

Ukraine to slash ties with Iran over drones supply to Russia Tehran says will make 'proportional' response

REUTERS

Ukraine said on Friday it would downgrade diplomatic ties with Iran over Tehran's decision to supply Russian forces with drones, a move President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called "a collaboration with evil". Zelenskyy said a total of eight Iranian-made unmanned aerial vehicles had been shot down so far in the conflict.

Ukraine and the United States accused Iran of supplying drones to Russia, a charge Tehran denies.

"Today the Russian army used Iranian drones for its strikes... The world will know about every instance of collaboration with evil, and it will have corresponding consequences," Zelenskyy said in a late night video address.

Yesterday, an Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson said that Iran was planning "proportional action" in response to Ukraine's decision to downgrade diplomatic ties.

Nasser Kanaani said Ukraine should "refrain from being influenced by third parties who seek to destroy relations between the two countries", a ministry

statement said. Kanaani said Ukraine's decision was "based on unconfirmed reports and resulted from a media hype by foreign parties".

Military authorities in southern Ukraine said in a statement they had shot down four Shahed 136 "kamikaze" unmanned aerial vehicles over the sea near the port of Odesa on Friday.

The air force said separately that for the first time it had brought down a Mohajer-6, a larger Iranian drone, the *Ukrainska Pravda* newspaper reported.

The Ukrainian foreign ministry earlier said the supply of drones had dealt a serious blow to bilateral relations.

"In response to such an unfriendly act, the Ukrainian side has decided to deprive the ambassador of Iran of his accreditation and also to significantly reduce the number of diplomatic staff of the Iranian embassy in Kyiv," it said in a statement on its website.

Military experts say the drones would be useful to Russia for both reconnaissance and as loitering munitions that can bide their time in locating and engaging suitable targets.



People evacuate with belongings amid ongoing clashes in the frontline city of Kupiansk, Kharkiv region, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Lightning, heavy rains kill at least 36 in India

AGENCIES

Hazardous weather has killed at least 36 people in northern India over the past 24 hours, including 12 who died after being struck by lightning.

Across the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, 24 people died after their homes collapsed during unrelenting rains, Relief Commissioner Ranvir Prasad said.

Mohamed Usman, 15, was on his friend's roof in the city of Prayagraj when lightning struck on Friday evening, killing him instantly. His friend Aznan, who goes by one name, was injured and is being treated in a hospital.

"As soon as they set foot on the roof they were hit by lightning and my son died," said Mohammad Ayub, Usman's father.

Officials said 39 people in the state have died from lightning in the last five days, prompting the state government to issue new guidelines for how people can protect themselves during a thunderstorm.

Lightning strikes are common during India's monsoon season, which runs from June to September.

Colonel Sanjay Srivastava, whose organisation Lightning Resilient India Campaign works with the Indian Meteorological Department, said deforestation, depletion of bodies of water, and pollution all contribute to climate change, which leads to more lightning.

Global warming has also increased the frequency of lightning, said Sunita Narain, director general at the Centre for Science and Environment.

A 1-degree-Celsius (1.8-degree-Fahrenheit) rise in temperature increases lightning by 12 times. Thunderbolts contain as much as a billion volts of electricity and can cause immense damage to buildings when they hit.

There has been a 34-percent rise in lightning strikes across India over the past year, which has caused deaths to increase. About 2,500 people die in lightning strikes around India each year, according to government figures, compared with just 45 in the United States.

Last year, a herd of 18 wild Asiatic elephants was found dead in India's northeastern state of Assam, possibly because of a huge lightning strike.

Evidence suggests lightning strikes are also becoming more common in urban areas - a particular concern in India, where the city population is forecast to rise dramatically in the coming years.

PROTESTS IN IRAN OVER WOMAN'S DEATH IN CUSTODY Leaders are safe for now, but unrest raise the stakes

REUTERS, Dubai

The popular revolt in Iran triggered by the death of a woman held by police is unlikely to pose an immediate threat to clerical rulers whose elite security forces have crushed one protest after another in recent years.

But the protests, the biggest since 2019, are another crack in the structure of the Islamic Republic, which has been facing unrest over economic hardship, inflation and freedoms.

Enraged by the death last week of Mahsa Amini, 22, who was arrested by morality police for wearing "unsuitable attire", women challenged the country's Islamic dress code and took charge, waving and burning their veils. Some publicly cut their hair as furious crowds called for the fall of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

As the government weighs its options, Amini's case has touched a raw nerve and unleashed years of pent up anger over the mandatory hijab.

Her death will embolden more and more women to challenge the government over dress restrictions even if the protests which spread to most of Iran's 31 provinces fade or are stamped out, analysts say.

"The death of Mahsa Amiri released decades of suppressed energy and will among women to fight back. It's not the first time, but this time is different," said Omid Memarian, an Iran analyst based in the United States.

Under Iran's Islamic Sharia law, imposed after the 1979 revolution,

women are obliged to cover their hair and wear long, loose-fitting clothes to conceal their figures. Violators face public rebuke, fines or arrest.

But decades after the revolution, clerical rulers still struggle to enforce the law.

While that defiance is common, the shock over Amini's

government," said Gissou Nia, director of the Strategic Litigation Project at the Atlantic Council.

So far Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Basij militia have been relatively restrained, but they could be mobilised quickly. Warnings from the army and the intelligence minister on Friday showed they are poised to crack down as they have done before.

In the past authorities have let protests run their course for several days, only resorting to full-scale force if the unrest starts to appear open ended or out of control.

"The protests pose less of a risk to immediate government stability than to its legitimacy and sustainability over the longer term," said Eurasia Group analyst Henry Rome.

Iran was rocked by unrest in 2017 and 2018. In 2019, Iran said 200,000 people took part in what may have been the biggest anti-government demonstration in the 40-year history of the Islamic Republic. Reuters reported 1,500 were killed by security forces.

Meir Javedanfar, who teaches Iranian politics at Reichman University in Israel, described the latest protests as a milestone for Iranians angered by "a corrupt and incompetent regime".

"These protests will not be the last. We will see more. But we are unlikely to see a revolution until and unless there is a leader and at least part of Iran's armed forces starts siding with the people against the regime. None of this has happened yet," he said.



death and nationwide protests have raised the stakes as Iranian women call for more freedoms.

Waves of the hijab protests have hit the clerical establishment in the past years. In 2014, rights activist Masih Alinejad started a Facebook campaign "My Stealthy Freedom", where she shared pictures of unveiled Iranian women sent to her.

"Now that protesters are clearly taking to the streets to protest Mahsa (Jina) Amini's murder and demanding change, it is beyond debate that ultimately people seek the change of the system and want human rights and representative



Anti-government protestors scuffle with police during a demonstration in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka disperses rally after partial protest ban

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan police dispersed hundreds of demonstrators yesterday, a day after severely curtailing protest rights in response to months of unrest sparked by the island nation's sharp economic downturn.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe has taken a tough line against activists who forced his predecessor to flee the country and resign in July at the peak of the country's crisis.

Officers in anti-riot gear blocked the student march hours after the government declared the city centre a "high security zone", outlawing protests in the vicinity.

Police fired tear gas and water cannon to clear out the demonstrators, who were demanding the release of fellow activists detained under draconian anti-terror laws.

Witnesses saw police detain dozens of participants. Wickremesinghe on Friday ordered a ban on all demonstrations and protests near key institutions, including his office and the homes of military top brass.

LEBANON MIGRANT TRAGEDY Death toll hits 89

AFP, Damascus

Twelve more bodies were recovered yesterday after a boat carrying migrants from Lebanon sank off Syria's coast, raising the overall toll to 89, Syrian state media said, in one of the eastern Mediterranean's deadliest such shipwrecks.

Filippo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), called it a "heart-wrenching tragedy". At least 14 people rescued were recovering in hospitals in Syria while six others were discharged, as search efforts continued, with several people still missing since the boat sank on Thursday. Lebanon's army yesterday said that it arrested a Lebanese man who "admitted to organising the recent smuggling operation from Lebanon to Italy by sea". Lebanon, a country which hosts more than a million refugees from Syria's civil war, has since 2019 been mired in a financial crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the worst in modern times. Nearly three years of economic collapse have turned the country into a launchpad for illegal migration, with its own citizens joining Syrian and Palestinian refugees clamouring to leave through dangerous sea routes. As many as 150 people were on board the small boat that sank off the Syrian port of Tartus, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) north of Tripoli in Lebanon, from where the migrants set sail.

Storm Fiona hammers Canada's east coast Thousands left without power

REUTERS, Halifax

Powerful storm Fiona yesterday slammed into eastern Canada with hurricane-force winds, blowing over trees and powerlines and leaving hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses without electricity. The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said the center of the storm, downgraded to Post-Tropical Cyclone Fiona, was now in the Gulf of St. Lawrence after racing through Nova Scotia. Reports of downed trees and power lines were widespread in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Designated a hurricane as it lashed Caribbean islands earlier in the week, Fiona killed at least eight people and knocked out power for virtually all of Puerto Rico's 3.3 million people during a sweltering heat wave. Nearly a million people remained without power five days later.

Nasa scraps Moon launch again

AFP, Washington

Nasa has called off the scheduled Tuesday's launch of its historic uncrewed mission to the Moon due to a tropical storm that is forecast to strengthen as it approaches Florida.

"Nasa is forgoing a launch opportunity... and preparing for rollback (from the launchpad), while continuing to watch the weather forecast associated with Tropical Storm Ian," it said yesterday. The US National Hurricane Center said Ian is due to "rapidly intensify" over the weekend as it moves toward Florida, home to the Kennedy Space Center, from which the rocket is set to launch. The next launch window will run from October 17 to 31, with one possibility of take-off

per day, except from October 24-26 and 28. The Artemis 1 space mission hopes to test the SLS as well as the unmanned Orion capsule that sits atop, in preparation for future Moon-bound journeys with humans aboard.

