

China's Xi to visit North Korea next week

AFP | Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping will visit North Korea next week, state media said yesterday, the latest in a series of high-level summits as Beijing asserts its position as a diplomatic superpower on the world stage.

State broadcaster CCTV said that Xi would visit from June 8 to 9 at the invitation of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, his first trip to Pyongyang in seven years.

Beijing is a vital source of political and economic support to North Korea, which is one of the most diplomatically isolated countries in the world and under heavy international sanctions.

The upcoming meeting will be Xi's first official trip abroad this year, and comes after he hosted back-to-back summits with US President Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin last month.



People inspect the aftermath at the site of an Israeli strike that hit the previous day in the southern Lebanese coastal city of Tyre

Lebanese leaders rebuke Iran as Israel, Hezbollah trade attacks

Beirut insisted diplomacy remains the only path to ending the conflict

● New ceasefire collapses quickly

● Aoun backs negotiations with Israel

AFP | Beirut

Lebanon's leaders issued pointed calls for Iran to stop interfering in their country's affairs yesterday, as Israel and the Tehran-backed Hezbollah traded attacks after a new truce deal collapsed before it even began.

Lebanese state media reported fresh Israeli strikes on around 40 locations in southern Lebanon yesterday, with some causing casualties, while Hezbollah claimed new attacks on Israeli troops who have invaded the south, including with drones and

rockets.

Lebanon was drawn into the wider Middle East war when Hezbollah attacked Israel on March 2 to avenge the February 28 killing of Iran's supreme leader.

Iran, in its peace negotiations with Washington, has repeatedly insisted that the fighting in Lebanon and the war in the Gulf are inextricably linked.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam addressed Iran's leaders in frank terms during a press conference yesterday, telling them: "Have mercy on our south, stop treating it and its people as merely a bargaining chip to improve the terms of your negotiations."

"We are the people of a sovereign nation that refuses to serve as a mailbox for the messages of others or as an open battlefield for their wars," he added. "The south is not anyone's reserve



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LEBANESE PRIME MINISTER NAWAF SALAM

front." Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, echoing Salam's "bargaining chip" remark, offered a similar message for Iran in an interview with CNN.

"It's not your country, it's our country," he said. "It's not your job to interfere into our country."

Lebanese and Israeli envoys in Washington agreed to a truce this week that according to a statement is conditional on a "com-

plete cessation" of Hezbollah fire, without mentioning a halt to Israeli attacks.

Hezbollah flatly rejected the deal on Thursday, demanding instead a comprehensive ceasefire and full Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon.

Lebanese parliament speaker and Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri said yesterday that the group would withdraw from the area south of Lebanon's Litani River if these conditions were met.

Hezbollah had vehemently opposed the government's direct engagement with Israel, with its leader Naim Qassem describing the talks as a "farce and humiliation" -- a stance Aoun took issue with yesterday.

"Hezbollah must understand that (there is) no other way but to sit and talk, no other way to solve this problem and to save what's left except through negotiation and diplomacy," he told CNN.

'How long will this go on?'

Israel has staged its deepest incursion in two decades into Lebanon, and yesterday it warned residents of nine towns and villages, including Sarafand on the coastal road between Tyre and Sidon, to immediately evacuate.

Lebanon's official National News Agency reported mass displacement from some of the villages, and subsequently reported strikes there.

An overnight Israeli strike near the city of Tyre's Jabal Amel hospital killed four people, wounded seven and lightly damaged the facility, while another in a residential area killed three and wounded five, including two children, according to a civil defence source.

An AFP correspondent saw a heavily damaged bank near the hospital, one of only three in the city.

Ireland bans two Israeli ministers from entering country

AFP | Dublin

Ireland announced yesterday it has banned Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir and finance minister Bezalel Smotrich from entering the country, slamming their behaviour towards pro-Palestinian activists.

Justice Minister Jim O'Callaghan "has instructed immigration officers to refuse entry to Itamar Ben Gvir -- Minister for National Security of Israel, and Bezalel Smotrich, Minister of Finance of Israel -- should they seek to enter the state," a justice ministry statement said.

Madonna stuns fans with New York pop-up concert

AFP | New York

To the delight of hundreds of lucky fans, the Material Girl... suddenly materialized in New York's Times Square for a pop-up concert.

Madonna, 67, strutted her stuff in a pink corset, blue bra, thigh-highs and blue shades Thursday night to promote her upcoming album "Confessions II" and kick off Pride Month.

Fans had short notice to show up in the landmark Manhattan plaza to catch the impromptu 15-minute set sponsored by gay dating site Grindr, which also livestreamed the show.



Madonna during the event concert

Performing from a stage set inside one of Times Square's huge LED displays, Madonna sang six tracks including "Hung Up," "Get Together" and "I Love New York" from her 2005 album "Confessions on a Dance Floor."

Australia seizes 100,000 cockroaches in bug-breeder bust

AFP | Sydney

Wildlife officers have busted an illegal cockroach-breeding operation in rural Australia, seizing a skin-crawling haul worth more than \$100,000 on the black market for exotic bugs.

More than 100,000 contraband cockroaches were found in a raid on a commercial breeder in the town of Bathurst, west of Sydney, Australia's environment department said yesterday.

They found Madagascar "hissing" cockroaches, a bulky insect named for its noisy de-



One of the 100,000 contraband cockroaches found in a raid on a commercial breeder in the town of Bathurst

fence mechanism, and dubia cockroaches, an invasive critter bred as a snack for pet lizards.

Photos showed one of the seized Madagascar cockroaches was almost big enough to completely cover the palm of

an adult hand.

"We take our job protecting Australia's unique biodiversity and breaches of national environment law very seriously," an environment department spokesman said.