



Ukrainian artist Varvara Logvyn paints traditional Ukrainian decorative patterns (Petrykivka style) on an anti-tank construction at Independence Square in Kyiv yesterday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The artist intends to collect money to help Ukrainian forces.

PHOTO: AFP

## RUSHDIE STABBING

### Iran denies link with attacker

Author's condition improving

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday denied any link with the attacker of British author Salman Rushdie but blamed the writer himself for "insulting" Islam in the novel "The Satanic Verses".

"We categorically deny" any link with the attack and "no one has the right to accuse the Islamic Republic of Iran," said foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani in Tehran's first official reaction to Friday's stabbing.

"In this attack, we do not consider anyone other than Salman Rushdie and his supporters worthy of blame and even condemnation," he said at his weekly press conference in Tehran.

Rushdie's condition, while still serious, has since Friday's attack at a literary event in western New York state shown clear signs of improvement and he no longer requires assisted breathing.

"He's off the ventilator, so the road to recovery has begun," his agent Andrew Wylie said in a statement on Sunday.

"It will be long; the injuries are severe, but his condition is headed in the right direction."

## China stages fresh drills around Taiwan

Slams a new visit by US lawmakers to the island; Taipei vows to face the latest drills 'calmly and seriously'

AFP, Beijing

China staged fresh military drills around Taiwan yesterday, slamming a new visit by United States lawmakers to the island days after a similar trip by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi triggered a furious response from Beijing.

The unannounced two-day trip by senior members of Congress prompted China to renew its rhetoric that it would "prepare for war" over Taiwan, a self-ruled democracy that Beijing's leaders claim and have vowed to one day seize.

The five-member congressional delegation -- led by Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts -- met with President Tsai Ing-wen yesterday, according to Washington's de facto embassy in Taipei.

"The delegation had an opportunity to exchange views with Taiwan counterparts on a wide range of issues of importance to both the United States and Taiwan," it said.

Tsai told the lawmakers she wants "to maintain a stable status quo across the Taiwan Strait" and "jointly maintain the prosperity and stability of the Indo-Pacific region", her office said in a statement.

She said Russia's invasion of Ukraine demonstrated "the threat that authoritarian states pose to the world order", according to her office, and also thanked Washington for its support in the face of Chinese military threats.

The bipartisan trip sparked another bellicose response from Beijing, which said it had carried out a fresh round of "combat readiness patrol and combat drills in the sea and airspace around Taiwan island" yesterday.

"The Chinese People's Liberation Army continues to train and prepare for war, resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and resolutely crush any form of 'Taiwan independence' separatism and foreign interference attempts," Wu Qian, a spokesman for China's defense ministry, said.

"We warn the US and the DPP authorities: 'Using Taiwan to contain China' is doomed to failure," he added, referring to Taiwan's ruling Democratic



Progressive Party.

In a defiant response, Taiwan's defence ministry vowed to face the latest drills "calmly and seriously and defend national security".

"Apart from expressing condemnation (of China's drills), the Ministry of National Defence will comprehensively grasp the movements in the sea and airspace around the Taiwan Strait," the ministry said.

It added that its forces had detected 30 Chinese planes and five ships operating around the strait yesterday. Of those, 15 planes crossed the median line -- an unofficial demarcation that Beijing does not recognise.

Yesterday's drills followed days of huge exercises around Taiwan in the wake of Pelosi's visit, which saw Beijing send warships, missiles and jets into the waters and skies near the island.

Taipei condemned those drills and missile tests as preparation for an invasion.

China's Communist Party has never ruled Taiwan but says it will use force if necessary to take the island and bristles at any perceived treatment of it as a sovereign nation state.

That decades-old threat was reiterated in a white paper published last week, when China's Taiwan Affairs Office said it would "not renounce the use of force" against its neighbour and reserved "the option of taking all necessary measures".

## Nepotism big challenge

Says Modi in Independence Day speech, calls for a developed India by 2047

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

As India marked 75 years of its independence from more than two centuries of British rule, Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday flagged corruption and nepotism among the biggest two challenges today saying graft is eating into the country like termites.

In his customary address to the nation from the ramparts of the landmark Red Fort in Delhi, he set a goal of turning India into a developed nation in the next 25 years and called for an end to insult to women for faster development.

"Corruption is eating up my country like termites. And nepotism is snatching opportunities from all...even dynastic politics-let's pledge to rid India of this," Modi said.

"From here, today, I want to discuss two things - corruption and dynasticism. We have to weed out corruption. We are making efforts to seize properties of people who have fled the country. I request you all to help me fight corruption," he said.

The PM said "the second issue - bhaitijawad, pariwarwad - is not just limited

to politics. We need to discourage this in institutions, in sports. We need to start a revolution against it. This is our social responsibility. We need transparency."

His remarks about corruption came in the midst of interrogation of a number of leading opposition politicians, including Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, in connection with money laundering cases and arrest of Partha Chatterjee (former TMC leader for alleged money laundering) and Anubrata Mandal (for alleged involvement in cattle smuggling).

A highlight of Modi's nearly 90-minute speech was his special emphasis on the dignity of woman power.

"A distortion has crept in our conduct and we at times insult women. Can we take a pledge to get rid of this in our behaviour?" Modi said.

Respect for women is important pillar for India's growth, the PM said, adding that we need to support our women's power.

Calling for celebration of India's unity in diversity, Modi said "at home too, the roots of unity are sowed when the son and the daughter are equal...Gender equality is a crucial parameter of unity."



## Russia, North Korea will expand ties

Says Putin in letter to Kim Jong Un

REUTERS, Seoul

Russian President Vladimir Putin told North Korean leader Kim Jong Un the two countries will "expand the comprehensive and constructive bilateral relations with common efforts," Pyongyang's state media reported yesterday.

In a letter to Kim for Korea's liberation day, Putin said closer ties would be in both countries' interests, and would help strengthen the security and stability of the Korean peninsula and the Northeastern Asian region, North Korea's KCNA news agency said.

Kim also sent a letter to Putin saying Russian-North Korean friendship had been forged in World War II with victory over Japan, which had occupied the Korean peninsula.

The "strategic and tactical cooperation, support and solidarity" between the two countries has since reached a new level is their common efforts to frustrate threats and provocations from hostile military forces, Kim said in the letter. KCNA did not identify the hostile forces, but it has typically used that term to refer to the United States and its allies.

## EAST JERUSALEM RAID

### Israeli forces kill Palestinian

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli security forces shot dead a Palestinian man they said had tried to stab officers during a home raid to locate weapons in east Jerusalem early yesterday. "A suspect who tried to stab our fighters was neutralised," police said, adding that the man, identified by Palestinians as Mohammed al-Shaham, 21, had died in an Israeli military hospital. The man's father, Ibrahim al-Shaham, told AFP that his son was shot in the head at point-blank range and was left bleeding for 40 minutes. According to Shaham, police knocked on their door at 3:30 am and "we didn't manage to make it to the door, Mohammed got there first, and the door exploded".

## Australia's ex-PM held 'secret roles'

REUTERS, Sydney

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has sought legal advice following reports that his predecessor Scott Morrison secretly held key ministerial roles during the Covid-19 pandemic, duplicating some portfolios. Ministers are traditionally sworn in at a ceremony by the governor-general but that did not happen in the case of the additional roles, and Albanese said it was unprecedented that key cabinet members were not aware of the appointments. "This was a centralisation of power by the former Prime Minister," Albanese, who has sought advice from the solicitor general, Australia's second law officer, told reporters yesterday. "This isn't some, you know, local footy club," he added.



## A YEAR OF TALIBAN RULE

### Afghanistan security still a pressing concern

REUTERS, Kabul

The Taliban marked a year in power yesterday with small-scale celebrations by the group's fighters as Afghanistan struggles with rising poverty, drought, malnutrition and fading hope among women that they will have a decisive role in the country's future.

Some people fired celebratory gunshots in the air in Kabul and Taliban fighters gathered, waving the group's black and white flag to mark a year since they marched into the capital after a stunning series of battlefield victories.

"This day is the day of the victory of truth over falsehood and the day of salvation and freedom of the Afghan nation," said Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid in a statement.

The country is safer than it was when the hardline Islamist movement was fighting against US-led foreign forces and their Afghan allies, although a local offshoot of Islamic State has carried out several attacks.

Yet that relative security cannot mask the scale of the challenge the Taliban face in setting Afghanistan on a path of economic

growth and stability. There are huge pressures on the economy, caused in large part by the country's isolation as foreign governments refuse to recognise its rulers.

Development aid upon which the country relied so heavily has been cut as the international community demands that the Taliban respect the rights of Afghans, particularly girls and women whose access to work and education has been curtailed.

"We are all heading to darkness and misfortune," said Amena Arezo, a doctor from southeastern Ghazni province. "People have no future, especially women."

Roughly 25 million Afghans are now living in poverty - well over half the population and the United Nations estimates that up to 900,000 jobs could be lost this year as the economy stalls.

Civil society and independent media have also shrunk, with many of its members leaving the country. The UN's mission to Afghanistan said in a recent review the group was limiting dissent by arresting journalists, activists and protesters.

A Taliban spokesman had rejected the UN's report and said arbitrary arrests were not allowed.



An aerial view shows the collapsed Treffen across the Gudbrandsdalslagen river in the Oyer municipality of southern Norway, yesterday, after it collapsed into the river. Local police report said that a car and truck hurtled into the river.

PHOTO: AFP