

UN Warns of Global Food Crisis

Russia Hits Kiev With Missiles, Putin Warns West on Arms



This photograph taken on June 5, 2022 shows smoke after several explosions happened in the Ukrainian capital Kiev in the early morning.

KIEV (AP) – Russia took aim at Western military supplies for Ukraine’s government with early Sunday airstrikes in Kiev that it said destroyed tanks donated from abroad.

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that any Western deliveries of long-range rocket systems to Ukraine would prompt Moscow to hit “objects that we haven’t yet struck.”

The cryptic threat of a military escalation from the Russian leader didn’t specify what the new targets might be, but it comes days after the United States announced plans to deliver \$700 million of assistance for Ukraine. Those weapons include four precision-guided, medium-range rocket systems, helicopters, Javelin anti-tank weapon systems, radars, tactical vehicles and more.

In a posting on the Telegram app, the Russian Defense Ministry said high-precision, long-range air-launched missiles were used. It said the strikes on the outskirts of Kiev destroyed T-72 tanks supplied by Eastern European countries and other armored vehicles located in buildings of a train car repair business.

In a television interview that aired Sunday, Putin lashed out at Western deliveries of weapons to Ukraine, saying they aim to prolong the conflict.

“All this fuss around additional deliveries of weapons, in my opinion, has only one goal: To drag out the armed conflict as much as possible,” Putin said. He said such supplies were unlikely to change the military situation much for Ukraine’s government, which he added was merely making up for losses of similar rockets that they

already had. If Kiev gets longer-range rockets, he noted, Moscow will “draw appropriate conclusions and use our means of destruction, which we have plenty of, in order to strike at those objects that we haven’t yet struck.”

The U.S. has stopped short of offering Ukraine longer-range weapons that could fire deep into Russia. The four medium-range High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems included in the security package include launchers on wheels that allow troops to strike a target and then quickly move away — which could be useful against Russian artillery on the battlefield.

Meanwhile, as the cost of food soars around the world, the United Nations warns that the war in Ukraine risks aggravating inflating prices and causing a full-on global food crisis.

The UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) food price index, a tool to measure prices of the most globally traded food staples, dipped in May for the second consecutive month after reaching a record in March, the UN agency said on Friday.

Despite the decline, the May index showed prices 22.8 percent higher compared with a year earlier, pushed higher by concerns over the conflict in Ukraine — one of the world’s major bread baskets.

Luca Russo, the FAO’s lead analyst for food crises, told Al Jazeera that as the war in Ukraine sends energy prices higher, the cost of delivering aid has increased as well. The risk of a severe food crisis is particularly felt in the developing world, he warned.

Bangladesh Port Depot Fire Kills Dozens, Injures Hundreds



Firefighters, rescue workers and journalists were among those injured by the explosion, officials say.

SITAKUNDA (AFP) – At least 49 people died and hundreds were injured after a fire sparked a huge chemical explosion at a shipping container depot in Bangladesh, officials said on Sunday.

The toll was expected to rise, with some of the more than 300 people injured in serious condition, officials said, while volunteers reported that there were more bodies inside the shrouding, wreckage-strewn facility.

The fire started late on Saturday at the depot in Sitakunda, which stores around 4,000 containers, many filled with garments destined for Western retailers. The facility is about 40 kilometers from the major southern port of Chittagong.

The blaze caused containers holding chemicals to explode, engulfing firefighters, volunteers and journalists in an inferno, hurling people and debris through the air, and turning the night sky a blazing orange.

Buildings located kilometers away rattled with the force of the blast.

Elias Chowdhury, regional chief doctor, told AFP that the number of dead was 49 but would likely increase.

“The death toll will rise as the rescue work has not been completed yet,” Chowdhury said.

“These people -- including several journalists who were doing Facebook lives -- are still not accounted for.”

Firefighters continued to douse pockets of fire on Sunday afternoon, with television footage showing

smoke still billowing from some containers, more than 19 hours after the fire began.

Reazul Karim, operations director of the fire department, said that at least seven firefighters died and at least four others were missing.

“Never in our fire department history have we lost so many firefighters in a single incident,” Bharat Chandra, a former senior firefighter, told AFP.

“There are still some bodies inside the fire-affected places. I saw eight or 10 bodies,” one volunteer told reporters.

Mominur Rahman, chief administrator of Chittagong district, said the depot contained millions of dollars of garment products waiting to be exported to Western retailers, for whom Bangladesh is a key supplier.

Ruhul Amin Sikder, spokesman for the Bangladesh Inland Container Association (BICA), said some of the containers at the 30-acre private depot contained chemicals, including hydrogen peroxide.

The director of the BM container depot, Mujibur Rahman, said the fire’s cause was still unknown. He added the facility employs about 600 people.

In 2020, three workers were killed after an oil tank exploded in another container depot in the neighboring Patenga area.

Fires are common in Bangladesh due to lax enforcement of safety rules. In July 2021, 54 people died when a blaze ripped through a food-processing factory outside the capital Dhaka.

North Korea Fires Eight Missiles as South, U.S. Wrap Up Drills

SEOUL (Al Jazeera) – North Korea has test-fired eight short-range ballistic missiles towards the sea off its east coast, a day after South Korea and the United States wrapped up naval drills in the Philippine Sea.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missiles were fired from the Sunan area of the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, on Sunday.

“North Korea fired an unidentified ballistic missile(s) into the East Sea,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Sunday morning, referring to the Sea of Japan.

The Japanese coast guard also said “possible ballistic missile(s)” had been launched from North Korea, citing the country’s Defense Ministry.

They flew between 110 km-600 km (70-370 miles) at altitudes between 25 km to 90 km.

The launch was North Korea’s

18th round of missile tests in 2022 alone — a streak that has included the country’s first demonstrations of intercontinental ballistic missiles in nearly five years.

South Korean and U.S. officials say there are signs that North Korea is also pressing ahead with preparations at its nuclear testing ground in the northeastern town of Punggye-ri. The North’s next nuclear test would be its seventh since 2006 and the first since it claimed to have detonated a thermonuclear bomb to fit on its ICBMs in September 2017.

Last month, North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-un said he would “strengthen and develop” his country’s nuclear forces at the “highest possible” speed.

U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration has failed to restart diplomatic talks with Pyongyang as tensions escalate.

Former U.S. president Donald Trump attempted to court Pyongyang. But even though he met with the North Korean leader three times, he refused to relieve any of the sanctions in return for the several steps taken by Pyongyang toward denuclearization. That hampered further diplomacy between Pyongyang and Washington and prompted Kim to announce an end to a moratorium on the country’s missile tests.

North Korea, which has been under rounds of crushing UN sanctions since 2006 over its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, has ramped up missile launches this year, including the launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) at full range for the first time since 2017.

China and Russia have voiced opposition to further sanctions by the United Nations Security Council against North Korea.

Tunisia Police Break Up Anti-President Protest as Judges Call for Strike

TUNIS (Middle East Eye/AFP) – Tunisian police used pepper spray to disperse protesters against President Kais Saied and a planned July referendum, nearly a year after he seized wide-ranging powers in what opponents decry as a coup.

The police blocked the protesters, who numbered around 100, as they attempted to reach the headquarters of the electoral commission, whose chief Saied replaced last month in a further extension of his control of state institutions.

Some at the protest in Tunis, organized by five small political parties, held up placards reading “the president’s commission = fraud commission”.

“The police... sprayed gas in our faces and attacked us,” said Hama Hamami, head of the Tunisian Workers’ Party.

Saied on 25 July sacked the government and suspended parliament, which he later dissolved in moves that sparked fears for the democracy that emerged from the “Arab Spring” uprisings.

He also seized control of the judiciary, and on Thursday summarily sacked 57 judges, accusing them of corruption and other crimes.

The Tunisian judges said on Saturday that they would also take part in a sit-in to protest the decision by Saied to



Demonstrators carry banners and flags during a protest against Tunisian President Kais Saied in Tunis, Tunisia on May 15, 2022.

expel the judges. The strike is to start this Monday and could be extended if necessary, said Anas Hamaidi, president of the Association of Judges.

“This injustice will not pass in silence ... These free voices will never be silenced,” Hamaidi said, adding “The attack was not only against judges, but on the law and freedoms.”

Tunisia has been gripped by a political crisis since the president dismissed Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and suspended parliament for 30 days in July 2021. The Tunisian president said at the time that his decision was meant to “save Tunisia, the state, and the Tu-

nisian people,” in the midst of growing public anger and protests against the government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The president has also rendered the country’s constitution ineffective in an apparent move to preempt any challenge to his decrees.

The judges, who were holding an emergency meeting in the capital Tunis, said their national strike would see them suspend work at “all criminal, administrative, and financial courts,” AFP reported.

They said they “strongly condemn the president’s continued interference in the judiciary.”

Earth’s CO2 Reaches Levels Not Seen for Millions of Years

WASHINGTON (Al Jazeera) – Concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere in May were 50 percent higher than during the pre-industrial era, reaching levels not seen on Earth for about four million years, the main U.S. climate agency says.

The amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere passed the threshold of 420 parts per million (ppm), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said. PPM is a unit of measurement used to quantify pollution in the atmosphere.

Last May, the rate was 419ppm, and in 2020, 417ppm.

Global warming caused by humans, particularly through the production of electricity using fossil fuels, transport, the production of cement, or even deforestation, is responsible for the new high, the NOAA said.

CO2 is a greenhouse gas that traps heat, gradually causing global warming. It remains in the atmosphere and oceans for thousands of years.

Its warming effect is already causing dramatic consequences, noted NOAA, including the multiplication of heatwaves, droughts, fires or floods.

“Carbon dioxide is at levels our species has never experienced before — this is not new,” said Pieter

Tans, a scientist with the Global Monitoring Laboratory at NOAA.

“We have known about this for half a century, and have failed to do anything meaningful about it. What’s it going to take for us to wake up?”

The measurements are taken at the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii, ideally located high on a volcano, which allows it to escape the possible influence of local pollution.

Before the Industrial Revolution, levels of CO2 held steady at about 280ppm, a level maintained for approximately 6,000 years of human civilization that preceded industrialization, according to NOAA.

The level now is comparable to what it was between 4.1 and 4.5 million years ago, when CO2 levels were near or above 400ppm, the NOAA said.

At that time, sea levels were between five and 25 meters higher than now, high enough to submerge many of today’s major cities. Large forests also occupied parts of the Arctic, according to studies.

“The science is irrefutable: humans are altering our climate in ways that our economy and our infrastructure must adapt to,” NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad was quoted as saying by the climate agency website.



NEW YORK (NYT) – Gina Haspel, who was the first female director of the CIA from 2018 to 2021, observed a prisoner being subjected to “enhanced interrogation” or torture that included waterboarding at an agency black site. Controlled by the Central Intelligence Agency, such black sites are used by the U.S. government in its so-called war on terror to detain enemy combatants. The revelation came in testimony during a hearing in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in May. The pre-trial hearings are part of the drawn-out trial of detainees facing capital charges related to allegations that they conspired in the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. So-called “psychologists” James Elmer Mitchell, who helped to invent and implement in common practice the agency’s interrogation program, which included rectal feeding, hanging by handcuffs, and waterboarding, testified in relation to events that took place in late 2002. He revealed that along with another CIA contract “psychologist”, John Bruce Jessen, they subjected a Saudi prisoner, Abd Al-Rahim Al-Nashiri, to waterboarding at a CIA black site in Thailand. The chief of base at the time, whom Mitchell referred to as Z9A, or “Zulu Nine Alpha”, in accordance with court rules, watched the “enhanced interrogation” of Nashiri. Z9A is the code name used in court for Gina Haspel, stated the report.

BANGKOK (AFP) – Fifty-nine Rohingya Muslims have been discovered on a Thai island, saying they were abandoned by traffickers en route to Malaysia, a senior police officer said Sunday. The group – among them five children -- were found on Koh Dong island in the southern Satun province on Saturday, said lieutenant general Surachet Hakpan. Each year, thousands of the Muslim minority Rohingya people, heavily persecuted in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, risk their lives in months-long expensive journeys to reach Malaysia over Thailand’s seas. The group appeared “starving and was likely to have had no food for three to five days”, a police statement said. The boat’s crew then decided to abandon those onboard on Koh Dong island – telling them that they had reached Malaysia, the group told officers. The incident comes after the bodies of 14 Rohingya people, including children, were discovered washed up on a beach last month after they attempted to flee Myanmar. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people fled a military crackdown in the nation in 2017, bringing with them harrowing stories of murder, rape and arson.

ATHENS (Reuters) – A wildfire raged out of control on the outskirts of Athens, damaging houses and cars, the Fire Department said. Fanned by strong winds, the blaze quickly spread across the slopes of Mount Hymettus which overlooks the Greek capital, sending thick clouds of smoke over the southern suburbs. As a precaution, civil protection authorities evacuated some parts of the Voula and Glyfada regions about 20 kilometers from Athens center. A witness saw at least two houses severely damaged by the fire. “Due to the intense north winds the fire quickly spread and approached the city,” Fire Department spokesman Yiannis Artopios said in a briefing. “We ask our fellow citizens to be very careful,” he added. More than 130 firefighters aided by 6 firefighting aircraft and 4 helicopters dropped tons of water in an attempt to douse the blaze, which has raged for more than seven hours. A spate of wildfires scorched about 300,000 acres of forest and bushland in different parts of Greece last summer, amid the country’s worst heatwave in 30 years. The country has bitter memories of a 2018 blaze that tore through the seaside town of Mati near Athens, killing 102 people in a matter of hours.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – The United States finds itself in the throes of the fourth wave of coronavirus, according to the official case count, while experts say the actual current rate could be 30 times higher than reported. About 94,000 people in the world’s worst-hit country are contracting the virus every day, and hospitalizations have also surged this month, but officials insist the rate is lower than in previous waves. A new survey of the surge in New York, cited in a Guardian report on Thursday, suggests that the virus cases could be undercounted by a factor of 30. “It would appear official case counts are under-estimating the true burden of infection by about 30-fold, which is a huge surprise,” Denis Nash, an author of the study and a professor of epidemiology at the City University of New York School of Public Health, is quoted as saying in the report. According to the study, which has not been peer-reviewed or published, at least 1 in 5 people in New York had COVID-19 between April 23 and May 8, constituting about 22 percent of the city’s population. This means that more than 1.5 million people in the city have been infected with coronavirus in just two weeks, which is more than the official figure, the study finds.

BEIJING (Reuters) – China launched a spacecraft on Sunday carrying three astronauts to the Chinese space station, due to be completed by the end of the year, as construction entered a pivotal stage. A Long March-2F rocket transporting the Shenzhou-14, or “Divine Vessel” in Chinese, blasted off from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China at 10:44 a.m. (0244 GMT), a live broadcast by state television showed. Construction of the space station began last year with the launch of the first and largest of its three modules - Tianhe - the living quarters of visiting astronauts. The modules Wentian and Mengtian are to be launched in July and October, respectively, docking with Tianhe to form a T-shaped structure. Shenzhou-14 mission commander Chen Dong, 43, and team mates Liu Yang, 43, and Cai Xuzhe, 46, all from China’s second cohort of astronauts, will live and work on the space station for six months before returning to Earth in December with the arrival of the Shenzhou-15 crew. Former air force pilot Chen with Liu, who became China’s first female astronaut in space a decade ago, space mission debutant Cai, will oversee the rendezvous, docking and integration of Wentian and Mengtian with the core module. They will also install equipment inside and outside the space station and carry out a range of scientific research.

GENEVA (AFP) – The World Health Organization said Sunday that 780 laboratory-confirmed monkeypox cases had been reported to it from 27 non-endemic countries, while maintaining that the global risk level was moderate. The WHO said the 780 figure, for cases from May 13 to Thursday, was probably an underestimate due to limited epidemiological and laboratory information. “It is highly likely that other countries will identify cases and there will be further spread of the virus,” the UN health agency added. Few hospitalizations have been reported, apart from patients being isolated. The WHO listed the non-endemic countries reporting the most cases as Britain (207), Spain (156), Portugal (138), Canada (58) and Germany (57). Besides Europe and North America, cases have also been reported – in single figures – in Argentina, Australia, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates. One case of monkeypox in a non-endemic country is considered an outbreak.