

Putin to meet Erdogan today

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin will meet Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan for talks in Kazakhstan today, a meeting at which the Turks are likely to raise ideas for peace in Ukraine, Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov told reporters.

Prior to the meeting, Putin yesterday said that Russia could redirect supplies intended for the damaged Nord Stream pipelines to the Black Sea to create a European gas hub in Turkey.

A probe is under way into explosions last month that ruptured the Russian-built Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines on the bed of the Baltic Sea.

"We could move the lost volumes from the Nord Streams along the bottom of the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea region and thus make the main routes for the supply of our fuel, our natural gas to Europe through Turkey, creating the largest gas hub for Europe in Turkey," he told an energy conference in Moscow.



Visitors stand in front of a picture showing Chinese President Xi Jinping during the exhibition entitled "Forging Ahead in the New Era", showing the country's achievements during his past two terms, at the Beijing Exhibition Center in Beijing yesterday, ahead of the 20th Communist Party Congress meeting.

PHOTO: AFP

NORD STREAM PIPELINE LEAKS Sabotage 'act of int'l terrorism'

Says Putin as energy crisis looms

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said that major leaks which suddenly erupted in the Nord Stream gas pipelines running from Russia to Europe were an "act of international terrorism".

Putin said the attacks on the pipelines, which European and Western governments have called sabotage, set a "dangerous precedent".

He said Europe was to blame for its energy crisis with policies that starved the oil and gas industry of investment and said price caps would make it worse, as EU states tried to forge a deal on ways to contain soaring energy costs.

Worries about the security of energy supplies were heightened on Wednesday when a leak in Poland on the Druzhba pipeline from Russia reduced the flow of oil to Germany.

Poland said the leak was probably caused by an accident but it came as European Union nations are seeking to wean themselves off a reliance on Russian energy in response to the invasion of Ukraine in February.

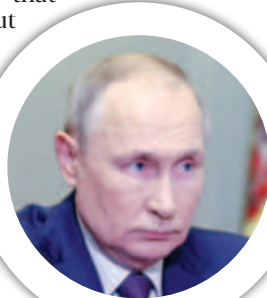
The Nord Stream gas link that serves Germany is currently out of action after a leak last month that both Russia and the West have blamed on sabotage, without identifying who was behind it.

Putin said the leaks in the two Nord Stream pipelines running from Russia to Europe were an "act of international terrorism" and about depriving people of cheap energy.

Putin said gas could still be supplied by one intact part of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline but it was up to the EU whether or not it wanted the gas. Germany cancelled the Nord Stream 2 project after Russia sent troops into Ukraine.

Speaking at an energy forum in Russia, Putin said Russia was not to blame for the sky-high energy prices in Europe.

The impact of efforts to use less Russian energy, plus steep cuts in supplies from Russia, have been felt across the 27-nation EU, with gas prices almost 90 percent higher than a year ago and fears of rationing and power cuts over the coming winter.



Nato, partners aim to boost Kyiv's air defence

Biden says Putin 'rational actor who has miscalculated'; US State Dept says 'neutrality' isn't an option in Ukraine war

AGENCIES

More than 50 Western countries met yesterday to promise more weapons for Ukraine, focusing on its need for air defences after Moscow launched its most intense missile strikes since the start of the war.

Opening the meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group at the headquarters of Nato in Brussels, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Russia's huge wave of missile attacks this week had laid bare the "malice and cruelty" of its war.

Ukraine had shifted the momentum in the conflict since September with "extraordinary" gains, but would need more help to keep fighting, he said.

"These victories belong to Ukraine's brave soldiers. But the Contact Group's security assistance, training, and sustainment efforts have been vital," Austin said.

Russian attacks using more than 100 missiles have killed at least 26 people across Ukraine since Monday, when President Vladimir Putin ordered what he called retaliatory strikes against Ukraine for an explosion on a bridge.

Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Russia's missile attacks were a sign of weakness.

"The reality is that they're not able to make progress on the battlefield. Russia is actually losing on the battlefield," Stoltenberg said.

Washington pledged after Monday's bloody salvos that it would up shipments of air defenses to Ukraine, while Germany promised delivery "in the coming



days" of the first Iris-T missile shield reportedly capable of protecting a city.

As his forces have lost ground on the battlefield since September, Putin has escalated the conflict, ordering the call-up of hundreds of thousands of reservists, proclaiming the annexation of occupied Ukrainian territory and repeatedly threatening to use nuclear weapons to protect Russia.

US President Joe Biden yesterday said he doubted Putin would use a nuclear weapon.

Putin is a "rational actor who has miscalculated significantly," Biden said in a CNN interview, saying he believed the Russian president wrongly expected his invading troops to be welcomed.

"I think... he thought he was going to be welcomed with open arms, that this was the home of Mother Russia in Kyiv, and that where he was going to be welcomed, and I think he just totally miscalculated,"

Biden said.

Asked how realistic he believed it would be for Putin to use a tactical nuclear weapon, Biden responded: "Well, I don't think he will."

Nato's Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels on Tuesday the military alliance had not noticed any change in Russia's nuclear posture.

Biden warned last week that the world risks "Armageddon" in unusually direct remarks about the dangers from Putin's thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons to assist Russia's faltering attempt to take over swathes of Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the United States was leading an all-out offensive to rally as many countries as possible to adopt a resolution at the UN condemning Moscow's annexation of Ukrainian regions.

"We believe the time has long passed for neutrality. There is no such thing as neutrality in a situation like this," said State Department spokesman Ned Price.

Prove your love with weapons

Ukraine tells France

REUTERS, Paris

Romantic gestures take many forms... well Ukraine's defence ministry yesterday posted a 41-second video on social media aimed at giving France a gentle nudge to show its love through weapons' supplies after repeated criticism that Paris has not been doing enough.

France has delivered Caesar howitzers, portable air defence systems and heavy armoured vehicles primarily.

However, a wave of attacks on Ukrainian cities has raised the stakes, with Kyiv demanding its partners provide more supplies, including air defence systems.

The clip made clear to France that it wanted more than just words and promises.

"Romantic gestures take many forms," images on the video read as the classic "Je t'aime moi non plus" (I love you ... me neither), the suggestive and once-censored song that Serge Gainsbourg recorded with then-lover Jane Birkin, played in the background.

The images intertwine lovers holding hands in Paris, chocolates, roses and Macron smiling with Zelensky. All with the French-made howitzer cannons in full action on the battlefield.

"But if you really want to win our hearts... nothing beats 155mm heavy self-propelled artillery ... Many thanks France. Please send us more!"

I can beat Trump again: Biden

AGENCIES

US President Joe Biden on Tuesday voiced confidence that he could beat his predecessor Donald Trump in a 2024 rematch -- even as he acknowledged the country could sink back into recession under his leadership.

The 79-year-old Democrat was asked if he'd be announcing a run for a second term after November's midterm elections -- and if Trump would be a factor in his decision.

"I believe I can beat Donald Trump again," Biden responded, although he stopped short of confirming another tilt at the Oval Office in 2024. Biden defeated Trump in both the state-by-state "electoral college" and the popular vote in 2020 -- leading to relentless false claims of widespread voter fraud from the defeated president.

King Charles III to be crowned in May

AFP, London

The coronation of King Charles III will take place on May 6 next year, Buckingham Palace announced on Tuesday, vowing to reflect the monarchy's historic traditions and its modern role.

Charles, 73, will be formally crowned at London's Westminster Abbey, following a long tradition dating back more than 900 years.

The monarch's wife, Queen Consort Camilla, 75, will also be crowned, the palace confirmed.

May 6 is the fourth birthday of Charles' grandson Archie, the son of Prince Harry and his wife Meghan.

Charles immediately became king when Elizabeth died on September 8. He also took over as head of state of 14 Commonwealth countries, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

The queen, who was 96, passed away at her remote Scottish estate Balmoral after a year of declining health. She was on the throne for a record 70 years.



Thirdhand smoke can trigger skin diseases: study

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The residual pollutants from tobacco smoke that remain on surfaces, also known as thirdhand smoke, may trigger skin diseases, according to a new study.

These dust particles, known as THS, that remain after tobacco has been smoked, can remain on indoor surfaces indefinitely and lead to potentially harmful exposure to both smokers and non-smokers, says the research, published recently in the journal eBioMedicine.

Researchers from the University of California, Riverside, found that acute exposure of the skin to THS elevates levels of molecules in the body that are linked to the initiation of skin diseases like contact dermatitis and psoriasis.

"We found exposure of human skin to THS initiates mechanisms of inflammatory skin disease, and elevates urinary biomarkers of oxidative harm, which could lead to other diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, and atherosclerosis," study co-author Shane Sakamaki-Ching said in a statement.



Oleksandra (R), 67, tends to her husband Mykola, 66, who was diagnosed with lung cancer five months ago, beside a pot placed on their bed to collect water leaking from the roof damaged by shelling, in their home in the frontline town of Bakhmut, in the Donetsk region, on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

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