

Russia 'reliable partner' for Africa on food supply

Putin tells BRICS leaders, warns 'neo-liberalism' poses threat to traditional values in developing countries

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin told the BRICS summit in South Africa yesterday that Moscow intends to deepen ties with African countries, and that it would remain a reliable partner for food and fuel supplies.

In a video link address, Putin said Russia was interested in developing "multi-faceted ties" with Africa, which has been roiled by fuel and food price rises resulting from the conflict in Ukraine.

Russia's July exit from the Black Sea grain deal has seen grain prices soar, hitting many African countries very hard. Russia and Ukraine are among the world's biggest grain exporters.

In his remarks, Putin also said Russia had more than 30 energy projects in African countries, adding that Russian fuel supplies would help African governments to contain price rises.

"Over the past two years, exports to Africa of Russian crude oil, petroleum



products and liquefied natural gas have increased by 2.6 times," he said.

Putin added that the global transition to a greener, low carbon emissions economy would have to be "gradual, balanced, carefully calibrated", given projections for further growth in the world's population and energy demand.

Russia is keen to build up the BRICS group into a more influential bloc able to challenge Western domination of the global economy.

At its three-day summit in Johannesburg this week, the BRICS leaders agreed to invite six more countries - Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - to join the bloc.

In his remarks yesterday, Putin took aim at former colonial Western powers and their espousal of what he called "neo-liberalism", which he said posed a threat to both traditional values in developing countries and to the emergence of a multi-polar world where no one country or bloc dominated.

Japan releases water from Fukushima nuke plant China furious

AFP, Namie

Japan began releasing wastewater from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean yesterday, prompting a furious China to ban all seafood imports from its neighbour.

The start of the discharge of around 540 Olympic swimming pools' worth of water over several decades is a big step in decommissioning the still highly dangerous site 12 years after one of the world's worst nuclear accidents.

Live video provided by plant operator TEPCO showed two engineers clicking on computer mouses and an official saying -- after a countdown -- that the "valves near the seawater transport pumps are opening".

Japan has repeatedly insisted the wastewater is treated and will be harmless, a position backed by UN atomic watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The IAEA said yesterday that new on-site tests had confirmed the levels of radioactive tritium in the water being discharged were safe.

But China has warned the release will contaminate the ocean, and immediately responded yesterday by blasting Japan as "extremely selfish".

It then banned all Japanese seafood imports "to comprehensively prevent the food safety risks of radioactive contamination" - with Japan hours later demanding China lift the ban.

North Korea's foreign ministry likewise criticised the release, urging Japan to call it off.

Killings, narco crimes on rise

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for Peace and Human Rights.

Mohammed Mizanur Rahman, the refugee, relief, and repatriation commissioner (RRRC), said delay in repatriation is one of the main reasons why crime is on the rise.

Also, different Rohingya groups clashed over "drug peddling" due to unemployment of Rohingyas, Mizanur told The Daily Star.

Their reluctance to cooperate with the law enforcers stems from their mindset that they are stateless," he said.

Police records show that a total of 3,223 cases were filed against Rohingyas between August 25, 2017 and July 31, 2023 for 14 criminal offences, including narcotics and arms smuggling, rape, abduction, and killing.

The figure was 2,438 during the first five years since the Rohingya influx began on August 25, 2017.

Mahfuzul Islam, superintendent of police in Cox's Bazar, also thinks that the increase in criminal activity is the result of the delayed repatriation process.

"There is a sense of despair among the Rohingyas because they don't see any hope for repatriation soon. Crime levels had not been that high in the last few years, but the recent data shows that they are on the rise," he told The Daily Star on Monday.

Mahfuzul stressed the need for conducting counseling, motivation, and awareness campaigns for the Rohingyas to cut the crime rate. "These efforts would help instill confidence in them about repatriation," he said.

Officials said both ARSA and RSO have been operating in the Rohingya camps for years, but the law enforcement agencies used to deny it. They however, have recently admitted the

presence of the two armed groups.

Rapid Action Battalion says some 400 to 450 ARSA members are currently active in the Rohingya camps and they are collecting arms from a neighbouring country to engage in criminal activities.

Commander Khandaker Al Moin, director of Rab's legal and media wing, said these groups collaborate with armed factions from a neighboring country and carry out criminal activities, including abduction and murder.

"They are mainly involved in narcotics smuggling, particularly ICE and yaba pills, which earns them a big amount of money," he told The Daily Star.

Rab is active in the recovery of firearms and dismantling of arms factories linked to the armed groups, he said.

Moin stressed that these security threats should

be addressed holistically by the law enforcement agencies. He suggested relocating Rohingyas from border areas to maintain law and order more effectively.

Source in Armed Police Battalion (APBn) said that both RSO and ARSA are trying to establish control of the camps. On July 7, a gunfight between the two criminal groups left five people dead at Balukhali Rohingya camp 8 in Ukhia. All the victims were ARSA members.

These armed groups are particularly targeting the Rohingya community leaders to assert control over the camps and silence the voice against them.

According to police data, at least 33 Rohingya community leaders, locally known as Majhi, have died this year alone at the hands of the two armed groups.

RRRC Mizanur suspects that there is a plot against the Rohingya community leaders. "The fact that the

community leaders are being targeted indicates that someone aims to stop the Rohingya leadership."

Mahmudul Haque Chowdhury, founder of Rohingya Repatriation and Prevention Committee, alleged that Myanmar is influencing ARSA and RSO to perpetrate criminal activities, including murder, inside the camps. "Their objective is to obstruct Rohingya repatriation."

Apart from ARSA and RSO, six other criminal groups are reportedly active inside the camps. The six - Nobi Hossain Group, Munna Group, Dakat Hakim Group, Dakat Saleh Group, Islamic Mahas Group, and Al Yeakin, -- are involved in various criminal activities and sabotage, according to law enforcers.

Mizanur said efforts are underway to raise awareness and provide education to Rohingyas with an aim to engage them in constructive activities.



Several buildings collapse after massive landslides following heavy rainfall at Kullu's Anni town, in India's Himachal Pradesh state yesterday. No one was hurt in the landslide as residents had been moved out of the area because it was deemed unsafe.

PHOTO: AFP

UKRAINE'S INDEPENDENCE DAY

Russia launches missile attacks across Ukraine

One killed, 16 wounded, more than 10 buildings damaged; report says

Norway to give F-16 fighter jets to Kyiv

REUTERS, Kyiv

At least one person was killed and 16 people were wounded in Russian attacks across Ukraine yesterday, local officials said, as Kyiv marked 32 years of independence from Moscow.

The cities of Kherson and Dnipro, and the frontline town of Kurakhove, were hit by attacks which wounded civilians, and a farmer was killed by shelling in southern Ukraine, the officials said. A Russian missile strike on a bus terminal in Dnipro wounded 10 people, regional governor Serhiy Lysak said.

Rows of shops near the station were rocked by the blast, which destroyed some of them and left others full of broken glass and ruined goods. One woman rushed to the scene, pleading with authorities to let her see the damage to her shop selling electronics.

"When we finally got inside... we saw that everything was completely destroyed," the woman, who gave her name only as Tetiana, told Reuters. Another shop owner, Serhiy, expressed rage with Russia.

"I think they're animals. There are lots of people here (at the bus terminal), people arrive and leave the city. How can you fire on a civilian target?" he said. More than 10 other buildings including a bank, hotel and administrative building were damaged, Lysak said.

In the southern region of Kherson, three people were wounded in addition to the farmer who was killed, officials said.

Regional governor Oleksandr Prokudin said the farmer was killed by shelling while working in a field near the village of

Shyroka Balka.

A seven-year-old girl was injured by Russian shelling of the centre of the city of Kherson, Prokudin also said.

Ukraine's general prosecutor's office said two other people were wounded when one of the shells hit a roof of a private house, and posted a photo online showing a partially destroyed building with a gaping hole in one side.



Three local residents were wounded in a separate attack on a supermarket in the town of Kurakhove in the eastern Donetsk region, the prosecutor's office said.

Russia has regularly carried out strikes on Ukrainian centres far from the front line though it denies deliberately targeting civilians.

Meanwhile, Norway has decided to donate F-16 combat aircraft to Ukraine for its battle against Russia's invasion,

Norwegian broadcaster TV2 reported yesterday, citing unnamed sources. TV2 did not say how many jets Norway would provide.

The Norwegian foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. If confirmed, Norway would become the third nation after the Netherlands and Denmark - to announce donations of US-made F-16 jets to Ukraine.

In the battlefield, Ukraine's navy and military intelligence carried out a "special operation" overnight in which units landed on Russian-occupied Crimea, the defence ministry's Main Directorate of Intelligence (HUR) said yesterday.

The operation would amount to a rare demonstration that Ukrainian forces are able to stage ground operations in Crimea, which Russia seized and annexed in 2014.

Brief and dark video footage posted alongside the statement showed a small motorboat moving through water at night near a coastline. HUR said the landing point was on the western tip of Crimea, near the settlements of Olenivka and Mayak.

"Special units on watercraft landed on the shore in the area of the Olenivka and Mayak settlements," HUR said in a statement.

It said "all goals" had been achieved and casualties inflicted on the enemy, but did not identify the goals. "Also, the state flag flew again in Ukrainian Crimea," it said, without saying where exactly or providing further details.

Russia did not comment on the report, which coincided with Ukraine's Independence Day.

Indian rover rolls onto moon surface

REUTERS, New Delhi

The moon rover of India's Chandrayaan-3 exited the spacecraft yesterday to begin its exploration of the lunar surface and conduct experiments to help future probes, as the media hailed the historic landing as the country's biggest scientific feat. The spacecraft landed on the unexplored south pole of the moon on Wednesday evening, days after Russia's Luna-25 failed, making India the first country to achieve this feat. The soft, textbook touchdown by the lander after a failed attempt in 2019 sparked widespread jubilation and celebration in the world's most populous country. "The Ch-3 Rover ramped down from the Lander and India took a walk on the moon!" the ISRO said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

ASYLUM APPLICATIONS

UK backlog hits record high

AFP, London

The UK's backlog of asylum claims has hit a record high, official figures showed yesterday, heaping fresh pressure on the government which has pledged to cut immigration. Interior ministry statistics showed that 175,457 people were waiting for an initial decision at the end of June, up 44 percent from the 122,213 outstanding claims at the same time last year. There was another record high in people waiting more than six months for an initial decision on their application, to 139,961 in June this year - a 57 percent jump from 89,231 in June 2022.

CONFLICT, DROUGHT

Over 4m displaced in Ethiopia: IOM

AFP, Nairobi

More than four million people have been driven from their homes in Ethiopia, mainly by conflict or drought, according to new UN figures. The International Organization for Migration's National Displacement Report, which covered the period from November 2022 to June 2023, said a total of 4.38 million people were internally displaced. "Conflict is the primary cause of displacement and displaced 2.9 million IDPs (66.41 percent), followed by drought which displaced 810,855 IDPs (18.49 percent)," said the report, which was published yesterday. More than one million were displaced in the war-scarred region of Tigray, which was included in the data for the first time since September 2021, it added.

Brazil experiencing winter heat wave

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazil is enduring a heat wave in the middle of the southern hemisphere's winter, with the metropolis of Sao Paulo close to breaking records for August and for the year 2023. The inhabitants of the largest city in Latin America, with 11.5 million people, have been surprised by temperatures almost 10 degrees above the average for the month, of 24.5 degrees Celsius (76.1 degrees Fahrenheit), according to the National Institute of Meteorology (Inmet). And thermometers hit a high of 32.3 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, close to the 32.5 degrees Celsius reported on January 16, in summer. And they were also very close to the highest temperatures ever officially logged for August.