

News in brief

South Africa will 'take a break' from G20 after US ban



◆ South Africa said yesterday it was prepared to wait out next year's G20 after being barred by the United States and did not expect other countries to lobby for its inclusion. The United States this month took over the year-long presidency of the group of leading economies after largely boycotting South Africa's tenure, including the November summit, in an escalation of its attacks on Pretoria. Secretary of State Marco Rubio repeated Wednesday that South Africa would not be invited to the US-run G20, repeating complaints including unfounded claims that the government deliberately discriminated against the white Afrikaner minority.

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) has been renamed in honor of President Donald Trump, the State Department said on Wednesday, the eve of a peace agreement signing ceremony between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda.

US Institute of Peace renamed in honor of Trump: State Dept



"This morning, the State Department renamed the former Institute of Peace to reflect the greatest dealmaker in our nation's history. Welcome to the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace. The best is yet to come," the department posted on social media. The post included a picture of the USIP building, showing Trump's full name added on a wall above the engraved name of the organization.

Pakistan says to let humanitarian aid into Afghanistan



◆ Pakistan will temporarily allow UN relief supplies into Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, in the first partial border opening since deadly clashes erupted between the two neighbours in October. The countries have been locked in an increasingly bitter dispute since the Taliban authorities retook control in Kabul in 2021. Islamabad accuses its neighbour of harbouring militants that launch cross-border attacks, charges the Afghan government denies.

India's Sarwagya Singh Kushwaha has become the youngest player in chess history to earn an official FIDE rating at the age of three years, seven months and 20 days.

Indian boy earns official chess rating -- aged three



The chess prodigy edged out the previous record of compatriot Anish Sarkar, who was three years, eight months and 19 days when he reached the milestone in November last year. Kushwaha, who is enrolled in nursery school in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, holds a rapid rating of 1,572. To achieve a rating from FIDE, the International Chess Federation, a player needs to beat at least one FIDE-rated player.

CURIOSER & CURIOSER

Thief swallows Faberge egg, caught before beating it



AFP | Auckland

A New Zealand thief with expensive taste has been arrested after snatching and swallowing a diamond-encrusted green Faberge egg from a high-end jewellery store. The 32-year-old gulped down the egg late last week from a store in the country's largest city, Auckland, but was arrested before he could flee. Police said Wednesday they were yet to recover the ornate trinket -- valued around US\$20,000 -- but had assigned an officer to watch over the man while waiting for nature to take its course. "At this stage the pendant has not been recovered," they

said in a statement. The special edition locket was inspired by the James Bond film "Octopussy", which revolves around a plot to steal a rare Faberge egg. "The exterior of the egg closely follows the design of the Faberge egg featured in the film Octopussy, with a beautiful 18k gold lattice framework which is delicately set with blue sapphires and white diamonds in a floral-like design," reads an online description. A small golden octopus is nestled inside. Russia's House of Faberge gained international fame in the late 19th century by designing opulent Easter eggs decorated with gold and precious gems.

Putin arrives in India for defence talks

Prime Minister Modi personally welcomed the Russian leader at the airport

Putin arrives for two-day visit

Possible deals on S-400 systems and Su-57 jets

AFP | New Delhi

Russian President Vladimir Putin landed in India yesterday for a two-day visit aimed at deepening defence ties. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was at the airport to welcome the Russian leader in person, greeting him on the red carpet with a hug, before riding together in the same car. Putin, on his first visit to India since the Ukraine war, is accompanied by his Defence Minister Andrei Belousov, with possible



Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi sit in a car as they depart Palam Air Force Base following the Russian leader's arrival in New Delhi

deals on fighter jets and air defence systems expected to be discussed. In an interview with India Today, Putin said he was "very happy" to be meeting "my friend" Modi. "The range of our cooperation with India is huge," he said in remarks translated by the broadcaster, citing ship and aircraft manufacturing, nuclear energy and space exploration. The Indian premier said he was "delighted to welcome my friend, President Putin to India". "Looking forward to our in-

teractions later this evening and tomorrow," Modi said in a post on X. He hosted Putin for a private dinner yesterday evening, which will be followed by a summit meeting today. "India-Russia friendship is a time tested one that has greatly benefitted our people," Modi added, posting a picture of them from inside the car. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said talks to expand the supply of Russia's advanced S-400 air defence systems had an "important place on the agenda".

Indian media reports suggested Moscow may also offer co-production of Russia's Su-57 fighter jets. India is one of the world's top arms importers, and Russia has long been a principal supplier. But New Delhi has also sought alternative suppliers, as well as boosting domestic production -- with the Russian share of India's arms imports falling from 76 percent in 2009-13 to 36 percent in 2019-23, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

YOU KNOW WHAT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed Putin at the airport with a hug, and the two leaders then rode together in the same car, signaling close personal ties

European leaders in phone call voiced distrust of US over Ukraine: report

AFP | Berlin

European leaders in a conference call this week voiced distrust of US efforts to negotiate an end to Russia's war in Ukraine, according to German news weekly Der Spiegel, which said it had obtained written notes on the call. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and French President Emmanuel Macron had expressed scepticism in the call Monday with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and others that US negotiators would safeguard Kyiv's interests, the report said. The magazine quoted Macron as saying during the call that "there is a chance that the US will betray Ukraine on territory without clarity on security guarantees". An Elysee source told AFP the reported quote did not match the French presidency's own record of the call. "The president has publicly stated his position on the ongoing negotiations between Russia and the United States, which is no different in private," the source added. According to the report, Merz



German Finance Minister and Vice Chancellor Lars Klingbeil (L) greets German Chancellor Friedrich Merz as Bavaria's State Premier Markus Soeder passes by

warned Zelensky to be "very careful in the coming days" and added that "they are playing games with both you and us". The German chancellery told AFP: "We cannot comment on individual media reports. Furthermore, we cannot, as a matter of principle, report on confidential conversations." Zelensky's communications

adviser Dmytro Lytvyn, asked about the Der Spiegel report by AFP, said: "We do not comment on provocations." "Protect" Zelensky According to the magazine, Finland's President Alexander Stubb expressed distrust of US President Donald Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-

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We cannot leave Ukraine and Volodymyr alone with these guys

FINLAND'S PRESIDENT ALEXANDER STUBB

law Jared Kushner, who went to the Kremlin for talks earlier this week. "We cannot leave Ukraine and Volodymyr alone with these guys," Stubb said, Der Spiegel reported. His office told AFP: "We do not comment on confidential discussions held by the President of the Republic." NATO chief Mark Rutte said in the call that "we must protect Volodymyr", Der Spiegel said, citing what it said were notes on the call, not a verbatim transcript, without naming the author of the notes. A NATO official said: "As a general rule, we do not comment on leaks. As for the Secretary General's stance on the ongoing work to end the war against Ukraine, he has been clear in his support for the efforts led by President Trump and his team."