

NEWS IN BRIEF

**Türkiye's
opposition
to announce
election
candidate**

REUTERS – Türkiye's six-party opposition alliance said it would announce its joint candidate next week to challenge President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the May presidential election. The alliance said it would announce its candidate on Monday, although there are signs of discord about the choice and other issues in the nationalist IYI Party, the second largest party in the alliance. The opposition has failed in previous national votes to pose a serious challenge to Erdogan, who has been in power for two decades.

**Hungary
delays vote
on Sweden,
Finland
joining NATO**

AP – Hungary further delayed a vote on ratifying Sweden and Finland's NATO accession bids, according to an updated schedule published Thursday on the National Assembly's website, the latest in a series of postponements that have frustrated Western allies. Hungary remains the only NATO member country besides Türkiye that hasn't yet approved the two Nordic countries' bids to join the Western military alliance. Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, alleges that the governments in Stockholm and Helsinki have "spread blatant lies" about Hungary.

**Argentina asks
UK to resume
negotiations
over Falklands**

REUTERS – The Argentinian government has again asked the United Kingdom to restart negotiations over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, the Argentinian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday. The request to resume talks is the latest chapter in Argentina's long-held claim over the British-run islands, which included the 1982 war. The islands are located in the South Atlantic about 600 kilometres from the Argentinian mainland.

Macron: Era of French interference in Africa is 'over'

President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday said the era of French interference in Africa was "well over" as he began a four-nation tour of the continent to renew frayed ties. Anti-French sentiment runs high in some former African colonies as the continent becomes a renewed diplomatic battleground, with Russian and Chinese influence growing in the region, according to AFP. Macron said France harboured no desire to return

to past policies of interfering in Africa ahead of an environment summit in Gabon, the first leg of his trip. "The age of Francophonie is well over," Macron said in remarks to the French community in the capital Libreville, referring to France's post-colonisation strategy of supporting authoritarian leaders to defend its interests. "Sometimes I get the feeling that mindsets haven't moved along as much as we have, when I read, hear and see

people ascribing intentions to France that it doesn't have," he added. "Francafrique" is a favourite target of pan-Africanists, who say that after the wave of decolonisation in 1960 France propped up dictators in its former colonies in exchange for access to resources and military bases. Macron and his predecessors, notably Francois Hollande, have previously declared that the policy is dead and that France has no intention of meddling in

sovereign affairs.

Military revamp

Macron on Monday said there would be a "noticeable reduction" in France's troop presence in Africa "in the coming months" and a greater focus on training and equipping allied countries' forces. France has in the past year withdrawn troops from former colonies Mali, Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic. The pullout from Mali and

Burkina Faso, where its soldiers were supporting the Sahel nations to battle a long-running insurgency, came on the back of a wave of local hostility. In his remarks on Thursday, Macron insisted the planned reorganisation was "neither a withdrawal nor disengagement", defining it as adapting to the needs of partners. More than 3,000 French soldiers are deployed in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon and Djibouti, according to official figures.



Angola soldiers take part in the official welcome ceremony for French President Emmanuel Macron at the Casa Rosada presidential palace, in Luanda on March 3, 2023.
● **LUDOVIC MARIN/AFP**

Lavrov, Blinken meet for first time since Ukraine war

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov talked briefly Thursday in the highest-level in-person talks between the two countries since Russia's military operation in Ukraine. But there was no indication of any movement toward easing the intense tensions between their two nations. The short encounter came as relations between Washington and Moscow have plummeted over war in Ukraine and tensions have soared amid a myriad of disagreements, complaints and recriminations on other matters ranging from arms control to em-

bassy staffing and prisoners. U.S. officials said Blinken and Lavrov chatted for roughly 10 minutes on the sidelines of the G-20 conference of foreign ministers in New Delhi. But there was no sign of any progress and the conference itself ended with the grouping unable to reach consensus on the Ukraine war. At a news conference, Blinken said he told Lavrov that the U.S. would continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes and would push for the war to end through diplomatic terms that Kyiv agrees to. "End this war of aggres-

sion, engage in meaningful diplomacy that can produce a just and durable peace," Blinken said he had told Lavrov. But, he noted that "President Putin has demonstrated zero interest in engaging, saying there's nothing to even talk about unless and until Ukraine accepts and I quote 'the new territorial reality.'" Blinken said he also urged Russia to reverse "its irresponsible decision and return to" participation in the New START nuclear treaty. Lavrov, who did not mention speaking with Blinken when he held a news conference after the G-20 session, told reporters that

Moscow would continue to press its action in Ukraine. He shrugged off Western claims of Russia's isolation, saying "we aren't feeling isolated. It's the West that has isolated itself, and it will eventually come to realize it." He said Russia remains open to talks on ending the conflict in Ukraine, but he accused the West of effectively blocking such talks. "They are calling on us to have talks, but I don't remember any Western colleagues calling on Ukraine to have talks," he said. "They are encouraging Ukraine to continue the war." "Our Western colleagues



have lost self-control, forgotten their manners and put diplomacy aside, switching exclusively to blackmail and threats," he said. The last time Blinken and Lavrov met in person was in Geneva, Switzerland, in January 2022 on the eve of Ukraine war.



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (top C) walks past Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (lower right) during the G20 foreign ministers' meeting in New Delhi, India, on March 2, 2023.
● **OLIVIER DOULIERY/POOL/AFP**

U.S., South Korea announce largest field exercises in five years

The South Korean and U.S. militaries announced Friday they will hold their biggest joint field exercises in five years later this month, as the U.S. flew a long-range B-1B bomber to the Korean Peninsula in a show of force against North Korea. The North has threatened to take "unprecedentedly" strong action against

such exercises. It's likely that it will respond to the upcoming training with missile tests because it views it as an invasion rehearsal, AP reported. In a joint news conference, the South Korean and U.S. militaries said they will conduct the Freedom Shield exercise, a computer-simulated command post training, from March 13 to 23 to

strengthen their defense and response capabilities, and separate large-scale joint field training exercises called Warrior Shield FTX. Col. Isaac L. Taylor, a spokesperson for the U.S. military, said the field training will include a combined amphibious drill and that their size would return to the scale of the allies' earlier big-

gest springtime field exercises called Foal Eagle. The two countries last conducted Foal Eagle in 2018. They then canceled or downsized some combined drills to support now-stalled diplomacy with North Korea and guard against the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, however, the two countries have been expanding their joint mil-

itary exercises in the face of an evolving North Korean nuclear threat. Friday's deployment of a U.S. B-1B was the aircraft's first such flyover in joint aerial training with South Korean warplanes since Feb. 19. North Korea is highly sensitive to the deployment of B-1Bs, which are capable of carrying a large conventional

weapons payload. It responded to the previous flights of multiple B-1Bs by test-launching two short-range missiles the next day. South Korea's Defense Ministry said the use of a B-1B demonstrated the U.S. determination and ability to use the full range of its military capabilities, including nuclear, to defend its allies.