



MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia could agree to using \$300 billion of sovereign assets frozen in Europe for reconstruction in Ukraine but will insist that part of the money is spent on the one-fifth of the country that Moscow's forces control, three sources told Reuters. Russia and the United States held their first face-to-face talks on ending the Ukraine war on Feb. 18 in Saudi Arabia and both U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin have said they hope to meet soon. After Putin sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, the United States and its allies prohibited transactions with Russia's central bank and finance ministry, blocking \$300-\$350 billion of sovereign Russian assets, mostly European, U.S. and British government bonds held in a European securities depository.

MEXICO CITY (AFP) - Mexico's president has warned the United States that her country would never tolerate an "invasion" of its national sovereignty and vowed fresh legal action against U.S. gunmakers after Washington designated cartels as terrorist organizations. The remarks were the latest in a series hitting back at the administration of President Donald Trump, which has ramped up pressure on its southern neighbor to curb illegal flows of drugs and migrants.

PARIS (Reuters) - French police will start random searches for knives and other weapons concealed in bags at and around schools in a bid to fight an increase in violent attacks, the education minister said Friday. The spot searches will begin in the spring, Elisabeth Borne told the BFMTV/RMC broadcaster. "I want us to be able to organize, together with the prefect, the prosecutor and the representative of the education system, regular bag searches at the entrance of schools," she said.

ROME (Reuters) - Tourists climbing Sicily's Mount Etna volcano at night in sneakers and light clothing to get a close-up view of an ongoing eruption may be risking their lives, rescuers warned on Friday. Europe's highest and most active volcano erupted in spectacular fashion last week, lighting up the night sky with explosions and bright red molten lava. "We had a number of people who got lost and could not find their way back because of the fog that suddenly appeared. Spending a night out at these temperatures can be very risky," Leonardo La Pica, regional president of the Sicilian Alpine Speleological Rescue Service, said on Friday.

LA PAZ (AFP) - Bolivian ex-president Evo Morales has launched a fresh election bid ahead of polls in August, in defiance of a constitutional term limit and pending criminal charges. "We will win," Morales told reporters in his political fiefdom of Cochabamba in central Bolivia in announcing his run. Morales, 65, claims to be the victim of a campaign to sideline him politically, led by incumbent President Luis Arce who was once an ally but now his main rival. Rising from dire poverty to become Bolivia's first-ever Indigenous president, he retains a large following in the South American country.

Caribbean Leader to EU Chief: Apologize, Pay Reparations for Slavery



Grenada Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell speaks during the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly at the United Nations headquarters in New York City on Sept 28, 2024.

BARBADOS (Reuters) - Former colonial powers must apologize and pay compensation for their historic role in the enslavement of Africans, Grenadian Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell told European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Mitchell addressed von der Leyen late at the 48th heads of government meeting of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in Barbados, which the European leader attended for the first time.

"I don't mean to be impolite," Mitchell said, looking at von der Leyen. "But I will say it to you: the issue of reparations... is an issue we will take up with you."

Mitchell added: "We owe it to ourselves and future generations of humanity to ensure slavery is accepted as a crime against humanity, and that appropriate apology and compensation is paid, and that the international community accepts this should never happen again."

Von der Leyen replied to Mitchell without referring to reparations, saying "slavery is a crime against

humanity... and the dignity and universal rights of every single human being is untouchable and must be defended by all means".

From the 15th to the 19th century, at least 12.5 million Africans were kidnapped, forcibly transported by mostly European merchants and sold into slavery.

Calls for reparations for slavery and colonialism are long-standing but have been gaining momentum worldwide, particularly among CARICOM and the African Union (AU).

CARICOM has its own reparation plan, which, among other demands, calls for technology transfers and investments to tackle health crises and illiteracy. The AU is developing its own plan.

In 2023, the EU and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) agreed to include in their summit's final statement a paragraph that acknowledged the "untold suffering" slavery inflicted on millions.

In the statement, adopted by leaders of both sides, the CELAC referred to CARICOM's reparations plan.

Protesters Extend 'Dark Indonesia' Rally Against Budget Cuts



People take part in an anti-government protest called 'Indonesia Gelap' (Dark Indonesia), against the recent budget cuts and other policies, near the presidential palace in Jakarta, Indonesia, February 21, 2025.

JAKARTA (Reuters) - Hundreds of students and activists rallied in some major cities for more "Dark Indonesia" protests on Friday, opposing President Prabowo Subianto's policies including \$19 billion of spending cuts that they say undermine their support systems.

Dressed in black as the sky darkened and rain started falling, the crowd gathered in streets near the presidential palace in the capital Jakarta, carrying posters that read "the government consists of dumb people" and invoking Prabowo's beloved "first cat", saying if it could speak it would join the protests.

Friday's protest followed several similar demonstrations in some major cities this week. The name comes from the unclear and bleak nature of the policies, Herianto, a student leader joining one rally, said.

Among the policies the people rally against include Prabowo's flagship program of giving free meals to students.

To help fund that, he instructed his government to cut spending by \$19 billion, which reduced travel, consultants, training, and stationery.

Students have said the cuts have negatively impacted teacher welfare and could raise tuition fees, which Prabowo's office has denied.

In Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city, hundreds of people staged a demonstration, Indonesia local media reported, with a street theatrical performance where a protester rolled around on the floor to signify poverty.

Students were also protesting against expanded military roles in civilian work and a lack of subsidized cooking gas.

"These policies delegitimize us as Indonesians," said university student Ridho Anwari Arifin at the Friday protest.

The protests occurred four months after Prabowo became the country's eighth president, which he won in a landslide election.

U.S. Intensifies Pressure on Ukraine to Sign Minerals Deal



U.S. National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, right, talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. National Security Adviser Mike Waltz has urged Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to "tone down" its stance and return negotiations over a minerals deal with the United States.

"They need to tone it down and take a hard look and sign that deal," Waltz told Fox News.

The proposed agreement, which reportedly demands a 50-percent share of Ukrainian natural resources, was initially presented by U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent at the Munich Security Conference.

"You really need to sign this," Bessent reportedly told Zelensky during their meeting.

However, Kyiv has so far rejected the U.S. proposal. "I can't sell our

state," Zelensky said.

"In total, the United States separately gave us about \$67 billion in weapons, and we received \$31.5 billion in budget support," he said, adding: "But one cannot count up to 500 billion dollars and say, 'give us back 500 billion dollars in minerals,' that's not a serious discussion."

Despite this, the Ukrainian leader said Ukraine is grateful for the support and is open to discussing a deal that includes U.S. security guarantees for his country.

Following a meeting in Kyiv with Keith Kellogg, the U.S. special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, Zelensky described their talks as "productive" in a post on the social platform X on Thursday.

"Ukraine is ready for a strong, effective investment and security agreement with the President of the United States. We have proposed the fastest and most constructive way to achieve results," he wrote.

"We had a detailed conversation about the battlefield situation, how to return our prisoners of war, and effective security guarantees," he said.

Zelensky thanked the United States for the assistance and bipartisan support for Ukraine and voiced readiness to sign "a strong, effective investment and security agreement" with U.S. President Donald Trump.

"We have proposed the fastest and most constructive way to achieve results," Zelensky emphasized.

According to Ukrainian presidential spokesperson Serhii Nikiforov, a joint press conference between Zelensky and Kellogg did not take place at the request of the U.S. side.

Also on Thursday, Kellogg met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha to discuss ways toward "comprehensive, just and lasting peace" in Ukraine.

After the meeting, Sybiha wrote on X that he affirmed Ukraine's willingness to achieve peace through strength and briefed Kellogg on Kyiv's vision for the necessary steps.

North Korea Criticizes U.S. Over AUKUS Nuclear Submarine Deal



North Korean state media has lashed out at AUKUS and US co-operation with South Korea and Japan.

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korean state media has criticized the United States for a nuclear submarine deal with Australia under the AUKUS partnership signed in 2021, calling it a "threat to regional peace."

A commentary carried by KCNA said Washington should be wary

of consequences for what it said were nuclear alliances, naming AUKUS and the trilateral cooperation with South Korea and Japan.

Australia just made its first \$500 million payment to the U.S. under the AUKUS nuclear submarine deal.

Under AUKUS, Australia will pay the United States \$3 billion to boost

the capacity of the U.S. submarine industry, and Washington will sell several Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarines to Australia in the early 2030s.

The KCNA commentary also argued the U.S. sees North Korea as an obstacle to its establishment of hegemony in the region and said nuclear states will not sit idly by, referring to itself.

North Korea has been criticizing the trilateral military cooperation between South Korea, Japan and the U.S. and has called the relationship "the Asian version of NATO".

South Korea's defense ministry on Thursday said that a joint air drill was held with the U.S. with at least one B-1B strategic bomber taking part.

The drill was to show extended deterrent capabilities by the United States in response to threats from North Korea's nuclear and missile program, the ministry said in a statement.

G20 Foreign Ministers Gather Amid Tensions Over Trade, Ukraine

JOHANNESBURG (Reuters) - Foreign ministers from the G20 top economies met in South Africa on Thursday, amid tensions between members over the Ukraine war, trade disputes and with the top U.S. diplomat staying away owing to a feud with the hosts.

The G20 countries, which represent some 85% of global GDP and three quarters of trade, often struggle to see eye to eye, but geopolitical rifts since Russia, Ukraine war have rendered it more fractious than ever.

The discord has increased since President Donald Trump took office a month ago and implemented rapid changes in Washington's trade and foreign policies.

"Geopolitical tensions and rising intolerance, conflict and war ... threaten an already fragile global co-existence," South African President

Cyril Ramaphosa, who holds the rotating presidency of the group, said in an opening speech of the gathering, which ends on Friday.

South Africa sees the first G20 meeting on the continent as an opportunity to get rich nations to heed poorer countries' concerns - worsening inequality, inadequate action by wealthy countries on climate change, and a financial system that favors investment banks over poor sovereign debtors.

"Those most responsible for climate change, you have a duty and a responsibility to support those least responsible," Ramaphosa said, while also calling for "debt sustainability for low-income countries."

Then Trump cut U.S. aid to South Africa in an ideological dispute with the latter's efforts to redress historic racial injustices in land ownership

- and over its genocide case against U.S. ally Israel at the International Court of Justice.

The gathering takes place as Trump has upended the U.S. policy of solidarity with Ukraine as he seeks to broker peace in its war with Russia. He has blamed President Volodymyr Zelenskiy for the conflict, and sidelined NATO allies in ending a campaign to isolate Russia.

"As the G20 we must continue to advocate for diplomatic solutions to conflicts," Ramaphosa.

The U.S. absence is an opportunity for China, which has the world's second biggest economy, to expand its influence. Such efforts by Beijing are normally focused on the Global South but China has quickly sought to capitalize on the cracks in the transatlantic alliance.