



TBILISI (AFP) - A Georgian court on Monday sentenced ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili to four and a half years behind bars for illegally crossing the border, bringing the pro-Western politician's total sentence to 12.5 years. Saakashvili, 57, was sentenced in absentia in 2018 to six years in prison for abuse of office and, last week, he received a nine-year sentence for mispending public funds. He began serving the term in 2021, when he returned to the country from exile. On Monday, Saakashvili was sentenced to "four years and six months in prison for illegally crossing Georgia's border" when he covertly returned from exile in Ukraine, lawyer Dito Sadzaglishvili told AFP.

HAMM, Germany (AP) - A German court on Monday started hearing a Peruvian farmer's case against major energy company RWE, a lawsuit arguing that global warming fueled by the firm's historical greenhouse gas emissions ultimately poses a risk to his home. Experts say the case at the state court in Hamm, in western Germany, could set a significant precedent in the fight to hold major polluters accountable for climate change. Saul Luciano Lliuya's lawsuit against RWE argues that the company's historical greenhouse gas emissions have fueled global warming, accelerating glacial melt above his hometown of Huaraz, Peru. As a result, Lake Palcacocha has swelled to dangerous levels, threatening the community with the risk of catastrophic flooding.

PARIS (AFP) - Police have detained 15 people after a fire at a nightclub in North Macedonia killed at least 59 people, officials have said. The blaze broke out around 02:30 local time (01:30 GMT) on Sunday at the Pulse club in Kocani, where about 500 people had gathered for a concert by DNK, a popular hip-hop duo in the country. Only one member of the band survived and was being treated in hospital, a spokesman for the public prosecutor's office told the BBC's Newshour. In total, 155 were injured at the concert. Interior Minister Pance Toskovski has said the detainees will be questioned, adding that there are "grounds for suspicion that there is bribery and corruption" linked to the fire.

MANILA (Reuters) - The Philippine Senate said Monday it will conduct a formal probe of ex-president Rodrigo Duterte's arrest and swift handover last week to the International Criminal Court, which is to try him for alleged crimes against humanity. The 79-year-old, the first Asian former head of state charged by the ICC, stands accused of the crime against humanity of murder over his years-long campaign against drug users and dealers that rights groups have said killed thousands. The probe was initiated by Senator Imee Marcos, sister of President Ferdinand Marcos but a close friend of Duterte's eldest daughter, Vice President Sara Duterte.

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - NASA astronauts Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore, who have been stranded at the International Space Station (ISS) since last June, are scheduled to return to Earth aboard SpaceX's Dragon spacecraft on Tuesday, according to NASA. Their fellow Crew-9 astronauts, NASA astronaut Nick Hague and Roscosmos cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov, are also preparing to leave the ISS following the arrival of Crew-10 to the orbital laboratory. NASA and SpaceX met on Sunday to assess weather and splashdown conditions off Florida's coast for the return of the Crew-9 astronauts.

North Korea Slams G7 Ministers' Call for Pyongyang to Abandon Nuclear Arms



SEOUL (AP) -- North Korea on Monday vowed to "steadily update and strengthen" its nuclear arsenal, rejecting a joint statement by the Group of Seven Foreign Ministers calling for Pyongyang to give up its nuclear ambitions.

The North's Foreign Ministry said its position as a nuclear weapons state has been "fixed permanently by the supreme law of its state."

"The DPRK's nuclear armed forces will exist forever as a powerful means of justice which defends the sovereignty of the state, territorial integrity and fundamental interests, prevents a war in the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia and guarantees a strategic stability of the world," the ministry said in a statement carried by state-run Korean Central News Agency.

"The DPRK will steadily update and strengthen its nuclear armed forces both in quality and quantity in response to the nuclear threat from outside," it added.

In September 2022, the North passed a law declaring itself a nuclear weapons state and giving it the right to conduct a pre-emptive nuclear strike to protect itself. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called the decision "irreversible" and later amended the country's constitution to enshrine the permanent growth of Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal.

North Korea's statement followed a meeting of the G7 Foreign Ministers in Charlevoix, Canada last week. On Friday, the group of advanced nations issued a joint statement, calling on the North to "abandon all its nuclear weapons and any other weapons as well as ballistic missile."

In its response, the North Korean Foreign Ministry slammed the G7 states as the "chief criminals wrecking the global peace and security and the international nuclear non-proliferation system."

"G7, which has turned into a nuclear criminal group gravely threatening the global peace and security, should thoroughly abandon its anachronistic ambition for nuclear hegemony before talking about someone's 'denuclearization' and 'dismantlement of nukes,'" the ministry said.

Rwanda Cuts Diplomatic Ties With Belgium



File photo of Rwandan President Paul Kagame

PARIS (AFP) - Rwanda on Monday severed diplomatic ties with Belgium and expelled all Belgian diplomats from the country. A Rwandan foreign ministry statement said the European nation had "consistently undermined" Kigali "during the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo". Belgium called the measure "disproportionate" and expelled Rwandan diplomats in response.

In a statement released Monday, Rwanda's foreign ministry said, "The Government of Rwanda notified the Government of Belgium of its decision to sever diplomatic relations, effective immediately."

"Belgium has clearly taken sides in a regional conflict and continues to systematically mobilize against Rwanda in different forums, using lies and manipulation to secure an unjustified hostile opinion of Rwanda, in an attempt to destabilize both Rwanda and the region," it said.

Paris (AFP) - Rwanda on Monday severed diplomatic ties with Belgium and expelled all Belgian diplomats from the country.

"Belgium regrets the decision of Rwanda to cut off diplomatic relations with Belgium and to declare Belgium's diplomats persona non grata," Belgium's Foreign Minister Maxime Prevet said on X.

"This is disproportionate and shows that when we disagree with Rwanda they prefer not to engage in dialogue," said Prevet.

The latest diplomatic spat came as the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo on Monday said it will participate in peace talks in Angola set for Tuesday with the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group that has advanced in Congo's mineral-rich east.

The M23 rebel group has also sent a delegation to Luanda, the group's spokesperson Lawrence Kanyuka said on X Monday.

The conflict in eastern Congo escalated in January when the Rwanda-backed rebels advanced and seized terrain in the DR Congo's mineral-rich east.

New Canada PM Seeks 'Reliable' Europe Allies After Trump Threats



France's President Emmanuel Macron (R) and Canada's newly appointed Prime Minister Mark Carney (L) shake hands in Paris on March 17, 2025.

PARIS (AFP) - New Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney began his first trip overseas since taking office by saying his country needed to work with "reliable allies," a clear shot at U.S. President Donald Trump.

"It's more important than ever that Canada reinforces its ties with our reliable allies like France," Carney said while appearing alongside French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris at the Elysée Palace. "We know that economic collaboration, not confrontation, is the way to build strong economies."

Carney appeared to emphasize the word "reliable," looking directly at Macron as he said the word in French. The former Canadian and English

central banker's grasp of French, an official language in Canada, has been a point of debate in domestic political circles. While he speaks French well, he is not natively bilingual.

Carney, who was sworn in as prime minister on Friday, travelled to France and the United Kingdom on Monday to shore up transatlantic support for Ottawa as it faces tariffs and annexation threats from Washington. Trump has slapped duties on several imports coming from U.S. trading partners like the European Union and Canada, most notably on steel and aluminum. Canada has hit back with retaliatory measures, while the European Commission has said it is ready to do so.

"I want to ensure that France and all

of Europe work enthusiastically with Canada — the most European of non-European countries," Carney said in what appeared to be a nod to suggestions that Canada should join the EU.

A recent survey from Canadian pollster Abacus data found that 44 percent of Canadian respondents believe their country should join the EU, while only 34 percent oppose the idea — although EU membership is reserved to European countries.

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Macron stressed that he and Carney shared a belief that "fair trade that respects international rules is good for everyone's prosperity. Certainly more effective than inflation-creating tariffs that damage production chains and the integration of our economies."

Both Carney and Macron underlined the shared economic opportunities for their countries in fields including AI and quantum technology. Earlier in the day, Carney visited the reconstructed Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris and met with the Canadian ambassador and former Liberal leader Stéphane Dion.

Later on Monday, he travelled to the UK to meet with Prime Minister Keir Starmer and King Charles III.

U.S.-EU Tariff Clash Imperils \$9.5 Trillion of Business

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The U.S.-European tariff conflict is jeopardizing transatlantic business worth \$9.5 trillion annually, the American Chamber of Commerce to the EU warned on Monday.

AmCham EU, whose more than 160 members include Apple, ExxonMobil and Visa, showed in its annual Transatlantic Economy report a deepening relationship hitting records in 2024, such as goods and services trade of \$2 trillion.

It talks of 2025 as a year of promise and peril for the world's largest commercial relationship.

In the past week, Washington has imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium, the EU has set out plans for retaliation and President Donald Trump has threatened 200 percent tariffs on EU wine and spirits.

Trump has railed against the U.S. goods trade deficit with the EU, although in services there is a U.S. surplus, and urged manufacturers to produce in America.

AmCham said trade is only part of transatlantic commercial activity and that the real benchmark was investment.

"Contrary to conventional wisdom, most U.S. and European investments flow to each other, rather than to lower-cost emerging markets," it said.

U.S. foreign affiliate sales in Europe are four times U.S. exports to Europe and European affiliate sales in the United States are three times higher than European exports.

AmCham warned ripple effects from the trade conflict could damage these close ties.

The report's lead author Daniel Hamilton said intra-firm trade making up about 90 percent of Ireland's and 60 percent of Germany's trade could be hit.

There was also a risk of spillover into services trade, data flows or energy, with Europe reliant on U.S. LNG imports.

"Ripple effects of conflict in the trade space will not be confined to trade. They ripple through all of those other channels and the interactions are quite significant," he said.

U.S. and European companies had interlinking value chains to be globally competitive, such as for BMW cars exported from the U.S.

"I'm not sure you're going to have isolated investments," Hamilton said. "That's just going to make things very inefficient."

South Korea's Opposition Says Delay of Yoon Impeachment Ruling Irresponsible



People attend a rally calling for immediate expulsion of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in central Seoul, South Korea, March 15, 2025.

SEOUL (Reuters) - South Korea's opposition Democratic Party on Monday urged the country's Constitutional Court to swiftly rule on President Yoon Suk Yeol's impeachment, saying keeping the country waiting is "irresponsible" and deepening social division.

As the eight-member court continued deliberations well into the third week, political tensions have surged between those who demand Yoon's ouster for declaring a short-lived martial law in December and supporters who want him reinstated.

The court had wrapped up arguments on February 25, where Yoon said his martial law declaration was needed to root out "anti-state" elements but he never intended to fully impose emergency military rule.

"The country and the people have come to the breaking point," a Democratic Party leadership member Kim Min-seok said. "We wait for the court's responsible decision. Further delay is not normal and irresponsible," he told a party meeting.

In 2017, former president Park Geun-hye was removed from office

11 days after the final arguments in the Constitutional Court in her impeachment trial.

South Koreans have gathered in huge numbers in the capital Seoul supporting and backing the conservative leader's removal, saying the delay has been frustrating and made confusion worse.

Yoon was impeached by the Democratic Party-controlled parliament in December for violating his constitutional duty. He committed acts that are a grave threat to rule of law and more than disqualify him from office, the impeachment motion said.

Yoon is on a separate criminal trial on charges of leading insurrection, which is punishable by death or life in prison.

The fallout of Yoon's martial law declaration has widened the rifts between the conservatives and liberals and those in the public, adding stress on institutions and putting much of the government policy making in limbo.

Some of the country's top military commanders have been taken off duty and face criminal trials for their roles in the martial law decree. Arguments in the trial of former defense minister Kim Yong-hyun on insurrection charges begun on Monday.