

Pro-Kremlin Rally Outside ‘Unfriendly’ Embassies

# Putin Ignores ICC Arrest Warrant, Visits Crimea



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KYIV (AP/AFP) – Russian President Vladimir Putin traveled to Crimea to mark the ninth anniversary of the Black Sea peninsula’s annexation from Ukraine on Saturday, the day after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the Russian leader accusing him of war crimes.

Putin visited an art school and a children’s center, locations that appeared to have been chosen in response to the court’s action on Friday.

The court specifically accused him Friday of bearing personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine during war on the neighboring country that started almost 13 months ago.

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 after a referendum.

Putin has shown no intention of relinquishing the Kremlin’s gains. Instead, he stressed Friday the importance of holding

Crimea.

“Obviously, security issues take top priority for Crimea and Sevastopol now,” he said, referring to Crimea’s largest city. “We will do everything needed to fend off any threats.”

The ICC’s arrest warrant was the first issued against a leader of one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. The court, which is based in The Hague, Netherlands, also issued a warrant for the arrest of Maria Lvova-Belova, the commissioner for Children’s Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation.

The move was immediately dismissed by Moscow. Its practical implications, however, could be limited as the chances of Putin facing trial at the ICC are highly unlikely because Moscow does not recognize the court’s jurisdiction or extradite its nationals.

Meanwhile, pro-Kremlin activists rallied in Moscow Saturday outside embassies of countries considered “unfriendly” by Russia on the ninth anniversary of its annexation of Crimea, a youth movement said.

The pro-Kremlin youth movement “Molodaya Gvardia” (“The Young Guard”) said that over 5,000 people demonstrated outside the embassies of 20 “unfriendly” nations including the United States, France, Germany and Poland.

Widespread Russian attacks continued in Ukraine after the court’s announcement. Ukraine was attacked by 16 Russian drones on Friday night, the Ukrainian air force reported early Saturday.

Writing on Telegram, the air force command said that 11 out of 16 drones were shot down “in the central, western and eastern regions.” Among areas targeted were the capital, Kyiv, and the western Lviv province.

The head of the Kyiv city administration, Serhii Popko, said Ukrainian air defenses shot down all drones heading for the Ukrainian capital, while Lviv regional Gov. Maksym Kozyskyi said Saturday that three of six drones were shot down, with the other three hitting a district bordering Poland.

According to the Ukrainian air force, the attacks were carried out from the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov and Russia’s Bryansk province, which borders Ukraine.

The Ukrainian military additionally said in its regular update Saturday morning that Russian forces over the previous 24 hours launched 34 airstrikes, one missile strike and 57 rounds of anti-aircraft fire. The Facebook update said that falling debris hit the southern Kherson province, damaging seven houses and a kindergarten.

## Officials Preparing Security in Case of Trump Indictment

NEW YORK (AP/AFP) – Law enforcement officials in New York are making security preparations for the possibility that former President Donald Trump could be indicted in the coming weeks and appear in a Manhattan courtroom in an investigation examining hush money paid to women who alleged sexual encounters with him, four law enforcement officials said.

There has been no public announcement of any timeframe for the grand jury’s secret work, including any potential vote on whether to indict the ex-president.

The law enforcement officials, who were not authorized to speak publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said

authorities are just preparing in case of an indictment. They described the conversations as preliminary and are considering security, planning and the practicalities of a potential court appearance by a former president.

Trump’s lawyer, Joseph Tacopina, told The Associated Press that if Trump is indicted, “we will follow the normal procedures.”

The Manhattan district attorney’s office had no comment. A message was left for court administrators.

Trump said he expects to be arrested Tuesday and called for protests ahead of his possible indictment.

“THE FAR & AWAY LEADING REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE & FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

WILL BE ARRESTED ON TUESDAY OF NEXT WEEK. PROTEST, TAKE OUR NATION BACK!” he wrote on Truth Social Saturday morning.

Danielle Filson, a spokesperson for Manhattan’s District Attorney’s office, declined to comment on the former president’s statement.

The former president has denied wrongdoing, and federal investigators ended their own inquiry into the payments in 2019.

But testimony from former Trump lawyer Michael Cohen, who arranged for the payment and already has been convicted and served prison time, could help bring the first charges in history against a former president.

## Pakistan Police Storm Home of Former PM Khan, Arrest Dozens

LAHORE (AP) – Police in Pakistan stormed former Prime Minister Imran Khan’s residence in the eastern city of Lahore on Saturday and arrested over 60 people amid tear gas shelling after someone opened fire from the roof of the building, officials said.

Senior police officer Suhail Sukhera, who led the operation in an upscale Lahore neighborhood, said police moved to remove a barricade erected by members of Khan’s Tehreek-e-Insaf party and his defiant supporters. He said they blocked the lanes around Khan’s residence with concrete blocks, felled trees, tents and a parked truck.

Khan was not in the home, having traveled to Islamabad to appear before a judge to face charges he sold state gifts while in office and hid his assets. The judge postponed that hearing until an unspecified future date.

Sukhera said baton-wielding Khan supporters attempted to resist police by throwing stones and Molotov cocktails and a man on the roof of Khan’s residence opened fire. No one was hurt.

Sukhera said police broke open the main door of Khan’s residence and found masks, petrol-filled bottles, iron rods and batons used in attacks on police during the week. Sukhera said that inside the sprawling residence, illegal structures were erected to shelter those who have been involved in attacks on police that have injured dozens of officers.

Witnesses said police attempted to disperse Khan supporters by firing tear gas and chased them to several homes



*Supporters of Pakistan’s former prime minister Imran Khan gather around his car as he leaves his Lahore residence to appear in court in Islamabad.*

in the Zaman Park neighborhood. Khan was expected to appear in an Islamabad court on Saturday after a top court Friday suspended his arrest warrant, giving him a reprieve to travel to Islamabad and face charges in a graft case without being detained.

Khan had been holed up at his home in Lahore since Tuesday, after failing to appear at an earlier hearing in the case. His supporters hurled stones and clashed with baton-wielding police for two days to protect the former premier from arrest.

Khan’s motorcade arrived near the federal judicial complex in Islamabad, where his supporters also clashed with police who were preventing them from entering the complex. The enraged Khan supporters threw rocks at police

and in reply police lobbed tear gas canisters to disperse them.

Khan’s attorney, Babar Awan, filed an application for Khan’s exemption from appearance in court amid special circumstances.

Khan, during his road trip to Islamabad, said in a video message that police had broken into his residence in Lahore while his wife was alone at the home. He condemned the action and demanded that those responsible be punished.

Khan, now the opposition leader, was ousted in a no-confidence vote in Parliament last April.

The 70-year-old has said his removal from power was part of a conspiracy by his successor, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, and the United States.

## North Korea: 800,000 Youths Volunteer to Fight ‘U.S. Imperialists’



*North Korean soldiers at the Ministry of National Defence in Pyongyang*

PYONGYANG (Al Jazeera) – North Korea claims that about 800,000 young people have volunteered for military service to fight against the United States and other enemies, the country’s state newspaper Rodong Sinnum has reported.

The volunteers – promising to “completely wipe out” North Korea’s enemies and unify the two Koreas – signed up for enlistment or re-enlistment in the military at events on Friday, Rodong Sinnum said, in a report that featured photos of people waiting in long lines to sign their names at construction sites and other outdoor venues.

“About 800,000” students and workers – described as the country’s “youth vanguard” – had stepped up “at once to join the war to defend the homeland and the war to destroy the enemy”, Rodong Sinnum reported on Saturday, according to NK News – which monitors events in North Korea.

According to the NK News report, the young volunteers were said to be responding to provocative acts by the U.S. and South Korea, referred to in the newspaper report as “U.S. imperialists and puppet traitors” bent on destroying North Korea’s “independence and right to live and

develop”.

The youth volunteers were determined to “mercilessly wipe out the war fanatics who are making a last-ditch effort to erase our socialist fatherland”, Rodong Sinnum said, according to NK News.

“While the ages of those who reportedly signed up were not announced, all men in North Korea must serve in the military for at least 10 years and women for at least three years due to the country’s conscription system,” NK News reported.

The mass enlistment on Friday came a day after North Korea launched a Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which Pyongyang said had travelled some 1,000km (620 miles) “before accurately landing” at a pre-set location in the East Sea of Korea, which is also known as the Sea of Japan.

North Korea said it launched the Hwasong-17 in response to “provocative and aggressive” military drills under way between the U.S. and South Korea. Pyongyang regards the joint exercises as a rehearsal by Washington and Seoul for an invasion of the North.

South Korean and U.S. forces began 11 days of joint military drills, dubbed “Freedom Shield 23”, on Monday.

## Serbia, Kosovo Leaders Hold Talks on Peace Plan

PRISTINA (AFP) – Kosovo and Serbia leaders kicked off the latest round of EU-led talks Saturday, as the long-time rivals come under increasing pressure to strike a deal to normalize ties.

The meeting in North Macedonia comes after the two sides failed to reach an agreement in Brussels last month, where the peace plan was unveiled even as Kosovo’s Prime Minister Albin Kurti and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic remained at loggerheads over a path forward.

The 11-point document laid out a deal stating that neither side would resort to violence to resolve a dispute, nor seek to prevent the other from joining the European Union or other international bodies -- a key demand from Kosovo.

As events began Saturday, Vucic posted a picture on social media of his meeting with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and special EU envoy for the talks Miroslav Lajcak.

The two sides sat down with the European representatives first before meeting face-to-face later on Saturday.

“I am optimistic, I am attentive. I will do the best for the Republic of Kosovo,” said Kurti on arriving for the talks in Ohrid.

Serbia has long refused to recognize Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence made in 2008, with perennial bouts of unrest erupting between Belgrade and its former breakaway province.

Following the talks in Brussels, Vucic vowed never to recognize

Pristina or provide a pathway that would allow them to join the United Nations or the NATO alliance.

Before the summit, Vucic remained defiant.

“I don’t plan on signing anything,” Vucic told reporters, saying the meeting “will not be historic or groundbreaking”.

The latest round of negotiations followed months of shuttle diplomacy, nearly 25 years after the war between ethnic Albanian insurgents and Serb forces sparked a NATO bombing campaign that ended the conflict.

Earlier in the week, Kosovo’s Kurti said he was optimistic about hammering out a deal but put the onus of signing the agreement with Vucic.

“Whether it will succeed or not, you know very well that it does not depend only on me,” Kurti told reporters.

Analysts said inking the agreement itself would not signal an ultimate breakthrough.

“I expect both parties to agree on the implementation plan. I can’t say it’s big because the big thing will happen only after the plan is implemented,” said Dusan Milenkovic from the think tank Center for Social Dialogue and Regional Initiatives.

Kurti’s administration hopes that a deal would allow for Kosovo’s entry into international institutions, a long-sought goal for the government in Pristina.

Serbia’s Vucic has said his government is under intense pressure to come to an understanding, while signaling to his domestic rivals that he will not give ground.

News in Brief

**SYDNEY (Al Jazeera)** – Millions of dead and rotting fish have clogged up a vast stretch of river near a remote town in the Australian outback as a searing heatwave sweeps through the region. Videos posted on social media showed boats ploughing through a blanket of dead fish smothering the water, with the surface barely visible underneath. On Friday, the New South Wales government said “millions” of fish had died in the Darling River near the small town of Menindee, in the third mass kill to hit the area in the recent past. The incident follows fish deaths in the same area in 2018 and 2019 where up to a million fish died from poor water flow, poor water quality and sudden temperature changes. “It’s horrific really, there’s dead fish as far as you can see,” Menindee resident Graeme McCrabb told AFP news agency. “It’s surreal to comprehend,” he said, adding this year’s fish kill appeared to be worse than previous ones.

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**LONDON (Middle East Eye)** – British Home Secretary Suella Braverman arrived in Rwanda on Saturday to discuss an agreement between the two countries to deport asylum seekers who arrive in the UK to the east African country. The talks come as the UK faces legal challenges and sharp criticism from campaigners over the deal, while Rwandan President Paul Kagame is under international pressure over his government’s support of the M23 rebel group, which is accused of perpetuating summary killings and rapes in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Braverman will meet Kagame on her first visit to Rwanda, and said that the removal of migrants could be put into action shortly. The Rwandan president is also subject to pressure from the United States over the rendition, trial and conviction of Paul Rusesabagina, hero of the Hollywood film Hotel Rwanda. The UK agreed to deport tens of thousands of migrants and refugees more than 4,000 miles away to Rwanda as part of a \$146mn deal last year, but no flights have taken off as the policy is being challenged in the courts.

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**NEW DELHI (Reuters)** – The situation between India and China in the western Himalayan region of Ladakh is fragile and dangerous, with military forces deployed very close to each other in some parts, Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar said on Saturday. At least 24 soldiers were killed when the two sides clashed in the region in mid-2020, but the situation has been calmed through rounds of diplomatic and military talks. Violence erupted in the eastern sector of the undemarcated border between the nuclear-armed Asia giants in December but did not result in any deaths. “The situation to my mind still remains very fragile because there are places where our deployments are very close up and in military assessment therefore quite dangerous,” Jaishankar said at an India Today conclave. India-China relations cannot go back to normal, he said, until the border row is resolved in line with the September 2020 in-principle agreement he reached with his Chinese counterpart. “The Chinese have to deliver on what was agreed to, and they have struggled with that.”

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**LONDON (AP)** – Security guards at London’s Heathrow Airport will walk off their jobs for 10 days over the Easter break, the union in a wave of strike action to affect the UK. The latest in a wave of strike more than 1,400 security guards employed by Heathrow Airport, one of Europe’s busiest, will strike from March 31 to Easter Sunday. April 9, to demand better pay. Unite said those striking include guards who work at the airport’s Terminal Five, which is used exclusively by British Airways, as well as those responsible for checking all cargo that enters the airport. The strikes will coincide with the two-week Easter school holidays, traditionally a peak time for travel for many in Britain. The union said workers are forced to take action because they cannot make ends meet as a cost-of-living crisis continues to affect millions of Britons.

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**GENEVA (AFP)** – Ten million children in West Africa’s central Sahel region are now in “extreme jeopardy” and desperately need humanitarian help due to worsening violence, the United Nations has warned. The number of children in dire need of aid in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger is twice as many as in 2020, the children’s agency UNICEF said. Meanwhile a further four million children are at risk in neighboring countries as battles between armed groups and security forces spill across the borders. “Children are increasingly caught up in the armed conflict, as victims of intensifying military clashes, or targeted by non-state armed groups,” Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF’s regional director for west and central Africa, said. “The year 2022 was particularly violent for children in the central Sahel. All parties to the conflict need to urgently stop attacks both on children, and their schools, health centers, and homes.”

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**TUNIS (Reuters)** – Tunisian President Kais Saied has named Kamal Feki as his new interior minister, hours after Taoufik Charfeddine resigned from the post amid a crackdown on prominent opposition figures. Saied issued two decrees, the first removing Charfeddine and a second appointing Feki, the former governor of Tunis, as head of the Ministry of Interior, the presidency said in a press release overnight. Feki, one of Saied’s staunchest supporters, refused to grant a protest permit to the opposition Salvation Front coalition, saying that its leaders were involved in plotting against state security. However, the Interior Ministry allowed them to protest. A former lawyer, Charfeddine was a key figure in the election campaign that propelled the previously little-known Saied to the presidency in 2019.