

U.S. to Send \$275mn in New Weapons to Ukraine



U.S. Army MIM-104 Patriots, surface-to-air missile (SAM) system launchers, are pictured at Rzeszow-Jasionka Airport, amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Poland March 24, 2022.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Pentagon will send Ukraine at least \$275 million in new weapons, U.S. officials said, as the Biden administration rushes to do as much as it can to help Kyiv fight back against Russia in the remaining two months before President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

The latest tranche of weapons comes as worries grow about an escalation in the conflict, with both sides pushing to gain any advantage that they can exploit if Trump demands a quick end to the war — as he has vowed to do.

In rapid succession this week, President Joe Biden gave Ukraine the authority to fire longer-range missiles deeper into Russia and then Russian President Vladimir Putin formally lowered the threshold for using nuclear weapons.

U.S. officials contend that Russia's change in nuclear doctrine was expected, but Moscow is warning that Ukraine's new use of the Army

Tactical Missile System, known as ATACMS, inside Russia could trigger a strong response.

One American official said the U.S. is seeing no indications that Russia is preparing to use a nuclear weapon in Ukraine. Asked if a Ukrainian attack with longer-range U.S. missiles could potentially trigger use of nuclear weapons, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov answered affirmatively. He pointed to the doctrine's provision that holds the door open for it after a conventional strike that raises critical threats for the "sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Russia and its ally Belarus.

The United States closed its embassy in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev over "a potential significant air attack" by Russia amid rising tensions between Moscow and Washington.

In a statement on Wednesday, the U.S. embassy said it has received specific information of a potentially significant Russian air attack, calling

on its citizens to be ready to swiftly seek shelter in the event an air alert is announced.

"Out of an abundance of caution, the embassy will be closed, and embassy employees are being instructed to shelter in place," the US Department of State Consular Affairs said in a statement on the U.S. embassy's website.

This came after the United States on Sunday gave Ukraine the green light to use Western-supplied long-range missiles to strike targets deep inside Russia.

U.S. admiral Sam Paparo overseeing American forces in the Asia-Pacific region said that conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East are eating into U.S. stockpiles of air defenses, "With some of the Patriots that have been employed, some of the air-to-air missiles that have been employed, it's now eating into stocks and to say otherwise would be dishonest," Paparo, head of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, said during an event.

Paparo said the expenditure of U.S. air defenses "imposes costs on the readiness" of the United States to respond in the Asia-Pacific, particularly given that China is the most capable adversary in the world.

The weapons in the new package of aid for Ukraine include an infusion of air defense, including High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), as well as 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds, Javelin anti-armor munitions and other equipment and spare parts.

The weapons will be provided through presidential drawdown authority, which allows the Pentagon quickly to pull supplies from its shelves to speed them to Ukraine's front line.

1 in 3 British Muslims Consider Leaving UK Amid Rising Islamophobia



Anti-racism activists take part in a "Stop Islamophobia, Stop the Hate" march in London on March 16, 2024.

LONDON (Middle East Eye) - A new survey by charity Tell Mama has revealed that most British Muslims feel Islamophobia has increased since the Summer riots following the Southport stabbings, with one in three considering leaving the UK as a result.

The survey of 750 Muslims was conducted eight weeks after the fatal stabbings of three young girls in Southport led to riots across parts of England and Northern Ireland. Tell Mama found that 71 per cent of respondents felt anti-Muslim hatred had grown more widespread since the unrest, which included attacks on mosques and hotels housing asylum seekers.

"Many British Muslims are very scared at the moment. They need our government to show it hears their fears, and is working to keep them safe," said Iman Atta, director of Tell Mama. "This poll is proof of the terrifying impact anti-Muslim hate and Islamophobia is having."

The survey also revealed that 62 per cent believed the risk of harm to Muslim

communities had increased since the unrest. However, 50 per cent said they had become more open about their Muslim identity, mainly through discussions with friends and colleagues.

In response, a government spokesperson said, "These results are extremely concerning. Attacks and hatred against Muslim communities are unacceptable. All communities must feel safe, especially in places of worship, which is why we introduced the Protective Security for Mosques scheme and will continue to work to tackle racial and religious hatred."

In August, reflecting on the riots, former First Minister of Scotland, Humza Yousaf, expressed doubts about his family's future in the country and even the West.

Speaking on a podcast, Yousaf shared his concerns about rising far-right violence stating: "It's felt utterly horrendous... I don't know whether the future for me and my wife and my three children is going to be here in Scotland, the United Kingdom, or indeed in Europe and the West."

News in Brief

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's top domestic security agency on Wednesday reported arresting a German national it accused of planning to sabotage energy facilities on orders from a Ukrainian national. The Federal Security Service, known as the FSB, said in a statement carried by Russian news agencies that it detained German national Nikolai Gayduk as he entered Russia's westernmost exclave of Kaliningrad from Poland and seized half a liter (one pint) of liquid explosives from his car. It didn't say whether also had Russian citizenship or a visa to enter the country. The FSB accused Gayduk, a resident of Hamburg born in 1967, of planning acts of sabotage on orders from a Ukrainian, Alexander Zhorov, who also lives in Hamburg.

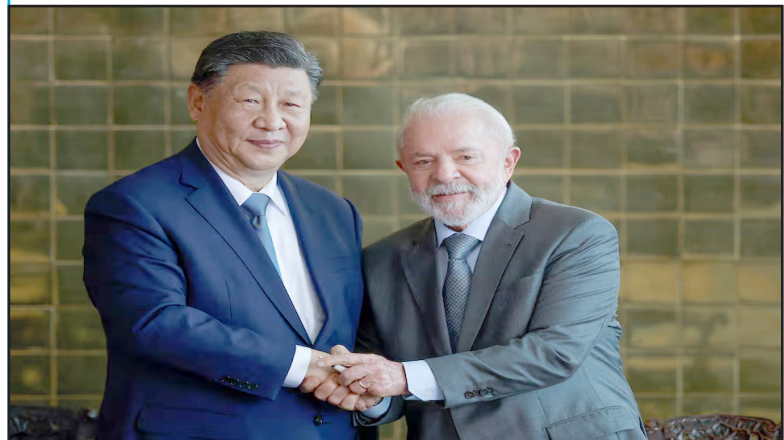
PARIS (AFP) - French far-right leader Marine Le Pen on Wednesday threatened to seek to topple Prime Minister Michel Barnier's fragile coalition government if her National Rally (RN) party's cost-of-living concerns were not incorporated into the 2025 budget. Le Pen's warning shot comes as she faces a major potential setback, with prosecutors seeking an obligatory five-year ban from public office for her alleged role in embezzling EU funds. She denies the allegations. If judged convict Le Pen and uphold the sought sentence, she would be barred from running in the 2027 presidential election which many believe she could win. Some analysts have suggested Le Pen's legal woes could accelerate her plans to bring down the government.

ABUJA (AFP) - At least 50 Boko Haram fighters were killed on Tuesday and seven members of Nigeria's infrastructure security force were missing following an insurgent ambush on a convoy monitoring the country's power grid installations, a spokesperson said. Boko Haram, which has waged an insurgency for 15 years mainly in the northeast, has been weakened by the military and internal fighting but remains a threat as it makes deadly attacks against civilians and government targets. Babawale Afolabi, spokesperson for the Nigerian Civil Defense Corp, a government agency set up to protect infrastructure, said security operatives were ambushed by about 200 Boko Haram fighters during the patrol mission.

NEW YORK (AFP) - The number of people killed or wounded worldwide by landmines and explosive remnants of war surged in 2023, according to a new report. There were more than 5,700 casualties last year, the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor group said in its annual report published on Wednesday. The highest number was reported in Myanmar, while significant tolls were also recorded in Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. The global total marks a rise of about 1,000 compared with the previous year. At least 1,983 people were killed and 3,663 injured across 53 countries. Civilians made up 84 percent of the victims, with children accounting for 37 percent, the report said.

ISLAMABAD (AP) — A Pakistani court granted bail Wednesday to former Prime Minister Imran Khan in a graft case, his lawyer said. But with a slew of other charges pending against him, the opposition leader is staying behind bars. Still, the order by a superior court in the capital, Islamabad, was a boost for Khan in the case in which he is accused, along with his wife, Bushra Bibi, of keeping and selling state gifts in violation of government rules when he was in power. Khan, who was ousted in a no-confidence vote in parliament in 2022, has denied the charge. The hearings in the trial on the graft charges started in July and are still ongoing. Khan has so far been embroiled in over 150 cases and has been sentenced in several, including to three years, 10 years, 14 years and seven years to be served concurrently under Pakistani law.

China's Xi Visits Brasilia to Cap Tour Flexing Diplomatic Clout



Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and China's President Xi Jinping shake hands as they sign bilateral agreements, in Brasilia, Brazil November 20, 2024.

RIO DE JANEIRO (Reuters) - Chinese President Xi Jinping made a state visit to Brasilia on Wednesday, capping a diplomatic blitz across South America that showed Beijing's growing clout in the region and at global

forums where it has filled a gap left by the U.S. presidential transition.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva greeted Xi at the presidential residence with a full honor guard and cavalry parade. They are

expected to sign agreements boosting trade and cooperation across sectors from agribusiness to energy and aerospace during morning meetings at the presidential residence in Brasilia.

Ahead of the visit, China's low earth orbit satellite company SpaceSail, which aims to challenge Elon Musk's Starlink, signed an agreement with state telecom Telemar to enter the Brazilian market.

The accords between the major developing economies with some \$180 billion of bilateral trade come after twin summits for Xi in one week - the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Lima and then the Group of 20 major economies in Rio de Janeiro.

While Xi played a central role at both summits, U.S. President Joe Biden arrived as a lame duck with just two months left in the White House and little room for lasting pledges, as his successor Donald Trump vows a total foreign policy overhaul.

Bomb Cyclone Pounds Northwest U.S., Leaving 600,000 Without Power

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A powerful storm was clobbering Washington state on Wednesday, knocking out power to hundreds of thousands while wreaking havoc on road travel and causing at least one death and two injuries.

A woman was killed when a tree fell on a homeless encampment in Lynnwood, just north of Seattle, local fire department officials said on social media. Two people were also injured when a tree fell on their trailer in Maple Valley, southeast of Seattle.

Schools across western Washington canceled classes or postponed the start of school on Wednesday.

The storm with tropical storm

force winds of 50 miles (80 km) per hour and gusts around 70 mph felled trees and power lines overnight. It knocked out electricity to more than 600,000 homes and businesses in Washington, Southwest Oregon and Northern California, according to the Poweroutage.us.

An NBC affiliate in Seattle broadcast images of cars smashed by fallen trees and damaged homes.

The strong winds should die down across the region by midday on Wednesday, but the storm is already above California, the National Weather Service said, and it is set to bring extreme rainfall totals by the end of the week.

"The biggest surge is Thursday. We're looking at 10-15 inches of rain by Friday, some places, 20-inches," Otto said, with the main concerns for southwest Oregon and Northern California.

A bomb cyclone rapidly intensifies in 24 hours or less when a cold air mass from the polar region collides with warm tropical air in a process that meteorologists call bombogenesis.

The weather service has issued a plethora of warnings and watches across the Pacific Northwest for high winds, flood watches and warnings, and including blizzard warnings from Northern Washington to the Sierra Nevada Range.

Thousands of Greek Workers, Italian Doctors Stage Strikes Over Pay



Supporters of the communist-affiliated PAME trade union attend a 24-hour general strike over rising consumer prices and housing costs, in Athens, Greece, November 20, 2024.

ATHENS (Dispatches) - Thousands of Greek docked ships workers and Italian doctors and nurses launched general strike on Wednesday to protest over their pay and rising cost of living.

Greek strikes disrupted rail and bus services across Greece, as thousands of workers marched in Athens to demand better pay and living standards.

Doctors, teachers, builders and transport workers from Greece's biggest private and public sector unions joined the walkout, which was triggered partly by the lingering impact of Greece's 2009-18 debt crisis and the high cost of living.

"Each time we go to the supermarket and each time electricity bills land, we suffer small heart attacks," said Stratis Dounias, a court employee who joined the march in Athens. "We want real measures against the high prices."

Protesters gathered in Syntagma Square in central Athens chanted "Workers' rights are the law" and waved banners that read "General strike against rising prices".

Greece's economy has rebounded since the debt crisis, but salaries lag the European average, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is among the lowest in the European Union, while the cost of goods has skyrocketed.

Many Greeks saw their wages and pensions slashed in return for bailouts worth 280 billion euros (\$297 billion) during the debt crisis, which shaved a quarter off Greece's economic output and nearly pushed the country out of the eurozone.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' centre-right government has raised the minimum monthly gross wage four times since taking power in 2019, to 830 euros, and has promised to raise it to 950 euros by 2027. It has also increased pensions.

But Greeks say the rises are not enough as energy, food and housing costs continue to outpace salary and pension increases.

In Italy, thousands of doctors and nurses stayed at home on Wednesday to protest over their pay and conditions in the latest sign of malaise in the country's struggling health sector.

Unions representing health workers say funds in the government's 2025 budget are insufficient for necessary hiring and salary increases as Italy, like many European countries, has an aging population requiring rising levels of care.

Italy spends about 6.2% of gross domestic product on its national health service, well below a European Union average of 6.8%, and health spending per capita is the lowest among the Group of Seven wealthy democracies, according to data by Italian health think-tank Gimbe.

The three union bodies coordinating Wednesday's strike, Anaa Assomed, Cimo-Fesmed and Nursing Up, said initial estimates showed up to 85% of workers had stayed at home, "which should make people reflect on the unacceptable conditions in our hospitals and the reasons for our protest."

A minimum level of essential health services is being maintained throughout the day.

Health Minister Orazio Schillaci said the government was "willing, as we always have been, not only to meet the unions but to try to resolve some of the problems on the table."

Pledges to boost the public health service in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic have not been kept and growing hospital waiting lists force increasing numbers of Italians to turn to private clinics for treatment.