

After 'Dangerous' Price Cap

Russia: Europe to Live Without Russian Oil



An aerial view shows the Vladimir Arsenyev tanker at the crude oil terminal Kozmino on the shore of Nakhodka Bay near the port city of Nakhodka, Russia on August 12, 2022.

MOSCOW (Reuters) – Russia “will not accept” a price cap on its oil and is analyzing how to respond, the Kremlin said in comments reported on Saturday, in response to a deal by Western powers aimed at limiting a key source of funding the war in Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow had made preparations for Friday’s price cap announcement by the Group of Seven nations, the European Union and Australia, the Russian state news agency TASS reported. “We will not accept this cap,” RIA news agency quoted him as saying.

He added that Russia would conduct a rapid analysis of the agreement and respond after that, RIA reported.

Russia has repeatedly said it will not supply oil to countries that implement the cap - a stance reaffirmed by Mikhail Ulyanov, Moscow’s ambassador to international organizations in Vienna, in posts on social media on Saturday.

“Starting from this year Europe will live without Russian oil,” he said.

The G7 price cap will allow non-EU countries to continue importing seaborne Russian crude oil, but it will prohibit shipping, insurance and re-

insurance companies from handling cargoes of Russian crude around the globe, unless it is sold for less than \$60. That could complicate the shipment of Russian crude priced above the cap, even to countries which are not part of the agreement.

Russian Urals crude traded at around \$67 a barrel on Friday.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin said on Friday after Joe Biden suggested he was prepared to speak to the Russian leader that Putin is open to talks on a possible settlement to the conflict in Ukraine and believes in a diplomatic solution.

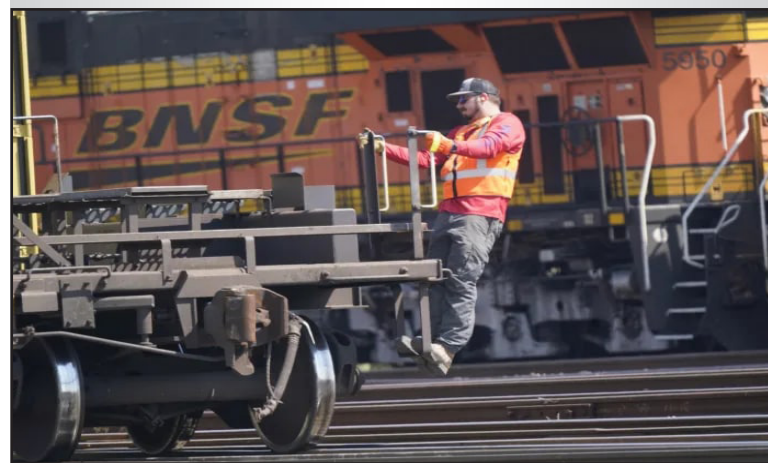
Biden, speaking beside French President Emmanuel Macron, said the only way to end the war in Ukraine was for Putin to pull troops out and that if Putin was looking to end the conflict then Biden would be prepared to speak to him.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov struck a dovish tone when asked about Biden’s remarks, saying that Putin remained open to negotiations but that Russia would not pull out of Ukraine.

“The president of the Russian Federation has always been, is and remains open to negotiations in order to ensure our interests,” Peskov told reporters.

Putin has said he has no regrets about launching Russia’s “special military operation” against Ukraine, casting it as a watershed moment when Russia finally stood up to arrogant Western hegemony.

U.S. Rail Labor Union Angered by ‘One-Two Punch’ From Politicians



A worker rides a rail car at a BNSF rail crossing in Saginaw, Texas, Wednesday, Sept. 14, 2022.

WASHINGTON (Xinhua/AFP) – Railroad Workers United (RWU) has expressed anger at both major parties of the United States.

U.S. President Joe Biden signed a measure earlier Friday implementing a labor agreement between freight rail carriers and unionized workers that his administration brokered this fall.

Congress cleared the bill on Thursday but the Senate rejected an amendment to grant seven days of paid sick leave to rail workers.

“A second defeat” was delivered by Republicans, most of whom refused to support a mandate that all railroad workers receive seven days of paid sick leave.

In a press release on Friday, the labor union said that it “finds it despicable -- but not surprising -- that both political parties opted to side with Big Business over working people yesterday and vote against the interests of railroad workers -- not once, but twice, within hours.”

“We suffered a one-two punch at the hands of, first the Democratic Party; the second served up by the Republicans,” the union wrote.

The majority of U.S. freight rail workers, said the union, had voted to reject the labor agreement that the Biden administration and Democrats backed. However, lawmakers “simply overrode our voices and desires.”

“This one-two punch from the two political parties is despicable,” RWU General Secretary Jason Doering

said in a statement.

“Politicians are happy to voice platitudes and heap praise upon us for our heroism throughout the pandemic, the essential nature of our work, the difficult and dangerous and demanding conditions of our jobs,” Doering stressed. “Yet when the steel hits the rail, they back the powerful and wealthy Class One rail carriers every time.”

Rail workers previously threatened to strike across the United States if they failed to reach a labor agreement by Dec. 9.

As he signed the bill, Biden said Congress had “avoided what, without a doubt, would have been an economic catastrophe.”

“Without freight rail, many of the U.S. industries would literally have shut down,” Biden said, adding that his advisors feared the loss of three-quarters of a million jobs within two weeks if the strike had gone ahead.

The episode was awkward politically for Biden.

Trade unions constitute a major element in his electoral coalition and he frequently describes himself as a lifelong union supporter and the “most pro-union president” in history.

That brand has taken a hit from the emergency bill signing, with some on the left accusing Biden of having sold out. After the Senate came down decisively in favor of the rail management, one union leader called the situation “horrific.”

Thousands Protest in South Korea in Support of Truckers

SEOUL (AP) – Thousands of demonstrators representing organized labor marched in South Korea’s capital on Saturday denouncing government attempts to force thousands of striking truckers back to work after they walked out in a dispute over the price of freight.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or major clashes from the protests near the National Assembly in Seoul. The marchers, mostly members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, accused President Yoon Suk Yeol’s conservative government of labor oppression and ignoring what they described as the truckers’ harsh work conditions and financial struggles, worsened further by rising fuel costs.

The government on Tuesday issued an order for some 2,500 drivers of cement trucks to return to work, saying that their walkout is rattling the national economy. It wasn’t immediately clear how many truckers returned to their jobs following the order as their union vowed to continue the strike.

Thousands of members of the Cargo Truckers Solidarity union have been striking since last week, calling for the government to make permanent a minimum freight rate system that is to expire at the end of 2022.



Members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions shout slogans during a rally against the government's labor policy near the National Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, Saturday, Dec. 3, 2022.

While the minimum fares are currently applied to shipping containers and cement, the strikers also call for the benefits to be expanded to other cargo. That would include oil and chemical tankers, steel and automobile carriers and package delivery trucks under the broader agreement.

Container traffic at ports recovered to 81% of normal levels as of Saturday morning after dropping to around just 20% earlier this week, according to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport. It said more than 5,000 truckers were ac-

tively participating in the strike on Saturday.

Tuesday’s order marked the first time a South Korean government exercised its controversial powers under a law revised in 2004 to force truckers back to their jobs.

A failure to comply without “justifiable reason” is punishable by up to three years in jail or a maximum fine of 30 million won (\$22,400). Critics say the law infringes on constitutional rights because it doesn’t clearly define what qualifies as acceptable conditions for a strike.

U.S. Whistleblower Snowden Swears Allegiance to Russia, Gets Passport

MOSCOW (Reuters) – Former U.S. intelligence contractor Edward Snowden, who exposed the scale of secret surveillance by the National Security Agency (NSA), has sworn an oath of allegiance to Russia and received a Russian passport, TASS has reported.

“Yes, he got [a passport], he took the oath,” Anatoly Kucherena, Snowden’s lawyer, told the state news agency TASS.

“He of course is happy and thankful to the Russian Federation for his citizenship – he’s now a fully fledged citizen of Russia,” Kucherena said. “And most importantly, under the Russian constitution, he cannot be given up to a foreign state.”

“This is still a criminal investigative matter,” White House spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Friday, referring any questions about the report on Snowden to the U.S. Department of Justice, which declined to comment.

U.S. authorities have for years wanted Snowden returned to the United States to face a criminal trial on espionage charges.

He was wanted by Washington on espionage charges, but he argues that his actions were in the interests of the United States.

President Vladimir Putin in September granted Russian citizenship to Snowden, who fled the United States after leaking secret files that revealed the extensive eavesdropping activities of the United States and its allies.

“I’m in Russia because the White

House intentionally canceled my passport to trap me here. They downed the President of Bolivia’s diplomatic aircraft to prevent me from leaving, and continue to interfere with my freedom of movement to this day,” Snowden, 39, said on Twitter on Friday, referring to events from 2013.

Snowden was referring an incident in July 2013, when Bolivia complained that its presidential jet carrying Evo Morales from Russia to Bolivia had been rerouted and forced to land in Austria over suspicion that Snowden was on board.

Defenders of Snowden hail him as a modern-day dissident for exposing the extent of U.S. spying and violation of privacy.

Snowden has been living in Russia since 2013 when the U.S. government stripped him of his passport after he exposed the vast domestic and international surveillance operations carried out by the NSA and the Five Eyes intelligence alliance.

After fleeing the U.S. in 2013, he was charged with violations of the Espionage Act, which could in total have led to decades in prison.

Snowden in 2020 said he and his then-pregnant wife were applying for Russian citizenship to make sure they are not separated from their future son in an era of pandemics and closed borders.

He was granted permanent residency rights the same year by the Russian government, which paved the way for him to obtain the country’s citizenship.

UN: Myanmar Military Uses Death Penalty to ‘Crush’ Opposition

YANGON (Al Jazeera) – Myanmar’s military government is using capital punishment as a tool to crush opposition to its rule and has sentenced more than 130 opponents of the regime to death since February 2021, a senior United Nations official says.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said on Friday that at least seven university students were sentenced to death behind closed doors on Wednesday, and there are reports that as many as four more youth activists were also sentenced on Thursday.

Turk called for a suspension of all executions and for Myanmar’s military rulers to place a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

“The military continues to hold proceedings in secretive courts in violation of basic principles of fair trial and contrary to core judicial guarantees of independence and impartiality,” he said in a statement.

The military had also shown a disdain for regional and international peace efforts “by resorting to use death sentences as a political tool to crush opposition”, the UN chief said.

The Students’ Union of Dagon University in Yangon – the country’s largest city – announced on Thursday that seven

university students between the ages of 18 and 24 who were arrested on April 21 had been sentenced to death on Wednesday by a military court in Yangon’s Insein prison.

An executive member of the Dagon University Students’ Union told The Associated Press that the seven were accused of links to an urban armed movement opposed to military rule and were convicted of murder for allegedly taking part in shooting a bank branch manager in April.

About 2,000 people have also been killed since the military seized power and toppled the government of Aung San Suu Kyi, said Duwa Lashi La, the head of a parallel civilian government established in opposition to the military regime.

Duwa Lashi La, the acting president of the National Unity Government (NUG), which is comprised of remnants of the administration of deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi and others, told Reuters on Thursday that the death toll was high but it was “the price we must pay” to resist the military.

The crushing of peaceful protests against military rule has now fuelled a popular armed resistance movement and that, in turn, has increased repression by the military, particularly in rural areas.

In late July, the military hanged four political activists in the country’s first executions in at least 30 years.



KHARTOUM (AFP) – Thousands of people in Sudan rallied Saturday against foreign interference in their country amid the political crisis sparked by last year’s coup, AFP journalists said. The demonstrations, the latest by Islamic factions in recent weeks, came one day after military leaders and a key civilian bloc announced plans to sign an initial deal. Political turmoil has gripped Sudan since army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan led an October 2021 military takeover, derailing a fragile transition to civilian rule installed after the 2019 ouster of long-time Islamist autocrat Omar al-Bashir. Near-weekly anti-coup protests, a spiraling economic crisis and a rise in ethnic clashes in Sudan’s remote regions have since fed deepening unrest. “Do not interfere in Sudanese affairs,” protesters chanted outside the headquarters of the UN mission in Khartoum. Others called on UN special representative Volker Perthes to “get out” of Sudan. “We are against this deal,” said protester Ahmed Omar.

BEIJING (AFP) – Chinese authorities on Saturday announced a further easing of COVID-19 curbs with major cities such as Shenzhen and Beijing no longer requiring negative tests to take public transport. The southern technological manufacturing center of Shenzhen said Saturday that commuters no longer need to show a negative COVID-19 test result to use public transport or when entering pharmacies, parks and tourist attractions. Meanwhile, the capital Beijing said Friday that negative test results are also no longer required for public transport from Monday. However, a negative result obtained within the past 48 hours is still required to enter venues like shopping malls, which have gradually reopened with many restaurants and eateries providing takeout services. The government reported 33,018 domestic infections in the past 24 hours, including 29,085 with no symptoms.

PUNTA DEL ESTE, Uruguay (Al Jazeera) – The first round of negotiations on a global treaty to halt plastic pollution has ended in a split on whether goals and efforts should be global and mandatory, or voluntary and country-led. More than 2,000 delegates from 160 countries met in Uruguay for the first of a planned five sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), a UN negotiating body aimed at crafting the first legally binding agreement by the end of 2024. Negotiations in the coastal city of Punta del Este that ended on Friday pitted a “High Ambition Coalition” against countries that have the world’s top plastic and petrochemical companies, including the United States and Saudi Arabia. The High Ambition Coalition of more than 40 countries, including EU members, Switzerland, host Uruguay and Ghana, pushed for the treaty to be based on mandatory global measures, including curbs on production. “Without a common international regulatory framework, we will not be able to address the global and increasing challenge of plastic pollution,” Switzerland said in its position statement.

KYIV (Middle East Eye) – The U.S. is working to transfer air systems from the Middle East to Ukraine, as it seeks to expedite arms deliveries to Kyiv in the face of fresh Russian drone and missile attacks. The plan would see the U.S. send National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) to Ukraine in the next three to six months. The U.S. would then replenish the systems taken from Middle Eastern partners with new NASAMS over the next 24 months, according to Greg Hayes, the CEO of Raytheon Technologies. “There are NASAMS deployed across the Middle East, and some of our NATO allies and we [the U.S.] are actually working with a couple of Middle Eastern countries that currently employ NASAMS and trying to direct those back up to Ukraine,” Hayes told Politico. Hayes told Politico that rerouting the systems from the Middle East would be faster than producing new ones for Ukraine, given the time needed to source component parts and deliver them.

TOKYO (Reuters) – Japan is set to earmark 40 trillion to 43 trillion yen (\$295 billion-\$318 billion) for military spending over five years starting in the next fiscal year, which begins in April, three sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters. That would be a jump from the current five-year defence plan for spending 27.5 trillion yen, stoking worry about worsening one of the industrial world’s worst debt burdens, which amounts to twice the size of Japan’s annual economic output. The new numbers marked a compromise between the defense and finance ministries, the three sources said. Until recently, the defence ministry had sought 48 trillion yen, while the finance ministry had multiple options centering around 35 trillion yen. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told key ministers on Monday to work on a plan to lift military spending to an amount equivalent to 2% of gross domestic product within five years, from 1% now.

PARIS (Reuters) – French President Emmanuel Macron said there was no reason to panic about possible power cuts this winter, but he called on citizens to use less energy and on state utility EDF to restart nuclear reactors to prevent outages in case of cold weather. In an interview with French TV station TF1 recorded during his state visit to the United States this week, Macron denied that the risk of rolling blackouts was due to inadequate management of EDF’s nuclear reactor restart program. “First of all, let us be clear: no panic! It is legitimate for the government to prepare for the extreme cases which would mean cutting off electricity for a few hours per day if we did not have enough power,” Macron said. The head of French power grid operator RTE said on Thursday that France may face “some days” of power cuts this winter and the government has started briefing local authorities on how to handle any outages.