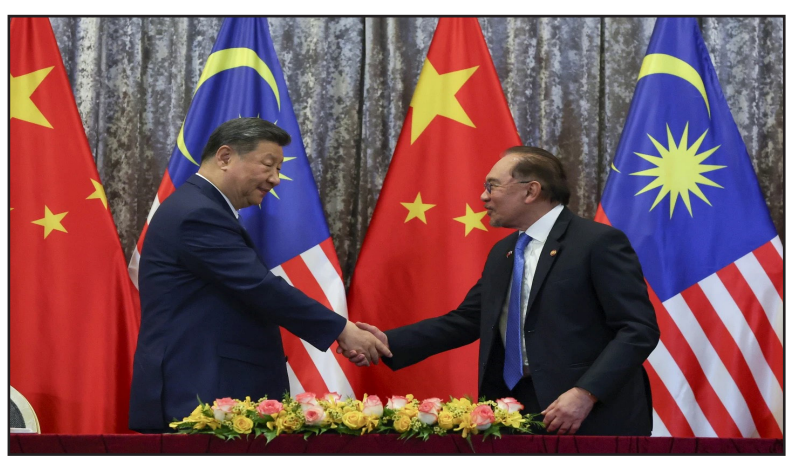


Xi Calls on Asian Nations to Resist Confrontation, Protectionism



Chinese President Xi Jinping, left, and Malaysian PM Anwar Ibrahim shake hand in Putrajaya, April 16, 2025.

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Chinese President Xi Jinping called on Wednesday for Asian nations to unite in resisting geopolitical confrontation, unilateralism and protectionism, as he aims to consolidate ties with some of China's closest neighbors amid a deterioration of relations with the U.S.

Xi is in Malaysia as part of a three-nation Southeast Asian trip that includes Vietnam and Cambodia.

China and Malaysia reached a consensus on deepening cooperation in various fields, Xi said after witnessing the exchange of 31 agreements with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, ranging from trade and tourism to railway transportation and agriculture. No details were provided for the agreements.

"In the face of shocks to the current international order and economic globalization, our two nations will stand united with other countries in the region to jointly resist the undercurrents of geopolitical

able" ally during upheaval in global geopolitics.

"At a time when multilateralism is under tremendous strain, when some nations abandon the principle of shared responsibility and others question long-standing commitments, China's global initiatives offer a new lease on hope," Anwar said.

China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner since 2009, with total trade valued at 484.1 billion ringgit (\$110 billion) last year, according to Malaysia's foreign ministry.

Xi urged Malaysia and other countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations regional bloc to jointly resist decoupling, supply chain disruptions and "excessive tariffs" with openness and greater cooperation, China's state-run CCTV reported.

China and Malaysia must also proceed with their cooperation under Beijing's Belt and Road initiative, other transport infrastructure investments, as well as in cutting-edge fields like artificial intelligence, Xi said.

Last June, China said it was willing to study a plan to connect Malaysia's \$10 billion East Coast Rail Link with other China-backed railway projects in Laos and Thailand, potentially expanding the BRI across Southeast Asia.

Xi said China also welcomes more high-quality Malaysian agricultural products into the Chinese market, CCTV reported following Xi's meeting with Malaysia's King Sultan Ibrahim.

Meanwhile, a series of briefing documents have reportedly revealed that the United States aims to force the European Union to choose between Washington and China in any future trade negotiations in return for reducing tariffs, as the trade war between the two countries escalates.

Muslim Prisoners in England More Frequently Subjected to Force, Data Shows



Anti-racism activists take part in a "Stop Islamophobia, Stop the Hate" march in London on March 16, 2024.

LONDON (The Guardian) - Muslim prisoners in England are more frequently subjected to painful restraining techniques at the hands of prison staff compared with other inmates, new data shows.

In eight out of nine prisons with high Muslim populations, Muslim men are more frequently targeted with batons, made to wear rigid bar handcuffs, or are held in painful positions, according to data obtained by freedom of information requests.

Maslaha, a social justice charity, requested the information from the nine prisons, The Guardian reported.

It comes amid calls for a crack-

Feltham B, as well as HMP Woodhill in Milton Keynes.

Just one of the nine prisons included in the data, HMP The Mount, recorded a use of force against Muslim prisoners lower than for the overall population.

Maslaha's director, Raheel Mohammed, said that the disparities "lay bare the realities of life" for Muslims in British prisons.

He added that Muslims were "being targeted by the use of force, subjected to dangerous, pain-inducing techniques and singled out for deliberately humiliating treatment."

Separate data from the Ministry of Justice, for September last year, showed that there were 15,594 Muslim prisoners in England and Wales. They accounted for 18 percent of all prison inmates.

In response to the statistics concerning the use of force, Mark Fairhurst, the national chair of the Prison Officers' Association, said: "Staff only use force at the last resort when necessary and when it is used, it is always proportionate and reasonable."

Last year, HM Prison & Probation Service launched a national initiative to tackle racial disproportionality in the use of force.

It included measuring disparities in treatment between prisoners of different ethnic groups and religions.

Al-Shabaab Attacks Strategic Somalia Town

MOGADISHU (Reuters) - Al-Shabaab fighters attacked a town in central Somalia on Wednesday that government forces have been using as a staging area for their efforts to drive back the militants, who have been gaining ground in recent weeks, residents said.

Advances by the Al-Qaeda affiliate, which included briefly capturing villages within 50 km (30 miles) of Mogadishu last month, have left residents of the capital on edge amid rumors Al-Shabaab could target the city.

The army has recaptured those villages, but al Shabaab has continued to advance in the countryside, leading

the government to deploy police officers and prison guards to support the military, soldiers have told Reuters.

The town attacked on Wednesday, Adan Yabaal, lies around 245 kilometers north of Mogadishu and has been used as an operating base for raids on Al-Shabaab.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who hails from the area, visited Adan Yabaal last month to meet with military commanders there about reinforcing them.

The outcome of the battle was not immediately clear, with government forces and Al-Shabaab giving conflicting accounts.

Captain Hussein Olow, a military officer in Adan Yabaal, told Reuters that government troops had pushed back the militants.

Al-Shabaab, which has waged an insurgency since 2007 to seize power, said in a statement that its forces had overrun 10 military installations and captured the town.

The fighting comes as the future of international security support to Somalia has grown increasingly precarious.

A new African Union peacekeeping mission replaced a larger force at the start of the year, but its funding is uncertain, with the United States opposed to a plan to transition to a UN financing model.

Report: U.S. Demanding \$100bn Compensation From Ukraine



A Ukrainian Army soldier places a U.S.-made Javelin missile in a fighting position on the frontline.

LONDON (Dispatches) - The U.S. continues to insist that Ukraine should pay it tens of billions of dollars as part of a resource deal in compensation for American assistance in the conflict with Russia, but has scaled back its initial assessment of the final amount, Bloomberg reported on Wednesday, citing sources.

Washington and Kyiv have for weeks been discussing a resource deal - a concept first floated by Vladimir Zelensky last year - which would grant the U.S. access to Ukraine's deposits of rare earths.

Following a round of talks in Washington last week, officials from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump cut their estimate of American assistance to Kyiv from more than \$300 billion to about \$100 billion, Bloomberg sources said. Ukraine itself assesses total aid U.S. during the conflict with Russia at just over \$90 billion.

However, U.S. officials still view the resource deal "as an opportunity to recoup costs in Ukraine through profits" received from a joint fund, the size of which is still unknown, a Bloomberg source claimed. Ukraine has consistently rejected the idea that U.S. aid constitutes a debt, insisting that assistance was provided unconditionally.

Kyiv is also pushing for future U.S. investment in the joint fund, although Trump's team has been reluctant to entertain the idea while insisting that previous American military support should be counted as Washington's contribution, the article said.

Asked to comment on the state of the negotiations, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told Bloomberg that the sides "are very, very close" to finding a consensus, and that the agreement "could even be signed as early as this week."

On Tuesday, NATO's secretary general Mark Rutte said that Ukraine was never promised NATO membership as part of any potential settlement of its conflict with Russia. He made the remarks in an interview with the broadcaster MI Ukraina while on a surprise trip to Ukraine.

Rutte said that while Kyiv's Western backers have stated Ukraine would "one day" become a member of NATO, "no one promised Ukraine that NATO membership would be part of the peace agreement."

Russia has long cited Kyiv's ambitions to join NATO, which Moscow views as an overtly hostile bloc, as one of the reasons for launching its military operation in 2022.

Europe Fastest-Warming Continent, Report Finds



A man cleans up among piled-up cars damaged in flooding in Valencia, Spain on Nov 5, 2024.

NEW YORK (AP) - Europe had its warmest year on record in 2024 and is the fastest-warming continent, becoming hotter at twice the global average rate, a United Nations report has said.

The second annual European State of the Climate report, which includes inputs from around 100 scientists and experts, said extreme weather, record temperatures and heavy rainfall that ravaged Europe were a direct result of man-made climate change.

The report, which the UN World Meteorological Organization, or WMO, and the Copernicus Climate Change Service, or C3S, said 2024 was a year of extremes. It found 45 percent of Europe's days were much warmer than average, and 12 percent were the warmest on record.

"This report highlights that Europe is the fastest-warming continent and is experiencing serious impacts from extreme weather and climate change," WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo explained. "Every additional fraction of a degree of temperature rise matters because it accentuates the risks to our lives, to economies, and to the planet."

The study said storms were more severe in Europe in 2024, and flooding was more prevalent than at any time since 2013, with swollen rivers claiming at least 335 lives and negatively impacting 413,000 people.

The experts said Europe will be more seriously impacted by climate change in the future than other continents, with a global temperature rise of 1.5 C likely to kill an additional 30,000 Europeans.

Florence Rabier, director-general of the European Center for Medium Range Weather Forecasts, which implements the C3S, said: "The 2024 report reveals that almost one third of the river network exceeded the high flood threshold, and heat stress continues to increase in Europe, highlighting the importance of building greater resilience."

She said 51 percent of European cities now have dedicated climate adaptation plans that use climate change information to mitigate the problems.

Saulo said "adaptation is a must" for European nations and that WMO and its partners will intensify their efforts "to strengthen early warning systems and climate services to help decision-makers and society at large to be more resilient."

"We are making progress, but need to go further and need to go faster, and we need to go together," she added.

The report said unprecedented high annual temperatures were recorded across half of the continent, and that sea surface temperatures hit record highs throughout Europe, some 0.7 C above average.

News in Brief

PARIS (Reuters) - French jails were hit by a new wave of attacks overnight, including several cars set alight at Tarascon prison in southern France, the National Anti-Terrorism Prosecutor's Office said on Wednesday, as authorities sought to identify those responsible. A car was also set on fire in front of the home of a prison guard who works in Aix-Luynes, in southern France, and the door of a building in the Seine-et-Marne region was also damaged, the anti-terrorism office said, adding that it was opening an investigation. That adds to at least nine prison facilities and other affiliated institutions - including a school for prison staff - targeted the previous two nights.

WASHINGTON (AFP) - U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio headed to Paris for talks on ending the war in Ukraine, his office said. The State Department said in a communique that Rubio is traveling with U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff for talks with European officials on advancing President Donald Trump's goal of ending the Russian-Ukraine war. Trump's push for a ceasefire in the war has yet to yield fruit, and a Russian missile strike Sunday in the Ukrainian city of Sumy that killed at least 35 people showed how the war is far from over, even as peace overtures are under way.

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Former U.S. president Joe Biden has slammed his successor Donald Trump's frenetic government overhaul, warning that Trump's cuts to Social Security risk devastating the lives of millions of retirees who depend on the program for survival. Joe Biden, in his first major speech since leaving the White House, railed against his successor Donald Trump's frenetic government overhaul, claiming the "hatchet" effort put Americans' retirement benefits at risk. "Fewer than 100 days, this administration has done so much damage, and so much destruction - it's kind of breathtaking it could happen that soon," Biden told a conference of disability advocates in Chicago.

BERLIN (AFP) - Prosecutors in Berlin charged a doctor with 15 counts of murder on Wednesday, alleging that he administered lethal doses of medication to palliative care patients. The now 40-year-old doctor, who worked in the palliative care team of a nursing service, is alleged to have acted out of malice and other base motives. According to the public prosecutor's office, the doctor is alleged to have killed a total of 15 patients cared for by the nursing service between September 2021 and July 2024. The man allegedly administered an anesthetic induction drug and then a muscle relaxant to his patients without medical necessity or their knowledge and consent.

LIMA, Peru (AP) - A Peruvian court has sentenced former President Ollanta Humala and his wife, Nadine Heredia, to 15 years in prison for laundering funds received from Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht to finance his 2006 and 2011 campaigns. The judges of the National Superior Court found that Humala and Heredia received almost \$3 million in illegal contributions for these campaigns from Odebrecht and the government of then-Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez (1999-2013). Humala's wife requested asylum at the Brazilian embassy in Lima, Peru's Foreign Ministry said Tuesday afternoon. In a statement, the foreign ministry added that Heredia entered the Brazilian embassy in the morning and requested asylum under the 1954 Convention on Diplomatic Asylum, to which both Peru and Brazil are signatories.