

## Don't be afraid of Russia

Putin tells West as war fear grips region

AFP, Moscow

Russia is not a threat to the West, President Vladimir Putin insisted in an interview published yesterday, saying he was still committed to a Ukraine peace deal after a fresh flare-up in the country's east.

"I would like to say - there's no need to be afraid of Russia," Putin told Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera in an interview published yesterday, ruling out a major conflict between Russia and Nato member countries.

"The world has changed so much that people in their right mind cannot imagine such a large-scale military conflict today."

"We have other things to do, I can assure you," the Russian president said.

Putin's interview was released by the Kremlin just as Group of Seven leaders are gearing up to meet in the Bavarian Alps for a summit this weekend without Russia.

In the interview, Putin stressed that Russia merely sought to defend itself



This photo shows the sank ship "Eastern Star" under the sunset as rescuers in sterilization suits prepare to board the vessel in Jianli, central China's Hubei province on Friday. Inset, The battered ship being held afloat by cranes.

PHOTO: AFP

## Scores of bodies found

396 confirmed dead; search on for 46 missing

AFP, Jianli

A total of 396 people have been confirmed dead after a cruise ship capsized in China, state media said yesterday, making it the country's worst shipping disaster in nearly 70 years.

Only 14 people have been confirmed alive out of the 456 -- mostly tourists aged over 60 -- on board when the "Eastern Star" rapidly sank on the Yangtze river in a storm on Monday.

The death toll jumped by over 200 after rescuers hoisted the battered ship out of the water on Friday and began recovering bodies trapped inside.

The official Xinhua news agency put the number of dead at 396 as of noon local time yesterday.

The figure would make it China's worst shipping disaster since 1948, when up to 4,000 on board the SS Kiangya were killed when it sank near the city of Shanghai.

Online images showed workers wearing surgical suits handling body

bags in the vessel's dark cabins, while others slept on a nearby floating platform, exhausted by their grim work.

At a nearby funeral parlour, AFP saw men also dressed in the white suits driving a convoy of about 20 mini-vans adapted to carry coffins towards the disaster site.

A total of 46 people remain missing, but a government spokesman said on

**CHINA RIVERBOAT TRAGEDY**

Thursday that no further survivors are expected to be found.

Rescuers used massive cranes to lift the ship at the site of the disaster in Hubei province's Jianli county on Friday.

Reports citing witnesses said the 76.5 metre long and 2,200 tonne ship overturned in under a minute, and weather officials said a freak tornado hit the area at the time. Local reports

said other ships in the area on the day of the accident had dropped anchor after a warning of heavy storms, but the Eastern Star continued on.

The vessel was cited for safety infractions two years ago, according to a notice by the Nanjing Maritime Bureau, but no further details have been given about the state of the ship.

Investigators will probe the ship's structure for flaws, CCTV said, after the ruling Communist party's all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee vowed to leave "no doubts remaining" about the disaster.

Information about the sinking and media access to the site have been tightly controlled, and online criticism of the search operation quickly deleted.

A petition posted by family members on social media service WeChat called for "key state leaders" to apologise, an investigation, compensation and the "death sentence" for the ship's captain -- one of the few survivors of the disaster -- who is in police custody.

## Egypt quashes Hamas terror blacklisting

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday quashed a February decision by another tribunal branding the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas a "terrorist" group, a court official said.

He told AFP that the earlier ruling was thrown out because the court that issued it was not "competent" to make such verdicts.

The February ruling came after a lawyer petitioned the court to classify Hamas as a terrorist organisation, accusing it of using underground tunnels to smuggle weapons into Egypt.

But in March the government appealed against the ruling, which took ties between Hamas and Egyptian authorities to a new low.

The Islamist movement had strongly condemned the February verdict -- which came a month after another court ruled Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, a "terrorist group".

Egypt is a traditional broker between Israel and Hamas.

Relations between Cairo and Hamas deteriorated after the 2013 ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi by Egypt's then army chief and now President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Ties further worsened after the authorities outlawed Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood movement, of which Hamas is an affiliate.

In March 2014, Egypt banned all Hamas activities on its soil and froze its assets.

## NEWS IN brief

### US drone strike kills 7 militants in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

A US drone attack on a militant compound in a restive Pakistani tribal area yesterday killed at least seven militants, security officials said. The drone strike took place in the Shawal area of lawless North Waziristan tribal district bordering Afghanistan, where the Pakistani military is battling

### Russia, China block UN Libya sanctions

AFP, United Nations

Russia and China on Friday opposed a US-led request to impose sanctions on two Libyans accused of obstructing UN talks on forming a national unity government, diplomats said. Britain, France, Spain and the United States had sought the measures to shore up efforts by UN envoy Bernardino Leon to clinch a political deal before the start

### Turkey braces for tense polls today

AFP, Diyarbakir

Turkey yesterday prepared for its tightest elections in over a decade, with tensions riding high after a bomb attack killed two and wounded dozens at a rally of the main pro-Kurdish party. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) wants to take a large majority in Sunday's legislative elections and change the constitution to give Turkey's charismatic but divisive President Recep Tayyip

### Flash floods kill 16 in SW Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

Flash floods caused by torrential rains in southwest Pakistan killed at least 16 people including 14 women, officials said on Friday. The floodwaters swept away many people in two remote villages of Khuzdar district in Baluchistan, around 370 kilometres south of the

### Mauritius' gets first woman president

AFP, Port Louis

Prominent scientist Ameenah Gurib-Fakim was sworn as president of Mauritius on Friday, becoming the first woman to hold the ceremonial position in the Indian Ocean island nation. Gurib-Fakim, 56, is the first female president of the island, which gained independence from Britain in 1968 and replaced Britain's Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state in 1992. Mauritius is one of the richest -- and least corrupt -- countries in Africa, a middle-income nation of some 1.3 million people with a per capita GDP of just over

## Yemeni rebels fire Scud missile at Saudi Arabia

REUTERS, Dubai/sanaa

Yemen's dominant Houthi group and its army allies fired a Scud missile at Saudi Arabia which the kingdom says it shot down yesterday, in a major escalation of two months of war.

In the first use of the long range ballistic Scud in the conflict, the missile was fired early yesterday morning at the city of Khamees Mushait in the kingdom's southwest and was intercepted by two Patriot missiles, a statement by the Saudi military said.

The area is home to the largest air force base in southern Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, but there are no oil facilities in the vicinity.

Al Masira, the Houthi group's official channel, confirmed the launch and said it targeted the Prince Khaled air base.

An alliance of Gulf Arab nations has been bombing Yemen's Houthi militia and allied army units loyal to powerful ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh since March 26 in an

attempt to restore exiled President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi to power.

The coalition has said a main goal of its war effort is to neutralize the threat that rockets in Yemen pose to Saudi Arabia and its neighbors.

A Saudi spokesman for the coalition said in April that the alliance had succeeded in removing the threat of heavy weapons to the Kingdom and its neighbors, but the air war and border clashes have persisted.

The Sunni Muslim coalition states also fear the Houthis, hailing from a Shia sect in Yemen's far north, will act as a proxy for the influence of their arch-rival, Shia

Iran, in the Arabian Peninsula.

Arab air strikes have pounded arms and missile stores in the capital Sanaa and other military bases in Yemen almost every day, but the firing of the Scud -- an 11-metre ) long ballistic missile with ranges of 300 km and more -- shows the country's supply has not yet been eliminated.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi hands over the wheel of now scrapped INS Vikrant to his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office in Dhaka yesterday. The Indian Navy's first aircraft carrier played a significant role in the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

PHOTO: AFP

## When civilisation destroys

World's last isolated tribes face elimination from modern society

AFP, Washington

Threatened by disease and deforestation, the world's last isolated tribes in the Amazon are on a collision course with modern society like never before, experts say.

Entire cultures of people are the verge of being wiped out in Peru and Brazil, according to a series of papers published this week in the journal Science.

"We are on the threshold of large extinctions of cultures," Francisco Estremadoyro, director of the Lima-based nonprofit ProPurus, was quoted as saying.

"There is no question that this is a historic moment."

While it is difficult to know precisely what is going on inside remote tribes, researchers say dangerous encounters with modern people are on the rise.

And not only because of the risk of violence -- common ailments

like the flu or whooping cough, transmitted accidentally by loggers, news crews, drug traffickers or well-meaning anthropologists, can be even more deadly.

In one case, a fish-bone necklace left by a German researcher decades ago was blamed by villagers along the upper Curanja River for being poisoned. Soon after it was found, a sore throat and fever illness killed around 200 people.

While other regions of the world -- such as the mountains of New Guinea and the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean -- are home to remote tribes of people, "by far the largest numbers are found across the Amazon," said the Science report.

"And it is in Peru that the situation appears most dire," it added, describing what experts believe are 8,000 people scattered in small bands across the rainforest.

The Peruvian government has set

aside three million hectares of protected land, but it may not be enough.

"A surge in sightings and raids in both Peru and Brazil may be a sign that some of the world's last peoples living outside the global economy are emerging," said the report.

The collision of cultures began in 1492 with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas, and has killed an estimated 50 million to 100 million native people, the report said.

But even modern technology and knowledge may not be enough to stop wiping out even more people, mainly due to diseases for which tribespeople have no immunity, as well as the lack of enough forest land for food, medicine and materials.

The isolated tribes "are some of the world's most vulnerable people," said Beatriz Huertas, an anthropologist based in Lima.

## 11 killed in Malaysia quake; 8 missing

AFP, Kundasang

A strong earthquake that jolted Malaysia's Mount Kinabalu killed at least 11 people and left another 8 missing, an official said yesterday, as authorities searched for survivors on Southeast Asia's highest peak.

The 6.0-magnitude quake struck early Friday near the picturesque mountain, a popular tourist destination, sending landslides and huge granite boulders tumbling down from the 4,095-metre peak's wide, craggy crown.

Authorities could not yet confirm the identities of the dead and missing.

Malaysian media reports said they included members of a Singapore primary school group on an excursion to the peak, including a 12-year-old girl who was killed.

## Only Cong can develop West Bengal: Rahul

IANS, West Bengal

Claiming that both the Left Front and the Trinamool Congress have failed the people of West Bengal, Rahul Gandhi yesterday said that only Congress can bring the state back on the path of development.

"Left Front had put brakes on the development of Bengal," Gandhi said, referring to the 34-year rule of CPIM-led Left Front in the state, while speaking to jute mill workers here in Hooghly district, around 25 km from Kolkata.

"Then people thought that Trinamool Congress will come and take the state forward, but after it came to power (in 2011), it put the brakes on development... continuing the deadlock," he said while talking to the workers at Wellington Jute Mill on the banks of River Ganges, which is dotted with jute mills.

During his interaction with the workers, Gandhi assured them that he will raise their problems in parliament.

Urging the people to bring Congress back to power in the state, he said, "Only Congress can release the brakes and take the vehicle of development forward in Bengal."

The Congress, which had been voted out of power way back in 1977, has steadily lost ground first to the Left Front and then to Trinamool Congress.

It received a drubbing in the recent civic elections in the state coming a poor fourth in vote share, behind Trinamool Congress, Left Front, and the BJP.

## QUOTE of the day



"Many conflicts across the planet amount to a kind of third world war being fought and, in the context of global communications, we sense an atmosphere of war"

Pope Francis condemns countries that foster division for political ends or profit from war