

End of the line for Finland's analogue phone network

AFP | Helsinki, Finland

Finland on Tuesday pulled the plug on analogue landline phone calls after almost 150 years, the latest country to push forward in a global transition towards digital infrastructure.

Estonia, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain have already made the jump, as countries across the world roll out fibre optic cable that can handle both internet services and voice calls.

Finland's fixed-line network began operating in the 1880s, but like everywhere else the digital revolution has swallowed up the old technology based on copper wires.

And the Nordic country, home of mobile phone pioneer Nokia, has seen the use of landline phones gobbed up by mobile technology.

Elisa, the country's last major telecom operator with a fixed-line copper-wire network, marked the end of its service with a call between the firm's CEO Topi Manner and Jarkko Saarimaki, head of the country's communication and transport agency.

Poland will not send MiG-29 fighter aircraft to Ukraine: minister

AFP | Warsaw, Poland

Warsaw and Kyiv have failed to reach an agreement on a swap of Polish MiG-29 fighter aircraft for Ukrainian drone technologies, Polish defence minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz said.

Poland, which already supplied Ukraine with a large share of its MiG-29s immediately after the start of the Russian invasion in 2022, still has around a dozen such Soviet-era aircraft, according to media reports.

Amid a backdrop of weeks of diplomatic tensions over WWII-era massacres between the two neighbour allies, Kosiniak-Kamysz attributed the failure to reach an agreement to Ukraine.

Myanmar denies ASEAN request for Suu Kyi meeting

AFP | Naypyidaw, Myanmar

Myanmar's authorities have denied a request for ASEAN's special envoy to meet its deposed and detained democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi, an administration spokeswoman said Tuesday.

The military plunged Myanmar into civil war in 2021 when it staged a coup ousting the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and ending a decade-long experiment with democracy.

India's much-delayed bullet train project picks up speed

AFP | New Delhi, India

India is finally on track to open a section of its long-delayed first high-speed bullet train line in 2027, railway ministry officials say, almost a decade after work began.

New Delhi hopes what it calls "a major milestone in India's railway modernisation efforts" will serve as a springboard for a wider national electrified high-speed rail network.

"The knowledge, skills and capabilities developed through the project are expected to support future high-speed rail corridors across the country," the government's

plan reads.

The first 508-kilometre (315-mile) line is being built along its west coast, the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail Corridor.

"A considerable amount of work on the entire corridor has already been completed," Dharmendra Tewari, Indian Railways additional director general, told AFP.

"The first section-

tion of the bullet train will be operational in 2027, between the cities of Surat and Vapi," he added.

Surat, the global diamond cutting centre, and Vapi, known for its chemical and manufacturing industries, are about 100 kilometres apart.

The project has been a long time coming, mired in cost overruns and delays.



Doha peace talks begin

US envoys Witkoff, Kushner meeting mediators

AFP | Doha, Qatar

US envoys were meeting with Qatari mediators on Tuesday, the Gulf state's foreign ministry spokesman said, after Washington said it was sending a negotiating team.

"Mr. Steve Witkoff and Mr. Jared Kushner are here in Doha to meet with mediators, with Qatari officials, and the talks will be around all regional issues," foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al Ansari said.

Talks with the envoys would include discussions on Iran but also other topics including Lebanon, the spokesman said.

"They are not here for their negotiations with the Iranians," he added.

Both the US and Iran had said they would send officials for meetings in Qatar to discuss a memorandum of understanding agreed between the two sides

aimed at ending the Middle East war, which broke out on February 28 with US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

Ansari clarified that no high-level meetings or direct talks between the United States and Iran were planned in Doha.

"To the best of my knowledge, there are no direct meetings scheduled between the two parties in the coming days," he said.

He explained that an Iranian technical delegation travels to and from Doha based on the progress of negotiations. There is currently no high-level delegation present.

The so-called technical talks, negotiations between lower-ranking officials on details, included "tracks on the nuclear side... a track on the economic and state performance issue" as well as security, the spokesman said.

Qatar had previously refused to enter into mediation under Iranian fire as Tehran launched an unprecedented aerial bombardment against Gulf states in retaliation for the US-Israeli strikes.

However, the Gulf emirate has played an active role in negotiations in recent weeks after an initial April ceasefire was brokered by Pakistan.



UK to spend 'record' £300 bn on defence over next four years: PM

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Outgoing UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced Tuesday that Britain would spend almost £300 billion (\$397 billion) over the next four years to modernise its armed forces amid rising threats.

Starmer, expected to leave office next month after losing the support of Labour MPs, announced that the overall defence budget would increase by £15 billion over the next four years to almost £300 billion, as he launched his long-awaited 10-year Defence Investment Plan.

"Last year I made the decision in the national interest to re-prioritise aid spending towards de-



fence and achieved the biggest uplift in defence spending since the end of the Cold War," Starmer said in a speech.

Russia says shot down over 400 Ukrainian drones, baby killed outside Moscow

AFP | Moscow, Russia

Russia on Tuesday said it shot down 419 Ukrainian drones over the country overnight, including in the Moscow region, where authorities said a six-month-old baby was killed.

Kyiv has stepped up its long-range drone strike campaign against Russia in recent months, as Moscow's full-scale offensive against Ukraine drags on for almost four-and-a-half years.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his forces struck a satellite communications site in the Moscow region for the second time in a week.

Air defence systems "intercepted and destroyed 419 Ukrainian fixed-wing unmanned aerial vehicles" around the country, Moscow's defence ministry posted on the state-run Max platform.

The governor of the Moscow region, Andrei Vorobyov, later said that drones had hit the village of Yevgoryevsk, south-west of Moscow, hitting a "private house." "Unfortunately, a six-month old baby died on the way to hospital," he said on Telegram.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said earlier that air defence had shot down 61 "enemy drones" on the capital since Monday evening.

Adani to sell stake in India port to MSC for \$1.4 bn

AFP | Mumbai, India

Indian conglomerate Adani Group said yesterday that Europe's MSC will buy a 49% stake in its deep-water transshipment port in southern India for \$1.4 billion.

The purchase by Switzerland-based MSC, the world's largest container shipping company, represents the "single largest foreign private investment in Indian port infrastructure", Adani said in a statement.

The agreement comes as India seeks to develop a network of major seaports and reduce its dependence on regional transshipment hubs such as Singapore and Colombo by handling a greater share of cargo domestically.

The Adani Group said MSC would buy the stake in Adani

Vizhinjam Port Private Limited, which operates the Vizhinjam International Seaport in the southern state of Kerala.



India has more than 7,500 km of coastline and over 200 ports, including major and minor ports.

Jawaharlal Nehru Port is India's largest container port.

Vizhinjam International Seaport is India's first deep-water transshipment port capable of handling some of the world's largest container ships.

Ultra-wealthy Chinese exile in New York sentenced to 30 years for fraud

AFP | New York, United States

Exiled Chinese entrepreneur Guo Wengui, convicted of defrauding thousands of people of more than \$1 billion, was sentenced Monday to 30 years in prison by a federal court in New York, US media reported.

In July 2024, a jury unani-

mously found him guilty of fraud and various securities offenses, wire fraud and money laundering.

Also known as Ho Wan Kwok and Miles Guo, he was accused of leveraging his online notoriety since 2018 to persuade thousands of people to invest in his companies or projects, which

promised lucrative returns or luxury services but allegedly mainly served to fund his lavish lifestyle, according to US authorities.

The billionaire businessman, in his fifties -- his exact age is unknown -- was arrested by the FBI in March 2023 in his luxury Manhattan apartment overlook-



ing Central Park.

His former associate Yvette

Wang was sentenced last year to 10 years in prison for her role in the scheme.

Guo Wengui, who made his fortune in real estate, moved to the United States in 2015, fleeing China, where he was targeted by an Interpol red notice for financial fraud -- accusations he denies.