

Russia rains drones, missiles on Ukraine

2 killed, dozens hurt; US mulls peace talks exit

AFP, Kharkiv

Russia fired a fresh volley of missiles and drones at Ukraine overnight, wounding dozens of people, Kyiv said yesterday, as the United States warned it could end efforts to broker a ceasefire if it did not see progress soon.

US President Donald Trump has been pressing Moscow and Kyiv to agree to a truce, but has failed to extract any major concessions from the Kremlin, despite repeated negotiations between his administration and Russia on the three-year war.

After meeting European officials in Paris to discuss Ukraine, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington needed to figure out soon whether a ceasefire was “doable in the short term”.

“Because if it’s not, then I think we’re just going to move on,” he told reporters at Le Bourget airport before leaving the French capital.

The US is pushing Ukraine into a deal that would give Washington sweeping access to its mineral resources.

Ukraine’s prime minister will visit Washington next week for talks with top US officials aimed at clinching the minerals and resources deal by April 26, according to a US-Ukraine signed “memorandum of intent” published yesterday.

Trump wants the deal – designed to give the United States royalty payments on profits from Ukrainian mining of resources and rare minerals – as compensation for aid given to Ukraine under Biden.

Outline of minerals deal signed with US: Ukraine



Lebanese soldiers inspect the site near a burnt-out vehicle reportedly hit by an Israeli strike in Ghazieh, near Sidon, yesterday. A Hezbollah official said that the Iran-backed movement categorically refused to discuss handing over its weapons to Lebanon’s army unless Israel withdrew completely from the south and stopped its “aggression”.

PHOTO: AFP

US unveils new port fees for Chinese-linked ships

AFP, Washington

The United States unveiled new port fees on Chinese built and operated ships Thursday, in a bid to boost the domestic shipbuilding industry and curb China’s dominance in the sector.

“Ships and shipping are vital to American economic security and the free flow of commerce,” US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said in a statement announcing the new fees, most of which will begin in mid-October.

Beijing warned yesterday the new fees would be “detrimental to all parties.”

“They drive up global shipping costs, disrupt the stability of global production and supply chains, increase inflationary pressure within the United States, and harm the interests of American consumers and businesses,” foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said.

Myanmar’s opposition, junta set to extend truce

Says Malaysia PM

REUTERS, Bangkok

Myanmar’s junta and a key opposition group have indicated they will extend a ceasefire to support more aid efforts after a devastating earthquake, Malaysia’s Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday, following rare high-level talks.

Myanmar has been in the throes of an expanding conflict since its military ousted an elected government in 2021 and formed the State Administration Council (SAC) to run the country.

In late March, a 7.7 magnitude earthquake hit the country, killing over 3,600 people and creating a humanitarian crisis.

Anwar, who is also the chair of the Asean regional bloc, has held talks since Thursday with Myanmar’s junta chief Min Aung Hlaing and with the shadow National Unity Government (NUG) that is battling the military, seeking to curb the ongoing conflict to push aid into the country.

“There will be a ceasefire and no unnecessary provocations, because otherwise the whole humanitarian exercise would fail,” Anwar told reporters in Bangkok.

“My initial exchange with both the SAC prime minister and NUG has been very successful,” he said.

After the March earthquake, Myanmar’s junta announced a 20-day ceasefire on April 2, following a similar move by the NUG.

China pushes anti-‘bullying’ agenda

Keeps up diplomatic pressure on Trump to roll back his punitive trade tariffs

REUTERS, Beijing

China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned Global South nations that “unilateral bullying” was hurting a rules-based world, as Beijing kept up the diplomatic pressure on US President Donald Trump to roll back his punitive trade tariffs.

Power politics and unilateral bullying were undermining international rules and creating divisions and confrontations, Wang told a roundtable of developing country diplomats and scholars, according to a statement released by the foreign ministry yesterday.

In a written speech delivered to the event on Thursday, Wang also said the world was at a critical crossroads, and urged countries to oppose “unilateral protectionism”.

He did not name the US directly in his comments.

Trump on April 2 announced “reciprocal” tariffs on many US trading partners, with China taking the biggest blow. While levies on many countries have since been postponed for 90 days, Trump did not relent on the 145 percent tariffs he added on Chinese imports, prompting Beijing to punch back with duties on the US.

China has also taken the lead in lobbying other countries to resist Trump’s tariffs, with President Xi Jinping this week on a visit to Southeast Asia personally urging Vietnam and Cambodia, hit with US tariffs of 46 percent and 49 percent respectively, to oppose “unilateral bullying”.

Next week, China is planning an informal United Nations Security Council meeting to accuse the US, the world’s biggest economy, of bullying.

A note inviting all 193 UN member states to attend the April 23 meeting in New York specifically criticises the United States for imposing tariffs.

Some countries, such as Japan, have

already started to reach out to Washington to seek a reprieve over the tariffs.

But China remains adamant that the US should show respect before any talks can take place.

Trump on Thursday signalled a potential end to the tit-for-tat tariff hikes between the US and China, saying “at a certain point” people would not want to buy things.

“So, I may not want to go higher or I may not want to even go up to that level. I may want to go to less because you know you



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want people to buy and, at a certain point, people aren’t gonna buy,” he said.

The new US ambassador to Japan said yesterday he was “extremely optimistic” that the two countries will agree a trade deal, after Tokyo’s tariffs envoy visited Washington.

Ryosei Akazawa met President Donald Trump on Wednesday and held talks with senior US officials as Japan looks to pare back stiff levies announced by the White House.

While there was no immediate breakthrough, the next round of negotiations is scheduled before the end of the month.

“I’ve met now with most of the principals who are in the room and doing the negotiating... I’m extremely optimistic that a deal will get done,” ambassador George Glass told reporters.

“(We) have the best and the brightest from Japan there doing the negotiations. We have the best and brightest from the United States,” he said at Tokyo’s Haneda Airport.

US VISA APPLICANTS

US orders Gaza-linked social media vetting

REUTERS, Washington

The Trump administration on Thursday ordered a social media vetting for all US visa applicants who have been to the Gaza Strip on or after January 1, 2007, an internal State Department cable seen by Reuters showed, in the latest push to tighten screening of foreign travelers.

The order to conduct a social media vetting for all immigrant and non-immigrant visas should include non-governmental organisation workers as well as individuals who have been in the Palestinian enclave for any length of time in an official or diplomatic capacity, the cable said.

“If the review of social media results uncovers potential derogatory information relating to security issues, then a SAO must be submitted,” the cable said, referring to a security advisory opinion, which is an interagency investigation to determine if a visa applicant poses a national security risk to the United States.

The cable was sent to all US diplomatic and consular posts.

The move comes as President Donald Trump’s administration has revoked hundreds of visas across the country, including the status of some lawful permanent residents under a 1952 law allowing the deportation of any immigrant whose presence in the country the secretary of state deems harmful to US foreign policy.

The cable dated April 17 was signed by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who said in late March that he may have revoked more than 300 visas already.

The State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Trump officials have said student visa holders are subject to deportation over their support for Palestinians and criticism of Israel’s conduct in the war in Gaza, calling their actions a threat to US foreign policy interests.

Trump’s critics have called the effort an attack on free speech rights under the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

Japan bus driver steals \$7, loses \$84,000 pension

AFP, Tokyo

A Japanese bus driver with 29 years of service lost his retirement package worth \$84,000 after being fired for stealing \$7 from passengers’ fares.

Kyoto City sacked the man, who was not named, after he was filmed by the security camera of his bus pilfering 1,000 yen (\$7) in 2022.

After he was denied his retirement money of more than 12 million yen (\$84,000), the driver sued the city but lost the case.

The verdict was overturned in his favour, with a court ruling that the punishment was excessive.

But on Thursday the Supreme Court delivered a final ruling in the city’s favour, reinstating the original penalty.

It ruled that the man’s conduct could undermine public trust in the system and the sound operation of the bus service.

TOXIC HEAVY METALS

Study finds 17pc of world’s arable land contaminated

AFP, Washington



Up to 17 percent of cropland worldwide is contaminated with at least one type of toxic heavy metal, posing health risks to up to 1.4 billion people, scientists warned Thursday.

Published in the journal Science, their study is a first-of-its-kind global overview of heavy metal contamination in soils, based on a meta-analysis – an approach drawing on data from many previous studies – of almost 800,000 samples.

After ensuring the reliability and representativeness of the data, for example by ruling out samples taken purposefully at contaminated sites, the researchers used machine-learning algorithms to identify the worst-affected areas of the world.

Karachi mob kills member of Ahmadi minority

REUTERS, Karachi

A mob attacked a place of worship of Pakistan’s Ahmadi minority community in Karachi yesterday, killing one man, police said.

Ahmadi community spokesperson Amir Mahmood said the mob of 100-200 people beat a 47-year-old owner of a car workshop to death with bricks and sticks. Mohammad Safdar, superintendent of police for Karachi’s Saddar area, confirmed the death.

Safdar said that the mob was later dispersed, allowing 15 people trapped inside the building to be rescued. Mahmood said 30 people had been trapped.



HIV advocates, carrying mock coffins, protest in front of the US State Department, demanding the full restoration of the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in Washington, DC, US, on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

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