

## Push for 'regime change' in Russia

Zelensky urges allies as Russian drone, missile attacks on Kyiv kill 8

AFP, Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday urged his allies to bring about "regime change" in Russia, hours after a Russian drone and missile attack on Kyiv killed eight people including a six-year-old boy.

The overnight strikes reduced part of a nine-storey apartment block in Kyiv's western suburbs to rubble and wounded dozens more in the capital, according to authorities.

The Russian army meanwhile claimed to have captured Chasiv Yar, a strategically important hillside town in eastern Ukraine where the two sides have been fiercely fighting for months.

Moscow has stepped up its deadly aerial assaults on Ukraine in recent months, resisting US pressure to end its nearly three-and-a-half year invasion as its forces grind forward on the battlefield.

Speaking virtually to a conference marking 50 years since the signing of the Cold War-era Helsinki Accords, Zelensky said he believed Russia could be

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"pushed" to stop the war.

"But if the world doesn't aim to change the regime in Russia, that means even after the war ends, Moscow will still try to destabilise neighbouring countries," the Ukrainian leader added.

Between late Wednesday and early yesterday, Russia fired over 300 drones and eight cruise missiles at Ukraine, the main target of which was Kyiv, the Ukrainian air force said.

One missile tore through a nine-storey residential building in western Kyiv, tearing off its facade, authorities said.

AFP journalists at the scene of the strike saw rescuers scouring through a smouldering mound of broken concrete, the belongings of residents scattered among the debris.

The attack killed eight people in Kyiv and injured 73 others, a rescue services spokesperson said.



Ukrainian emergency workers operate amid the rubble of a residential building following an airstrike in Kyiv yesterday, part of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. PHOTO: AFP

## War of words escalates between US, Russia

Medvedev reminds Trump of Russia's Doomsday nuclear strike capabilities

REUTERS, Moscow

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev yesterday told US President Donald Trump to remember that Moscow possessed Soviet-era nuclear strike capabilities of last resort after Trump told Medvedev to "watch his words".

Trump, in a post on his Truth social network in the early hours of yesterday, singled out Medvedev, who is deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, for sharp criticism after Medvedev said that Trump's threat of hitting Russia and buyers of its oil with punitive tariffs was "a game of ultimatums" and a step closer towards a war between Russia and the United States.

"Tell Medvedev, the failed former President of Russia, who thinks he's still President, to watch his words. He's entering very dangerous territory!," Trump wrote, in his second warning to the close ally of President Vladimir Putin in recent weeks.

Trump on July 29 said Russia had "10 days from today" to agree to a ceasefire in Ukraine or be hit, along with its oil buyers, with tariffs. Moscow, which has set out its own terms for peace, which Kyiv says amount to demanding its capitulation, has not so far indicated it will comply with Trump's deadline.

Trump in his post yesterday said he didn't care what India - one of Russia's biggest oil buyers along with China - did with Russia.

"They can take their dead economies down together, for all I care. We have done very little business with India, their Tariffs are too high, among the highest in the World. Likewise, Russia and the USA do almost no business together. Let's keep it that way," he said.

Medvedev said that Trump's statement showed

that Russia should continue on its current policy course.

"If some words from the former president of Russia trigger such a nervous reaction from the high-and-mighty president of the United States, then Russia is doing everything right and will continue to proceed along its own path," Medvedev said in a post on Telegram.

Trump should remember, he said, "how dangerous the fabled 'Dead Hand' can be," a reference to a secretive semi-automated Russian command system designed to launch Moscow's nuclear missiles if its leadership had been taken out in a decapitating strike by a foe.

Medvedev has emerged as one of the Kremlin's most outspoken anti-Western hawks since Russia sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in 2022. Kremlin critics deride him as an irresponsible loose canon, though some Western diplomats say his statements give a flavour of thinking in senior Kremlin policy-making circles.

Trump also rebuked Medvedev in July, accusing him of throwing around the "N (nuclear) word" after the Russian official criticised US strikes on Iran and said "a number of countries" were ready to supply Iran with nuclear warheads.

"I guess that's why Putin's 'THE BOSS'," Trump said at the time.

Meanwhile, the governor of Russia's Penza region said yesterday that Ukrainian drones had struck a local industrial facility.

Separately, Russia's state railway company said that drone debris had hit railway infrastructure and temporarily halted trains in the southern Volgograd region.

Russia's Defence Ministry said that it had downed 32 Ukrainian drones over several Russian regions.



## Lithuanian PM resigns amid corruption probe

AFP, Vilnius

Lithuanian Prime Minister Gintautas Paluckas resigned yesterday amid an ongoing investigation into potential financial crimes by firms linked to him.

"I informed the president about an hour ago that I took the decision to resign from my duties as the prime minister," Paluckas said in a statement.

He added that he was also leaving his post as the head of the Social Democratic party.

"Despite my decision to leave my current duties, I will continue to defend my honour and dignity and I'm waiting for the conclusions of the investigations, which I'm sure will separate the facts from insinuations," he said.

Earlier yesterday, local media reported that Lithuania's Financial Crimes Investigation Service (FNTI) searched the offices of Dankora, a company belonging to Paluckas's sister-in-law.

The firm used EU funds to buy battery systems from Garnis, a company partly owned by Paluckas.

Investigative reporters in Lithuania first revealed in May that the same company partly owned by Paluckas received a subsidised state loan when he was already head of government.

The country's authorities then launched a probe, which is ongoing.

Journalists later revealed more cases of alleged corruption, some of which are now also under investigation.

Paluckas was previously convicted of abuse of office while serving as the director of the Vilnius City municipal administration. He was fined.



South Korean protesters hold signs reading 'No Trump! No King!' during a rally against US President Donald Trump's tariff policy outside the US Embassy in Seoul yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

EXTREME RAIN, FLOODS

## Death toll in north China rises to 60

REUTERS, Beijing

Extreme weather killed at least 60 people in northern China over the past week, with 31 deaths in an elderly care home in Beijing's hilly Miyun district in one of the deadliest floods to have hit the Chinese capital in years.

In Beijing, 44 people were killed and nine were missing as of midday yesterday, deputy mayor of Beijing, Xia Linmao, said at a press conference.

Heavy rains began a week ago and peaked around Beijing and surrounding provinces on Monday, with Miyun experiencing rainfall of up to 573.5 mm (22.6 inches) - levels local media described as "extremely destructive." The average annual rainfall in Beijing is around 600 mm.



In the nearby province of Hebei, 16 people died as a result of the intense rainfall, authorities said.

At least eight were killed in the city of Chengde just outside Beijing, with 18 unaccounted for.

The deaths occurred in villages within the Xinglong area of Chengde in Hebei province, state-run Xinhua reported late on Wednesday citing local authorities, without specifying when or how the people died.

The deaths in Chengde occurred in villages which border Beijing's Miyun about 25 km (16 miles) from the Miyun reservoir, the largest in China's north.

## Buddhist gem collection returns to India after 127 years

REUTERS, Hong Kong

A collection of hundreds of jewels linked to Buddha's remains has returned to India after 127 years following an auction planned for earlier this year that drew threats of legal action from the government in Delhi.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the return of the collection, known as the Piprahwa Gems of the Historical Buddha.

"A joyous day for our cultural heritage!" Modi wrote in a post on X on Wednesday. "It would make every Indian proud."

The collection of more than 300 gems including amethyst, topaz and pearls dates from the Mauryan Empire, Ashokan Era, around 240-200 BCE.

The collection, first unearthed by a Briton in northern India, was originally scheduled to be auctioned by Sotheby's in Hong Kong in May but the sale was postponed after India's government threatened legal action and demanded the jewels be returned.

Sotheby's subsequently identified Indian conglomerate Godrej Industries Group as the buyer and secured a sale that saw the permanent return of the gems to India, where they would be placed on public display. "Sotheby's is delighted to have facilitated the return of the Piprahwa Gems to India," the auction house said.

India's Ministry of Culture said it was an exemplary public-private partnership and the initiative aligned with Modi's broader mission to reclaim and celebrate India's ancient cultural and spiritual heritage from across the world.

## UN sounds alarm on SE Asia scam centre surge

AFP, Geneva

Human trafficking for forced criminal activity is growing at an alarming rate, with hundreds of thousands of people trapped in online scamming centres across Southeast Asia, the United Nations said Wednesday.

Too often, instead of getting help, victims are arrested for crimes they were forced to commit, the head of the UN's migration agency said on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons.

"Trafficking is a human rights crisis, but it's more than that. It's a massive global business that fuels corruption, spreads fear, and prays on the most vulnerable," Amy Pope said.

Her International Organization for Migration agency has witnessed trafficking for forced crime expand with "alarming" speed, she said.