windows as drones hit two houses in the town of Kotovsk, about 480 kilometers (300 miles) southeast of Moscow. Meanwhile, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Saturday that Ukraine has captured two North Korean soldiers in Russia's Kursk region, the first time Ukraine has announced the capture of North Korean soldiers alive since their entry into the war last autumn. In a post on X, Zelenskyy said that the soldiers had been brought to Kyiv and were communicating with the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the country's domestic intelligence agency.

**WASHINGTON (RT)** – Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg acknowledged that U.S. authorities, including the CIA, can access WhatsApp messages by remotely logging into users' devices, effectively bypassing the platform's end-to-end encryption. Speaking on the Joe Rogan Experience podcast, Zuckerberg explained that while WhatsApp's encryption prevents Meta from viewing message content, it does not protect against physical access to a user's phone. His comments came in the context of a question by Rogan about Tucker Carlson's quest to set up an interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin. In February last year, while speaking about finally succeeding in talking to Putin after three years of failed attempts, Carlson blamed the U.S. authorities, namely the NSA and the CIA, for stalling his efforts. According to Carlson, the agencies spied on him by tapping his messages and emails, and leaked his intentions to the media, which "spooked" Moscow from talking to him. Rogan asked Zuckerberg to explain how this could have happened given encryption safeguards that are supposed to protect messages.

**ABUJA (AFP)** – At least 21 government-backed fighters have been killed in an ambush by bandits in Nigeria's northwest Katsina State, according to authorities. Katsina police spokesman Abubakar Sadiq Aliyu told the AFP news agency on Saturday that a convoy of pro-government fighters was returning from paying condolences to the family of a dead colleague when it came under fire from bandits in the village of Baure, in the Safana district. "Sadly, 21 persons were fatally shot as a result of the attack," Aliyu said, adding police were seeking to "ensure the arrest of the perpetrators" of the attack, which happened on Tuesday. Witnesses, however, told Nigeria's Premium Times that as many as 25 people were killed in the attack, while many more villagers remain missing. Nigeria's The Guardian said the fighters were members of the state-backed Katsina Community Watch Corps (KCWC).

**JAKARTA (AFP)** – A volcano in eastern Indonesia erupted on Saturday, spewing hot lava and releasing a column of smoke and ash four kilometers (3.1 miles) into the air, an official said. Mount Ibu, on Halmahera island in North Maluku province, erupted at 7:45 pm central Indonesia time (11:45 GMT), sending a tall flaming column soaring into the sky. "The lava was spotted two kilometers away from the eruption centre," Geological Agency head Muhammad Wafid said in a statement. Images from the volcano monitoring post showed a bright red column of flame and thick, dark smoke billowing high above the volcano crater. The volcano is currently still on the second highest alert level.

## 'No to Nazis' Thousands of Protesters Delay German Far-Right Party's Key Meet



Demonstrators protesting against Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party hold banners close to the venue of the AfD's party congress on January 11, 2025 in Riesa, eastern Germany.

**RIESA (AFP)** – A key congress of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party was delayed Saturday as thousands shouting "No to Nazis" protested outside the venue in the eastern town of Riesa.

Once the congress started the party's 600-odd delegates approved co-leader Alice Weidel as candidate for chancellor by acclamation ahead of a snap general election on February 23.

The two-day meet is also expected to agree the party's election program.

The draft version of the manifesto includes a pledge to leave the euro, reversing Germany's exit from nuclear power and a tough immigration policy.

The program was delayed by around two hours due to protests preventing delegates reaching the venue but eventually started just after 12pm (1100 GMT).

Police said at least 8,000 demonstrators had assembled outside the town's convention center.

The protesters braved the cold to shout slogans such as "no to Nazis" and listened to music from a stage erected by organizers.

Late on Saturday morning, a police spokesman said there was "no serious unrest" but that one road on the way to Riesa remained blocked by protesters.

Protest organizers said earlier on Saturday that police had hit groups of demonstrators and deployed pepper spray.

A statement from protest organizers said more than 12,000 people had

turned out from all over Germany to voice their opposition to the AfD.

"The congress was delayed by wide-ranging and determined protests in many locations inside and outside the town," the statement said.

Maria Schmidt, spokeswoman for the protest organizers, said: "Today we are protecting the right of people to live in safety without the fear of deportation or being attacked."

"We are all making it clear: Riesa is not a peaceful place for fascism," she said.

Inside the convention center the congress got under way with condemnations of the protesters who had tried to prevent the meeting.

Weidel congratulated her party colleagues for "defying the left-wing mob" while her co-leader Tino Chrupalla accused the demonstrators of acting like "anti-democrats and terrorists".

Once the congress gets under way in earnest observers expect there to be stormy debates over some points of the party's program.

One proposed amendment for example would commit the party to a policy of "remigration", meaning a wide-ranging campaign to expel foreigners from Germany.

Controversy has also been stirred by the party leadership's plans to replace its Junge Alternative ("Young Alternative") youth wing, which has been classified an extremist group by intelligence services.

Its members, mostly aged 16 to 30, have frequently been implicated in using racist chants and holding meetings with neo-Nazis.

## Thousands Protest in South Korea as Yoon Resists Second Arrest Attempt

**SEOUL (AFP)** – Thousands of South Koreans have continued to gather for rival protests in Seoul, as investigators prepare another attempt to arrest suspended President Yoon Suk-yeol over his short-lived martial law decree amid warnings against potential bloodshed.

Protesters both for and against Yoon gathered in sub-zero conditions along major roads in the center of the country's capital on Saturday, either demanding his arrest or calling for his impeachment to be declared invalid.

Yoon has been resisting arrest in a standoff between his guards and investigators last week, after his failed December 3 power grab plunged South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades.

On Friday, Park Chong-jun, Yoon's chief of security, resigned from his post after being investigated for blocking the embattled president's arrest. Park warned that any further efforts to detain the ex-leader must avoid violence.

He told reporters that the current attempt to arrest Yoon was wrong and that "there should not be any physical clash or bloodshed under any circumstances".

On Saturday, Park was again placed under questioning for blocking Yoon's arrest.

The country has bristled with tension for weeks after Yoon directed

soldiers to storm parliament, where they unsuccessfully tried to prevent politicians from voting down martial law.

Since the failed martial law attempt, the parliament has impeached Yoon, and he has been suspended while awaiting a final decision from the constitutional court about his removal.

In the meantime, prosecutors carried out a separate investigation and had secured a court order for Yoon's arrest and detention, which the presidential security defied. The arrest warrant expired on Monday.

Kim Seong-hun has taken over from Park as chief of Yoon's security. He is expected to lead efforts to prevent the execution of a second arrest warrant. According to news reports, Yoon's guards have reinforced his Seoul compound with barbed-wire installations and bus barricades.

The CIO said it will "prepare thoroughly" for its second attempt to arrest Yoon and warned that anyone obstructing them could be detained.

The National Office of Investigation, a police unit, has also sent a note to high-ranking police officials in Seoul requesting they prepare to mobilize 1,000 investigators for the new attempt, Yonhap news agency reported.

If Yoon is taken into custody, he would become the first sitting South Korean president to be arrested.

member of the NATO alliance, and many Europeans were shocked by the suggestion that an incoming U.S. leader could even consider using force against an ally.

But Frederiksen said that she sees a positive aspect in the discussion.

"The debate on Greenlandic independence and the latest announcements from the U.S. show us the large interest in Greenland," she said. "Events which set in motion a lot of thoughts and feelings with many in Greenland and Denmark."

### 'Denmark Sent Trump Private Messages'

Denmark sent private messages to U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's team expressing willingness to discuss boosting security in Greenland or increasing the U.S. military presence there without claiming the island, Axios reported on Saturday, citing two sources.

Axios said that the Danish government wanted to convince Trump that his security concerns could be addressed without claiming Greenland.

A spokesperson for the Trump transition team did not respond to a request for comment on the Axios report.

Frederiksen said earlier this week that she had asked for a meeting with Trump, but did not expect it to happen before his inauguration. Egede too said he was ready to speak with Trump but urged respect for the island's independence aspirations.

# As Trump Covets Territory Greenland's PM: We Don't Want to Be Americans



Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and her Greenland's counterpart Mute B. Egede, left, meet the media in the Mirror Hall at the Prime Minister's Office, at Christiansborg in Copenhagen.

**COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP/Reuters)** – Greenland's prime minister says that the mineral-rich Arctic territory's people don't want to be Americans, but that he understands U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's interest in the island given its strategic location.

The comments from the Greenlandic leader, Mute B. Egede, came after Trump said earlier this week that he wouldn't rule out using force or economic pressure in order to make Greenland — a semiautonomous territory of Denmark — a part of the United States. Trump said that it was a matter of national security for the U.S.

Egede acknowledged that Greenland is part of the North American continent, and "a place that the Americans see as part of their world." He said he hasn't

spoken to Trump, but that he's open to discussions about what "unites us."

"Cooperation is about dialogue. Cooperation means that you will work toward solutions," he said.

Egede has been calling for independence for Greenland, casting Denmark as a colonial power that hasn't always treated the Indigenous Inuit population well.

"Greenland is for the Greenlandic people. We do not want to be Danish, we do not want to be American. We want to be Greenlandic," he said at a news conference alongside Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen in Copenhagen.

Trump's desire for Greenland has sparked anxiety in Denmark as well as across Europe. The United States is a strong ally of 27-nation European Union and the leading

## Myanmar Military Airstrike Kills Dozens of Muslims in Rakhine Village, UN Reports

**RAKHINE (Reuters/AP)** – Dozens of people were killed in an airstrike by Myanmar's military government in the western state of Rakhine this week, the United Nations said, as the Southeast Asia nation's civil war nears its fourth year.

The civilian shadow government and the Arakan Army, an ethnic militia based in Rakhine fighting for the autonomy of the region, also reported the attack had killed dozens.

The junta hit Kyauk Ni Maw village of Yanbye township on Wednesday afternoon, destroying around 500 homes and killing more than 40 people, according to the National Unity Government and a UN statement released late on Friday.

Women and children were among those who were killed in Rakhine, according to the statement, which was attributed to the UN resident and humanitarian coordinator in Myanmar.

"Fighting in Rakhine has recently escalated, with civilians paying the highest price of the conflict," the statement said.

"Civilians face extreme risks, acute food insecurity and a near total collapse of critical public services."

Reuters could not immediately verify the reports. A spokesperson for the military did not answer phone calls seeking comment. The junta rejects



A man stands near a burning house at the site of an attack carried out by Myanmar's military on Ramree island in western Rakhine State.

accusations of committing atrocities against civilians.

The Arakan Army released the names of 26 Muslim villagers it said were killed and 12 injured in the attack.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military overthrew the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, igniting mass protests that evolved into a widespread armed rebellion on multiple fronts.

The UN statement urged all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law.

The Blood Money Campaign, a co-

alition of Myanmar activists working to cut off revenue to the junta, urged international governments to swiftly sanction entities supplying it with aviation fuel.

"Only when this support stops will the airstrikes truly come to an end," said Mulan, spokesperson for Blood Money Campaign who goes by one name.

Last week, the UN said more than 3.5 million people have been displaced by the conflict in Myanmar — an increase of 1.5 million from last year.

## Sudan Army Says Captures Key RSF-Held Al-Jazira State Capital

**PORT SUDAN (AFP)** – The Sudanese military and allied armed groups launched an offensive Saturday on key Al-Jazira state capital Wad Madani, entering the city after more than a year of paramilitary control, the army said.

The armed forces "congratulated" the Sudanese people in a statement on "our forces entering the city of Wad Madani this morning."

Sudan's army and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitaries have been at war since April 2023, leading to what the UN calls the world's worst displacement crisis and declarations of famine in parts of the northeast African country.

A video the army shared on social media showed fighters claiming to be inside Wad Madani, after an army source told

AFP they had "stormed the city's eastern entrance."

The footage appeared to be shot on the western side of Hantoub Bridge in northern Wad Madani, which has been under RSF control since December 2023.

The office of army-allied government spokesman and Information Minister Khalid al-Aiser said the army had "liberated" the city.

With a months-long communications blackout in place, AFP was not able to independently verify the situation on the ground.

"The army and allied fighters have spread out around us across the city's streets," one eyewitness told AFP from his home in central Wad Madani, requesting anonymity for his safety.

Eyewitnesses in army-controlled cities across Sudan reported dozens taking to the streets celebrating the army offensive.

In the early months of the war between the army and the RSF, more than half a million people had sought shelter in Al-Jazira, before a lightning offensive by paramilitary forces displaced upwards of 300,000 in December 2023, according to the United Nations.

Most have been repeatedly displaced since, as the feared paramilitaries — which the United States this week said have "committed genocide" — moved further and further south.

The war has killed tens of thousands and uprooted more than 12 million overall, more than three million of whom have fled across borders.