

News in brief

◆ **Pavel Durov, the** Russian-born founder of Telegram, said yesterday that Russian authorities were probing him for "aiding terrorism", the latest escalation in Moscow's repeated attempts to block the popular messenger. Moscow has restricted access to both Telegram and WhatsApp, Russia's two most popular messaging apps, as it tries to shift users onto Max -- a state-backed alternative which critics say lacks privacy -- but so far without much success.



Telegram founder Durov says Russia launched 'terrorism' probe against him

◆ **Russia says new US nuclear tests could spur dangerous 'domino effect'**

◆ **Moscow voiced alarm** yesterday at Washington's assertion it will resume nuclear testing to match alleged secret explosions by China and Russia, warning such a move would spark a dangerous "domino effect". Speaking before the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Russian ambassador Gennady Gatilov decried US

President Donald Trump's announcement last year that his country was prepared to stage its first nuclear test since 1992. "We warn that the US withdrawal from its national moratorium would trigger a domino effect," he said, speaking through a translator, stressing that "the responsibility for the consequences would rest entirely with Washington". Christopher Yeaw, the US assistant secretary of state for arms control and nonproliferation, indicated last week that Trump was serious when he said in October that the United States would resume nuclear testing.

◆ **Australian Prime Minister** Anthony Albanese

Australian PM evacuated after 'security incident': police

was forced to evacuate his official residence yesterday over a security threat, police said. Albanese was evacuated from The Lodge, his official residence in the capital Canberra. National broadcaster ABC reported the threat saw Albanese taken to a separate location for several hours. In a statement, the Australian Federal Police said they had responded to "an alleged security incident" around 6 pm (0700 GMT).

◆ **Aid groups petition Israel's top court to halt ban on Gaza, West Bank ops**

◆ **More than a dozen** international humanitarian organisations have petitioned Israel's Supreme Court to block an imminent order that would force

37 NGOs to cease operations in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, warning of catastrophic consequences for Palestinians. Organisations including Doctors Without Borders (MSF), Oxfam, the Norwegian Refugee Council and CARE were notified on December 30, 2025 that their Israeli registrations had expired and that they had 60 days to renew them by providing lists of their Palestinian staff. If they fail to do so, they will have to cease operations in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including east Jerusalem, from March 1.

Europe faces large 'shortfalls' in its defence: report

◆ **Europe has wide "shortfalls"** in its military capabilities which leave it "ill-prepared" as the war in Ukraine grinds on, a new report said yesterday. The 2026 edition of the Military Balance report by the London-based institute notes that the United States is seeking to refocus its efforts on protecting its own territory. As a result, the US leader continues to push allies for "greater burden-sharing" in military spending, both in Europe and in the Asia-Pacific region in response to China's growing influence.

SPOTLIGHT

Iran says students must respect 'red lines' after protests



Iranian women walk past street vendors in northern Tehran

AFP | Paris, France

Iran offered a muted warning yesterday for students who staged anti-government rallies, with the country's leaders under pressure after a recent mass protest movement and threats of US military action over its nuclear programme.

University students kicked off a new semester over the weekend with gatherings in which they revived slogans from nationwide protests against the country's clerical leadership that peaked in January and were met by a deadly crackdown.

On Tuesday, the fourth consecutive day of the campus protests, videos verified by AFP showed two groups facing off in a large hall at a Tehran university -- one wav-

ing Iranian flags and the other chanting anti-government slogans -- before scuffles break out.

The day before students had burned the flag that was adopted by Iran's Islamic republic after the 1979 revolution that toppled the monarchy, according to verified videos.

Iranian government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani, giving the first official reaction to the rallies, said on Tuesday that while students had a right to protest, they must "understand the red lines".

The flag, she added, was one "of these red lines that we must protect and not cross or deviate from, even at the height of anger". She said Iran's students "have wounds in their hearts and have seen scenes that may upset and anger them; this anger is understandable".

Duterte drew up 'death lists', boasted about murders: ICC prosecutor

Duterte publicly named persons he alleged were involved in drugs

● The week-long ICC proceedings are not a trial but a "confirmation of charges" hearing

● The court passed him fit to attend but granted his right to stay away

AFP | The Hague, Netherlands

Former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte personally drew up "death lists" and boasted about murders committed during his "war on drugs", an International Criminal Court prosecutor alleged yesterday at a crimes against humanity hearing.

On day two of proceedings against Duterte, ICC prosecutor Edward Jeremy laid out searing testimony including allegations that children had their heads wrapped in packing tape and were strangled to death.

"As president, Duterte publicly named persons he alleged were involved in drugs, and many of those would end up as victims in his so-called war on drugs," Jeremy said.

The "Duterte list" was "basically a death list", Jeremy cited a witness as saying, showing a video of Duterte himself saying: "I am the sole person responsible for it all."

Duterte faces three ICC counts of crimes against humanity, with prosecutors alleging his involvement in at least 76 murders between 2013 and 2018.

Prosecutors say this is a "mere



Protestors, rallying in support of the detention of former Philippine's president Rodrigo Duterte, hold a placard which reads « hold Duterte accountable now » outside of the International Criminal Court (ICC)

fraction" of the thousands believed killed in his "war on drugs" as mayor of Davao City and then president.

"As witnesses stated, the poor were often targeted, because they were the ones least likely to file complaints against the police," said Jeremy.

'The bodies pile up'

Jeremy played a clip of Duterte joking about "extrajudicial killings" during a speech.

"And in this opulent, gilded, presentation room, the officials laugh along with their president while he boasts about his skills in extrajudicial killing," said Jeremy.

"And outside on the streets of the Philippines, the bodies pile up."

Jeremy alleged that almost 1,500 people had already been killed at the time of this video.

The prosecutor said that on

two occasions, children aged around 14 or 15 were taken into custody.

"On each occasion, the police wrapped the child's head in packing tape. So no one could hear them scream. And then strangled the child to death with wire," said Jeremy.

"It's difficult to imagine a more terrifying end to two lives that had barely even begun. And these murdered children were then sold to funeral homes."

The week-long ICC proceedings are not a trial but a "confirmation of charges" hearing, enabling judges to weigh whether to move ahead with a trial.

Another prosecutor, Robynne Croft, described the alleged crimes as a "widespread and systematic attack" on the people of the Philippines.

The killings were "highly organised, planned and coordinated" and without Duterte's "es-

sential contribution", would not have occurred, Croft alleged.

Duterte, 80, is not in court after exercising his right not to appear.

His defence team says he is weak and in cognitive decline. The prosecution and victims counter that he is healthy but does not want to face the loved-ones of victims.

The court passed him fit to attend but granted his right to stay away.

Once the hearings wrap up Friday, the court will take up to 60 days to decide whether to proceed to a full trial, usually in a written judgement.

Duterte's defence lawyer, Nicholas Kaufman, on Monday said his client "maintained his innocence absolutely".

Kaufman argued that while Duterte used "bluster and hyperbole" in his speeches, he also frequently ordered authorities only to shoot in self-defence.



Rodrigo Duterte was arrested in March 2025 under a warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and is facing charges of crimes against humanity over his controversial "war on drugs" campaign that killed thousands of people.

UK steps up support for Ukraine four years after invasion

TDI | Manama

Britain unveils 'biggest' Russia sanctions on Ukraine war anniversary

AFP | London, United Kingdom

The UK government yesterday announced its "biggest sanctions package" against Russia since ones imposed straight after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine four years ago, targeting oil exports and military equipment suppliers.

Marking the anniversary of the invasion, London announced nearly 300 new sanctions as foreign minister Yvette Cooper visited Kyiv.

This took the total of companies and individuals targeted by Britain over the Ukraine war to

more than 3,000.

New measures included an asset freeze on Russia's state controlled pipeline operator Transneft, citing the oil sector's "strategic significance to the government of Russia".

Britain said the new raft of sanctions sent the message that "Russian oil is off the market".

she described as Russia's "disgraceful attempts to erase the Ukrainian identity" in occupied territories, citing forced passportisation, suppression of Ukrainian language and arbitrary detentions. "Russia can and must end this war," she said. "The UK will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes to achieve a just and lasting peace."

On the military front, British medical teams are mentoring Ukrainian clinicians in complex battlefield trauma care, sharing expertise developed through years of operational experience. Meanwhile, Ukrainian pilots are training at a UK air base to become helicopter flying instructors -- the first time Britain has offered rotary-wing instructor training -- enabling them to train the next generation of military aviators.

Defence Secretary John Healey said Putin had underestimated Ukraine's determination. "With our support, they continue to fight with huge courage and defiance," he said, adding that Britain would continue stepping up pressure on Moscow as efforts intensify to bring the conflict to an end.

An additional £5.7 million will provide humanitarian assistance to frontline communities, those forced to evacuate and civilians affected by airstrikes. The UK has also pledged £30 million to bolster Ukraine's societal resilience and support accountability efforts for victims of alleged Russian war crimes.

In Kyiv, Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper condemned what

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