France's Macron tightens curbs on protests

Blames hard left for unrest; Lyon bans all Saturday protests

REUTERS, *Paris*

French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday that "illegitimate" protests would be banned in the coming days and blamed "seditious" ultra-left groups and vandals for last weekend's riots and looting.

Speaking after a meeting with intelligence chiefs and senior ministers, Macron said demonstrations organised by groups such as trade unions would be allowed to go ahead but could be diverted along alternative routes to protect businesses.

"Last Saturday we had political and seditious acts by ultra-left groups whose aim is to bring down the Republic," Macron said. His comments came as authorities across France prepared for fresh protests following some of the country's worst urban unrest in years.

All protests planned for Saturday in Lyon, France's second-largest city, have been banned, local authorities said. Yet fresh demonstrations are already taking shape ahead of what officials fear could be another volatile weekend.

France's main student union, UNEF, has called for rallies tomorrow, while the Yellow Vest movement, the anti-establishment force that emerged in 2018, has filed plans for a march through central Paris.

Businesses in central Paris have begun boarding up their shop windows in case of violence. Luxury goods group Hermes said it had stepped up security measures at its French stores.

Elsewhere, authorities in the northern city of Orleans were bracing for potential unrest as the far-right National Rally was due to hold an annual meeting and unions and left-wing groups planned demonstrations.



Protesters wave flags and carry signs as they face riot police during an anti-government protest by students in Tirana, Albania, yesterday. Albanian lawmakers grappled on the floor of parliament as the opposition accused the government of violently targeting protesters amid a week of unrest in the capital. PHOTO: **REUTERS**

Russia, Ukraine trade missile, drone strikes

Zelensky says ballistic missile attacks show 'no change' in Kremlin position after Putin-Witkoff talks; Ukraine gets 252 bodies in swap with Russia

REUTERS, *Kyiv*

Russia pounded Kyiv with ballistic missiles and Ukraine sent hundreds of drones towards Moscow overnight as the warring sides kept up a barrage of attacks despite the latest US push to end the conflict.

Russia said on Wednesday it was ready to resume US-mediated talks with Ukraine next month, after President Vladimir Putin hosted US envoy Steve Witkoff for talks in St Petersburg.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he hoped negotiations, which would be the first since February, would take place early in November.

But after overnight missile strikes, Zelensky said: "Almost immediately after another round of talks, Russia launched a pointed attack. This means there has been no real change in its attitude towards everything that is happening."

Ukraine said Russia fired at least 21 ballistic missiles in three waves. Russia said Ukraine launched 630 drones towards the capital Moscow during the night.

The two sides held an exchange of war dead, with Moscow handing over 252 bodies and Ukraine handing over 25, according to the Belta state news agency in neighbouring Belarus. Such exchanges have accompanied moves towards talks in the past.

But while Witkoff spoke of "some degree of momentum" after meeting Zelensky and European and Nato officials in Oslo earlier in the week, the Kremlin expressed doubts.

"The Americans sensed some new nuances (in Oslo) and told us about this. But these nuances, so to speak, do not entirely satisfy us," Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said.

A senior Russian official, briefed on the results of the Putin-Witkoff talks, said they were relatively short and not substantive. The American brought a set of proposals drafted in Oslo and handed them to Putin for review, the person said.



- Ukraine launches 630 drones towards Moscow
- Russia fired 21 ballistic missiles in three waves

Meanwhile, Nato yesterday said it was allowing Ukraine to buy weapons through the alliance's central procurement agency, as the war-torn country seeks to boost arms supplies.

On Wednesday night, Russia carried out a "massive strike" on port infrastructure in Ukraine's Odesa region, as well as on vessels used by the Ukrainian military. In Russia, two people were wounded near Moscow by drones launched towards the capital.

IN BRIEF



Iran's Guards hit 4 ships in Gulf

Warn US of wider response

AGENCIES

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy said yesterday that four vessels involved in illegal oil transfers in the northern Persian Gulf were simultaneously hit and caught fire after being tracked by its forces on Wednesday.

The IRGC added that three more vessels collided with mines west of the Strait of Hormuz, and warned the US military that continued provocations could lead to a wider response against its regional bases.

"The US military must know that if this trend continues, the conflict will extend to its bases in the region," the Guards, the ideological arm of Iran's military, said in a statement on their Sepah News website.

"This is a serious warning," they added.

Iran claims control over Hormuz. It regularly attacks ships that attempt to navigate the strait without its authorisation.

But the US military has been escorting vessels through the waterway in increasing numbers, with Iran responding by stepping up attacks.

POLLS INTIMIDATION

US Democrats accuse Trump administration

AFP, *Washington*

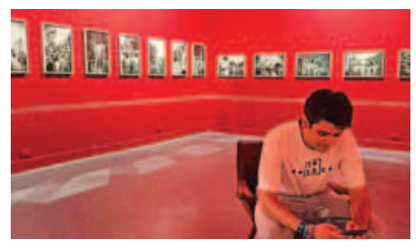
Democratic Party leaders have sued US President Donald Trump and members of his administration, accusing them of aiming "threats and intimidation" at state and local officials in the run-up to the November 3 midterm election.

Democratic governors, Congressional leaders and other party entities filed suit in federal court on Tuesday against Trump, Attorney General Todd Blanche, the Justice Department and Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin, among others.

Democrats sued Trump, Blanche, Justice Department and Homeland Security chief Mullin in federal court

Justice and Homeland Security officials have "sought to bolster their interference efforts through a persistent stream of threats and intimidation directed towards state and local election officials across the country," the complaint reads.

Democratic officials railed against the government's request "with just 48 hours' notice" that California refuse to send ballots to more than 20,000 registered voters, citing doubts about their citizenship.



Rahul Gandhi's nephew alleges forced removal of artwork

REUTERS, *New Delhi*

The nephew of Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi said he was forced to remove several pieces of art documenting youth protests from his exhibition at a government-run cultural centre in New Delhi this week, as they were deemed "objectionable."

Raihan Vadra, 26, the son of Gandhi's sister, lawmaker Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, said the management at Bikaner House forced him to remove the artwork just hours before his exhibition opened on Wednesday.

"The photos were of the youth protests in Delhi," Vadra said in a post on social media. "Apparently the content is objectionable."

He was also directed to remove two photographs of the Indian flag but he refused, he said.

Youth protests, led by the Cockroach Janta Party, have emerged as a major challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. A weeks-long sit-in forced the resignation of his education minister in July over exam paper leaks.



Palestinians spray a vehicle with water after it was hit by an Israeli strike in Gaza City yesterday. Israeli strikes and gunfire killed at least four people in the enclave in separate incidents, health officials said. PHOTO: **REUTERS**

UN climate fund moves to provide $20m aid for Nepal

AFP, *Washington*

The United Nations' climate loss and damage fund yesterday moved to provide $20 million in aid sought by flood-stricken Nepal, the first time it has set aside money for any country, in a key test of the body's credibility.

In the first extraordinary meeting since its launch in 2022, the fund's board agreed to earmark the modest sum for the Himalayan country, which was hit in August by tsunami-like floods triggered by a climate-induced ice and rock avalanche that killed more than 1,400 people and left over 5,000 missing.

"Hearing no objections, the decision is so adopted," Camila Minerva Rodriguez Tavarez, co-chair of the board, said following a virtual meeting.

The decision does not, however, mean that Nepal will immediately receive the funding, which amounts to less than 0.5 percent of the government's $4.78 billion estimate for reconstruction.

Twenty million dollars is the maximum amount countries can request in a single application.

Nepal will first have to present a proposal, and that proposal will have to be approved by the fund's board. There is no firm timeline for the process.

The creation of the "Fund for responding to Loss and Damage" was hard-won by developing countries, and greeted with standing ovations, at the UN climate conferences of 2022 and 2023 (COP27 and COP28).

But since it became operational, critics have faulted both the meager pledges from governments -- $822 million to date -- and a disbursement cycle disconnected from climate disasters.



No money has been disbursed so far.

Nepal's devastating floods should be a turning point for global climate action, with the international community helping the Himalayan nation recover, a top UN official told AFP on Saturday.

The country suffered one of the worst disasters in its history on August 26, when a mountain collapse near the China border triggered catastrophic floods that killed more than 1,400 people and left over 5,000 missing.

Scientists said climate change played a significant role in that disaster.