

UK to Deport 6,000 Migrants to Rwanda This Year



A British Border Force vessel carrying people believed to be migrants passes by a cruise ship as it arrives at the Port of Dover in Dover, Britain, April, 29, 2024.

LONDON (AFP) -- The UK expects to deport nearly 6,000 migrants to Rwanda this year, a senior minister said Tuesday, after the government published new details on the controversial scheme.

The figures come days after the plan aimed at deterring migrant arrivals on small boats from northern Europe became law following months of parliamentary wrangling.

Rwanda has "in principle" agreed to accept 5,700 migrants already in the UK, the interior ministry revealed late Monday.

Of those, 2,143 "can be located for detention" before being flown there, according to the ministry.

Law enforcement agencies will find the remainder, Health Secretary Victoria Atkins said Tuesday when asked

about the 5,700 earmarked for deportation.

"The expectation is that we remove that group of people... by the end of the year," she told Sky News television. "If somebody doesn't report as they should do... They will be found."

Migrants who arrived in the UK between January 2022 and June last year are liable to have their asylum claims deemed inadmissible and be removed to Rwanda, the interior ministry said.

More than 57,000 people arrived on small boats after trying to cross the Channel during this 18-month period, according to official statistics.

UK lawmakers last week passed the Safety of Rwanda Bill, which compels British judges to regard Rwanda as a safe third country.

It followed a UK Supreme Court ruling last year that said sending migrants on a one-way ticket there was illegal.

The new law also gives decision-makers on asylum applications the power to disregard sections of international and domestic human rights law.

UK opposition parties, UN agencies and various rights groups have criticized the flagship policy of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative government.

He said last week that deportation flights are expected to begin within 10-12 weeks.

Britain's prisons chief on Monday hit out at the "unacceptable" detention conditions faced by migrants, especially children, at an airport near London.

"Luton (airport) was simply unable to cope with the demands placed on it and we were particularly concerned to find that children were placed in crowded holding rooms with unrelated adults," wrote the Chief Inspector of Prisons Charlie Taylor in a report.

Most British airports have detention centers where migrants arriving on airplanes or those transferred from other centers are briefly held.

More than 17,400 migrants were placed in those centers between June and November 2023.

Close to 3,000 people were sent during that period to the centre at Luton airport, north of London, making it the largest such centre in England and Wales.

EU Could 'Die', Michel Says After Macron



Charles Michel's comments came after French President Emmanuel Macron last Thursday declared: "Our Europe, today, is mortal and it can die."

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AFP) -- EU chief Charles Michel backed French President Emmanuel Macron's assessment that the European bloc is "mortal" and could "die" if it doesn't face up to the threats descending on it.

"Any democratic project, any democratic model, by nature, is mortal," Michel told a group of journalists in Brussels.

"But let's be clear," he added, "when Emmanuel Macron said it or when I give you this answer, this is not a pessimistic impression."

"I am optimistic," he said. "We have

the strength, we have the tools" to handle the challenges, he said.

The comments by Michel, the head of the European Council representing the EU's 27 member countries, came after Macron last Thursday declared: "Our Europe, today, is mortal and it can die."

"It can die and this depends only on our choices," Macron said in a wide-ranging speech at the Sorbonne University in Paris.

Referring to Europe's struggle to build defense independence as it supports Ukraine, and industrial competition with the United States and China, Macron said

Europe is "not armed against the risks we face" in a world where the "rules of the game have changed".

Both Macron and Michel held forth just over a month before the European Union holds elections to choose a new European Parliament.

The vote will in turn influence who gets the bloc's top jobs -- including the one currently held by Michel -- and help determine the union's policies in coming years.

Asked about the European Union expanding eastwards, to take in countries such as Ukraine and ones in the Balkans, Michel stood by his call that "we must be ready by 2030".

"What is the alternative? If the idea is to procrastinate for decades to come, it means that we give a message to China, to Russia, that this is a playground for them in our direct neighborhood."

Michel gave his interview to mark the 20-year anniversary of the EU's last expansion, in 2004, when it took in 10 countries.

The EU in December decided to open adhesion negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, and gave candidate status to Georgia, which earlier Bosnia had obtained.

Four countries in the Western Balkans -- North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania -- are officially candidate countries but their path currently remains blocked.

Global Plastic Talks End in Ottawa Without Agreement

OTTAWA (AFP) -- A fourth and penultimate round of UN-led negotiations to solve global plastic pollution wrapped up in Ottawa early on Tuesday with a world-first pact said to be within reach by year's end but without a cap on the production of polymers.

For the first time in the negotiations, delegates from 175 countries and observers discussed a draft of what is to become a global treaty on ending the scourge of plastics that are found everywhere from mountain tops to ocean depths, as well as within human blood and breast milk.

The current session picked up where talks in Kenya left off five months ago.

They also agreed to a series of consultations between now and November, when the final round of talks is to be held in South Korea.

The Ottawa talks saw "a massive, monumental change in the tone and in the energy" compared with the previous round, Canadian parliamentary secretary Julie Dabrusin said.

"I'm really optimistic that we can get to an agreement by the end of the year... to end plastic pollution by 2040," she said.

Dabrusin and others welcomed a shift in the negotiations from vague objectives to treaty language, as well as streamlining options presented in Kenya.

However, a proposed cap on plastic production did not make it into the draft text and remains a major sticking point.

Although there is a broad consensus on the need for a treaty, environmental activists pleading for a cut in plastic production remain at odds with oil-producing nations and the plastics industry, which favors recycling.

Ana Rocha, speaking on behalf of Global South nations, said there had been "a growing willingness to address primary plastic polymers under the treaty."

This is crucial, according to environmental groups. "You cannot end plastic pollution if you do not reduce the amount of plastic we produce,"

Greenpeace's Graham Forbes told AFP.

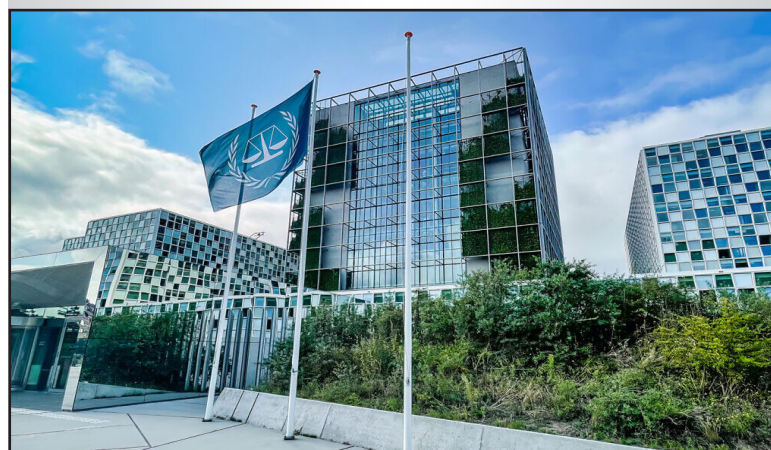
Annual plastics production has more than doubled in 20 years to 460 million tonnes and is on track to triple within four decades if left unchecked.

"This treaty will succeed or fail based on the extent to which it addresses and reduces plastic production. Nothing else will work if we don't get that right," Forbes said.

G7 environment ministers meeting in Italy had been expected on Tuesday to commit to reducing plastic production, recognizing "that the level of plastic pollution is unsustainable and that its increase is alarming," according to the French delegation.

Peru and Rwanda proposed in a motion in Ottawa cutting plastic production by 40 percent in the next 15 years, in line with Paris agreement climate goals. Plastic production is a significant driver of global warming because most plastic is made from fossil fuels. The motion was defeated.

Russia: U.S. Hypocritical Over ICC and Israel



The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia said on Tuesday that the United States was being hypocritical by opposing the International Criminal Court's (ICC) investigation of Israel but supporting the court's warrant for the arrest of President Vladimir Putin.

The ICC - which can charge individuals with war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide - is investigating Hamas' Oct. 7 cross-border attack on Israel's devastating military assault on Gaza, now in its seventh month.

White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday the United States did not support the ICC's investigation of Israel and did not believe that the court had jurisdiction.

U.S. President Joe Biden said last year that the ICC decision to issue an arrest warrant for Putin was justified. The United States has shared details of alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine with the ICC.

Russia says the warrant against Putin is a meaningless attempt by the West to soil Russia's reputation and denies war crimes in Ukraine. Ukraine says Russia committed war crimes.

Russia says the West has ignored

Ukraine's crimes, a charge denied by Kyiv.

"Washington fully supported, if not stimulated, the issuance of ICC warrants against the Russian leadership," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said in a post on Telegram.

But "the American political system does not recognize the legitimacy of this structure in relation to itself and its satellites," Zakharova said, adding that such a position was intellectually "absurd".

The Kremlin has called the issuing of the warrant against Putin outrageous and legally void, as Russia is not a signatory to the treaty that created the ICC.

Israel is not a member of the ICC, while the Palestinian territories were admitted as a member state in 2015.

Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Friday that any ICC decisions would not affect Israel's actions but would set a dangerous precedent.

Israeli officials are worried that the court could issue arrest warrants against Netanyahu and other top officials for violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza, Israeli media have reported.

Stoltenberg: Ukraine Has Lost Trust in NATO After Failures



NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky meet, amid Russia's attack, in Kyiv, April 29, 2024.

RZESZOW, Poland (Reuters) -- Ukraine's trust in its NATO allies has "taken a dent" because of delays and failures in the delivery of arms for the war with Russia, NATO boss Jens Stoltenberg said.

Speaking to Reuters as he travelled out of Ukraine by train after a day-long visit, Stoltenberg said such failings showed it was time to revamp the coordination of military aid to Kyiv.

"We need a more robust, institutionalized framework for our support to ensure predictability, to ensure more accountability and to ensure burden-sharing," said Stoltenberg, the secretary general of the transatlantic military alliance.

As examples of NATO allies falling short, he cited the U.S. Congress taking six months to pass a \$60-billion Ukraine aid package and European countries delivering much less artillery ammunition than promised.

Those shortcomings had a major impact on the battlefield as Russia gained the initiative while ammunition-starved Ukrainian forces have been forced onto the defensive.

"Of course, the fact that we have not delivered what we promised has put a dent ... into the trust," Stoltenberg said.

But, after a day of talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and other senior officials, he said Kyiv still believed in its allies and it was now up to them to deliver.

Stoltenberg, a former prime minister of Norway, said one way to avoid future shortfalls in military aid to Ukraine was to give NATO a greater coordinating role and draw up a multi-year plan that makes clear the contributions expected from each ally.

He has put such a proposal to NATO's 32 members and said it should be backed by a big financial commitment. Diplomats say 100 billion euros (\$107 billion) over five years has been floated.

Western military support for Ukraine is currently organized on an ad-hoc basis by the U.S.-led Ukraine Defense Contact Group, also known as the Ramstein group.

NATO members gave the go-ahead earlier this month for military planners to work on Stoltenberg's proposal but some governments have expressed reservations.

Hungary said it would oppose anything that might bring NATO closer to war and some diplomats have cast doubt on whether a big extra financial commitment is feasible.

News in Brief

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- Four U.S. law enforcement officials were killed and four others wounded in a shootout Monday as they carried out a warrant at a home in the southern state of North Carolina, officials said. The wanted man was later found dead on the property after he shot multiple officers, and officers returned fire, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) said in a statement, following a standoff that lasted around three hours. The Department of Justice confirmed that a deputy U.S. marshal and two task force officers were killed in the incident. Five other officers were also shot, with one from the local police force in "critical condition," CMPD said on social media. CMPD later announced the death of one of the injured officers, saying in a post on X that he had "passed away tonight from his injuries after being shot in the line of duty this afternoon while assisting other officers with the apprehension of a suspect."

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- The Russian-backed head of Crimea said on Tuesday that long-range Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS) were shot down over the peninsula, which was annexed by Russia in 2014. Sergei Aksyonov posted on Telegram a photo showing what he described as undetonated submunitions of ATACMS missiles. Aksyonov did not specify when and how many missiles had been shot down. The United States in recent weeks secretly shipped long-range missiles to Ukraine, which has so far used them twice, a U.S. official said last week.

THE HAGUE (AFP) -- Ecuador's early April raid on Mexico's embassy to seize a former top Ecuadorian official crossed a line and set a dangerous precedent for global diplomatic relations, the UN's top court heard on Tuesday. Ecuadorian security forces stormed the Mexican embassy in a late night raid on April 5 to arrest former vice president Jorge Glas, who is wanted on corruption charges and had been granted asylum by Mexico. "There are lines in international law which should not be crossed," Mexico's representative told judges at the International Court of Justice. "Regrettably, Ecuador has crossed that line," Alejandro Celorio Alcantara told the Hague-based court, where Mexico filed a case against Quito. Quito's rare incursion on diplomatic territory sparked an international outcry, and led Mexico to break ties with Ecuador and pull its diplomats out of the country. On Tuesday, Celorio warned the raid by special forces -- of which images were shown in the courtroom -- set a "disconcerting" precedent.

MANADO, Indonesia (AFP) -- Indonesia's remote Mount Ruang volcano erupted several times on Tuesday, authorities said, issuing the highest level of alert and ordering thousands of people to evacuate due to the threat of a tsunami from debris sliding into the sea. Ruang, located in Indonesia's North Sulawesi province, erupted at around 01:15 am local time on Tuesday (1715 GMT Monday) and then twice more that morning, the volcanology agency said in a statement. The volcano sent a tower of ash more than five kilometers (3.1 miles) into the sky, it added, as well as a fiery column of lava. The national disaster agency BNPB estimated 11,000 to 12,000 people had to be relocated from near Ruang's crater, spokesman Abdul Muhari told a press conference. Images released by the agency showed a molten red column bursting into the sky, a large ash cloud spilling from the crater and burning embers near local houses. Indonesia, a vast archipelago nation, experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire".

MANILA (AFP) -- The Philippines said the China Coast Guard used water cannon on two of its vessels on Tuesday, causing damage to one of them, during a patrol near a reef off the Southeast Asian country. Manila and Beijing have a long history of territorial disputes in the South China Sea, with several collisions involving Philippine and Chinese vessels in recent months, as well as the use of water cannon by the China Coast Guard. The latest incident happened near the China-controlled Scarborough Shoal, which has long been a potential flashpoint, during a mission to resupply Filipino fishermen. China's coast guard said it had "expelled" two Philippine ships from its waters near Huangyan Island, which is the Chinese name for the shoal. China claims almost the entire South China Sea, brushing off rival claims from other countries, including the Philippines, and an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis. Tuesday's incident came as the Philippines and the United States hold a major annual military exercise that has infuriated Beijing.

NAIROBI (Reuters) -- Rescuers were searching on Tuesday for at least 91 people missing in heavy flooding across Kenya, the interior ministry said. At least 91 people were killed on Monday morning in a mudslide and flash floods in Mai Mahiu town in central Kenya, the ministry said in a situation report, an increase of one on the previous death toll. Fifty-three more people in Mai Mahiu were reported missing, the interior ministry said, while the Kenya Red Cross said its tracing desk had reports of 76 missing. In all, at least 169 people have died across Kenya from heavy rains and flooding since last month. More than 185,000 have been forced from their homes, according to government data. Dozens more have been killed and hundreds of thousands displaced by intense downpours in Tanzania and Burundi, with scientists saying climate change is causing more intense and frequent extreme weather events.