



Members of the Taliban security forces arrive as Afghan women march during a demonstration they call 'Stop Hazara genocide' a day after a suicide bomb attack at Dasht-e-Barchi learning centre, in Kabul, Afghanistan, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## N Korea again fires ballistic missiles

AFP, Seoul

North Korea fired two ballistic missiles early yesterday, South Korea's military said, the nuclear-armed country's fourth launch this week as Seoul, Tokyo and Washington ramp up joint military drills to counter Pyongyang.

South Korea, Japan and the US staged anti-submarine drills Friday — the first in five years — just days after Washington and Seoul's navies conducted large-scale exercises in waters off the peninsula.

US Vice President Kamala Harris was in Seoul Thursday and toured the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone that divides the peninsula, on a trip that aimed to underscore her country's "ironclad" commitment to South Korea's defence against the North.

With talks long stalled, Pyongyang has doubled down on its banned weapons programmes, conducting a record-breaking blitz of tests this year and revising its laws to declare itself an "irreversible" nuclear power.

South Korea's military said it had "detected two short-range missiles between 0645 and 0703 fired from the Sunan area in Pyongyang into the East Sea", referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

## Putin 'not going to scare us': Biden

Says the Russian leader is 'struggling', vows to defend every inch of Nato territory, if attacked

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden said Friday the United States and Nato will not be intimidated by Russia's President Vladimir Putin and warned that the Western alliance would defend "every inch" of its territory if attacked.

"America and its allies are not going to be intimidated," he said in remarks at the White House. Putin is "not going to scare us."

Biden then addressed the Kremlin leader directly, pointing his finger into the television camera as he warned against any attack spilling beyond Ukraine onto Nato territory.

"America's fully prepared, with our Nato allies, to defend every single inch of Nato territory," he said. "Mr Putin, don't misunderstand what I'm saying: every inch."

Biden was speaking shortly after Putin presided over a ceremony in Moscow to declare that Russia has annexed four more regions of Ukraine, although Western-armed Ukrainian troops continue to battle to restore control there.

Putin and multiple supporters have suggested that having declared the swath of Ukraine to belong to Russia, the Kremlin could now legitimately resort to nuclear weapons to defend what it says is Russian territory.

Biden called out his Russian counterpart's "reckless words and threats" but dismissed Friday's ceremony as a "sham routine that

he put on" to show strength, while instead demonstrating that "he's struggling."

Shortly after, Biden's top national security official said while there is a chance of Putin resorting to nuclear weapons, this doesn't appear imminent.



"There is a risk, given all the loose talk and nuclear saber rattling by Putin, that he would consider this and we've been equally clear about what the consequences would be," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters.

"We do not presently see indications about the imminent use of nuclear weapons."

Sullivan underlined that Washington was communicating privately but "directly with Russia about the kind of decisive response the United States would have."

The United States has walked a thin line since Putin launched the invasion of Ukraine in February by funneling ever greater military support to Kyiv while not getting directly involved — yet also guarding against potential for a spillover.

Sullivan noted that multiple reinforcements had been sent to boost Europe-based US forces, saying that they were ready if Russia escalated.

"We feel we have in place right now the capacity to respond to any contingency," Sullivan said.

With Ukraine's army making new headway against the Russian invaders in the east, Washington is maintaining the pace of new deliveries in ammunition and weapons.

There will be "another announcement of immediate security assistance to announce next week," Sullivan told reporters, noting that the US government had also just pledged a longer term delivery of weapons to Ukraine, including 18 new HIMARS multiple rocket systems that must first be manufactured.

Congress on Friday approved a further national spending bill that includes \$12.3 billion more in military aid for Ukraine.

Meanwhile, addressing the mysterious explosion at the major Nord Stream natural gas underwater pipeline from Russia to western Europe, Biden echoed other Western leaders saying it was "a deliberate act of sabotage."

He did not say who the US believes is behind the attack but he described Russian allegations that Washington was involved as "disinformation and lies."

## KABUL CLASSROOM BOMBING

# Death toll rises to 35

Defying Taliban, women protest 'genocide'

AFP, Kabul

The death toll of a suicide bombing on a Kabul classroom has risen to 35, the UN said yesterday, as Shia Hazara women who bore the brunt of the attack staged a defiant protest against the "genocide" of their minority community.

On Friday, a suicide attacker blew himself up in a Kabul study hall as hundreds of pupils were taking tests in preparation for university entrance exams in the city's Dasht-e-Barchi area.

Witnesses have told AFP that the suicide attacker detonated in the women's section of the gender-segregated study hall.

The western neighbourhood is a predominantly Shia Muslim enclave and home to the minority Hazara community — a historically oppressed group that has been targeted in some of Afghanistan's most brutal attacks in recent years.

No group has claimed responsibility for Friday's attack. But the jihadist Islamic State (IS) group regards Shiites as heretics and has previously claimed attacks in the area targeting girls, schools and mosques.

"The latest casualty figures from the

attack number at least 35 fatalities, with an additional 82 wounded," the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said in a statement. More than 20 of the killed were girls and women, it said.

An Afghan interior ministry official told AFP that 25 people were killed and 33 wounded in the attack on the Kaaj Higher Educational Centre.

Meanwhile, dozens of Hazara women yesterday defied a Taliban ban on rallies to protest the latest bloodshed in their community.

Around 50 women chanted, "Stop Hazara genocide, it's not a crime to be a Shia", as they marched past a hospital in Dasht-e-Barchi where several victims of the attack were being treated.

Protesters later gathered in front of the hospital and chanted slogans as dozens of heavily armed Taliban, some carrying rocket-propelled grenade launchers, kept watch.

Since the hardline Taliban returned to power, women's protests have become risky, with numerous demonstrators detained and rallies broken up by Taliban forces firing shots in the air.



## Turkey rejects annexation of Ukraine areas

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday said Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian provinces was a "grave violation" of international law and called for negotiations to end the conflict.

A foreign ministry statement said Ankara had not recognised Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and held the same stance after Russia on Friday declared Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia part of its territory after referendums that were slammed globally as a sham vote.

"Turkey did not recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea in an illegitimate referendum in 2014 and has emphasised its strong support to Ukraine's territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty on every occasion," the ministry said.

Nato member Turkey has tried to stay neutral throughout the seven-month conflict and refrained from joining Western sanctions against Russia.

Ankara is dependent on Russian oil and gas while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is keen to boost trade with Moscow as he tries to stabilise the battered economy in the run up to elections next June.

## CONGRESS PRESIDENTIAL POLL

# It's Kharge vs Shashi Tharoor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The contest for Congress' presidential poll was narrowed down yesterday to a straight square-off between Shashi Tharoor and Mallikarjun Kharge after the rejection of the nomination paper of third candidate K N Tripathi.

The three had filed nominations on Friday, the last day to submit nominations.

The party's Central Election Authority chairman Madhusudan Mistry told reporters in New Delhi that Tripathi's form was rejected as the signature of one of his proposers did not match and another proposer's signature was repeated.



Compared to Kharge and Tharoor, Tripathi was a light weight candidate.

Kharge, a Dalit leader from the southern state of Karnataka, has emerged as the clear favourite to be the party chief in the October 17 poll.

A day after filing his nomination, Kharge resigned as the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha in line with the Congress' declared 'One person, One post' principle that was announced at the party's brainstorming session in Udaipur in May.

Senior party leader Jairam Ramesh said on Friday that he does not know if poll would be held on October 17 as the last date for withdrawal of nominations is on October 8.

Kharge and Tharoor are contrasting figures with starkly different political trajectories in the Congress.

Kharge, who joined the Congress in 1969, has risen from grassroots and is a known loyalist of the Gandhi family while Tharoor, articulate and erudite, joined the Congress in 2009 and is considered a lateral entry into the party.

## Toab Khan no more

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Born on April 24, 1934, in Satkhira, Khan studied at Jagannath College (now a university). He started his career in journalism in 1953 at the weekly Janata. He joined the daily Sangbad in 1955 and became the news editor in 1961.

In 1964, Khan started working for the Dainik Pakistan which was renamed the Dainik Bangla after Bangladesh's independence in 1971. He was made the editor of the daily in 1972.

He also served as the press secretary to then prime minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman between 1973 and 1975.

Khan worked as the principal information officer and director general of the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB).

He was the advisory editor of daily Janakantha till October last year from its inception. Lastly, he joined the Dainik Bangla as the editor.

Khan was awarded the Ekushey Padak in 2016.

Meanwhile, President Abdul Hamid and Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina, now in Washington DC, expressed deep shock at the death of the veteran journalist, reports BSS.

In a message of condolence, the president recalled the outstanding contribution of Khan in the field of journalism.

"His death is an irreparable loss to the country's media industry... This emptiness in the media will never be filled," he said.

Hasina in her message said the lifelong fighter and dignified journalist will be remembered through his work.

She prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed her sympathies to the bereaved family.

Sources in the Dainik Bangla said Khan will be buried at the capital's Banani graveyard tomorrow. Before that, the body will be taken to the newspaper's office at 10:00am. His first namaz-e-janaza will be held there.

The body will be kept on the Central Shaheed Minar premises from 11:30am to 12:30pm tomorrow, where

people from all walks of life will pay their last respects to the veteran journalist.

From there, the body will be taken to the Jatiya Press Club at 1:00pm and a second namaz-e-janaza will be held. The body will then be taken to his home in Gulshan.

A third namaz-e-janaza of Khan will be held at the Gulshan Azad Mosque after Asr prayers before his burial.

## Hurricane Ian death toll at 23

AFP, FORT MYERS

The death toll in Florida from Hurricane Ian now stands at 23, the southern US state's Department of Law Enforcement said Friday.

Many of the fatalities from the monster storm were from drowning, the department said in a release sent to AFP.

News outlets quoting county officials have given even higher tolls, with CNN saying 45 fatalities have been blamed on Ian.



Protestors hold banners during a demonstration in Brussels, Belgium, yesterday, to support Iranian women following the death in Iran of Masha Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurdish woman. Masha Amini had been arrested by the morality police for violating Iran's strict dress code, which requires women to wear the Islamic veil. PHOTO: AFP