INTERNATIONAL



A person holds a sign that reads "Freedom" as people attend a demonstration to protest against a bill that would transform France's current coronavirus disease (Covid-19) health pass into a "vaccine pass", in Paris, France, on Saturday. Similar protests were held in Germany, Austria, Italy. PHOTO: REUTERS

No concessions

Says Russia ahead of talks with US on Ukraine, security

AFP, Geneva

Russia yesterday ruled out any concession at talks with the United States on soaring tensions over Ukraine as Moscow seeks a wide-ranging new security arrangement with the West but faces strong pressure to pull back troops

Russia's deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov told Russian news agencies ahead of his talks in Geneva the Kremlin was also "disappointed" with signals coming from both Washington and Brussels, where Nato and the European Union are based.

The high-level discussions start a week of diplomacy in which Russia will meet with Nato and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), with the US trying to assure European allies they will not be

Russia since late last year has amassed tens of thousands of troops at the Ukrainian border and demanded guarantees that Nato will not expand further eastward. The Kremlin is insisting Nato must never grant membership to ex-Soviet Ukraine, which is pushing to

The United States, to be represented by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, agreed to talks even though it made plain that many of Moscow's proposals

are non-starters. Originally scheduled to start on Monday, Sherman is now due to have a working dinner with Ryabkov in the evening, said a State Department spokesperson.

'We will not agree to any concession. That is completely excluded," Ryabkov said. "We are disappointed with the signals coming in the last few days from Washington but also from Brussels.'

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, dismissing Moscow's demands as "gaslighting", has insisted that talks will yield no progress so long as Russia has a "gun to Ukraine's head"

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

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg, meeting foreign ministers of the alliance on Friday, said there remained real risks of a Russian invasion.

Russia insists it was deceived after the Cold War and understood that Nato would not expand. Instead, the US-led alliance accepted most of the former Warsaw Pact nations and the three Baltic nations that were under

Putin's foreign policy adviser Yury Ushakov warned after the call with Biden that the United States would make a "colossal mistake" if it went ahead with sanctions. ECONOMIC CRISIS IN SRI LANKA

China FM pushes BRI as India watches



AP, Colombo

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was in Sri Lanka vesterday seeking to advance Beiling's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative as the island nation tries to rescue itself from a foreign currency and debt crisis, partly due to infrastructure built with Chinese loans that don't generate revenue.

In Sri Lanka, Wang met with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. Later, Wang and the prime minister were expected to speak at Colombo's Port City, a reclaimed island developed with Chinese investment.

China loaned money to build a seaport and airport in the southern Hambantota district, in addition to a wide network of roads. But the projects have failed to make money. Central Bank figures show that current Chinese loans to Sri Lanka total around \$3.38 billion not including loans to state-owned businesses, which are accounted for separately.

The situation has left households facing severe

shortages. People wait in long lines to buy essential goods like milk powder, cooking gas and kerosene. Prices have increased sharply and the Central Bank says the inflation rate rose to 12.1% by the end of December from 9.9% in November. Food inflation increased to over 22% in the same period.

Wang's visit also has regional significance, as both China and India, Sri Lanka's closest neighbor, vie for influence in the island.

"We can see Sri Lanka being saddled between India and China for a potential bailout package, said political analyst Ranga Kalansooriya. "India is dragging its feet for some time while China is trying to manipulate the situation to the maximum."

India has been wary of China's increased investments and loans in Sri Lanka since a civil war ended in 2009. India considers Sri Lanka part of its territory of influence. China considers Sri Lanka to be a critical link in its Belt and Road global infrastructure initiative.

Kalansooriya said Wang may also be looking to iron out relations with Sri Lanka after they were recently strained over a shipment of fertilizer that allegedly contained harmful bacteria and business agreements that were inked with China's rivals, the United States and India.

But he said that China is unlikely to bail Sri Lanka out of its economic crisis. "They will look for more business opportunities, fishing in the troubled waters of economic doldrums in the country," he said.

Taliban arrest Afghan professor after criticism

A prominent Afghan university professor who openly criticised the Taliban's hardline regime has been arrested in Kabul, a spokesman for the government said. Professor Faizullah Jalal has made several appearances on television talk shows since the previous US-backed government was ousted in August, blaming the Taliban for the worsening financial crisis and criticising them for ruling by force. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted that Jalal had been detained Saturday over statements he made on social media in which he was "trying to instigate people against the system and was playing with the dignity of the people".



Cliff collapse kills seven in Brazil

REUTERS, Brasilia

At least seven people were killed and three were missing after a cliff collapsed onto boats carrying tourists on a lake in Brazil, authorities said Saturday. Rescue teams including a dive squad and members of the Brazilian Navy rushed to Furnas Lake in Minas Gerais state, where panicked tourists had watched helplessly as a large rock fragment broke off a ravine and plunged atop three boats. Another 32 were wounded, including nine who had to be hospitalized, authorities said. Tourists flock to see the rock walls, caverns and waterfalls that surround the green waters of Lake Furnas, formed by the hydroelectric dam of the same name. Very heavy rain has fallen in recent days in southeastern Brazil, making the collapse more likely, according to firefighters.

Nasa fully deploys Webb telescope

AFP, Washington

The most powerful space telescope ever built completed a tricky two-week-long deployment phase Saturday, unfolding its final golden mirror panel, as it readies to study every phase of cosmic history. Engineering teams in the James Webb Space Telescope's control room cheered as confirmation came back that its final wing was deployed and latched into place. Because the telescope was too large to fit into a rocket's nose cone in its operational configuration, it was transported folded up. Webb, the successor to Hubble, blasted off in an Ariane 5 rocket from French Guiana on December 25, and is heading to its orbital point, a million miles from Earth. Though Webb will reach its space destination, known as the second Lagrange point, in a matter of weeks, it still has around another five and a half months of setup to go.



Wang arrived in Sri Lanka on Saturday from the Maldives on the last leg of a multi-city trip that also took him to Eritrea, Kenya and Comoros in Africa.

The visit comes as Sri Lanka faces one of its worst economic crises, with foreign reserves down to around \$1.6 billion, barely enough for a few weeks of imports. It also has foreign debt obligations exceeding \$7 billion in 2022.



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বিশেষ সুবিধা : মফখল এলাকার ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের জন্য আলাদা হোস্টেল ও পরিবহণের ব্যবস্থা রয়েছে।

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প্রফেসর মো. সহিদুল ইসলাম

কর্নেল নুরন্ নবী (অব.), উপদেষ্টা প্রাক্তন অধ্যক্ষ-ফৌজদারহাট ও ঝিনাইদহ ক্যাডেট অধ্যক্ষ (একাডেমিকস) প্রাক্তন অধ্যক্ষ-মির্জাপুর ও বরিশাল কলেজ এবং প্রতিষ্ঠাতা অধ্যক্ষ- রাজউক উত্তরা মডেল কলেজ ও মাইলস্টোন কলেজ। ক্যাডেট কলেজ

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ফোন: ৫৮৯৫৭৭৩৩, ৪৮৯৬৩৪৩৭। মোবাইল: ০১৭৭১৫৮১৬৫০, ০১৯১৩৮৪৩১৫৯, ০১৮১৫০৫৯৪০১, ०३७२२३८७७०, ०३৯२१४८७, ०३९३४२३७४४४, ०३७१७७५५२२, ०३४५४०७५७७४ ।



Russia's deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov ahead of talks with US

from Washington

but also from

Brussels.



Motorists make their way through a partially deserted road after a weekend lockdown was imposed by the state government as a preventive measure against the spread of the coronavirus in Chennai, yesterday. India yesterday reported 1,59,632 new coronavirus cases. The country has reported 3,623 cases of Omicron variant across 27 states and union territories so far.