

We must not humiliate Russia

Urges Macron, says Putin making 'historic mistake'

REUTERS, Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron said it is vital that Russia is not humiliated so that when the fighting stops in Ukraine a diplomatic solution can be found, adding that he believed Paris would play a mediating role to end the conflict.

Macron has sought to maintain a dialogue with Russian President Vladimir Putin since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February. His stance has been repeatedly criticised by some eastern and Baltic partners in Europe, as they see it as undermining efforts to pressure Putin to the negotiating table.

"We must not humiliate Russia so that the day when the fighting stops we can build an exit ramp through diplomatic means," Macron said in an interview to regional newspapers published on Saturday. "I am convinced that it is France's role to be a mediating power."

Macron has spoken with Putin regularly since the invasion as part of efforts to achieve a ceasefire and begin a credible negotiation between Kyiv and Moscow.

"I think, and I told him, that he is making a historic and fundamental mistake for his people, for himself and for history," Macron said.

France has supported Ukraine militarily and financially, but until now Macron has not been to Kyiv to offer symbolic political support like other EU leaders, something Ukraine has wanted him to do. Macron said he had not ruled out going.

Paris sends offensive weapons including Caesar howitzer canon taken from French army stocks.



Pro-democracy activists take part in a vigil outside a train station in Shinjuku district of Tokyo yesterday, to mark the 33rd anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in Beijing.

PHOTO: AFP

MYANMAR CRISIS

Junta troops 'burnt down hundreds of houses'

AFP, Bangkok

Myanmar junta troops have torched hundreds of buildings during a three-day raid in the country's north, local media and residents said, as the military struggles to crush resistance to its rule.

The Sagaing region has seen fierce fighting and bloody reprisals since the coup last year, with local "People's Defence Force" (PDF) members clashing regularly with junta troops.

Troops torched hundreds of buildings in the villages of Kinn, Upper Kinn and Ke Taung over three days last week, locals and media reports said.

On May 26, villagers in Kinn fled as soldiers approached and began shooting into the air, said one resident who requested anonymity.

"The next morning we saw smoke rising from our village before they left."

"Over 200 houses were burned down... my house was totally burned down, only the concrete foundation is left."

Drone footage purporting to show the aftermath obtained by AFP showed columns of smoke rising into the sky from the villages, set along a roughly eight-kilometre stretch of the Chindwin river.

TIANANMEN ANNIVERSARY

Hong Kong drives memories underground

China protests as US says victims won't be forgotten



AGENCIES

Hong Kong authorities yesterday detained multiple people as they pounced on any attempt at public commemoration of the 33rd anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown, as China vies to remove all reminders of the deadly event.

On June 4, 1989, Beijing sent troops and tanks to break up peaceful protests, crushing demonstrations calling for political change and curbs on official corruption.

Hundreds, by some estimates more than 1,000, were killed in the crackdown.

Discussion of what happened is all but forbidden on the mainland.

Semi-autonomous Hong Kong had been the one place in China where large-scale remembrance was still tolerated — until two years ago when Beijing imposed a national security law to snuff out dissent after huge pro-democracy protests in 2019.

AFP reporters saw at least half a dozen people being taken away by police yesterday, the majority in the evening. Authorities had warned that "participating in an unauthorised assembly"

risked the maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment.

They also closed large parts of Victoria Park, once the site of packed annual candlelight vigils.

China has gone to exhaustive lengths to erase the crackdown from collective memory, omitting it from history textbooks and scrubbing references to it from the Chinese internet and social media platforms.

Multiple Western Consulates General in Hong Kong yesterday posted Tiananmen tributes on social media, despite local media reports that they had been warned by the city's Chinese foreign ministry office to refrain from doing so.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday released a statement terming the crackdown "a brutal assault".

"The efforts of these brave individuals will not be forgotten. Each year, we honour and remember those who stood up for human rights and fundamental freedoms," he added.

A spokesperson for the city's Chinese foreign ministry office said it "firmly rejected and strongly condemned" Blinken and other US officials' statements.

Saudi receives first foreign hajj pilgrims since pandemic

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia yesterday welcomed its first batch of hajj pilgrims since before the coronavirus pandemic, which prompted authorities to sharply restrict the annual ritual.

The group from Indonesia landed in the city of Medina and was set to travel south to the holy city of Makkah in the coming weeks to prepare for the hajj next month, state media reported.

"Today we received the first group of this year's pilgrims from Indonesia, and the flights will continue from Malaysia and India," Mohammed al-Bijawi of the country's Hajj Ministry told the state-run Al-Ekhabriya channel.

"Today we are happy to receive the guests of God from outside the kingdom, after a two-year interruption due to the pandemic," he added, describing Saudi Arabia as "fully prepared" to accommodate them.

Usually one of the world's largest religious gatherings, about 2.5 million people participated in 2019. But after the onset of the pandemic in 2020, Saudi authorities announced they would only let 1,000 pilgrims take part. The following year, they increased the total to 60,000 fully vaccinated Saudi citizens and residents chosen through a lottery.

Blast at India chemical factory kills at least 10

REUTERS, Lucknow

At least ten people were killed and 22 injured in an explosion at a chemical factory in northern India's Hapur district yesterday, a police official said. The accident happened after a boiler burst at an industrial facility in Dhaulana, around 60 kilometres from New Delhi, police spokesman Surendra Singh told Reuters. "Rescue operations are underway," Singh said, adding that the death toll could go up because of a number of people were severely injured. Industrial accidents are common in India and often blamed on people flouting safety norms, as well as lax inspection by government officials.

Floods kill at least three in Cuba

AFP, Havana

Heavy rains from the remnants of Hurricane Agatha flooded much of western Cuba on Friday, killing at least three people in Havana. Thousands of residents in the region lost power

and a man in Pinar del Rio province also was missing, Cuban officials said. A 44-year-old man, initially thought missing, was found dead Friday evening in the western province of Pinar del Rio after falling into a stream, according to local news site

CubaDebate. They also reported the disappearance of another person in the region. Agatha had crashed into southern Mexico with the potential to redevelop as a tropical storm in the Atlantic, the Miami-based US National Hurricane Center had said.



Sexual

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engaged in a heated argument with the men. Boni later went to a restaurant where Arif along with several other men attacked him with sharp weapons.

Local later rescued him and took him to the hospital, said the officer.

The prime suspect Arif was previously accused in two murder cases, said Sazzadul, adding that police were looking for him.

Boni, a resident of the Multinagar area of the town, was an avid cyclist and runner. He was the general secretary of an association called Bogura Cyclists (BgC).

He was also a member of an environmental organisation called BD Clean.

His father Anisur Rahman filed a case accusing Ariful Islam, 28, Sohan, 26, and 3-4 others, said Selim Reza, officer-in-charge of Bogura Sadar Police Station.

US can indeed raise

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"We urge strengthening the democratic processes, political institutions, the rule of law, protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms, workers' rights and safety, and the protection of refugees as well."

He pointed out that the US provided more than \$8 billion in assistance to Bangladesh since its independence.

In 2021 alone, USAID provided over \$300 million to improve the lives of the Bangladeshis, promote democracy and good

Focus shifts to war

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The government though will be keeping a block allocation of Tk 5,000 crore, as in this year, to provide assistance to the poor to soften the blow of inflation arising out of the Russia-Ukraine war on them.

The amount might be disbursed in cash or in kind, the finance ministry official added.

Inflation is having an outsize impact on the poor,

governance, and protect the environment.

The journalist asked for his comments on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent remarks on "dropping" former premier Khaleda Zia and Nobel Laureate Prof Mohammad Yunus in the river from the Padma Bridge.

Hasina had also claimed Yunus influenced the US to stop the World Bank from funding the bridge construction.

The journalist then sought Price's comments on law enforcers attacking

said Zaid Bakht, a former research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

"For the low-income people, the cost of living is a very stressful situation. The government should help them as much as possible. And Tk 5,000 crore is not enough to help the poor."

But having an allocation to safeguard the poor from inflationary shocks is a step in the right direction, said

peaceful demonstrations.

Price said the freedom of assembly, expression, the right of individuals everywhere to protest peacefully is universal. These rights and freedoms apply equally to the people of Bangladesh as it does to those anywhere around the world. "We call on governments around the world, we call on security services, security forces, and civil forces as well to respect that right, to allow for individuals to assemble peacefully to make their voices heard."

Bakht, who is currently the chairman of Agrani Bank.

Keeping a separate allocation for vaccine procurement is not too necessary.

"After giving the booster dose to one crore people, it seems that the risk factors will be diluted and the necessity of the vaccination will be decreased also. But we need a backup plan and keep an eye on the new covid variants," he added.

Prices drop in global markets, not at home

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Speaking to The Daily Star, Mohiuddin, owner of Shah Amanat Traders of Khatunganj wholesale market, said, "Loose palm oil is being sold at around Tk 6,500 and loose soybean oil at around Tk 7100 per maund [40.9 litres] in wholesale markets."

He said the prices need to be adjusted in the domestic market in line with those in the international one.

According to Market Insider, a facts and statistics data portal, palm oil was sold at 7,757 Malaysian Ringgit (MR) per tonne in the international market on April 27. It was sold at 6,754 MR per tonne on June 3 — a drop of MR 1,003 per tonne.

The decrease in palm oil prices occurred when Indonesia, the world's top palm oil producer, lifted its oil export ban on May 23.

Prices of crude soybean oil declined from \$1,880 per tonne on April 27 to \$1,790 on June 3.

Rafiqul Alam, a private

job holder who lives in the capital's Mirpur, said that when the price of soybean oil went up, traders said it will go down (in the domestic market) if it decreases in the international market.

"It has now gone down in the global market. Yet, businesspeople are saying it not possible for them to reduce prices at the moment. Why? Who will answer this question?"

He added that while the prices of essentials are increasing every week, people's incomes are not. "It is a difficult time for those in the lower-income bracket."

Meanwhile, Rafiqul Islam, owner of Bismillah Store in the port city's Hamzarbagh Kitchen Market, said, "We have to sell cooking oil at the previous rate as we bought them [the stocks of oil] a week ago."

On Thursday, the commerce minister said, "Like the international market, prices will drop

in the local markets too. We will take a decision [in this regard] soon after reviewing the import data of May in around a week."

Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager of Meghna Group of Industries, said the oil purchased two months ago are now coming into the country.

He said, "If you purchase now, the product will come to the country in August. The prices may be reduced only by then."

Shafiqul Ather Taslim, director of TK Group's finance and operations' wing, said, "Considering the overall situation, we sent a letter to the commerce ministry and the tariff commission last Wednesday, saying that the prices need to be adjusted in 15 days."

SM Nazer Hossain, vice-president of Consumer Association of Bangladesh, said that although there is a law, the prices decrease and increase according to the

businessmen's will.

He said prices in the international market have come down but not at the retail level in Bangladesh due to the government's dependency on traders.

"When prices in the international market go up, they automatically rise in the retail market even before the government can adjust them. But when they go down [in the international market], it takes long for them to come down [in the country's retail market]."

According to the National Board of Revenue, six refiners imported more than 15.11 lakh tonnes of palm oil and soybean oil worth Tk 18,182 crore in five months till May this year through the Chattogram and Mongla ports.

Some 78,557 tonnes of palm oil worth Tk 1,116.65 crore (with 5 percent import tax) and 57,557 tonnes of soybean oil worth Tk 957.29 crore were imported last May, according to the NBR data.