

UKRAINE WAR 700,000 children now in Russia: Moscow

REUTERS

Russia has brought some 700,000 children from the conflict zones in Ukraine into Russian territory, Grigory Karasin, head of the international committee in the Federation Council, Russia's upper house of parliament, said late on Sunday.

"In recent years, 700,000 children have found refuge with us, fleeing the bombing and shelling from the conflict areas in Ukraine," Karasin wrote on his Telegram messaging channel.

Moscow says the move is to protect orphans and children abandoned in the conflict zone.

However, Ukraine says many children have been illegally deported and the United States says thousands of children have been forcibly removed from their homes.



Palestinians run for cover during clashes with Israeli forces amid an Israeli military operation in Jenin, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Taiwan holds live fire drills

REUTERS, Taiwan

Taiwan's military carried out live fire drills on its strategically-located southern coast yesterday, firing missiles from highly mobile armoured cars to destroy targets close to shore in a simulation of repelling invading forces.

China, which views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, has ramped up military pressure over the past three years to try to assert its sovereignty claim, and the island's armed forces routinely practice seeing off a Chinese attack.

Camouflaged Taiwan army Humvees roared around the coastal drill area in Pingtung county's Fangshan near the far southern tip of the island, before firing off US-made TOW anti-tank missiles to destroy static targets near the shoreline.

"Most of the drills we carried out today involved live artillery because the defence exercise needs to be similar to actual combat, allowing our army to be confident and have the capability to protect our homeland," Defence Ministry spokesperson Sun Li-fang told reporters.

Pingtung, which looks out on the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea, Pacific Ocean and Bashi Channel that separates Taiwan from the Philippines, is a highly strategic spot to watch Chinese military activity.

MAJOR WEST BANK OPERATION Israel kills 8 in Jenin

REUTERS, Jenin

Israeli forces hit the city of Jenin with drone strikes yesterday during one of the biggest West Bank incursions in twenty years, killing at least eight people and involving hundreds of troops and gun battles that lasted into the afternoon.

With drones clearly audible overhead and the sounds of gunfire and explosives heard across the city hours after the strikes, the Jenin Brigades, a unit made up of militant groups based in the city's crowded refugee camp, said it was engaging Israeli forces and had shot down one of the unmanned aircraft.

Operation of this scale have rarely been seen in the city since the end of the second Intifada uprising two decades ago.

At times during the morning, at least six drones could be seen circling over the city and the adjoining camp, a densely packed area housing around 14,000 refugees in less than half a square kilometre.

The camp has been at the heart of an escalation of violence across the West Bank that has triggered mounting alarm from Washington to the Arab world, without so far opening the way to a resumption of political negotiations that have been stalled for almost a decade.

For more than a year, army raids in cities such as Jenin have become routine, while there have been a series of deadly attacks by Palestinians against Israelis and rampages by Jewish settler mobs against Palestinian villages.

"What is going on in the refugee

camp is real war," said Palestinian ambulance driver Khaled Alahmad, describing yesterday's fighting. "There were strikes from the sky targeting the camp, every time we drive in, around five to seven ambulances and we come back full with injured people."

The Palestinian health ministry confirmed at least eight people had been killed and more than 50 wounded in Jenin, while another man was killed in the city of Ramallah overnight after being shot in the head at a checkpoint.

The Israeli military said its forces struck a building that served as a command centre for fighters from the Jenin Brigades in what it described as an extensive counterterrorism effort aimed at destroying infrastructure and disrupting militants from using the refugee camp as a base.

Footage showed Israeli armoured bulldozers ploughing up roads in the camp, which was largely destroyed by Israeli troops during a previous incursion two decades ago, while gunfire continued and aircraft hit at least one other target in the afternoon.

A spokesman said the operation would last as long as needed and officials suggested forces could remain for days. "An operation doesn't end in one day," Energy Minister Israel Katz, a member of the security cabinet, told Army radio.

Until June 21, when it carried out a strike near Jenin, the Israeli military had not used drone strikes in the West Bank since 2006. But the growing scale of the violence and the pressure on ground forces meant such tactics may continue,

a military spokesman said. "We're really stretched," he told journalists. "It's because of the scale. And again, from our perception, this will minimize friction," he said, saying the strikes were based on "precise intelligence".

Yesterday's operation, involving a force described as "brigade-size" - suggesting around 1,000-2,000 troops - was intended to help "break the safe haven mindset of the camp, which has become a hornets nest," the spokesman said.

Its apparent scale underlined the importance of the Jenin camp in violence that has further exposed the impotence of the Palestinian Authority to impose its writ over towns in the West Bank, where it holds nominal governance powers.

A spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called the operation "a new war crime against our defenceless people."

Saleh Al-Arouri, accused by Israel of leading the Hamas military wing in the West Bank, told Aqsa TV that fighters in Jenin should try to capture Israeli soldiers.

"Our fighters will rise from everywhere, and you will never know where the new fighter will come from," he said.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said his forces were "closely monitoring the conduct of our enemies," with the defence establishment "ready for all scenarios."

Following the last major raid in Jenin in June, Palestinian gunmen killed four Israelis near a Jewish settlement in the West Bank.

HK issues warrants for 8 overseas activists

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police yesterday accused eight overseas-based activists of serious national security offences including foreign collusion and incitement to secession and offered rewards for information leading to any arrest.

The accused are activists Nathan Law, Anna Kwok and Finn Lau, former lawmakers Dennis Kwok and Ted Hui, lawyer and legal scholar Kevin Yam, unionist Mung Siu-tat, and online commentator Yuan Gong-yi, police told a press conference.

Issuing wanted notices and rewards of HK\$1 million (\$127,656) each, police said the assets of the accused would be frozen where possible and they warned the public not to support them financially.

"They have encouraged sanctions ... to destroy Hong Kong and to intimidate officials," Steve Li, an officer with the police's national security department, told reporters.

The activists are based in places including US, Britain and Australia.

They are wanted under a national security law that Beijing imposed on the former British colony in 2020, after the financial hub was rocked by protracted anti-China protests the previous year.

Climate change spells 'terrifying' future

Says UN rights chief

AFP, Geneva

Climate change threatens to deliver a "truly terrifying" dystopian future of hunger and suffering, the United Nations' human rights chief warned yesterday.

Volker Turk slammed world leaders for only thinking of the short term while dealing with the climate crisis.

Turk told a UN Human Rights Council debate on the right to food that extreme weather events were wiping out crops, herds and ecosystems, making it impossible for communities to rebuild and support themselves.

"More than 828 million people faced hunger in 2021. And climate change is projected to place up to 80 million more people at risk of hunger by the middle of this century," said Turk.

"Our environment is burning. It's melting. It's flooding. It's depleting. It's drying. It's dying," he said, evoking a "dystopian future".

"Addressing climate change is a human rights issue... there is still time to act. But that time is now," he said.

The 2015 Paris Agreement saw countries agree to cap global warming at "well below" two degrees Celsius above average levels measured between 1850 and 1900 -- and 1.5C if possible. The global mean temperature in 2022 was 1.15C above the 1850-1900 average.

On current policy trends, the planet will be 2.8C warmer by the end of the century, according to the UN's IPCC climate science advisory panel.

"We must not deliver this future of hunger and suffering to our children, and their children," Volk said.

Iran executed 354 in 2023

AFP, Paris

Iran has hanged at least 354 people in the first six months of 2023, a rights group said yesterday, adding that the pace of executions was much higher than in 2022.

Rights groups have accused Tehran of increasing the use of the death penalty to spread fear across society in the wake of the protest movement that erupted last September over the death of Mahsa Amini.

Norway-based Iran Human Rights said the 354 people figure for the first six months up to June 30 was up 36 percent on the same period in 2022, when 261 people were executed.

Non-Persian ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by executions in Iran, it said.

Myanmar court to hear Suu Kyi appeal tomorrow

REUTERS



The Supreme Court in military-ruled Myanmar will hear an appeal this week by former leader Aung San Suu Kyi against two of her convictions, a source familiar with the case said yesterday, as the Nobel laureate seeks to reduce her 33 years of jail time.

The Supreme Court has announced it will hear appeals tomorrow against Suu Kyi's conviction for a breach of the official secrets act and for electoral fraud. The source, who declined to be identified because of sensitivities over her cases, said a decision could take two months.

A spokesperson for the junta could not immediately be reached for confirmation.

China, Japan, S Korea need to regroup

Says Beijing's top diplomat

REUTERS, Beijing

China, Japan and South Korea need to send a clear signal of regrouping towards co-operation, and resist "the coercion of bullying and domination", China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, said yesterday, in an apparent swipe at the United States.

The remarks come at a time of heightened tension as the US moves to forge closer ties with allies Japan and South Korea to push back against China's growing regional influence.

Wang was speaking on efforts to revitalise co-operation among the three neighbours at a forum organised by the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, a body set up by agreement among Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo.

He called for them to "foster a sense of strategic autonomy, maintain regional unity and stability, resist the return of the Cold War mentality, and be free from the coercion of bullying and domination," the Chinese foreign ministry said.

Although Wang stopped short of mentioning the US, he said "certain major countries outside the region" had attempted to replace unity with division while seeking geographical gains, the ministry said in a statement.

"If this trend is allowed to develop, it will not only seriously interfere with the smooth progress of trilateral co-operation, but also increase tension and confrontation in the region," Wang added.



A soldier launches a US-made TOW A2 missile during a live firing exercise in Pingtung county, Taiwan yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

UK saw hottest June on record in 2023

AFP, London

The UK this year has seen its hottest June on record, both in terms of mean temperature and the average maximum temperature, the British Meteorological Office said yesterday.

"The average mean temperature of 15.8 degrees Celsius (60.44 degrees Fahrenheit) for June 2023 in the UK is the highest in a series since 1884," the Met Office said in a statement.

The average temperature in June 2023 was 0.9 degrees higher than a previous joint record of 14.9 degrees registered in June of 1940 and 1976, according to provisional figures.

"It's officially the hottest June on record for the UK," said the Met Office's Mark McCarthy.

On the hottest day in June, the temperature reached 32.2 degrees Celsius, McCarthy said.