

Top Russian general shot, hospitalised Lavrov points finger at Ukraine

AFP, Moscow

A top Russian military intelligence general was shot in a Moscow apartment building yesterday and hospitalised, Moscow said, in what it said was an assassination attempt orchestrated by Ukraine.

There was no comment from Kyiv. Russian investigators said Vladimir Alekseyev – the deputy head of Moscow's GRU military intelligence, sanctioned in the West for his alleged role in cyberattacks and charges that he organised a nerve agent attack on a Russian defector in Britain – was shot by an "unidentified individual".

It said the suspect fled the scene and the general was admitted to hospital. In televised comments, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused Ukraine of being behind the "terrorist act".



A displaced Palestinian man and woman retrieve a blanket from the rubble after Israeli aircraft targeted a five-storey house in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Willing to talk to US, 'without pressure' Cuba president responds to Trump's oil threat

AFP, Havana

Cuba is prepared to hold dialogue with the United States but not under pressure, President Miguel Diaz-Canel insisted Thursday after months of threats from US President Donald Trump.

Trump has vowed to cut off Cuba's access to oil and stated the communist island was "ready to fall" as he warned it to "make a deal" with Washington "BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE."

The Republican did not say what kind of a deal he was after, but has repeatedly stated the two countries were in negotiations, which Havana has denied.

"Cuba is willing to engage in dialogue with the United States, a dialogue on any topic... but without pressure or preconditions," Diaz-Canel said on state TV and radio.

He said any talks must take place "from a position of equals, with respect for our sovereignty, our independence and our self-determination" and without "interference in our internal affairs."

Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio have made no secret of their desire to bring about regime change in Havana.

NEW LIMITS ON NUKE WEAPONS US seeks three-way deal with Russia, China

AFP, Geneva

The United States yesterday urged three-way talks with Russia and China to set new limits on nuclear weapons, after the last treaty between top nuclear powers Washington and Moscow expired.

Thomas DiNanno, the under secretary of state for arms control, told the UN Conference on Disarmament that the New START treaty, which was allowed to lapse on Thursday, had "fundamental flaws".

Top US official says New START treaty had 'fundamental flaws'

China publicly rejected joining disarmament negotiations

Russia envoy insists new nuclear talks include France, Britain

"Serial Russian violations, growth of more worldwide stockpiles and flaws in New START's design and implementation gives the United States a clear imperative to call for a new architecture that addresses the threats of today, not those of a bygone era," he told the conference at the United Nations' European headquarters in Geneva.

"As we sit here today, China's entire nuclear arsenal has no



limits, no transparency, no declarations, had no controls," he lamented.

He added that "the next era of arms control can and should continue with clear focus, but it will require the participation of more than just Russia at the negotiating table."

The expiration of New START, which restricted the United States and Russia to deploying 1,550 nuclear warheads each, marks the first time in decades that the world finds itself without a treaty to curb the positioning of the planet's most destructive weapons, sparking fears of a fresh arms race.

US President Donald Trump did not accept a proposal from Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to keep New START's restrictions in place for another year, and called Thursday for a "new, improved and modernised treaty".

"New START does not allow the

United States to credibly uphold both our strategic deterrence commitments to the American people and our extended deterrence commitments to our allies," DiNanno insisted.

"We aim to improve upon New START in order to achieve a new, better strategic stability and arms control architecture that makes the world safer and more secure," he said.

China has already publicly rejected joining disarmament negotiations, noting that its arsenal is much smaller.

Russia's ambassador Gennady Gatilov meanwhile insisted that any new nuclear talks should also include other nuclear-armed states such as France and Britain.

Russia "would be involved in such a process if the UK and France are also involved, who are military allies of the United States in Nato," he told the conference.

EASTERN PACIFIC US strike on 'drug-smuggling' boat kills two

AFP, Washington

The US military Thursday said it killed two alleged drug traffickers in a strike on a boat in the eastern Pacific, bringing the death toll from Washington's campaign to at least 128.

"Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations," the US Southern Command said in a post on X, adding "no US military forces were harmed" in the operation.

President Donald Trump's administration began targeting alleged smuggling boats in early September, insisting it is effectively at war with alleged "narco-terrorists" operating out of Venezuela.

But it has provided no definitive evidence that the vessels are involved in drug trafficking, prompting heated debate about the legality of the operations, which have expanded from the Caribbean to the Pacific.

Last month, the US military carried out another strike in the eastern Pacific, killing two alleged drug traffickers.

Last week, relatives of two Trinidadian men killed in a strike on a boat the military said was carrying drugs.

ISRAELI-HELD SOUTH GAZA UAE plans to build compound for Palestinians

REUTERS, Jerusalem

The United Arab Emirates has drafted plans to build a compound to house thousands of displaced Palestinians in a part of south Gaza under Israeli military control, according to a map seen by Reuters and people briefed on the plans.

The planning map shows where the "UAE Temporary Emirates Housing Complex" would be constructed near Rafah, once a city of a quarter of a million people but now almost completely destroyed and depopulated by Israeli forces.

Rafah, near the Egypt border, is where reconstruction of Gaza is expected to start under US President Donald Trump's plan for a durable peace in the densely populated coastal enclave after two years of devastating war.

Donors have been reluctant to commit funds to the plan, worried that disagreements over disarming Hamas could lead the parties back to full scale conflict. However, there are doubts about the political viability of the Emirati project, as most Palestinians could balk at being housed in an Israeli-controlled zone while the vast majority of civilians live in Hamas-run areas of Gaza, diplomats said.

Trump's plan saw the establishment of a US-led, multinational mission for Gaza based in southern Israel, where Emirati officials have shared details of their plans to build temporary housing.

JAILED PROTESTERS Venezuela amnesty law passes first vote

REUTERS

An amnesty law being considered in Venezuela's legislature that would grant immediate clemency to people jailed for participating in political protests or critiquing public figures won initial lawmaker approval on Thursday.

According to a draft seen by Reuters, the bill would also return assets of those detained and cancel Interpol and other international measures previously issued by the government, allowing opposition figures in exile to return home.

The bill passed unanimously in the first of two necessary votes at the National Assembly, which is controlled by the socialist ruling party. The date for a second session to debate the matter has not yet been set.

The amnesty law, announced last week by interim President Rodriguez, would lead to hundreds of people being released if it were to be passed in its current form and would likely please the Trump administration, which has hailed prisoner releases.

Rodriguez's brother Jorge Rodriguez, the head of the assembly, described the law as a difficult but necessary step. "The path of this law is going to be full of obstacles, full of bitter moments ... we're not only going to have to swallow hard ... but also swallow frogs," he said. "We ask for forgiveness and we also have to forgive."

Venezuela's opposition and rights groups have said for years the government has used detentions to stamp out dissent by politicians, members of the security services, journalists and activists, charging them arbitrarily with crimes.



MANIPUR VIOLENCE Kuki-Zo tribal bodies enforce shutdown Oppose MLA's role in govt formation

NDTV ONLINE

A total shutdown was imposed in the areas where clashes took place between youth protesters and security forces on Thursday night in the Indian state of Manipur's Churachandpur district.

Kuki-Zo tribal groups have declared a social boycott of Kuki-Zo legislators who have joined the newly formed Manipur government led by Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh.

The boycott and a dawn-to-dusk "total shutdown" across the hills inhabited by the Kuki-Zo people – to protest the "betrayal" by these MLAs – were enforced hours before the seventh session of the 12th Manipur Assembly began with an address by Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla.

According to sources, around two people were injured while another five were detained. Throughout the night, there was tear gas shelling on the mob.

The clashes started at the Tuibong Forest gate area, initially with mobs pelting stones at security forces, forcing the forces to backtrack. However, the security forces took up positions at a location along the road after retreating.

The protesters then regrouped and launched another round of attacks on the security forces, which continued until 3:00 am yesterday morning, sources added.

Kuki Women Organisation for Human Rights (KWCHR) also announced that it will organise a mass public rally to oppose the participation of Kuki-Zo MLAs in the formation of the government.



Observers film ICE agents holding a perimeter after one of their vehicles got a flat tire on Penn Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Tunisia detains MP critical of president

AFP, Tunis

A Tunisian court yesterday ordered the detention of a lawmaker accused of criticising President Kais Saied following recent floods, his lawyer told AFP.

Ahmed Saidani was taken into custody on Wednesday for "harming others via social media", lawyer Houssein Eddine Ben Attia said.

Ben Attia said his client faced up to two years in prison under a telecommunications law, with his trial due to start on February 12.

Saidani posted on social media on Tuesday about Saied's visits to areas affected by floods, calling him the "supreme commander of sanitation and stormwater drainage".

At least five people died and others were still missing after Tunisia saw its heaviest rainfall in over 70 years last month.