

Kremlin Denies Report Putin Offered Ukraine Truce to U.S.



A mortar is fired at Russian forces in the Bakhmut region.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov on Wednesday said that a media report suggesting that Russian President Vladimir Putin reached out to the U.S. with an offer to freeze the Ukraine conflict is false.

Reuters news agency claimed that Putin had contacted Washington through intermediaries to propose "a ceasefire in Ukraine to freeze the war." However, according to "three Russian sources with knowledge of the discussions," who the agency claims to have spoken with, the U.S. rejected the idea.

When asked by journalists about the report, Peskov responded: "No, this is not true."

In his interview with American journalist Tucker Carlson last week, Putin said Russia maintains contacts with the U.S. "through various agencies."

According to the Russian leader, Moscow has told Washington many times that "if you really want to stop the fighting, you need to stop supplying weapons" to Ukraine.

In that happens, the conflict "will be over within a few weeks. That's it. And then we can agree on some terms before you do that, stop," he stressed. Putin reiterated that Russia remains

ready for talks with Ukraine, but in order for them to take place, President Vladimir Zelensky should at least cancel his decree that forbids him from negotiating with Moscow.

But in the battle field, Ukraine on Wednesday claimed it had destroyed a Russian warship in the Black Sea, a key battleground of the nearly two-year war where Kyiv's forces have recently escalated attacks.

"The Ukrainian Armed Forces, together with the Defense Ministry's intelligence unit, destroyed the large landing ship Tsezar Kunikov. It was in Ukrainian territorial waters near Alupka at the time of the hit," Ukraine's military said on the Telegram messaging app.

The Ukrainska Pravda media outlet earlier Wednesday reported that sea drones hit and damaged a large Russian landing ship off occupied Crimea.

The news outlet published several videos showing a column of smoke off the southern coast of Crimea, as well as helicopters flying over the sea.

The news came after Russian bombing raids killed three people including a child late Tuesday near Ukraine's eastern city of Donetsk, local authorities said.

The strikes hit nine apartment blocks and a hospital in Selydove, about 20 kilometres (12 miles) west of the front line, the local council said on Telegram.

Twelve people were also injured in the bombing, including four children, it added.

According to the governor of Donetsk region, Vadym Filachkine, the first strike took place at around 11:30pm (21:30 GMT) and the second at around 1am (23:00 GMT).

On Tuesday, the Republican leader of the U.S. House of Representatives blocked war aid for Ukraine.

The bill was approved in the Senate earlier Tuesday. It includes \$95 billion in funding, mostly for the security of pro-Western Ukraine, as well as for the top U.S. strategic priorities of Israel and Taiwan.

At the White House, Biden said that helping U.S. allies -- and particularly coming to the aid of Ukraine -- is a fundamental responsibility.

"History is watching," said Biden, repeating the phrase five times in televised remarks. "Supporting this bill is standing up to Putin. Opposing it is playing into Putin's hands," the Democrat added.

Biden also lashed out at Trump after the former one-term president encouraged Russia to attack NATO members who failed to meet financial commitments.

"For God's sake, it's dumb. It's shameful. It's dangerous. It's un-American," Biden said, saying that twice-impeached Trump viewed the Western military alliance as a "protection racket."

U.S. aid to Ukraine has been paralyzed for months by chaos in Congress, even as Kyiv begs for help to counter increased Russian attacks.

The \$95 billion Senate package includes funding for Israel's military and for Taiwan, but the lion's share -- \$60 billion -- would help Ukraine restock ammunition supplies, weapons and other crucial needs.

U.S. Gov't 'Protecting Terrorists Plotting to Harm Venezuela', Says Foreign Minister



In this file photo taken on Nov 16, 2023, Venezuela's Foreign Minister Yvan Gil Pinto speaks during a joint press conference with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

CARACAS (Xinhua) - Venezuelan Foreign Affairs Minister Yvan Gil denounced the U.S. government that it shelters "terrorists, who have confessed" to carrying out orders "to harm our people".

In a post on social media platform X, formerly Twitter, Gil said the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration "have been conspiring from Miami and Colombia, along with Venezuelan far-right opponents", to assassinate Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez and Governor of western Tachira state Freddy Bernal, among others.

The plots aim to "destabilize our country, through violence, terrorist

attacks against military units and a long list of extremist atrocities", Gil said.

Gil made the remarks in response to a statement issued a few hours earlier out of Washington, demanding the release of suspects arrested in connection with the alleged assassination plots.

"Today the Government of the United States comes out to protect and defend the terrorists, who have confessed to their crimes and the orders they received to harm our people," he added.

The White House, he said, is "complicit with the intellectual and material authors of the acts of terrorism and interventionism in Venezuela".

Pakistan's Former Premier Sharif, Allies to Form Coalition



(L-R) Bilawal-Bhutto Zardari of the PPP and Shehbaz Sharif of the PML-N have agreed to form a coalition government.

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The party of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and its allies announced late Tuesday that they will jointly form a coalition government, ending the uncertainty since last week when no party won a simple majority in parliamentary elections.

The latest development came hours after the parties — all of them rivals of the country's imprisoned former prime minister Imran Khan — met in Islamabad.

The meeting was attended by the Pakistan People's Party of former president Asif Ali Zardari and by Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League, including his younger brother, Shehbaz Sharif, who replaced Imran Khan when he was ousted through a no-confidence vote in parliament in

2022. At a news conference with Zardari and other politicians, Shehbaz Sharif did not say who would be the joint choice for prime minister, though it is widely believed that Sharif would head the new government. In his brief remarks, Sharif said that the talks on a coalition were successful.

Though candidates backed by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party won 93 out of 265 National Assembly seats, it was not enough to form a government. Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League and Zardari's Pakistan People's Party won 75 and 54 seats respectively.

Khan's party says last Thursday's vote was rigged to stop it from getting a majority in the parliament, a charge the election officials denied.

Indonesia's Prabowo Claims Victory in Presidential Election



Prabowo Subianto has campaigned on the premise that Indonesia can run up debt to as much as 50% of gross domestic product, well above the 38% recorded in 2023.

JAKARTA (Reuters) - Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto declared victory in a presidential election on Wednesday after unofficial vote counts showed him with a huge lead, and on course for a single-round win in his third attempt at the presidency.

Political veteran Prabowo, a former special forces commander, trounced his rivals, winning about 58% of votes according to four pollsters, based on "quick count" ballots at samples of voting stations nationwide. The number of votes tallied ranged from about 86% to 95% as of 1400 GMT.

Appearing before supporters alongside his running mate, the incumbent president's son Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Prabowo, 72, declared the outcome "a victory for all Indonesians", in a rousing speech that drew roars and applause.

"We are grateful for the quick count results. All the calculation, all pollsters including those on our rivals' side, the figures showed a Prabowo-Gibran win in one round," he said.

"We will assemble a government consisting of the best sons and daughters of Indonesia."

Rivals Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo trailed with about 25%

and 17% respectively, according to the independent pollsters conducting the sample counts, which in previous elections have proven to be accurate.

A preliminary count by the election commission was far slower and showed Prabowo securing 57.7% of votes with about 6% of ballots recorded.

The contest pitted the two popular former governors against the pre-election frontrunner Prabowo, who was feared in the 1990s as a top lieutenant of Indonesia's late strongman ruler Suharto.

Crucially, Prabowo has the tacit backing of the wildly popular incumbent Joko Widodo, who is betting on his former rival as a continuity candidate to preserve his legacy, including the inclusion of his 36-year-old son Gibran on the ticket.

Anies and Ganjar urged the public not to draw conclusions on the outcome and to await the official result, which

Their campaign teams said they were investigating reports of electoral violations, both calling it "structural, systematic and massive fraud". They did not provide evidence.

But top billing on Wednesday was always the race to replace Jokowi, as

the incumbent is known, whose influence could be the decisive factor in who takes the helm of a resource-rich Group of 20 economy of at least \$1.3 trillion.

Arya Fernandes of Indonesia's Center for Strategic and International Studies, one of the pollsters, said Prabowo had a commanding margin of victory in the unofficial figures.

Deadly riots broke out after the 2019 election, when Prabowo had vigorously contested Jokowi's victory.

Since then, Prabowo has transformed his image into a cuddly, cat-loving grandfatherly figure, attracting a huge youth following on social media in a country where more than half of the nearly 205 million electorate is under 40.

Prabowo said those were his key supporters.

Ganjar has campaigned largely on continuing the president's policies as a member of the same party PDI-P, but crucially lacked Jokowi's endorsement. He remained upbeat on Wednesday, but said his camp would investigate reports of fraud, which he did not detail.

UN Chief Warns Climate Chaos, Food Crises Threaten Global Peace

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The United Nations chief has warned that climate chaos and food crises are increasing threats to global peace, telling a high-level UN meeting that climate disasters imperil food production and "empty bellies fuel unrest."

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged the UN Security Council to address the impact of food shortages and rising temperatures on international peace and security — a view echoed by many countries but not Russia.

"Climate and conflict are two leading drivers of our global food crisis," the secretary-general said. "Where wars rage, hunger reigns — whether due to displacement of people, destruction of agriculture, damage to infrastructure, or deliberate policies of denial."

"Meanwhile, climate chaos is imperiling food production the world over," he said.

Guterres said the world is teeming with examples of "the devastating relationship between hunger and conflict."

In war-torn Gaza, he said, no one has enough to eat and the tiny strip accounts for 80% of the 700,000 hungriest people in the world. After more than a decade of war in Syria, he said, 13 million Syrians go to bed hungry every night. And in Myanmar, prospects of ending hunger have gone into reverse because of conflict and instability, he said.

Simon Stiell, the United Nations climate chief, told the council that climate change is contributing to food insecurity and to conflict.

He said one in 10 people on the planet today already suffers from chronic hunger and if climate change accelerates, "it will become worse."

Beth Bechdol, deputy director of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said 258 million people in 58 countries are facing high levels of food insecurity and over two-thirds of them — 174 million people — are at high hunger levels because of climate and conflict.



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives has narrowly voted to impeach Democratic President Joe Biden's top border official, accusing him of lax policies that encouraged illegal immigration. By a vote of 214-213, the House approved two articles of impeachment accusing Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas of not enforcing U.S. immigration laws, which Republicans argue led to record flows of migrants across the U.S.-Mexico border, and making false statements to Congress.

PARIS (AFP) - A Paris court on Wednesday lightened a one-year prison sentence for former president Nicolas Sarkozy over illegal campaign financing, saying he needed to spend only half that time behind bars. But while lighter than the original sentence, Wednesday's ruling was still harsher than the one-year suspended sentence that prosecutors called for. The Paris court of appeal confirmed a lower court's guilty verdict for Sarkozy, who was convicted of hiding illegal overspending in his 2012 reelection campaign. Sarkozy was initially sentenced to one-year in prison, but the appeals court said he should serve six months, with another six months suspended. Sarkozy has faced a litany of legal problems since his sole term in office between 2007 and 2012.

MOSCOW (Reuters) - The Russian Interior Ministry has put Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas and State Secretary Taimar Peterkop on the country's wanted list for the destruction of Soviet monuments, local media reported. "A case has been filed against Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas and State Secretary Taimar Peterkop for the alleged demolition and damage to the monument to Soviet soldiers. Meanwhile, the above two people have been included in the Russian wanted list," Russia's TASS news agency cited the ministry as saying. In addition, Lithuanian Culture Minister Simonas Kairys was also included in the wanted list for the same reason. "The abuse of historical memory and hostility to Russia" were the reasons why the officials were wanted, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida (AFP) - The planned launch of a robotic moon lander built by Houston-based aerospace company Intuitive Machines was called off less than two hours before Wednesday's liftoff time and postponed for at least a day, launch contractor SpaceX said. SpaceX, the private rocket and satellite company founded by billionaire Elon Musk, said on the social media platform X that the launch team was "standing down from tonight's attempt" because of irregular methane temperatures before loading. The precise function of the methane and its implications for the proper function of the Falcon 9 rocket were not immediately explained. The rocket's Merlin engines run on kerosene and liquid oxygen.

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korea fired multiple cruise missiles off its east coast on Wednesday, South Korea's military said. The missiles were launched about 9 a.m. Wednesday (0000 Tuesday GMT) off the eastern coastal city of Wonsan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said. "While strengthening surveillance and vigilance, our military is cooperating closely with the United States and closely monitoring additional signs and activities from North Korea," the JCS said in a statement.