

WAGNER'S MUTINY AGAINST PUTIN

World watches with concern

AFP, Paris

Countries around the world were closely watching events unfolding in Russia yesterday, where a mutiny by the Wagner mercenary group posed the most serious challenge to President Vladimir Putin's long rule.

Below are what governments and analysts are saying about the extraordinary situation taking place in nuclear-armed Russia.

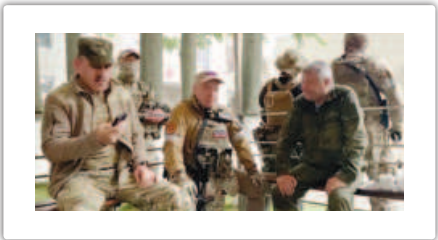
UKRAINE

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that the Wagner mutiny showed Russia was weak.

"Russia's weakness is obvious. Full-scale weakness. And the longer Russia keeps its troops and mercenaries on our land, the more chaos, pain, and problems it will have for itself later," he said in statement on social media.

THE UNITED STATES

US President Joe Biden was briefed on the situation in Russia and Washington and "will be consulting with allies and partners on these developments", National Security



Council spokesman Adam Hodge said.

EUROPE

European Union chief Charles Michel tweeted that the bloc was "closely monitoring the situation in Russia as it unfolds. In touch with European leaders and @G7 partners."

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak urged "all parties to be responsible and to protect civilians."

In Berlin, "the government is closely following the events in Russia", a spokesman told AFP. The foreign ministry advised avoiding central Moscow and government and military buildings in the capital.

In Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron "is following the situation very closely," the Elysee said. "We remain focussed on supporting Ukraine."

In Rome, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is closely following the events taking place in Russia, which show how the aggression against Ukraine is causing instability also within Russia," her office said in a statement.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Rescuers work in a 24-storey building partially destroyed as a result of missiles strike in Ukrainian capital of Kyiv early yesterday. Ukraine was on high alert after a fresh barrage of Russian missiles, with three people were killed and eight wounded in Kyiv and the central city of Dnipro.

SUDAN CONFLICT

Aid situation worsens as fighting spreads

AFP, Khartoum

Desperately needed relief supplies are being confiscated by the warring parties in Sudan as fighting spreads to areas previously untouched by the 10-week-old conflict between top generals, aid agencies said.

Demonstrations in support of the regular army were held Friday in greater Khartoum and in White Nile state to its south as civilians gave vent to their anger at the widespread requisition of private homes by the rival paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), witnesses said yesterday.

The battle for power between army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his former deputy, RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, has killed more than 2,000 people since April 15, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Greater Khartoum and the flashpoint western region of Darfur have been the main battlegrounds so far but this week residents reported a flare-up of fighting in the Kordofan region, scene of another long-running rebellion.

On Friday, witnesses reported renewed artillery exchanges and street-fighting in Khartoum, as well as "clashes between the army and the RSF" in North Kordofan state, hundreds of kilometres (miles) to its south.

The United Nations says a record 25 million people -- more than half of Sudan's population -- are in need of aid and protection.

While some relief supplies have trickled in, aid agencies report almost insurmountable hurdles to their work.

"Blatant restrictions on entry into Sudan for humanitarian workers and aid supplies are leaving millions in need stranded," according to the Norwegian Refugee Council's William Carter.

Doctors without Border (MSF) reported similar hurdles. Permits have been "delayed, rejected, rescinded, or plainly not respected," while "supplies have been confiscated" and staff "beaten and violently threatened" by armed groups, it said.

Two-thirds of health facilities in the main battlegrounds remain out of service, according to the Sudanese doctors' union, which says medical personnel have been targeted amid widespread violations against civilians.

At least 36 cases of sexual violence have been recorded in Khartoum alone by the governmental Combating Violence Against Women and Children Unit, with the majority of survivors accusing RSF fighters.

Eyeing China, Biden goes all-in for Modi

AFP, Washington

Laser-focused on countering China, US President Joe Biden has embraced Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he has few other world leaders, casting aside any concerns about the Hindu nationalist's authoritarian streak.

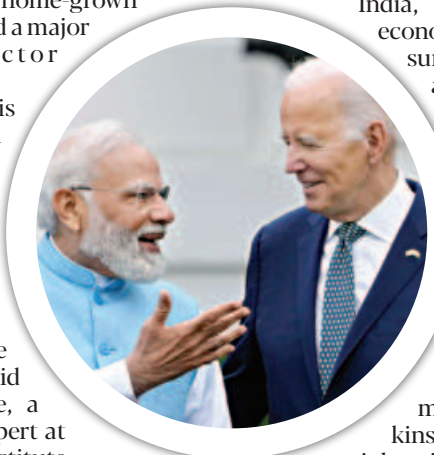
Biden offered Modi the full pomp of a state visit with two dinners -- one intimate and one gala -- a meeting with top CEOs, and a long list of concrete takeaways including agreements on US engines for India's new home-grown fighter-jets and a major semiconductor factory.

Biden is "trying to tell the world that America is back. We've got partners and allies and we've got India on our side of the ledger," said Aparna Pande, a South Asia expert at the Hudson Institute.

Biden hopes to "send a message to China -- you have your people and I have my people and India is among mine," she said.

Tamanna Salikuddin, a former State Department official, called the joint statement for Modi's visit "remarkable" in its scope with the defense deliverables on par with what the United States would give a Nato or other treaty ally.

"The depth and breadth of what we're committing to with India is really putting them in a totally different basket. And I think that is what Modi wanted," said



Salikuddin, now director of South Asia programs at the US Institute of Peace.

The Biden administration considers China the most serious long-term challenger to the United States, despite renewed efforts to manage tensions.

Both Biden and Modi publicly played down the China factor but Modi made a clear allusion in his address to the US Congress where he backed a "free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific," winning knowing applause from lawmakers.

India, a fast-growing economy which has surpassed China as the world's most populous country, has a long-running territorial dispute with China, which the Indian public widely sees negatively.

Modi enjoyed more obvious kinship with fellow right-wing populist Donald Trump, for whom the prime minister arranged a packed stadium rally in his home state of Gujarat, a scene hard to imagine with Biden, who is not known for exciting the masses.

But US presidents across party lines have been seeking a closer relationship with India since Bill Clinton in the late 1990s, seeing alignment between the world's largest democracies after Cold War estrangement.

Modi, the most powerful Indian leader in decades, comes with particular baggage. Before he became prime minister in 2014, the United States refused to issue him a visa due to his alleged role in anti-Muslim riots as leader of Gujarat.

The US State Department in its latest religious freedom report spoke of vigilante violence against minorities after incitement from Modi's base. Indian authorities also raided media offices and parliament expelled the opposition leader.

At least six lawmakers boycotted Modi's speech but Biden made clear that rights concerns would not impede ties and offered carefully chosen words about both countries facing challenges to democracy.

Modi, who has not held an open press conference at home in his nine years in power, was coaxed to take two questions as part of the visit and denied discrimination against minorities.

"There's an irony in that the Biden administration seeks to contrast democratic India with authoritarian China," said Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center.

But Biden "doesn't appear to worry too much" about accusations he is ignoring democratic backsliding in India, Kugelman said.

"The two leaders definitely got what they wanted: They brought the most prestige possible to a partnership they're keen to showcase," he said.

Ashley Tellis, a prominent India scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, offered a contrarian view in a recent essay in Foreign Affairs.

He pointed to India's refusal to join the West in isolating Russia over Ukraine and doubted that India, hesitant at formal alliances, would provide any meaningful support in a US conflict with China.

BOAT SINKS OFF ITALY 40 migrants missing: UN

AFP, Rome

More than 40 people are missing after a migrant boat capsized off the Italian island of Lampedusa, the UN said. The shipwreck took place on Thursday and at least one newborn baby is among those missing, said UNHCR representative to Italy Chiara Cardoletti. The vessel left from Sfax in Tunisia and was carrying 46 migrants from Cameroon, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast, Flavio Di Giacomo, a spokesman for the UN migration agency IOM, said Friday. The boat capsized in strong winds and high waves, he said. "Some survivors were taken to Lampedusa and others were brought back to Tunisia". "Among those missing were seven women and a minor. The survivors are all adult men", he added.

ANTARCTIC CONSERVATION Russia, China block move for new reserves

AFP, Santiago

Members of a multinational group on Antarctic conservation failed to agree Friday on a roadmap for the creation of three new marine protected areas -- a goal that has proven elusive for years. "No agreement was reached. It was not possible to obtain... a road map" for protected areas in the seas around Antarctica, Cesar Cardenas, a member of the Chilean Antarctic Institute and part of the Chilean delegation, told AFP. Cardenas said Russia and China resisted new protected areas. The bid to create the sanctuaries around Antarctica to counter climate change and protect fragile ocean ecosystems would safeguard nearly four million more square kilometers (1.5 million more square miles) of ocean from human activities. The areas are home to penguins, seals, toothfish, whales and huge numbers of krill -- a staple food for many species. Members of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) met to discuss plans for three new marine protected areas (MPAs): in East Antarctica, the Weddell Sea and the Antarctic Peninsula.



PHOTO: AFP

Activists gather in Seoul, South Korea yesterday to protest against a planned release of water from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant in Japan.

INDIA'S MANIPUR Gunfights rage on in 2 districts

TNN, Guwahati

Violence continued for the third consecutive day in Manipur on Friday as gunfights were reported between security forces and unidentified attackers in Manipur's Imphal East and Kangpokpi districts.

Sources in the security forces said exchange of fire between joint patrolling teams of Army and BSF and the attackers took place at Urangpat in Imphal East and Yaingangpokpi in Kangpokpi. No casualty has been reported so far.

Sources said armed miscreants sneaked into the area from Yaingangpokpi towards hill side, targeting Urangpat and Gwaltabi villages in Imphal East in the afternoon by firing from automatic weapons.

