

Pakistan ex-PM granted bail after arrest cancelled



Police officers stand in a position to stop the supporters of Pakistan's former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, as he appeared before the Supreme Court in Islamabad, Pakistan, on May 11, 2023.
● AKHTAR SOOMRO/REUTERS

Pakistan former prime minister Imran Khan was granted two weeks of bail by Islamabad High Court on Friday in a graft case, AFP quoted private television channel Geo News as reporting. The court approved the bail after the Supreme Court on Thursday said his arrest earlier in the week, which ignited deadly protests and a tussle with the military, was "invalid and unlawful".

"They had no justification to arrest me. I was abducted. It seems as if there was a law of jungle," Khan told British news outlet The Independent at the Islamabad High Court, Reuters reported.

"The Islamabad High Court has given a two-week bail and also ordered the (anti-graft body) not to arrest Imran Khan during this period," his lawyer Faisal Chaudhry told Reuters.

Khan, 70, is a cricket hero-turned-politician who was ousted as prime minister in April 2022 in a parliamentary no-confidence vote and who is Pakistan's most popular leader according to opinion polls. Many cities in Pakistan saw violent protests following his arrest by the anti-graft agency in a land fraud case on Tuesday.

At least eight people have been killed in the violence that has worsened the country's instability and doused hopes of resumption of a crucial International Monetary Fund bailout.

The army, which remains Pakistan's most powerful institution, having ruled it directly for close to half its 75-year history through three coups, has warned against further attacks on its assets and has called the violence "pre-planned".

Over 30 Palestinians killed as Israel keeps pounding Gaza

Israeli forces continued to strike the Gaza Strip for the fourth day in a row on Friday, bringing the total death toll from airstrikes to 31, including six children and three women.

According to the Palestinian Health Ministry, 31 people, including six children and three women, have been killed and 93 others, including 32 children and 17 women, have been injured in the last four days of Israeli forces air attacks, Anadolu Agency reported.

The statement came after the ministry announced the death of a Palestinian, who succumbed to his injuries sustained during an Israeli raid in northern Gaza.

Five senior members of the Islamic Jihad organization were also killed in the Israeli attacks on Gaza.

Meanwhile, armed Palestinian factions retaliated by firing rocket-propelled grenades at Israeli military sites adjacent to the Gaza Strip. According to Press TV, Palestinian resistance fighters on Friday fired rockets towards Al-Quds for the first time since Israel began its assassination of resistance commanders in the besieged Gaza Strip on Tuesday.

Rocket sirens sounded in the town of Beit Shemesh and elsewhere in the hills outside Al-Quds, ending a 12-hour lull in fighting.

Israel's national emergency medical service, Magen David Adom, reported that a rocket fired from Gaza struck a residential building in the central Israeli city of Rehovot, resulting in one fatality and five injuries, Anadolu Agency reported.

Regional and international powers have urged an immediate cease-fire between Israel and Palestine, but have been unsuccessful thus far. On Thursday, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation strongly condemned "the barbaric military aggression" against the Gaza Strip, describing it as "a heinous crime and a flagrant violation of international law and humanitarian principles".

According to Palestinian figures, more than 160 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces since the start of this year. At least 20 Israelis have also been killed in separate attacks during the same period.

The OIC called on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities and intervene urgently to stop the ongoing Israeli acts of aggression.

Palestinians inspect the rubble of a house after it was struck by an Israeli airstrike in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, on May 12, 2023.
● FATIMA SHBAIR/AP



NEWS IN BRIEF

Germany braces for 50-hour train strike



AP - A labor union representing more than 200,000 railway workers said Friday that it was going ahead with a planned strike next week after its demands for better pay were rejected by employers.

The EVG union said its members will walk out for 50 hours from late Sunday until late Tuesday. Rail company Deutsche Bahn has canceled all long-distance travel during that period and warned that most regional trains also won't run. The strike will likely be one of the biggest in recent years, following a previous large-scale walk-out in April.

Sudan's rival forces agree to protect civilians, no ceasefire

REUTERS - Sudan's warring factions early on Friday committed to protect civilians and the movement of humanitarian aid, but did not agree to a ceasefire and remain far apart, U.S. officials said.

After a week of talks in the Saudi port of Jeddah, Sudan's army and rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) signed a declaration that they would work towards a short-term ceasefire in further discussions, they said.

Sarkozy face trial over alleged Libyan financing



AFP - French prosecutors on Thursday demanded that former president Nicolas Sarkozy face a new trial over alleged Libyan financing of his 2007 election campaign.

France's financial crimes prosecutors (PNF) said Sarkozy and 12 others should face trial over accusations they sought millions of euros in financing from the regime of then Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi for his ultimately victorious campaign.

Moscow denies reports of Ukrainian breakthroughs



Ukrainian service members from a 110th Separate Mechanised Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, prepare fire a self-propelled howitzer "Dana", amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, near the town of Avdiivka in Donetsk region, Ukraine, on May 9, 2023.
● SOFIYA GATILOVA/REUTERS

Russia's defence ministry on Thursday denied reports that Ukrainian forces had broken through in various places along the front lines and said the military situation was under control.

Moscow reacted after Russian military bloggers, writing on Telegram, reported what they said were Ukrainian advances north and south of the city of Bakhmut, with some suggesting a long-awaited counter-offensive by pro-Kyiv forces had started, Reuters reported.

U.S. accusations

Meanwhile, South African officials on Friday hit back at U.S. accusations that a sanctioned Russian ship had picked up weapons from a naval base near Cape Town late last year, a move investors feared could lead Washington to impose sanctions.

The U.S. ambassador to South Africa said on Thursday he was confident that a Russian ship uploaded weapons from the Simon's Town naval base in December, suggesting the incident was not in line with Pretoria's

professed neutrality in the Ukraine conflict.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's office said on Thursday that an inquiry led by a retired judge would look into the allegation. On Friday, a minister responsible for arms control and a foreign ministry spokesman said the country had not approved any arms shipment to Russia in December. Washington has repeatedly warned countries against providing material support to Russia, cautioning that those who do may be denied access to U.S.

markets.

During a briefing on Thursday, U.S. State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel did not repeat the allegation that arms had been loaded onto the vessel.

He said Washington had serious concerns about the docking of the ship at a South African naval port and had raised those concerns directly with South African officials.

South Africa's defence department said on Friday it would give its side of the story to the government's inquiry.

Turkish presidential candidate withdraws in potential boost for Erdogan rival



Turkish presidential candidate Muharrem Ince has pulled out of the race, in a potential boost to the main opposition candidate's chances of beating President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Sunday's vote.

Ince had low polling numbers and some opposition figures feared he would split the anti-Erdogan vote, which had coalesced around the president's principal rival, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, CNN reported. "I am pulling out of this race. I am doing this for my country," Ince said at a press conference in Ankara "I don't want them to blame me when they lose," he said referring to the main opposition. His centrist party, Homeland, will remain in the parliamentary race. "I urge each household to give

Homeland Party at least one vote," he said. Ince did not endorse any of the remaining candidates. His name will remain on the ballot.

Ince said he had withdrawn following a "slander campaign." He has faced weeks of lurid allegations on social media in Turkey and the Ankara public prosecutor's office said Thursday it had opened an investigation into potential blackmail.

The 59-year-old ran for president in 2018 but lost against Erdogan. In March this year, he broke away

from Kemal Kilicdaroglu's Republican People's Party (CHP) and joined the presidential race. He initially rebuffed calls by his former party to withdraw amid concern that he'd take votes away from Erdogan's rival.

Speaking at a rally in Ankara, Erdogan said he wished Ince had not withdrawn, adding that it was "impossible to understand why" he did.

Turkey holds elections every five years. The candidate who receives more than 50% of votes in the first round is elected

president, but if no candidate gets a majority, the election goes to a second round between the two candidates who received the highest number of votes in the first round.

It is unclear how Ince's supporters would vote, but Turkish polls have shown that a large proportion of his backers would pick Kilicdaroglu if the Homeland Party leader withdrew.

The election is expected to be a close race between Erdogan and Kilicdaroglu, with pollsters predicting record voter turnouts.

Chairman of Homeland Party Muharrem Ince speaks to the press at party headquarters in Ankara, Turkey, on May 11.
● MUSTAFA CIFTCI/AA/GETTY IMAGES