

Putin: We Must Think How to Stop 'Tragedy' of War in Ukraine



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk attend the G20 virtual summit via a video link in Moscow, Russia, November 22, 2023.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin told the leaders of the Group of Twenty (G20) on Wednesday that it was necessary to think about how to stop "the tragedy" of the war in Ukraine.

Addressing G20 leaders for the first time since the start of the war, the Kremlin chief said some leaders had said in their speeches that they were shocked by the ongoing "aggression" of Russia in Ukraine.

"Yes, of course, military actions are always a tragedy," Putin told the virtual G20 meeting called by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"And of course, we should think about how to stop this tragedy," Putin said. "By the way, Russia has never refused peace talks with Ukraine."

Putin used the word "war" to describe the conflict instead of the current Kremlin term of "special military operation".

"I understand that this war, and the death of people, cannot but shock," Putin said, before setting out the Russian case that Ukraine had persecuted people in eastern Ukraine.

About 14,000 people were killed there between 2014 and the end of 2021, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner

for Human Rights, including 3,106 civilians.

The West and Ukraine have repeatedly vowed to defeat Russia in the war and to eject Russian forces, though the failure of a Ukrainian counteroffensive to achieve any real gains this year has raised concerns in the West over the strategy.

Ukraine Troops Face 'Difficult Defense'

On Wednesday, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said that Ukrainian troops face "difficult" defensive operations on parts of the eastern front with bitter winter cold setting in, but forces in the south are still conducting offensive actions. Russian troops launched offensives on different sections of the front line in Ukraine's east this autumn, trying to advance on the devastated town of Avdiivka and in the northeast between the towns of Lyman and Kupiansk.

"Difficult weather, difficult defense on the Lyman, Bakhmut, Donetsk and Avdiivka fronts," Zelenskiy said on Telegram messenger.

Snow and freezing temperatures that stood at about minus 5 degrees Celsius during the day on Wednesday and were expected to drop lower may further complicate operations on the battleground, where fighting is moving to an attritional phase.

Thousands of Civil Servants Go on Strike in Canada



Public sector workers protest in Montreal, demanding better pay and working conditions.

QUEBEC, Canada (AFP) - Several hundred thousand school, hospital and social services workers in Canada's Quebec province have walked off their jobs for the first day of what is billed as a historic strike to demand better pay and working conditions.

In total, some 600,000 civil servants in the French-speaking province plan to strike this week, with some calling for a lengthy general strike after months of fruitless negotiations with the

Quebec government.

In one location, a crowd gathered outside a school in Montreal, waving union flags and placards that read: "Inflation is making us poorer, employers are getting richer," and "My batteries are dead," lamenting that teachers are being worked to exhaustion.

"We have the impression that the government makes choices, but does not choose public services," Valerie Fontaine, president of the Federation of Higher Education

Support Staff, told AFP.

"The main sticking point is salary," she said. "We have a salary gap in the public service which is growing."

Primary school teacher Eric L'Heureux added: "We want more services for our students, we want more balanced classes... with fewer students per class."

Last month, the unions rejected a 10.3 percent wage hike over five years and a onetime bonus of Can\$1,000 for each civil servant.

The Quebec government said it considered the offer to be in line with inflation forecasts, but the unions said it was "insulting" and did not come close to increased costs of living and in fact would end up making workers poorer.

For the next three days, 420,000 civil servants represented by a coalition of major unions will be off the job. This is their second strike action in November.

They will be joined on Thursday by 66,000 teachers from the Autonomous Education Federation. Some 80,000 nurses and other health professionals are also planning to walk off the job on Thursday and Friday.

North Korea Puts Its First Satellite in Orbit



A rocket carrying a spy satellite Mallyong-1 is prepared to be launched, as North Korean government claims, in a location given as North Gyeongsang Province, North Korea in this handout picture obtained by Reuters on November 21, 2023.

SEOUL/TOKYO (Reuters) - North Korea said it successfully placed its first satellite in orbit and vowed to launch more in the near future, defying international condemnation from the United States and its allies.

North Korea's KCNA state news agency said the Mallyong-1 satellite was launched on a Chollima-1 rocket from the Sohae satellite launch facility at 10:42 p.m. (1342 GMT) and entered orbit at 10:54 p.m. (1354 GMT). KCNA cited North Korea's National Aerospace Technology Administration.

North Korea had earlier notified Japan it planned to send up a satellite between Wednesday and Dec. 1, after two failed attempts to launch what it called spy satellites earlier this year.

South Korea responded to the North Korean announcement by saying it would take steps to suspend parts of a 2018 inter-Korean agreement designed to lower military tensions, its Yonhap news agency reported.

North Korea's reported launch comes as the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier arrived at South Korea's port city of Busan as part of an agreement between Washington and Seoul to promote the "regular visibility" of US military assets in the country, the Ministry of Defense said in a news release Tuesday.

It said the deployment signals a "combined defense posture" against North Korea.

The U.S. carrier group is the third Navy carrier to visit the peninsula so far this year. It is capable of carrying roughly 5,000 sailors and 70 aircraft, according to the Navy.

The aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan also

visited Busan in October to drill with the South Korean and Japanese navies.

KCNA said Kim Jong Un personally observed the launch, which came just over a week before South Korea plans to send its first spy satellite into space on a Falcon 9 rocket operated by the U.S. company Space X.

North Korea's space agency will send up multiple satellites in the near future to continue securing surveillance capabilities over South Korea and other regions of interest to North Korea's armed forces, the report said.

North Korea warned back then that the U.S. is increasing provocations of a "nuclear war" by deploying nuclear-capable bombers to the region. It said that U.S. nuclear assets stationed in the Korean peninsula will become Pyongyang's "first targets for destruction" in the event of an actual conflict.

China's foreign ministry said it is in the interest of all parties to ensure peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula after North Korea claimed it successfully placed its first spy satellite in orbit, vowing to launch more in the near future.

"China has taken note of (North Korea's) announcement of its satellite launch and the reactions of relevant parties," spokesperson Mao Ning said in response to a question on the situation at a regular media briefing on Wednesday.

"Maintaining peace and stability on the peninsula and promoting the process of political settlement of the peninsula issue are in the common interests of all countries in the region," she said.

Hundreds of Rohingya Come Ashore in Indonesia, Joining About 1,000 This Week



Rohingya Muslims rest after landing on a beach in Sabang, Aceh province, Indonesia, November 22, 2023.

JAKARTA (Reuters) - More than 200 ethnic Rohingya came ashore in Indonesia's Aceh province late on Tuesday, taking total arrivals of members of the Myanmar Muslim minority to more than 1,000 for the week, a leader of the province's fishing community said.

During November to April, when the seas are calmer, many members of the persecuted minority leave Myanmar on rickety boats for Thailand, Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Acehnese fishing community chief Miftach Cut Adek told Reuters that the latest arrivals, 216 mostly of them women and children, "weak and lacking nutrition", had arrived near Sabang, off the northern tip of Sumatra island, late on Tuesday.

Mitra Salima Suryono, a spokesperson for the UN refugee agency in Indonesia, said there did not appear to be any particular reason for the big number of Rohingya arriving.

"The reason why they migrated is

to find a safer life," she said.

Mitra said Aceh villagers had tried to prevent hundreds of Rohingya arriving in the Bireuen area in northeast Sumatra last week although they eventually came ashore on Sunday.

For years, Rohingya have left Buddhist-majority Myanmar where they are generally regarded as foreign interlopers from South Asia, denied citizenship and subjected to abuse.

Nearly a million Rohingya live in refugee camps in the Bangladeshi border district of Cox's Bazar, most after fleeing a military-led crackdown in Myanmar in 2017.

Indonesia's Foreign Ministry has said it "has no obligation nor capacity to accommodate refugees, let alone to provide a permanent solution".

Usman Hamid, the director of rights group Amnesty International Indonesia, called for authorities to take in the Rohingya and talk with neighbours, especially Malaysia and Thailand, where Rohingya also often stop.

News in Brief

BANGKOK (AP) - The United States and the Philippines are conducting joint air and maritime patrols in the South China Sea, which come as the two countries step up cooperation against China. The Philippine Air Force said Wednesday its aircraft had taken part in joint patrols the day before in the vicinity of Batanes, the northernmost province of the Philippines. The patrols run through Thursday and also include both the U.S. and Philippine navies. They come only days after Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. called the situation in the South China Sea increasingly "dire".

SILKYARA, India (Reuters) - Rescuers hope to drill through the last third of the debris blocking a collapsed tunnel in the Indian Himalayas by early on Thursday to reach 41 workers trapped for ten days, an official said, so long as there are no new hurdles. The men have been stuck in the 4.5-km (3-mile) tunnel in Uttarakhand state since it caved in early on Nov. 12 and are safe, authorities have said, with access to light, oxygen, food, water and medicines. Authorities have not said what caused the tunnel collapse, but the region is prone to landslides, earthquakes and floods. Efforts to bring the men out have been slowed by snags in drilling in the mountainous terrain. By Wednesday, rescuers drilled through 42 m (130 ft) of an estimated 60 m (197 ft) that need to be cleared in order to push through a pipe wide enough for the men to crawl out, said Mahmood Ahmed, an official of the firm building the tunnel.

BEIJING (Reuters) - China is ready to work with Argentina to keep relations on a "steady" course, a foreign ministry spokesperson said, after the presidential election victory of a right-wing libertarian who said he will not deal with communists. Argentinian president-elect Javier Milei has criticized China and Brazil, which are among his country's most important trading partners. A few months ago, Milei even likened the Chinese government to an "assassin" and said the people of China were "not free". Milei's tough talk on China stands in sharp contrast with a vow of cooperation by the outgoing president, Alberto Fernandez, who visited Beijing last month and hailed China as a "true friend" of Argentina. Fernandez also pledged coordination with China under frameworks such as the G20 and BRICS. "Bilateral relations between China and Argentina have shown sound momentum of growth," said Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning.

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) - Pakistan's Supreme Court accepted on Wednesday a bail application from detained former prime minister Imran Khan, his lawyer said, a day after another court declared illegal his trial on charges of leaking state secrets. The 71-year-old was jailed on Aug. 5 for three years jail for unlawfully selling state gifts during his tenure as prime minister from 2018 to 2022. His lawyer said the Supreme Court had accepted the bid for bail. "A decision will come in the next hearing after arguments from both sides," lawyer Naeem Panjutha said in a post of the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

WELLINGTON (Reuters) - Ozone levels above Antarctica may not be recovering and changes in the southern hemisphere atmosphere may be contributing to the persistence of the ozone hole, according to a study published on Wednesday. In a study published in Nature Communications, New Zealand scientists analyzed the monthly and daily ozone changes at different altitudes and latitudes within the Antarctic ozone hole from 2004 to 2022. Despite public perception, the Antarctic ozone hole has been remarkably massive and long-lived over the past four years, University of Otago researchers believe chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), the ozone-depleting substances, are not the only things to blame. There is much less ozone in the center of the ozone hole compared to 19 years ago, said the study's lead author Hannah Kessenich, PhD candidate in the Department of Physics, University of Otago.