



Traffic police personnel stop vehicles at a road checkpoint during the first weekend curfew imposed to curb the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus in Bangalore, India, yesterday. Indian state of Delhi is also under a 55-hour-long weekend curfew which kicked in at 10 pm on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Russians might not leave soon
Blinken warns Kazakhstan; ex-security chief detained

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned that Kazakhstan will find it difficult to lower Russian influence after inviting in troops to quell unrest that killed dozens.

"I think one lesson in recent history is that once Russians are in your house, it's sometimes very difficult to get them to leave," Blinken told reporters.

Kazakhstan invited in the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization to combat rare protests sparked by concern over fuel prices.

"It would seem to me that the Kazakh authorities and government certainly have the capacity to deal appropriately with protests, to do so in a way that respects the rights of protesters while maintaining law and order, so it's not clear why they feel the need for any outside assistance," Blinken said.

He called on foreign troops and Kazakh authorities to "adhere to international human rights standards," hours after President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev thanked Russia for assistance and issued shoot-to-kill orders.

Russia yesterday slammed Blinken as "boorish" for the comments. The detention of Karim Masimov, a former prime minister and longtime ally of Kazakhstan's ex-leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, was the first major move against a top official in the biggest crisis the ex-Soviet Central Asian republic has faced in years.

Tokayev sacked Masimov earlier this week after protests over rising fuel prices erupted into widespread violence, with government buildings in the largest city Almaty stormed and set ablaze. Dozens were killed in the violence with authorities arrested more than 4,000 people.

An AFP correspondent in Almaty said the city was quiet but tense yesterday, with security forces firing warning shots at anyone approaching a central square.

Rumours have swirled of infighting among the Kazakh elite, with speculation that Nazarbayev -- who stepped down in 2019 after decades in power and hand-picked Tokayev as his successor -- had fled the country.



Will not give in to 'non-starter demands'
Says Blinken ahead of US-Russia talks on Ukraine; Nato chief warns of real conflict

AFP, Washington

The United States has said a diplomatic solution was possible with Russia but that it would not give in to its demands in talks next week, as Nato warned of real risks Moscow will invade Ukraine.

Top Russian and US diplomats meet Monday in Geneva after Moscow amassed tens of thousands of troops on the Ukrainian border and urged the West to agree in writing not to expand Nato.

With unusual bluntness, Secretary of State Antony Blinken accused Russia of "gaslighting" the world by alleging provocations by Ukraine and vowed that the talks would focus on Moscow's "aggression toward Ukraine."

"We won't be diverted from that issue," Blinken told reporters on Friday.

Using an analogy he has employed before, Blinken likened Russia to "a fox saying it had to attack the henhouse because its occupants somehow pose a threat."

Blinken said that Russia should know it was issuing "absolutely non-starter demands" but that it was part of its "playbook." Russia can "claim that the other side is not engaging and then to use that as somehow justification for aggressive



action," Blinken said.

Blinken said it was up to Russia whether there will be success in Geneva, where the delegations will be led by his deputy Wendy Sherman and Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov.

"We're prepared to respond forcefully to further Russian aggression. But a diplomatic solution is still possible and preferable if Russia chooses it," he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin denies plans for an invasion of Ukraine, where Moscow in 2014 seized the Crimean peninsula.

"The risk of conflict is real. Russia's aggressive actions seriously undermine the security order in Europe," Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg said after a video meeting of the alliance's foreign ministers.

"The Russian military build-up has not stopped, it continues and they are gradually building up with more forces, more capabilities."

Russia contends that it was falsely promised after the Cold War that Nato would not expand eastward. In draft proposals issued by Russia, Nato would agree not to take in former Soviet republics Ukraine and Georgia or to build bases elsewhere in the former Soviet Union.

After the Geneva talks, Russia on Wednesday will meet with all 30 NATO members -- the first such encounter since July 2019.

INDIA STATE POLLS
Five states to vote from February 10

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian election commission yesterday announced dates for Assembly elections in five states - Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Manipur, Punjab, and Uttarakhand. The five states will vote over seven phases starting February 10, with counting of votes scheduled for March 10.

UP will vote in each of the seven phases.

Punjab, Goa, and Uttarakhand will vote on February 14. Manipur will vote in two phases on February 27 March 3.

To ensure safety, the EC barred physical rallies and meetings till January 15, saying a review will be taken after that since the "ground situation is dynamic".



An activists takes part in a performance with others to protest against the taxation on menstrual hygiene products in Lalitpur near Kathamndu, Nepal, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

PAKISTAN SNOWSTORM
At least 21 die in trapped vehicles

AFP, Islamabad

At least 21 people died in an enormous traffic jam caused by tens of thousands of visitors thronging a Pakistani hill town to see unusually heavy snowfall, authorities said yesterday.

Police reported that at least six people had frozen to death in their cars, while it was not immediately clear if others had died from asphyxiation after inhaling fumes in the snowdrift.

Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid said the military had mobilised to clear roads and rescue thousands still trapped near Murree, around 70 kilometres northeast of the capital, Islamabad.

Video shared on social media showed cars packed bumper-to-bumper, with one-metre-high (three-foot) piles of snow on their roofs.

For days, Pakistan's social media has been full of pictures and video of people playing in the snow around Murree, a picturesque resort town built by the British in the 19th century as a sanatorium for its colonial troops.

The Punjab province chief minister's office said Murree had been declared a "disaster area" and urged people to stay away.

Authorities warned last weekend that too many vehicles were trying to enter Murree, but that failed to discourage hordes of daytrippers from the capital.



Taliban orders women to cover up

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban's religious police have put up posters around the capital Kabul ordering Afghan women to cover up, an official said Friday, the latest in a string of creeping restrictions.

The poster, which includes an image of the face-covering burqa, was slapped on cafes and shops this week by the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.

Since returning to power in August, the Taliban have increasingly curtailed freedoms -- particularly those of women and girls.

"According to Sharia law, Muslim women must wear the hijab," the poster reads, referring to the practice of covering up.

A spokesman for the ministry, responsible for enforcing the Taliban's harsh interpretation of Islamic law, confirmed to AFP on Friday that it was behind the orders.

"If someone does not follow it, it does not mean she will be punished or beaten, it's just encouragement for Muslim women to follow Sharia law," Sadeq Akif Muhajir said.

Mother Teresa charity in India gets back access to foreign funds

AFP, Kolkata

The Indian government renewed permission for late Catholic nun Mother Teresa's charity to receive foreign funds, weeks after rejecting it, the organisation said yesterday.

On Christmas Day the Narendra Modi government moved to cut off foreign funding to the Missionaries of Charity and refused to renew its licence under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA).

Charities and non-profit firms need to register under FCRA to receive money from abroad.

The Missionaries of Charity, which runs shelter homes across India, was founded in 1950 by the late Mother Teresa, a Catholic nun who devoted most of her life to helping the poor in the eastern city of Kolkata. She won the Nobel Peace Prize and was later declared a saint.

India's home ministry issued a statement in December saying it was rejecting the renewal application because the charity did not meet "eligibility conditions" and that "adverse inputs were noticed".



Capt. Yousuf A H Khan
(Retired) Airline Pilot
Biman Bangladesh Airlines
& Ex-Sargodhian 15th Entry

Sabr House Passed Away on 06.01.2022 At 9.27 am At Evercare Hospital. He Was 70 Years Old. His Qulkhani Will Be Held Today 09.01.2022 At New Dohs Mohakhali Mosque Baadh Asar. Mobile : 01313212038



If they build a thick wall and we use our head to hit it, it is useless. Cambodia uses different approaches to achieve the five-point consensus (that was agreed last year by heads of Asean countries to end Myanmar post-coup crisis).

Cambodian Foreign Minister
Prak Sokhonn
denies Prime Minister Hun Sen's trip to Myanmar amounted to backing the junta