

Russian Lawmakers Endorse Suspension of Nuclear Pact With U.S.



In this handout photo released by The State Duma, The Federal Assembly of The Russian Federation, Russian lawmakers attend a session at the State Duma, the Lower House of the Russian Parliament in Moscow, Russia, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2023.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's State Duma, the lower house of the country's parliament, on Wednesday unanimously passed a law endorsing President Vladimir Putin's move to suspend Moscow's participation in a key nuclear pact with the U.S.

The document announcing Russia's exit from the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) was presented by Putin to the State Duma.

The effect of the New START Treaty is currently suspended and the decision to restore it rests with the president of Russia. The law will be effective from the time of its official publication.

The treaty was signed by Russia and the United States in Prague on April 8, 2010. It envisages the reduction of the nuclear arsenals of two countries. In his speech to the Federal Assembly on Tuesday, Putin announced the deci-

sion to suspend Russia's participation in the treaty.

The president said Russia will not withdraw from the treaty but must know how the nuclear arsenals of other NATO countries, England and France, are calculated under the treaty before the treaty is renewed.

Meanwhile, a senior Russian defense official said on Wednesday Moscow would stick to agreed limits on nuclear missiles and continue to inform the United States of changes in its deployment despite the suspension of the latest arms control treaty with Washington.

Both houses of the Russian parliament quickly voted to suspend Moscow's participation in New Start.

But a senior Russian Defense Ministry official, Major General Yevgeny Ilyin, told the lower house that Russia would continue to abide by the agreed limits on nuclear delivery systems — missiles and strategic bombers.

The Russian president has already said no one should have dangerous illusions that global strategic parity can be destroyed. Putin has accused the West of being directly involved in attempts to strike its strategic air bases.

The U.S. had previously accused Russia of not being in compliance with New START.

North Korea Calls UN Chief's Remarks on Missile Test 'Unfair'

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Wednesday accused UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres of "an extremely unfair and imbalanced attitude," as it lambasted him for condemning its recent missile test but ignoring alleged U.S. hostility against the North.

The accusation came as U.S., South Korean and Japanese destroyers were holding trilateral anti-missile training near the Korean Peninsula, a move the North could regard as a provocation.

After the North's ballistic missile test on Saturday, Guterres condemned the launch and reiterated his call for the North to immediately desist from making any further provocations. In a statement, Guterres also urged North Korea to resume talks on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

"To be most deplorable, the UN secretary-general is going on the rampage of illogical and miserable remarks, which are little different from those of U.S. State Depart-



This photo provided by the North Korean government, shows what it says is Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missiles during a military parade to mark the 75th founding anniversary of the Korean People's Army on Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang, North Korea, Wednesday, Feb. 8, 2023.

ment officials over the years," Kim Son Gyong, the North's vice foreign minister for international bodies, said in a statement carried by state media.

Kim said North Korea's ICBM test was a response to the security

threat the U.S. posed to the North by temporarily deploying long-range bombers for joint training with South Korea earlier this year. Kim said the test was also a warning to the earlier convocation of the UN Security Council on the North.

West, Russia Clash Over Probe of Nord Stream Sabotage



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Russia's ambassador to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzia has once again accused the United States of being behind the explosions on Nord stream gas pipelines in September last year, saying the national investigations of Germany, Denmark, and Sweden into the sabotage are aimed at protecting Washington.

Nebenzia made the remarks at a UN Security Council session in New York, stressing that Western countries were showing no intention of cooperating with Moscow in an inquiry into the blasts.

"We have strong reasons to doubt the effectiveness, transparency, and impartiality of investigations that are being carried out under some national jurisdictions," Nebenzia said, adding, "We do not see our partners being eager to cooperate."

The senior diplomat also noted that "the so-called investigations by Scandinavian states and Germany into the incident not only lack transparency but are aimed at covering up the tracks and exculpating the big American brother."

Nebenzia said Russia was not allowed to partake in the probe, and all its requests "are ignored with arrogance." Nebenzia further explained that Germany, Denmark, and Sweden had ignored Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin's communications last October regarding the participation of Russian energy giant Gazprom and other relevant agencies in the investigations.

He said, "Since we talk about a crime that was committed by means of an explosive device, which makes it subject to the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings of 15 December 1997, we expect that all states that have to do with the incident, namely the U.S., Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, will fulfill their obligations under this document."

Airlines Cancel Over 1,000 U.S. Flights as Winter Storm Grips States

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Airlines canceled more than 1,000 flights in the United States on Wednesday as a strong winter storm makes its way through the western and central states.

A total of 1,035 flights within, into or out of the United States were canceled by 0915 am ET, according to flight-tracking website FlightAware, which showed 932 flights were de-

layed. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said in a tweet on Tuesday that the severe weather could cause flight delays or cancellations this week in Minnesota and other states in the Great Lakes and southern plains.

Snow falling at a rate of two inches an hour and gusty winds will make travel conditions treacherous and

perhaps impossible in parts of the Northern Plains and the Upper Midwest, the National Weather Service said in its forecast.

Low-cost carrier Southwest Airlines-Co led the cancellations with 235 flights, followed by Delta Air Lines that canceled 197 flights.

Southwest and Delta did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

China Blasts Pentagon Official's Taiwan Visit, Military Ties



Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen, center, and Taiwanese officials pose for photos with a U.S. delegation led by California Rep. Ro Khanna, sixth from left, during a meeting at the Presidential Office in Taipei, Taiwan on Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2023.

BEIJING (Dispatches) — China on Wednesday sharply criticized a visit to Taiwan by a senior Pentagon official and reaffirmed it has sanctioned Lockheed Martin and a unit of Raytheon for supplying military equipment to the region.

Asked about the reported visit by Michael Chase, deputy assistant secretary of defense for China, office spokesperson Zhu Fenglian said China "resolutely opposes any official interaction and military collaboration" between the U.S. and Taiwan.

Efforts by Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party to cement the island's independence with foreign assistance are "doomed to failure," Zhu told reporters.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said a "new round of tensions" in the Taiwan Strait was a result of the Taiwanese authorities' attempts to "seek independence with U.S. support, as well as the U.S. intention to contain China with Taiwan."

"We urge the U.S. to ... stop any form of official U.S.-Taiwan contacts, stop meddling in the Taiwan issue and stop creating new factors of tension in the Taiwan Strait," Wang said at a daily briefing.

Tensions between the U.S. and China again ratcheted up last month after Washington accused Beijing of sending a spy balloon that was shot down over the American East Coast. Secretary of State Antony Blinken canceled a trip to Beijing in the wake of the incident and said over the weekend that the United States was concerned China would provide weapons to Russia for its war in Ukraine.

On a visit to Moscow Tuesday, the Communist Party's top diplomat Wang Yi said relations between Moscow and Beijing are "solid as a rock" and will "stand the test of the volatile

international situation."

Russia and China have an "excellent opportunity to continue close strategic cooperation and contacts to protect our shared strategic interests," Wang said.

A delegation of U.S. lawmakers visiting Taiwan met on Tuesday with President Tsai Ing-wen, who said she looked for increased cooperation on issues from security to climate change.

On Monday, the delegation met with the head of the legislature as part of their five-day visit. They include Reps. Ro Khanna of California, Tony Gonzales of Texas, Jake Auchincloss of Massachusetts and Jonathan Jackson of Illinois.

On Tuesday, Russia's security head held talks with the Chinese Communist Party's foreign policy chief, calling for closer cooperation with Beijing to resist Western pressure.

Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of Russia's National Security Council, said during a meeting with Wang Yi, the party's most senior foreign policy official who is visiting Moscow that the West sought to deter Russia and China as part of its attempts to preserve global domination.

"The bloody events in Ukraine staged by the West is just one example of it," said Patrushev, a longtime associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin. "All that is being done against Russia and China and to the detriment of developing nations."

Wang said that the relations between Moscow and Beijing are "solid as a rock" and will "stand the test of the volatile international situation."

The Chinese official noted that Russia and China have "excellent opportunity to continue close strategic cooperation and contacts to protect our shared strategic interests."

Report: Child Abuse Image Offences in UK Soared

LONDON (The Guardian) - Police have recorded a surge in child abuse image offences in the UK, with more than 30,000 reported in the most recent year, according to a report from the NSPCC.

That is an increase of more than 66% on figures from five years ago, when police forces across the country recorded 18,574 such offences.

The charity warned that the increase was in part due to the "pervasive" issue of young people being groomed into sharing images of their own abuse, with tech companies failing to stop their sites being used by offenders to "organize, commit and share child sexual abuse."

But better police recording, greater awareness of abuse and survivors feeling more confident in coming forward can also contribute to higher numbers of recorded offences, the NSPCC added.

"These new figures are incredibly alarming but reflect just the tip of the iceberg of what children are experiencing online," said Peter Wanless, the chief executive of the NSPCC.

"We hear from young people who feel powerless and let down as online sexual abuse risks becoming normalized for a generation of children," he added.

In those instances where a social media or gaming site was recorded alongside the offence, just two companies were responsible for more than three-

quarters of the reports: Snapchat, with more than 4,000 incidents, and Meta, whose three flagship apps — Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp — were mentioned in more than 3,000 incidents. The company's Oculus "metaverse" brand was mentioned in one report, with virtual reality more generally being mentioned seven times.

Teenager Roxy Longworth's experience shows how fighting the problem can require coordination between corporate rivals. She was 13 when she was contacted on Facebook by a boy four years older than her, who coerced her into sending images via Snapchat. He passed the pictures on to his friends, and a pattern of blackmail and manipulation coerced Roxy into sending even more photos to another boy, which were then shared publicly on social media.

The NSPCC, which compiled the figures from freedom of information requests sent to police forces across the UK, says the data demonstrates the need for a "child safety advocate" to be included in the next iteration of the online safety bill when it returns to parliament.

The power to intervene directly with Ofcom, the internet regulator, on behalf of children online, "to ensure appropriate counterbalance against well-resourced industry interventions", the NSPCC says.

News in Brief

PARIS (AP) — A teacher was stabbed to death Wednesday in southwestern France by a high school student, according to French authorities and media reports. The student has been arrested by police, the prosecutor of Bayonne said. A top government official, speaking anonymously because he was not allowed to discuss the issue publicly, said first elements communicated by police suggest the attacker has severe mental health issues. French media reported that the student, born in 2007, said he heard voices telling him to kill the 53-year-old teacher of Spanish at the private Catholic school in Saint-Jean-de-Luz. Education Minister Pap Ndiaye headed to the school later Wednesday.

LONDON (Reuters) - Ambulance staff and other health workers who are a part of Britain's Unison trade union will take strike action on March 8 in an ongoing pay dispute, the union said on Wednesday. "We have just announced more strike dates in the NHS. The promise of talks alone won't be enough for us to suspend these," Unison General Secretary Christina McAnea said on Twitter. While nurses have paused strike action to enter talks with the British government over pay, the state-run National Health Service still faces a planned walk out next month by tens of thousands of junior doctors in England.

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Nearly 1 million people applied for international protection in the European Union in 2022, according to data published Wednesday, bringing the number of asylum requests to a level not seen since the refugee crisis of 2015-2016. The EU agency for asylum said 966,000 asylum applications were made in the 27 EU countries as well as in Norway and Switzerland last year, up 50% from 2021. That doesn't include more than 4 million Ukrainian refugees who were granted temporary protection in the EU, a special mechanism activated to avoid collapsing already backlogged asylum systems.

MOGADISHU (Reuters) - Ten people were killed in an attack in Somalia's capital claimed by the al Qaeda-linked al Shabaab group, which said it was targeting military officials and militia fighters involved in an offensive against it. The Tuesday attack began with a car bomb blast followed by a gun fight that went on for hours at a house in Mogadishu where several lawmakers were believed to be staying, a witness told Reuters. Somalia's information ministry said late on Tuesday that 10 civilians were killed, but did not say who was targeted. Security forces killed the four militant gunmen involved in the assault, it said. Al Shabaab has stepped up attacks in a show of resurgence since President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's government launched an offensive against the group in August.

BRASILIA (Reuters) - The death toll from heavy rains that devastated coastal areas of Brazil's southeastern Sao Paulo state rose to 46 on Tuesday, with more precipitation expected. The city of Sao Sebastiao bore the brunt of the human toll, with 45 of the reported deaths. Massive rainfall has caused landslides and flooding, displacing almost 2,500 people. Rescue work is ongoing, according to the Sao Paulo state government.