

Russia attacks Kyiv, other Ukrainian cities

One rescue worker killed, 8 hurt in Kherson

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russia attacked military and infrastructure targets across Ukraine early yesterday, including in the capital Kyiv and the western city of Lviv, Ukrainian officials said.

Ukraine said it had shot down 32 of 35 Iranian-made Shahed drones launched from Russia's Bryansk region and Azov Sea.

But a "critically important facility" was struck in Lviv, far from the front lines and around 70 km (43 miles) from the border with Nato member Poland, regional governor Maksym Kozitskiy said. He gave no other details of the facility.

At least one emergency worker was killed and eight others were wounded in Russian shelling in the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson yesterday, the head of the president's office said.

The air force said on Telegram messaging app air defences had been in action in most regions of Ukraine.

"However, the main direction of attack

by Iranian drones was the Kyiv region. More than two dozen Shaheds were destroyed here," it said.

President Volodymyr Zelensky's office said drones attacked the Kyiv region in several waves, with the air alert lasting for over four hours. Several commercial and administrative buildings and some private houses were damaged, it said.

The Energy Ministry said debris from falling drones damaged electricity lines in the Kyiv region and also in the Mykolaiv region in the south, cutting off electricity for hundreds of residents.

Air force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat said in a radio interview that it was simply not possible for air defence systems to

cover all of a country as large as Ukraine. The air force said Russia had also hit the southeastern industrial city of Zaporizhzhia with Iskander and S-300 missiles.

Meanwhile, the European Union was set to unveil yesterday an aid package for Ukraine worth 50 billion euros, officials said ahead of an announcement.



Palestinian refugees gather with national flags outside the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza City yesterday, to protest cuts in aid. The head of UNRWA warned that a funding squeeze could jeopardise access to basic services for millions. PHOTO: AFP

Modi heads to US to deepen ties

Says no doubting India's position on Ukraine

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi left for the US yesterday on a state visit that has been projected as a milestone in ties between the two countries that would deepen and diversify their partnership.

Modi has been to the US five times since becoming prime minister in 2014 but the June 21-24 trip will be his first with the full diplomatic status of an official state visit.

The visit is expected to see the two countries expand cooperation in defence industry and high technology sectors, with India getting access to critical technologies that Washington rarely shares with non-allies.

"This special invitation is a reflection of the vigour and vitality of the partnership between our democracies," Modi said in a statement ahead of his departure.

Modi's visit comes amid differences in positions of Washington and New Delhi over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Asked in an interview with the Wall Street Journal about critical comments in the US for not taking a more forceful stance against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Modi said: "I don't think this type of perception is widespread in the US."

"I think India's position is well known and well understood in the entire world. The world has full confidence that India's top-most priority is peace," he said in the interview published yesterday.

Himalayan glacier melt accelerates

Scientists warn as climate change bites; glaciers in the region feed 10 of the world's most important river systems, including the Ganges, Indus and Yellow

AFP, Kathmandu

Himalayan glaciers providing critical water to nearly two billion people are melting faster than ever before due to climate change, exposing communities to unpredictable and costly disasters, scientists warned yesterday.

The glaciers disappeared 65 percent faster from 2011 to 2020 compared with the previous decade, according to a report by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

"As it gets warmer, ice will melt, that was expected, but what is unexpected and very worrying is the speed," lead author Philippus Wester told AFP. "This is going much faster than we thought."

Glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region are a crucial water source for around 240 million people in the mountainous regions, as well as for another 1.65 billion people in the river valleys below, the report said.

Based on current emissions trajectories, the glaciers could lose up to 80 percent of their current volume by the end of the century, said the Nepal-based ICIMOD, an inter-governmental organisation that also includes member countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar and Pakistan.

The glaciers feed 10 of the world's most important river systems, including the Ganges, Indus, Yellow, Mekong and Irrawaddy, and directly or indirectly supply billions of people with food, energy, clean air and income.

"With two billion people in Asia reliant

on the water that glaciers and snow here hold, the consequences of losing this cryosphere (a frozen zone) are too vast to contemplate," said ICIMOD's deputy chief Izabella Kozielec.

Even if global warming is limited to the 1.5 to 2.0 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels agreed to in the Paris climate treaty, the glaciers are expected to lose a third to a half of their volume by 2100, the peer-reviewed report said.

"It underscores the need for urgent climate action," Wester said. "Every small increment will have huge impacts and we really, really need to work on climate mitigation... that is our plea."

Wester said improving technologies and previously classified high-resolution satellite imagery meant predictions could be made with a good degree of accuracy.

The world has warmed an average of nearly 1.2 C since the mid-1800s, unleashing a cascade of extreme weather, including more intense heatwaves, more severe droughts and storms made more ferocious by rising seas.

Hardest hit are the most vulnerable people and the world's poorest countries, which have done little to contribute to the fossil fuel emissions that drive up temperatures

Amina Maharjan, a livelihoods and migration specialist at ICIMOD, said communities do not have the support they need.

"Most of the adaptation is communities and households reacting (to climate events). It is inadequate to meet the challenges posed by climate change," Maharjan said.

"What is going to be very critical moving forward is anticipating change," she said.

Unique species are also threatened by adverse changes to the climate of the diverse ecosystems that include tropical and subtropical rain forests, temperate coniferous forest and cold deserts, the report said.

Fourteen species of butterflies have already become extinct from the Murree Hills of Pakistan, according to the report, while endemic frog species are among the most impacted by climate change as they experience breeding problems and developmental deformities.

Melting glaciers also pose a danger to downstream communities. Runoff pools in shallow lakes, held back by rocks and debris. The risk comes when a lake overfills, bursting through its natural barrier and sending a torrent of water rushing down mountain valleys.



A man walks on the rubble of a damaged house following reported Russian air raids on the outskirts of Syria's rebel-held northwestern city of Idlib yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

500,000 fled Sudan fighting

Says UN refugee chief

AGENCIES

The head of the UN's refugee agency Filippo Grandi said yesterday that the number of people who have fled the fighting in Sudan was now more than 500,000 while two million are internally displaced.

"Today we pass the mark of half a million refugees from Sudan following the beginning of the conflict," he said at a press conference in Nairobi. "Two million people are displaced inside the country."

Sudan has been riven by conflict since April 15, with the army led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan battling the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commanded by his former deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

"If we don't silence those guns, the exodus of Sudanese people will continue," said Grandi.

He was speaking on World Refugee Day, a day after donors at a UN conference pledged close to \$1.5 billion to combat the humanitarian crisis in Sudan and help its neighbours host those fleeing the fighting.

NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Pakistan, China sign \$4.8b deal

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan and China yesterday signed a \$4.8 billion deal to build a 1,200-MW nuclear power plant, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said, hailing the investment by a country that Pakistan views as its most dependable ally. Work on Chashma 5 project would begin immediately, Sharif said on PTV following the signing of MOU between China National Nuclear Cooperation and Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission. "Investment from China in this project to the tune of \$4.8 billion sends a message loud and clear that Pakistan is a place where Chinese companies and investors continue to show their trust and faith," Sharif said.

GUN, TAX CHARGES

Joe Biden's son reaches plea deal

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden's son Hunter has agreed to plead guilty to two counts of failure to pay federal income tax, and admitted to illegally owning a gun, prosecutors said yesterday. Hunter Biden, whose business dealings have been under attack for years from Republican lawmakers, acknowledged possessing a firearm despite being a drug user. The plea agreement between the 53-year-old and the US Attorney's Office in his home state of Delaware will still need to be approved by a federal judge. The president's son is unlikely to face any prison time.

FOMENTING AMINI PROTESTS

Iran accuses 20 countries

AFP, Tehran

An Iranian intelligence officer has claimed that the United States and France are among some 20 countries involved in nationwide protests last year sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini. The demonstrations erupted following the September 16 death in custody of Kurdish Iranian Amini, 22, after her arrest for allegedly violating Iran's dress code for women. Hundreds of people were killed and thousands were arrested in connection with what officials labelled "riots" which they said were fomented by foreign countries after Amini's death. "Investigations carried out by the intelligence services of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) indicate that around 20 countries were involved in the riots," said the head of the services.

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAM

South Korea cuts 'killer questions'

AFP, Seoul

South Korea will drop so-called "killer questions" from its notoriously tough college entrance exam in a bid to reduce reliance on private cram schools, the education ministry said yesterday. More than half a million students sit the annual nine-hour test, known as "suneung", which plays a crucial role in deciding a student's college, career and even marriage prospects. The inclusion of "killer questions" was meant to help distinguish top students. But it has created an arms race of extra educational spending as parents and students flock to expensive private tutoring centres.