

Turkey to pay
for some Russia
gas in rubles:
Erdogan

AFP, Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has confirmed that Turkey will start paying for some of its Russian natural gas imports in rubles.

The announcement was initially made by Moscow late Friday after more than four hours of talks between Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi.

The United States is leading international efforts to impose economic sanctions on Russia in response to its February invasion of Ukraine.

But Nato member Turkey has tried to remain neutral in the conflict because of its heavy dependence on Russian energy.

Russia accounted for about a quarter of Turkey's oil imports and 45 percent of its natural gas purchases last year.

"As Turkey, our door is open to everyone," Erdogan was quoted yesterday as telling Turkish reporters on his flight home from Sochi. "One good thing about this Sochi visit is that we agreed on the ruble with Mr. Putin," Erdogan said.

"Since we will conduct this trade in rubles, it will of course bring money to Turkey and Russia."



ESCALATION OF
VIOLENCE IN GAZA

(From top right, anti-clockwise) Children react following an Israeli air strike in Gaza City; a fireball erupts as a result of an Israeli air strike on a building in Gaza City; Palestinian rockets fired from Gaza City towards Israel are seen in this photo in retaliation to Israeli air strikes; and Palestinian children receive treatment at al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City following the air strikes. Israel hit Gaza with air strikes and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group retaliated with a barrage of rocket fire, in the territory's worst escalation of violence since a war last year.

PHOTO: AFP



MILITARY DRILLS IN TAIWAN STRAIT

Taipei accuses Beijing of
simulating invasion

China calls on US to 'rectify mistakes' amid rising tensions

AGENCIES

Taiwan officials said Chinese aircraft and warships rehearsed an attack on the island yesterday, part of Beijing's retaliation for a visit there by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that has also seen it halt talks with the United States on issues including defence and climate change.

Pelosi's brief visit this week to the self-ruled island that China regards as its territory infuriated Beijing and prompted military drills that are unprecedented in scale around Taiwan and have included ballistic missiles fired over the capital, Taipei. Taiwan's defence ministry said multiple Chinese ships and planes conducted missions in the Taiwan Strait yesterday, with some crossing the median line, an unofficial buffer separating the two sides, in what the Taiwan military described as a simulation attack on the island.

"They were judged to be conducting a simulation of an attack on Taiwan's main island," it said.

The ministry said later that Taiwan scrambled jets to warn away 20 Chinese aircraft, including 14 that crossed the median line. It also detected 14 Chinese military ships conducting activities around the Taiwan Strait, the ministry said in a statement.

China's Eastern Theater Command said it had continued to conduct sea and air joint exercises north, southwest and east

of Taiwan. It said its focus was on testing the system's land strike and sea assault capabilities.

The Chinese exercises - centred on six locations around the island - began on Thursday and are scheduled to last until midday on Sunday.



Beijing says its relations with Taiwan are an internal matter and that it reserves the right to bring the island under its control, by force if necessary. Taiwan rejects China's claims saying only Taiwan's people can decide their future.

Pelosi arrived in Taiwan late on Tuesday in the highest-level visit to the island by a US official in decades, despite Chinese warnings.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, meeting with his Philippine counterpart yesterday, said Washington was "determined to act responsibly" to avoid a major global crisis.

The environment became the latest victim

of the geopolitical jousting a day earlier, as Beijing said it would withdraw from a series of talks and cooperation agreements with Washington -- most notably on climate change and defence cooperation.

China should not hold talks on issues of global concern such as climate change "hostage", Blinken said, as it "doesn't punish the US, it punishes the world".

China's foreign minister Wang Yi told a media briefing on Friday that Blinken was spreading "misinformation", adding: "We wish to issue a warning to the United States: Do not act rashly, do not create a greater crisis".

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned the two superpowers must continue to work together -- for the world's sake. "For the secretary-general, there is no way to solve the most pressing problems of all the world without an effective dialogue and cooperation between the two countries," his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

With tensions over Taiwan having risen to their highest level in nearly 30 years with an elevated risk of military conflict, experts told AFP the latest downturn in relations between the two superpowers could be long-lasting.

The suspension Friday of bilateral military and maritime dialogue while China continues its military exercises was "particularly worrisome", said Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the German Marshall Fund.

INDIAN PRESSURE

Lanka seeks
to delay visit
of China ship

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has asked China to indefinitely delay a visit by a ship reported by Indian media to be a spy vessel, following intense pressure by the island's northern neighbour, official sources said yesterday.

In a written request, the Sri Lanka foreign ministry told the Chinese embassy in Colombo not to go ahead with the visit, an official involved in the process told AFP yesterday.

"The ministry wishes to request that the arrival date of the vessel Yuan Wang 5 in Hambantota to be deferred until further consultations are made on this matter," the request says.

The Yuan Wang 5 is en route from the Chinese port of Jiangyin and due in the Chinese-run Sri Lankan port of Hambantota on Thursday, according to analytics website MarineTraffic.

It is described as a research and survey vessel, but according to Indian broadcaster CNN-News18 is a dual-use spy ship, employed for space and satellite tracking and with specific usage in intercontinental ballistic missile launches.

Earlier this week, Colombo appeared to brush aside Indian concerns, saying the vessel was coming only to refuel and replenish supplies and would not undertake any work in Sri Lankan waters.

'Worst destroyer
of int'l peace'

N Korea slams Pelosi over DMZ visit

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday slammed US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi over her recent visit to the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone, calling her the "worst destroyer of international peace". Pelosi, who visited Seoul earlier this week following a trip to Taiwan, became the highest-ranking US official to visit the Joint Security Area (JSA) between the two Koreas since then-president Donald Trump met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un there in 2019. Pelosi's Taiwan visit, meanwhile, drew threats and massive military drills from China, a key ally of North Korea. "Pelosi, the worst destroyer of international peace and stability... incurred the wrath of the Chinese people for her recent junket to Taiwan," the North Korean foreign ministry said in the statement. "The US will have to pay dearly for all the sources of trouble spawned by her wherever she went."

Blast hits Kabul

REUTERS, Kabul

Many people were feared injured after a bomb blast hit Afghanistan's capital Kabul yesterday, witnesses said. The blast hit a busy shopping street in the western part of the city where members of the Shia Muslim community regularly meet. No militant group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, which came ahead of Ashura, a commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which is marked mainly by Shia Muslims. On Friday, at least eight people were killed and 18 injured in a blast in Kabul carried out by the Islamic State militant group.

Not even Superman can
solve Myanmar crisis

Says Asean envoy as lack of progress frustrates bloc

AFP, Phnom Penh

A regional envoy tasked with brokering peace in Myanmar yesterday admitted that "even Superman cannot solve" the crisis, capping a week of foreign ministerial meetings that ultimately yielded little progress.

Myanmar has spiralled into civil war since a putsch in February last year, with the death toll from the military's brutal crackdown on dissent passing 2,100, according to a local monitoring group.

The 10 country Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) has spearheaded so far fruitless efforts to resolve the turmoil, and acknowledged in a joint statement on Friday the lack of progress around a five-point crisis resolution plan.

Asean special envoy Prak Sokhonn, who has made two trips to Myanmar since the coup, dampened expectations for major progress in the short term.

"I am just a special envoy, I am not a superman," he told reporters in Phnom Penh Saturday. "I think that even Superman cannot solve the Myanmar problem."

Anger is growing within Asean over Myanmar generals' stonewalling of the peace plan, particularly after the execution last month of four prisoners -- including two prominent pro-democracy figures.

The plan, agreed in April last year, calls for an immediate end to violence and dialogue between the military and the anti-coup movement.

"Negotiation takes years, like the issue in Myanmar. After two visits of the special envoy, two visits only, some people start to lose patience and ask for results," said Prak Sokhonn, who is also Cambodia's foreign minister.

He flagged a possible third trip to Myanmar in early September -- contingent upon progress on the five-point plan.

"Especially if -- and I say it clearly, publicly -- if more executions are conducted, then things would have to be reconsidered," he said.

His remarks built on Friday's joint statement, which emphasised the need for some concrete action from the junta ahead of the Asean leaders' summit in November.



For the secretary-general there is no way to solve the most pressing problems of all the world without an effective dialogue and cooperation between the two countries (US and China).

UN chief Antonio Guterres as US-China ties nosedive over Taiwan



People release paper lanterns on the Motoyasu River beside the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall, commonly known as the atomic bomb dome, to mark the 77th anniversary of the world's first atomic bomb attack in Hiroshima, Japan, yesterday. Around 140,000 people died when Hiroshima was bombed by the United States on August 6, 1945.

PHOTO: AFP