

ERDOGAN-PUTIN MEET

Turkey calls for Ukraine truce

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday called for a ceasefire in Ukraine just days ahead of a meeting between the leaders of Turkey and Russia in the Kazakh capital Astana.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who won plaudits for securing a grain deal as well as Russia-Ukraine prisoner swap, has long sought to bring together Kyiv and Moscow for truce talks.

Turkey's call comes ahead of a meeting set for tomorrow between Vladimir Putin and Erdogan, who has a good working relationship with the Russian leader despite disagreements on several issues including in Syria.

Nato member Turkey, which has stayed neutral throughout the conflict in Ukraine, also has good ties with Kyiv. But increasing Russian attacks on Ukrainian cities are further diminishing the chances for a diplomatic solution which Ankara has longed for since the war began in February.

Turkey has refrained from joining Western sanctions against Russia. However, Turkey has rejected Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian provinces as a "grave violation" of international law and called for negotiations to end the conflict.



Relatives mourn next to the coffins of victims of the nursery massacre during the cremation ceremony in Na Kiang in northeastern Nong Bua Lam Phu province, Thailand, yesterday. The massacre carried out by a former cop claimed 36 lives including 24 children.

PHOTO: AFP

Lebanon, Israel clinch maritime border deal

REUTERS

Lebanon and Israel have reached a historic agreement demarcating a disputed maritime border between them following years of US-mediated negotiations, Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid said yesterday.

While limited in scope, a deal would mark a significant compromise between states with a history of war and hostility, opening the way for offshore energy exploration and easing a source of recent tensions.

"This is a historic achievement that will strengthen Israel's security, inject billions into Israel's economy, and ensure the stability of our northern border," Lapid said in a statement.

In Lebanon, President Michel Aoun said the terms of the final US proposal were satisfactory.

The agreement is meant to resolve a territorial dispute in the eastern Mediterranean sea in an area where Lebanon aims to explore for natural gas. It sets a border between Lebanese and Israeli waters for the first time and also establishes a mechanism for both countries to get royalties from an offshore gas field that straddles the boundary.

PROTESTS IN KURDISH CITY

Alarm grows as Iran readies crackdown

AFP, Paris

Rights groups voiced alarm yesterday over the extent of an Iranian crackdown on a Kurdish-populated city that has become a hub for protests.

Iran's clerical authorities have been shaken by over three weeks of protests that erupted after the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian of Kurdish origin, who had been arrested by the notorious morality police.

Protests have been especially intense in the city of Sanandaj in the western province of Kurdistan, Amini's home region.

Amnesty International and the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran expressed concerns as authorities appear to move against the protests. The Norway-based Hengaw rights group said buses carrying special forces were on their way to the city from elsewhere in Iran.



'All I saw was death'

Shatner on travelling to space

AGENCIES

Astronauts have for decades described their trips to space as "breathtaking" and humbling, a reminder of the Earth's fragility and humanity's need to serve as stewards of our home planet.

Actor William Shatner, who went to space last year in JEFF Bezos's Blue origin, experienced the same phenomenon, but he had a very distinct observation when he turned his gaze from the Earth to black expanse of the cosmos: "All I saw was death," he wrote in a new book.

"I saw a cold, dark, black emptiness. It was unlike any blackness you can see or feel on Earth. It was deep, enveloping, all-encompassing. I turned back toward the light of home. I could see the curvature of Earth, ... It was life. Nurturing, sustaining, life. Mother Earth. Gaia. And I was leaving her," reads an excerpt from the book.

Instead of euphoria, Shatner wrote that he felt one of the strongest feelings of grief he's ever encountered.

He described the experience as "a clarion call" to stop climate change.

Biden to 're-evaluate' Saudi ties after OPEC snub

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden is to "re-evaluate" the US relationship with Saudi Arabia in light of the OPEC+ decision to cut oil production, a White House spokesperson said yesterday.

"I think the president's been very clear that this is a relationship that we need to continue to re-evaluate, that we need to be willing to revisit," National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told CNN.

"Certainly in light of the OPEC decision, I think that's where he is."

The 13-nation, Saudi-led OPEC cartel and its 10 allies headed by Russia agreed last week to reduce output by two million barrels a day from November - raising fears that oil prices could soar.

The decision was widely seen as

a diplomatic slap in the face, since Biden traveled to Saudi Arabia in July and met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, despite vowing to make the kingdom an international "pariah" following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

It also comes at a sensitive moment for Biden's Democratic party, as it faces November midterm elections with rising consumer prices a key Republican talking point.

Kirby added that Biden is "willing to work with Congress to think through what that relationship (with Saudi Arabia) ought to look like going forward."

His remarks come a day after Senator Bob Menendez, the lead Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called for

Washington to halt all cooperation with Saudi Arabia.

"The US must immediately freeze all aspects of our cooperation with Saudi Arabia, including any arms sales and security cooperation beyond what is absolutely necessary to defend US personnel and interests," Menendez said.

"As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I will not green-light any cooperation with Riyadh until the kingdom reassesses its position with respect to the war in Ukraine."

Biden said last week that he would look at alternatives to prevent more price hikes. These could include further releases from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve, potentially increased US domestic drilling, and more drastic measures, including limits on exports.

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