



Emergency and security service members and residents gather around the carcass of a car at the site of an Israeli strike in al-Khiyara town in Lebanon's Western Bekaa area yesterday which killed a member of the Jamaa Islamiya group according to a Lebanese security source. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday warned that fighting between Israel and Hezbollah must not turn Lebanon into "another Gaza."

PHOTO: AFP

West provoked Ukraine war

Says UK far-right leader, triggers outrage

AFP, London

Nigel Farage, leader of Britain's anti-immigration Reform UK party, faced strong criticism yesterday after saying that the West provoked Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In an interview with the BBC on Friday, Farage said "we've provoked this war", while adding that "of course" it was Russian president Vladimir Putin's "fault".

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak told reporters that Farage's claim was "completely wrong and only plays into Putin's hands".

Labour leader Keir Starmer, who looks set to take Sunak's job after an election next month, said Farage's comments were "disgraceful".

"Anyone who is standing for parliament ought to be really clear that Russia is the aggressor", he told reporters on the campaign trail.

Farage, a former European Union parliamentarian who has tried and failed to run for Westminster seven times, is seeking a seat for Clacton in east England in the country's general election next month.

His party is polling third behind the ruling Conservatives and opposition Labour parties, but is only predicted to pick up a few seats.

His comments met with outrage yesterday.

Interior minister James Cleverly criticised Farage for "echoing Putin's vile justification for the brutal invasion of Ukraine".

Former Conservative defence minister Tobias Ellwood called the comments "shocking" in the Daily Telegraph newspaper.

Meanwhile Labour's defence spokesman John Healey called the comments "disgraceful" and said his stance made him "unfit for any political office in our country".

Probed further on his views on Putin in the interview, Farage said that he "disliked him as a person" but "admired him as a political operator because he's managed to take control of running Russia".



UKRAINE POWER GRID

Russia launches new 'massive' attack, says Kyiv

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine yesterday said Russia had launched a "massive" overnight attack on energy infrastructure in the west and south, adding that at least seven people died from Moscow strikes elsewhere.

Russia launched 16 cruise missiles from land, sea and air as well as 13 attack drones, aiming at energy infrastructure in several regions, Ukraine's military said.

Air defences downed all but four of them, it added.

Russia's defence ministry said that its troops "carried out a group strike with long-range high-precision weaponry from air and sea and also drones on Ukrainian energy facilities that power arms production".

It said it also targeted warehouses containing munitions and "air-launched weapons provided to the Ukrainian military by western countries".

"All the set targets were hit," the ministry said, calling its latest attacks retaliation for Ukrainian attacks on its own energy network.

The Ukrainian energy ministry said this was Russia's "eighth massive, combined attack on energy infrastructure facilities" in the past three months, targeting the southern Zaporizhzhia region and Lviv in the west.

"Equipment at (operator) Ukrenergo facilities in the Zaporizhzhia and Lviv regions was damaged," the ministry said.

Ukrenergo said that two employees were wounded and hospitalised in Zaporizhzhia, where



Europe's biggest nuclear plant is located.

More than two years into the Russian invasion, targeted missile and drone attacks have crippled Ukraine's electricity generation capacity and forced Kyiv to impose blackouts and import supplies from the European Union.

Ukrenergo said outages across the country would start earlier than usual yesterday due to damage from the attacks.

Maksym Kozitskyi, the governor of the western Lviv region, said Russia "launched a missile attack on a critical energy infrastructure facility", sparking a fire that was later extinguished.

Ukrainian troops based in the west shot down seven out of 10 cruise missiles fired by Moscow, the Lviv regional governor said.

DTEK, the largest private energy company in Ukraine, said Thursday that strikes caused "serious damage" at one of its plants.

DTEK chief executive Maxim Timchenko warned that Ukraine "faces a serious crisis this winter" if the country's Western allies do not provide military aid to defend the energy network.

Front-line clashes were ongoing yesterday in the area near the town of Pokrovsk, northwest of the Russian-controlled city of Donetsk, where Moscow is trying to break through Ukraine's defences, Kyiv's military said.

Russia's defence ministry said troops had improved positions in the eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions and northeastern Kharkiv region.

Russia's defence ministry said it had hit 340 Ukrainian targets over the past day.

The head of Russian authorities in the Donetsk region, Denis Pushilin, said the separatist-controlled city of Donetsk and the nearby town of Gorlivka had come under heavy attack from Ukraine.

KOREA TENSIONS

US aircraft carrier arrives in S Korea

AFP, Seoul

A US aircraft carrier arrived in South Korea on Saturday for a joint military drills aimed to better counter North Korean threats, Seoul's navy said.

"The US Navy's aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt... arrived at the Busan Naval Base on the morning of June 22," the South Korean Navy said in a statement.

Its arrival "demonstrates the strong combined defence posture of the South Korea-US alliance and their firm resolve to respond to the escalating threats from North Korea," it added.

The carrier's visit comes around seven months after another US aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, came to the South in a show of strength against Pyongyang.

The USS Theodore Roosevelt is expected to participate in joint exercises with South Korea and Japan this month. Pyongyang has always decried similar combined drills as rehearsals for an invasion.

Progress on rights needed for Afghan 'reintegration': UN

AFP, United Nations

Restrictions on women's rights continue to prevent Afghanistan's "reintegration" into the international community, a senior UN official said Friday, noting the Taliban's participation in upcoming talks in Doha is not legitimisation of the isolated government.

Since their 2021 return to power, Taliban authorities have not been formally recognised by any nation and apply a rigorous interpretation of Islam, leading to a suppression of women's freedoms that the United Nations has described as "gender apartheid."

Restrictions on women and girls, particularly in education, "deprive the country of vital human capital" and lead to a brain drain that undermines the impoverished country's future, Roza Otunbayeva, head of the UN mission in the country, UNAMA, told the Security Council.

"By being deeply unpopular (the restrictions) undermine the de facto authorities' claims to legitimacy," she said. "And they continue to block diplomatic solutions that would lead to Afghanistan's reintegration into the international community."

Last year marked the start of a process in Doha to consider strengthening the world community's engagement with Afghanistan.

China, France launch satellite

AFP, Xichang

A French-Chinese satellite blasted off Saturday on a hunt for the mightiest explosions in the universe, in a notable example of cooperation between a Western power and the Asian giant.

Developed by engineers from both countries, the Space Variable Objects Monitor (SVOM) is carrying four instruments -- two French, two Chinese -- that will seek out gamma-ray bursts, the light from which has travelled billions of light years to reach Earth.

The 930-kilogram (2,050-pound) satellite "successfully" took off around 3:00 pm (0700 GMT) aboard a Chinese Long March 2-C rocket from a space base in Xichang, in southwestern Sichuan province, China's National Space Administration said. Gamma-ray bursts generally occur after the explosion of huge stars -- those more than 20 times as big as the sun -- or the fusion of compact stars.

UK's richest family get jail terms for exploiting staff

AFP, Geneva

A Swiss court handed jail sentences to four members of Britain's richest family, the Hinduja, on Friday, branding them "selfish" for exploiting Indian staff at their Geneva mansion.

Lawyers for the members of the Swiss-Indian family -- who were not present in court -- said they would appeal the verdict.

The defendants were acquitted of human trafficking, but convicted on other charges in a stunning verdict for the family, whose fortune is estimated at 37 billion pounds (\$47 billion) by the Sunday Times.

Prakash Hinduja, 78, and his wife Kamal Hinduja, 75, each got four years and six months, while their son Ajay, 56, and his wife Namrata, 50, received four-year terms, the presiding judge in Geneva ruled.

They were convicted of "usury" for having taken advantage of their vulnerable immigrant staff to pay them a pittance.

"The employees' inexperience was exploited," judge Sabina Mascotto said in her judgement. "The defendants' motives were selfish," she said, adding that the Hinduja family were motivated "by the desire for gain".

The court acquitted them of the more serious charge of human trafficking.

During the trial, the family were accused of bringing servants from their native India and confiscating their passports once they got to Switzerland.

Prosecutor Yves Bertossa accused the Hinduja family of spending "more on their dog than on their domestic employees".

The family paid the household staff about \$363 a month, up to 90 percent less than the going rate, the judge said.

The family had reached a confidential out-of-court settlement with the three employees who made the accusations against them, leading them to drop their

legal action, said the defence. Despite this, the prosecution had decided to pursue the case due to the seriousness of the charges.

Following the verdict, Bertossa requested an immediate detention order for Ajay and Namrata Hinduja, claiming a flight risk. The judge denied it, accepting the defence argument that the family had ties to Switzerland.

It noted that Kamal Hinduja was hospitalised in Monaco and the three other family members were at her bedside.



A girl holds placards as she joins the "Restore Nature Now" protest supported by Extinction Rebellion (XR), National Trust and WWF in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP