



BEIJING (Reuters) — China retaliated for the United States House speaker's meeting with the Taiwanese president by announcing sanctions Friday against the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and other organizations, adding to strains over the self-governed island democracy Beijing claims as part of its territory. Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy with President Tsai Ing-wen at the Reagan library in Simi Valley, California, in defiance of Chinese warnings. McCarthy joined a growing series of foreign legislators who have met Tsai in a show of support for Taiwan in the face of Chinese intimidation.

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia has seized the west bank of the Bakhmutka River, endangering a key Ukraine supply route, in its push to regain control of the devastated eastern city of Bakhmut, the British defense ministry said on Friday. "Russia has made further gains and has now highly likely advanced into the town centre ... Ukraine's key 0506 supply route to the west of the town is likely severely threatened," the ministry said on Twitter in a regular bulletin.

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Gunmen have killed at least 50 people during two attacks on a village in north-central Nigeria, authorities said Thursday. Ruben Bako, chairman of the Otukpo local government where the massacre happened, said that gunmen killed 47 people on Wednesday in Umogidi village in Benue state. A day earlier, three other people had been slain in the same place, he said. Anene Sewuese with Benue state police confirmed that attack and said that the assailants had open fire at a market. However, Sewuese put the death toll at eight people, including a police officer.

BANGKOK (AP) — More than 5,000 people have fled from eastern Myanmar into Thailand in recent days as fighting between Myanmar's army and armed resistance groups has intensified in the border area, Thai media and officials said Thursday. At least 5,428 civilians, including more than 800 children, crossed the border by Wednesday night from Myanmar's Myawaddy district to seek refuge in Thailand's Tak province, public broadcaster Thai PBS reported, citing an unidentified security official.

TOKYO (AP) — An unused lifeboat, a door and other fragments believed to be from a Japanese army helicopter were found after the Black Hawk carrying 10 crew members was presumed to have crashed at sea, officials said Friday. Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada, apparently struggling to hold back tears, told reporters that none of the missing crew members have been found as the search continued Friday. He said he took the accident seriously and would take all precautions for the safe operations of Self Defense Force aircraft. "We will do our utmost for the rescue of the 10 people who are still missing, while continuing to gather information related to the extent of damage," he said.

North Korea: U.S. – South Korea Drills Push Tension to Brink of Nuclear War



South Korean soldiers take part in a joint military drill which is a part of the Freedom Shield joint military exercise between South Korea and U.S., at a military training field near the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas in Paju, South Korea, March 16, 2023.

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korea accused the U.S. and South Korea of escalating tensions to the brink of nuclear war through their joint military drills, vowing to respond with "offensive action," state media KCNA reported on Thursday. KCNA released a commentary by Choe Ju Hyon, whom it called an international security analyst, criticizing the exercises as "a trigger for driving the situation on the Korean peninsula to the point of explosion." "The reckless military confrontational hysteria of the U.S. and its followers against the DPRK is driving the situation on the Korean peninsula to an irreversible catastrophe ... to the brink of a nuclear war," the article said. U.S. and South Korean forces have

been conducting a series of annual springtime exercises since March, including air and sea drills involving a U.S. aircraft carrier and B-1B and B-52 bombers, and their first large-scale amphibious landing drills in five years. North Korea has reacted furiously to the exercises, calling them a rehearsal for invasion. North Korean state media photos published on Wednesday showed a South Korean bus, used to transport workers before the North unilaterally shut the park in 2016, running in Pyongyang. The ministry said it tried to warn against using the factory equipment without approval via a border hotline, but the North refused to take its message.

Two Dead, Over a Million Without Power After Ice Storm Hits Canada

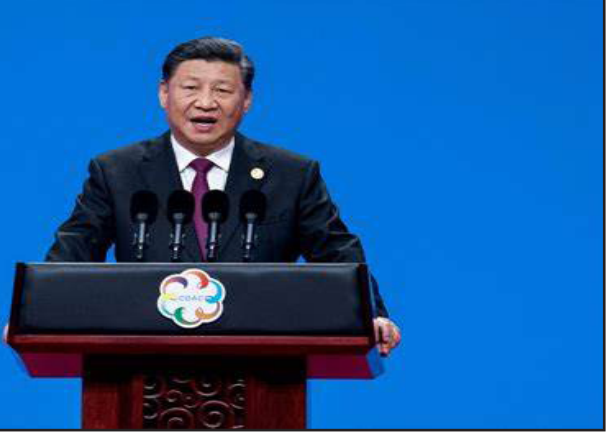


Two people died and more than a million were without power on Thursday.

OTTAWA (Reuters) - Two people died and more than a million were without power after an ice storm hit Canada's two most-populated provinces ahead of a holiday weekend, bringing freezing rain and strong winds that toppled trees and weighed down power lines. Outages combined for both provinces had crossed at least 1.3 million earlier in the day. The two provinces account for more than half of Canada's total population of about 39 million. Electricity providers in both provinces were working to restore power, but repairs were expected to continue for days, meaning many Canadians could spend Easter weekend in the dark. One man was killed in Quebec

when a tree fell on him, Premier Francois Legault said at a briefing, cautioning people to watch out for live wires and weakened trees. Another man died in eastern Ontario when he was struck by a falling branch, broadcaster CTV News reported. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who was elected to parliament in a Montreal constituency, offered to provide federal assistance if required. "It's a very difficult moment ... the power being down for so many folks, the trees coming down, hurting buildings and cars and whatnot, is of course an ongoing concern," Trudeau told reporters on a street in his district as crews cleaned up a fallen tree behind him. Montreal is among the worst-hit areas in Quebec, accounting for about half of the total outages in the largely French-speaking province. Hydro-Quebec was hoping to restore power for about 70% of customers by Friday midnight, an executive at the utility said in a televised briefing. "Unfortunately, it is the start of a long weekend and certain areas are more complex that we will not be able to reconnect immediately," said Regis Tellier, Hydro-Quebec's vice president of operations and maintenance. In the city of Ottawa, crews were expected to restore power for a large portion of some 65,000 affected customers by noon, Mayor Mark Sutcliffe said. Some areas in the national capital "remain hazardous due to fallen debris and power outages affecting traffic signals," Sutcliffe said.

Xi Says China Will Not Make Any Concessions on Taiwan Issue



in Los Angeles between Tsai Ing-wen and McCarthy. "China firmly opposes and strongly condemns the acts," China's foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said, according to the official state news agency. "In response to the seriously erroneous acts of collusion between the United States and Taiwan, China will take resolute and effective measures to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity." On Thursday, Xi Jinping welcome French President Emmanuel Macron, which some analysts see Beijing's growing offensive to woo key allies within the European Union to counter the United States. The two leaders visited southern China together on Friday, capital of the economic and manufacturing powerhouse of Guangdong province. Such forays by Xi with visiting leaders are rare. Diplomats say it underlines the importance Beijing attaches to this relationship with a key member of the EU as it looks for support against what Xi has called "all-round containment, encirclement and suppression" by the U.S. "All Chinese foreign policy offensives have the U.S.-China relationship in the background...so to work with any country, especially mid or big powers, like France, is something they'll try to do to counter the U.S." said Zhao Susheng, a professor of China studies and foreign policy at the University of Denver. Noah Barkin, an analyst with the Rhodium Group, said China's chief objective was to prevent Europe from aligning more closely with the United States. Macron travelled to China with European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, both pressuring China on Ukraine, but failing to wrest any public shifts in position from Xi.

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese President Xi Jinping has said that anyone who expects China to make concessions on the Taiwan issue is thinking unrealistically. "The Taiwan issue is at the center of China's key interests, the Chinese government and the Chinese people will never agree with those who speculate around the one China principle. Anyone who expects China to make concessions on the Taiwan issue is thinking unrealistically," Xi was quoted as saying by Chinese TV channel during a meeting with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. This statement comes shortly after a meeting between U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen in United States. The representative of Beijing stressed that such summits contradict one-China principle. Taiwan has been governed independently from mainland China since 1949. Beijing views the island as its province, while Taiwan — a territory with its own elected government — maintains that it is an autonomous country

but stops short of declaring independence. Beijing opposes any official contacts of foreign states with Taipei and considers Chinese sovereignty over the island as indisputable. To date, Taiwan is recognized by 13 countries. **China Deploys Warships, Aircraft Near Taiwan for Second Day** China has deployed warships and aircraft near Taiwan for a second day, Taiwanese officials said on Friday, as tensions mount between Beijing and the self-ruled island over a meeting between President Tsai Ing-wen and U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Three Chinese warships transited in waters surrounding the island territory on Friday, while a fighter jet and an anti-submarine helicopter also crossed Taiwan's air defense identification zone, Chinese Taipei's defense ministry said in a statement. Earlier in the week, China's Shandong aircraft carrier sailed through Taiwan's southeastern waters on its way to the western Pacific on Wednesday, hours prior to a meeting

Ukraine War Plans Leak Prompts Pentagon Investigation



A Ukrainian serviceman fires a rocket-propelled grenade during a training exercise in the Donetsk region on Thursday.

WASHINGTON (NY Times) — Classified war documents detailing U.S. and NATO plans for building up the Ukrainian military before a planned offensive against Russia were posted this week on social media channels, senior U.S. officials said. The Pentagon is investigating who may have been behind the leak of the documents, which appeared on Twitter and on Telegram, a platform with more than half a billion users that is widely available in Russia. According to the U.S.-based daily, one of the documents summarized the training schedules of 12 Ukraine combat brigades and added that nine of them were being trained by U.S. and NATO forces, fur-

ther pointing out that 250 tanks and more than 350 mechanized vehicles were needed for the effort. The report stated that information in the documents also details expenditure rates for munitions under Ukraine military control, including for the HIMARS rocket systems, the U.S.-made artillery weapon widely publicized in Western media reports as being highly effective against Russian forces. It further noted that the documents -- at least one of which carried a "top secret" label -- were circulated on pro-Russian government channels. The report quoted military analysts as claiming that some of the documents appear to have been altered in a "disinformation cam-

aign" by Russia, claiming that in one document deaths of Ukrainian troops were inflated while Russian battlefield losses were minimized. The daily also cited officials as saying that the information in the documents is at least five weeks old, with the most recent dated March 1. The development came amid persisting U.S.-led efforts to send more weapons to Ukraine to further escalate the military campaign against Russia. The U.S. has so far pledged more than \$35.2 billion worth of military aid to Ukraine since February 2021, when Russia began a military operation in the former Soviet republic, insisting that it was aimed at defending the pro-Russian population in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk. Russian officials have repeatedly warned Western countries against supplying weapons to Ukraine, saying it risks prolonging the already protracted war. In January, the speaker of Russia's parliament warned that countries supplying Ukraine with more powerful weapons risked their own destruction. Ukraine formally applied for NATO membership last year, following the outbreak of the war with Russia. So did Finland and Sweden — the former having joined the alliance earlier this week.

Russia: West Must Remove Obstacles to Its Grain Exports

ANKARA (AP) — Russia may pull out of a wartime deal that allows the export of Ukrainian grain to global markets if the West fails to remove obstacles to Russian agricultural exports, Moscow's top diplomat suggested Friday. The deal, which was brokered by the United Nations and Turkey in July, unblocked shipments that were stuck in Ukraine's blockaded and mined ports, alleviating rising food prices and threat of hunger in some countries. A separate agreement aimed to facilitate the export of Russian fertilizers and grain. Moscow has repeatedly complained that the deal failed to work for Russian agricultural exports, which have had trouble reaching

world markets due to Western sanctions. Speaking at a joint news conference with his Turkish counterpart, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov told reporters that Russia agreed last month to extend the deal for 60 days - instead of the 120 days set under a previous extension - to send a warning signal to the West. "After we extended the deal for 120 days, we saw no indication that those issues could be solved and grew tired of appealing to the conscience of those who determine it," Lavrov said of Moscow's dissatisfaction. "We made a small escalatory move and offered to extend the deal only for 60 days on the assumption that if there is

no change in removing the obstacles to the exports of Russian fertilizers and grain, we would think whether the deal is needed." Lavrov shrugged off the West's argument that Russian food and fertilizers are not subject to sanctions. He noted that "obstacles related to financing, logistics, transportation and insurance of Russian exports have remained and even have grown tougher." Experts say private shipping and insurance companies remain cautious about handling Russian commodities amid the war in Ukraine, although Russian wheat shipments were at or near record highs in November, December and January, according to financial data provider Refinitiv.

Lavrov said the West has effectively blocked the UN-Turkey agreement on Russian agricultural exports and "that's why we've asked for letters of comfort from certain governments." Instead of agreeing to another extension later this year, Russia may decide to cooperate directly with Turkey and Qatar to ensure grain gets to the countries that need it. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, whose country joined the UN and Ukraine in pressing for a 120-day extension before the deal on Ukrainian exports expired last month, said he and Lavrov "agreed that the obstacles to the export of Russian grain and fertilizer should be removed immediately."