

INTERNATIONAL

Huge dam destroyed in Ukraine war zone

Moscow, Kyiv accuse each other of blowing it up; villagers in Kherson region flee flood

REUTERS, Kherson

A torrent of water burst through a massive dam on the Dnipro River that separates Russian and Ukrainian forces in southern Ukraine yesterday, flooding a swathe of the war zone and forcing villagers to flee.

Ukraine accused Russia of blowing up the Nova Kakhovka dam in a deliberate war crime. The Kremlin said it was Ukraine that had sabotaged the dam, to distract attention from the launch of a major counteroffensive Moscow says is faltering. Some Russian-installed officials said the dam had burst on its own.

Neither side offered immediate public evidence of who was to blame. The Geneva Conventions explicitly ban targeting dams in war, because of the danger to civilians.

By mid-morning in the city of Kherson in Ukrainian government-controlled territory downstream from the dam, a pier on a tributary of the Dnipro had already been submerged.

Lidia Zubova, 67, waiting for a train out of the city after abandoning her inundated village of Antonivka, told Reuters: "Our local school and stadium downtown were flooded... The road was completely flooded, our bus got stuck."

Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko accused Russia of shelling areas from where people

were being evacuated and said two police officers were wounded.

Russia also carried out a fresh wave of overnight air strikes on Kyiv. Ukraine said its air defence systems had downed more than 20 cruise missiles on their approach to the capital.

The Shebekino district of Russia's Belgorod region near the Ukrainian border came under renewed shelling, local authorities said. Anti-government Russian fighters based in Ukraine claim to have captured villages there.

On the Russian-controlled bank of the Dnipro, the Moscow-installed mayor of Nova Kakhovka said water levels had risen to 11 metres after the destruction of the dam.

Residents reached by telephone there told Reuters that some had decided to stay despite being ordered out by occupying Russians. The Kazkova Dibrova zoo on the Russian-held riverbank was completely flooded and all 300 animals were dead, a representative said via the zoo's Facebook account.

The dam supplies water to a wide area of southern Ukrainian farmland, including the Russian-occupied Crimean peninsula, as well as cooling the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said there is "no immediate nuclear safety risk at the plant."



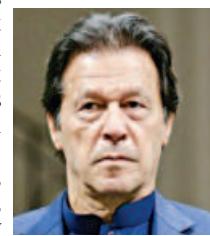
This general view shows a partially flooded area of Kherson yesterday, following damage sustained at Kakhovka hydroelectric dam. The Russian-held dam in southern Ukraine was damaged yesterday, with Kyiv and Moscow accusing each other of blowing it up while locals were forced to flee rising waters.

PHOTO: AFP

REUTERS SURVEY
Ex-Pak PM Imran faces blackout on local media

REUTERS, Islamabad

Coverage of Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan has disappeared from all mainstream news channels in the country after the media regulator asked networks to block out people involved in rioting last month, a Reuters survey showed on Monday.



A directive, seen by Reuters, was put out by the regulator last week referring to violent protests in Pakistan last month following Khan's brief arrest that saw military installations ransacked, allegedly by the former prime minister's supporters.

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) asked television licensees to ensure that "hate mongers, rioters, their facilitators and perpetrators" are "completely screened from media". It did not refer directly to Khan.

However, coverage of the former prime minister - Pakistan's most popular leader according to polls - has disappeared to the extent that his name and image are not being aired. His mention has also disappeared from news websites.

PEMRA officials did not respond to multiple requests for comment and queries on whether the directives pertained to Khan, and if the directive was meant to be an all-encompassing ban.

Khan has long been the most televised politician in Pakistan, with his speeches and gatherings getting wall-to-wall coverage and widespread viewership.

US, China talks in Beijing strike upbeat tone

Both sides agree to maintain communication lines; Chinese media report says open clashes are still a risk

REUTERS, Beijing

Meetings between senior US and Chinese officials in China this week struck an upbeat chord, with both sides agreeing to maintain communication lines, even as Beijing remains leery of more "provocative" US moves and open clashes are still a risk.

Statements from Washington and Beijing on meetings between Daniel Kritenbrink, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and Chinese officials including Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu were positive, describing the talks as candid and productive.

Just before Kritenbrink arrived in Beijing on Sunday, the US navy reported an "unsafe interaction" on Saturday when a Chinese warship crossed in front of a US destroyer in the sensitive Taiwan Strait, raising the prospect of future face-offs that could spiral out of control.

Kritenbrink's visit also followed China's apparent snub last week of US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who had sought a formal meeting with his Chinese counterpart but was bluntly rejected.

The two sides conducted candid, constructive and fruitful communication on promoting the improvement of Sino-US relations and properly managing and controlling differences, the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement yesterday of Kritenbrink's meetings.

Both sides also agreed to continue to communicate, according to the statement.

The two sides had candid and productive discussions as part of ongoing efforts to maintain open lines of communication and build on recent

high-level diplomacy between the two countries, the US State Department said late Monday.

US President Joe Biden's administration has pushed to boost engagement with China as ties between the world's two largest economies have deteriorated over issues ranging from democratically governed Taiwan, which China claims as its own, to military activity in the South China Sea.

But critics have questioned US overtures to China, arguing that past decades of engagement have failed to



change Beijing's behaviour.

The recent interactions between China and the United States showed both sides are trying to manage disputes, but the risk of clashes will still rise if Washington does not cease its provocations and if it does not show sincerity in improving relations, state-backed Chinese newspaper Global Times reported late Monday.

China and US ties have entered a "more complicated" phase - while China is willing to stabilise relations and is open to possible cooperation, it will also firmly fight back against the US provocations, wrote Global Times, known for its

nationalist leanings.

"We're working hard to manage the relationship as best as we possibly can," said Kritenbrink, when asked by reporters in Beijing yesterday about the current state of bilateral ties.

The already frayed ties took a sharp turn south in February as Secretary of State Antony Blinken scrapped a trip to China after what Washington described as a Chinese spy balloon flew through US airspace. Asked if Blinken would visit China soon, Kritenbrink said: "We'll see, I have nothing to announce."

On the odds of a meeting between Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Summit in San Francisco in November, he said, "I couldn't possibly say."

Meanwhile, China and Russia yesterday conducted a joint air patrol over the Sea of Japan and East China Sea for a sixth time since 2019, prompting neighbouring South Korea to scramble fighter jets.

China's defence ministry said the patrol was part of the two militaries' annual cooperation plan. South Korea scrambled fighter jets, according to its military, after four Russian and four Chinese military aircraft entered its air defence zone in the south and east of the Korean peninsula.

In China's last joint aerial patrol with Russia in November, South Korea also scrambled fighter jets after Chinese H-6K bombers and Russian TU-95 bombers and SU-35 fighter jets entered its Air Defence Identification Zone (KADIZ).

Japan similarly scrambled jets when Chinese bombers and two Russian drones flew into the Sea of Japan.

Press has blood on its hands

Prince Harry tells UK court

REUTERS, London

Prince Harry said the press had blood on its hands as he gave evidence against a tabloid publisher whose titles he accuses of phone-hacking and other unlawful activities, becoming the first senior royal in a witness box in more than a century. Harry briefly smiled as he passed the phalanx of waiting photographers and camera crews when he arrived at the modern Rolls Building in central London, ahead of the very rare court appearance by a royal. He and more than 100 others are suing Mirror Group Newspapers over allegations of widespread wrongdoing between 1991 and 2011.

MANIPUR GUNFIGHT
One border guard killed, 2 hurt

REUTERS, New Delhi

A gun battle between Indian security forces and insurgents in Manipur state killed one security personnel and wounded two others early yesterday, the army said, days after many militants were killed there in an operation following deadly ethnic clashes. The northeastern state bordering Myanmar has been tense in the past few weeks, with rioting and ethnic clashes killing at least 60 people and displacing 35,000 since early May. The ethnic violence began when tribal groups clashed with the majority Meitei community over economic benefits and quotas given to the tribes.

Blinken visits KSA to rebuild ties

AFP, Jeddah

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken headed to Saudi Arabia yesterday to strengthen strained ties with the long-time ally as the oil-rich kingdom forges closer relations with America's rivals. Blinken's three-day trip will also focus on efforts to end conflicts in Sudan and Yemen, the joint battle against the Islamic State group and the Arab world's relations with Israel. His visit comes at a time of quickly shifting alliances in the Middle East, centred around a China-brokered rapprochement in March between regional heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran. Another landmark change saw Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad invited back to the Arab League last month for the first time since the start of 12-year civil war in which his government has been backed by Russia and Iran.

SUICIDE ATTACK

Taliban provincial governor killed

AFP, Faizabad

The acting governor of an Afghan province was killed by a suicide bomber yesterday, officials said, months after the region's police chief was killed in a similar attack claimed by the Islamic State group. Security has improved dramatically since the Taliban stormed back to power in August 2021, ousting the US-backed government, but IS remains a threat. The bomber drove a car filled with explosives into the vehicle carrying Nisar Ahmad Ahmadi -- the deputy governor of northern Badakhshan -- in the provincial capital Faizabad.



An aerial view shows the dry bed of Woodhead Reservoir, revealed by a falling water level after a prolonged period of dry weather, near Glossop, northern England yesterday.

INDIA TRAIN CRASH
More than 100 bodies remain unclaimed
CBI begins probe

REUTERS, Balashore

Indian authorities yesterday made fervent appeals to families to help identify over 100 unclaimed bodies kept in hospitals and mortuaries after 275 people were killed in the country's deadliest rail crash in over two decades.

The disaster struck on Friday, when a passenger train hit a stationary freight train, jumped the tracks and hit another passenger train passing in the opposite direction near the district of Balashore in the eastern state of Odisha.

Till Monday evening around 100 bodies were yet to be identified, a senior state health department official told Reuters.

Meanwhile, a team from the federal Central Bureau of Investigation reached the site yesterday to start a probe into the cause of the disaster while a separate inquiry by railway's safety commission started on Monday.

At state capital Bhubaneswar's biggest hospital, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), large television screens displayed pictures of the dead to help desperate families who are scouring hospitals and mortuaries for friends and relatives.