



First responders work at a site of fuel storage facilities hit by cruise missiles in Lviv, in western Ukraine, yesterday. Russia hit a fuel depot being used by Ukrainian forces and used cruise missiles to strike a plant in the city being used to repair anti-aircraft systems, radar stations and sights for tanks, the ministry said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Israel will do anything we believe is needed to stop the Iranian nuclear program. Anything. From our point of view, the Iranian threat is not theoretical. The Iranians want to destroy Israel. They will not succeed. We will not let them.

Israel Foreign Minister Yair Lapid during talks with US top diplomat Anthony Blinken

‘Regime change’ not goal

Blinken stresses after Biden says ‘butcher’ Putin can’t stay in power; Macron fears ‘escalation’ in war

AGENCIES

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday said President Vladimir Putin’s position is “up to the Russians”, playing down President Joe Biden’s comments that suggested a desire for regime change in Moscow.

Biden’s point, Blinken said in Jerusalem, was that “Putin cannot be empowered to wage war, or engage in aggression against Ukraine, or anyone else”.

Speaking in Warsaw on Saturday, Biden sparked controversy when he called the Russian leader a “butcher” and added: “For God’s sake, this man cannot remain in power.”

That raised questions of whether the United States was advocating non-democratic “regime change” in Russia.

The White House later scrambled to deny he was seeking “regime change” in Moscow, while the Kremlin said Biden’s words could harm bilateral relations.

“As you’ve heard us say repeatedly, we do not have a strategy of regime change in Russia or anywhere else for that matter,” said Blinken.

“As in any case, it’s up to the people of the country in question. It’s up to the Russians,” he

said.

Meanwhile the comment also drew attention of French President Emmanuel Macron.

He yesterday warned against verbal “escalation” with Moscow, after Biden called the Russian leader a “butcher”.

Macron told broadcaster France 3 that he saw his task as “achieving first a ceasefire and then the total withdrawal of (Russian) troops by diplomatic means.”

“If we want to do that, we can’t escalate either in words or actions.”

Paris has kept diplomatic channels to Moscow open throughout Russia’s military buildup on Ukraine’s borders and invasion of its neighbour.

The stance has been criticised by some other leaders and commentators but defended by Macron as

vital to limiting damage from the war.

He nevertheless accused Putin of wanting to return to “a Europe of empires, of domination, without respect for the integrity of borders and nations’ right to decide for themselves”.

Macron said that he would call Putin within a day or two to discuss a proposal from France, Greece and Turkey to evacuate Ukrainians from besieged port city Mariupol.

Sanctions should only come off with a full ceasefire and withdrawal, but also commitments that there will be no further aggression.

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss

Nearly 50pc Ukrainians ready to take up arms: poll

AFP

Nearly half of Ukrainians aged 18-55 are ready to fight to defend their country against Russia, a poll conducted by a Norwegian research centre suggested on Saturday.

Around 70 percent of men and 30 percent of women said they were willing to take up arms, according to the survey carried out by the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (Prio) with the help of local pollsters Info Sapiens.

Surveyed March 9-12, during the third week of the conflict, the respondents answered online questions about their attitudes to four types of resistance.

When presented with the statement, “If the war continues, I will help the resistance by joining direct military combat in open battles against the Russian or pro-Russian forces”, 49 percent responded positively.

Air strikes hit Yemen rebels despite truce

AFP, Riyadh

The Saudi-led coalition yesterday launched air strikes on Yemen hours after Huthi rebels announced a three-day truce, with the UN chief condemning a surge in violence as the war enters its eighth year. The raids targeted Sanaa, the rebel-held capital, according to Saudi Arabia’s Al Ekhbariya TV, which tweeted “the start of air strikes on Huthi camps and strongholds in Sanaa” around midnight. The attacks began shortly after the Iran-backed Huthis announced a three-day truce and offered peace talks on condition that the Saudis stop their air strikes and blockade of Yemen and remove “foreign forces”. Just a day earlier, the rebels had fired drones and missiles at 16 targets in Saudi Arabia, turning an oil plant near Jeddah’s Formula One track into a raging inferno as aghast drivers looked on. The flurry of attacks and diplomacy came as Yemen, the Arab world’s poorest country, on Saturday marked seven years since the Saudi-led intervention against the Huthis, who seized Sanaa in 2014.

CHINA EASTERN PLANE CRASH 2nd black box found

AFP, Beijing

The second black box has been recovered from last week’s deadly China Eastern plane crash, officials said yesterday, and could help solve the mystery of the jet’s breakneck descent. The Boeing 737-800 was flying between the cities of Kunming and Guangzhou on Monday when it nosedived into a mountainside, disintegrating on impact and killing all 132 people on board. The cause of the disaster, China’s deadliest plane crash in more than 30 years, is not yet known. Tracking website FlightRadar24 showed the jet sharply dropped from an altitude of 29,100 to 7,850 feet in just over a minute. After a brief upswing, it dropped again to 3,225 feet.

Ex-colonies must decide monarchy’s role: Prince William

AFP, London

Prince William ended a turbulent tour of the Caribbean by starkly admitting this weekend that the region’s former British colonies must decide whether to scrap the monarchy’s role in their countries. The 39-year-old Duke of Cambridge also hinted that a British royal may in future no



longer head the club of 54 Commonwealth countries as the political association of ex-colonies evolves. The unusually candid comments, which were splashed on the front of several British newspapers yesterday, followed a rocky three-country Caribbean tour over the last week which drew both protests and criticism. William and his wife Catherine, 40, faced calls to apologise for the slave trade that helped make past British royals’ fortunes, and accusations of appearing “tone deaf” over elements of the visit.



Villagers and relatives mourn during the funeral of a slain policemen and his brother at Chattabugh village of central Kashmir’s Budgam district near Srinagar yesterday, a day after suspected militants reportedly shot the policeman and his brother.

PHOTO: AFP

‘Nothing happens’ when ME suffers

Qatar, Saudi, amid Ukraine crisis, decry lack of attention to region

AFP, Doha

Saudi Arabia and Qatar have expressed regret at a lack of attention to Middle East conflicts, as the West pushes them to show more solidarity with Ukraine.

“The humanitarian suffering that we have seen in Ukraine, and everyone is talking about it right now... has been the suffering of a lot of countries in this region for years and nothing happened,” Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani told a roundtable at the annual Doha Forum.

“We have never seen a global response to address those sufferings,” he added, evoking “the brutality against the Syrian people, or against the Palestinians or against the Libyans or against the Iraqis, or against the Afghans”.

Neither oil kingpin Saudi Arabia nor gas-rich Qatar, both close to the West but with ties to Russia, have taken a strong position for or against Moscow since it invaded Ukraine last month.

The Qatari diplomat expressed hope that the Ukraine conflict would serve as “a wake-up call for everyone in the international community, to look at our region and to address the issues... with the same level of commitment that we have seen between Russia and Ukraine”.

Hundreds of thousands of people in Yemen have been killed, directly or indirectly, and millions have been displaced as a result of its years-long conflict, in what the UN calls the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

The war in Syria is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions more since it began with a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests in 2011.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan appeared to support the Qatari position.

“The engagement of the global community... now and then, it’s quite different,” he said at the forum.

“The trans-Atlantic unity right now, it’s commendable. But I think you have to have a much better conversation with the rest of the global community,” he said, addressing US and European officials at his side.

TWO MORE PROMISES FULFILLED

6 MONTHS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

SPRING BLOSSOM

Aftabnagar

AFNAAN

Lalmatia

16604

www.btibd.com