

Iraq reopens border crossing with Syria shut for nearly 13 years

All three border crossings between Iraq and Syria are now open

AFP | Rabi'ah, Iraq

Iraq reopened a once-bustling border crossing with Syria yesterday, more than a decade after it was closed to trade following the rise of the Islamic State group.

With the al-Rabia post -- known as al-Yarubiyah on the Syrian side -- back in operation, all three border crossings between Iraq and Syria are now open. Border Ports Authority chief Omar Al-Waeli told journalists during the reopening ceremony that al-Rabia "is a strategic border port" that had been shut for almost 13 years.

He added that the crossing "will play an important role on the Development Road", a mega-project aimed at providing a link between Asia and Europe via upgraded rail and road infrastructure through Iraq and Turkey.

Previously a major trade route between the two countries, the al-Rabia crossing in Nineveh province closed after the emergence of the Islamic State group,



Cars and trucks loaded with goods waiting to cross over into Syria at the al-Rabia border crossing

which seized large swathes of Syria and Iraq in a lightning offensive in 2014.

Although the jihadists were later defeated, the border cross-

ing remained closed and was only briefly used to deliver aid into war-torn Syria.

Until earlier this year, Kurdish forces controlled the post on

the Syrian side, before handing it over to the Syrian authorities, who overthrew former ruler Bashar al-Assad in December 2024.

US opens tariff refunds portal after court struck down Trump duties

AFP | Washington, United States

The US government yesterday launched a tool for refunding more than \$166 billion in revenue from tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump and subsequently struck down by the Supreme Court.

The conservative-majority high court in February ruled against a swath of Trump's tariffs, marking a stinging rebuke of his key economic policy and opening the door to refunds.

Yesterday, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said it has activated the first phase of its processing tool, meaning that importers and customs brokers can start submitting documentation to recover their payments.

The agency estimated in March that more than 330,000 importers could be eligible for refunds on duties or deposits paid on over 53 million shipments.

In the new system's initial deployment, around \$127 billion in duty payments are eligible for electronic refunds, the agency said.

The Supreme Court ruling applies to duties imposed un-

der the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, which Trump used to target virtually all US trading partners with varying tariff rates since returning to the presidency in January last year.

But his sector-specific tariffs on goods like steel, aluminum and autos remain intact.

Thousands of companies have filed lawsuits with the Court of International Trade since the high court's ruling, to seek refunds.

The extent to which consumers who have borne the brunt of tariffs will be repaid depends on whether companies share the recovered funds, however. For now, FedEx for example said it plans to issue refunds for tariffs paid to "shippers and consumers who originally bore those charges."

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US begins 'biggest ever' Philippines war games

● The war games will feature live-fire exercises in the north of the Philippines facing the Taiwan Strait

AFP | Manila, Philippines

Thousands of American and Philippine troops, joined for the first time by a significant contingent of Japanese forces, began annual military exercises yesterday set against the backdrop of the Middle East war.

The war games will feature live-fire exercises in the north of the Philippines facing the Taiwan Strait, as well as a province off the disputed South China Sea, where Philippine and Chinese forces have engaged in repeated confrontations.

In one drill, the Japanese military, which is contributing



A US Army High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) is fired as part of a live fire exercise during a joint army-to-army exercise between the Philippines and the US at Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija province north of Manila

about 1,400 personnel, will use a Type 88 cruise missile to sink a World War II-era minesweeper off the coast of northern Luzon island.

More than 17,000 soldiers, airmen and sailors are taking part in the 19-day Balikatan, or "Shoulder to Shoulder," exercises -- about the same number as last year's edition, including contingents from Australia, New Zealand, France and Canada.

Balikatan comes as Iran and the United States, along with Israel, edge towards the end of the two-week ceasefire that halted the Middle East war, ignited by surprise US-Israeli strikes on the Islamic republic.

"Regardless of the challenges elsewhere in the world, the United States' focus on the Indo-Pacific and our ironclad commitment to the Philippines remains unwavering," US Lieutenant General Christian Wortman said at Monday's opening

ceremony. Philippine military chief General Romeo Brawner added that US Indo-Pacific Command chief Admiral Samuel Paparo had assured him at the war's outbreak that this year's Balikatan would be "the biggest ever".



Among the high-end weapons expected to be used is a US Typhon missile system that has been in the archipelago since visiting US forces left it there in 2024, provoking outrage from Beijing.

Whale stranded on German coast swims off, gets stuck again

AFP | Berlin, Germany

Efforts to rescue a humpback whale stranded for weeks on Germany's Baltic Sea coast were complicated yesterday when the animal unexpectedly swam away but then appeared to have got stuck again.

The 13.5-metre (44-foot) whale and its struggle for survival have captured the hearts of the German public, with some of the press calling him "Timmy".

Rescuers had cleared sand away from the spot where the whale had been stuck for around three weeks off the island of Poel, near Wismar, and sent a tugboat to be used in the rescue



Divers try to help the whale free itself

effort.

The plan was to lift the whale from the seabed using inflatable cushions and transport it with pontoons back to the North Sea or possibly as far as the Atlantic Ocean.

However, the animal swam free on its own on Monday, before coming to a halt on a different sandbank nearby, said Till Backhaus, environment minister for the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

Rescuers see the escape attempt as a sign that the whale is still relatively healthy and plan to try again, the Bild daily reported.

Backhaus, speaking at the

scene, insisted the animal this time had not become fully stranded and was instead "resting".

The creature was first spotted stuck on a sandbank on March 23 near the city of Luebeck before freeing itself and then becoming stuck again several times.

On April 1, regional officials said they were convinced that the badly injured and distressed animal was going to die and could no longer be saved.

But local authorities last week approved a last-ditch rescue attempt proposed by two entrepreneurs, one of whom founded a major electronics retail chain.