



Gang-raped Indian woman 'numb' after attackers released

## Zionists troops raid Palestinian human rights offices

Page 6

Page 7



KHARKIV, Ukraine: Rescue workers inspect the site of a destroyed hostel as a result of a missile strike in the second largest Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. — AFP

# Russia strikes ahead of UN chief meeting

## Moscow denies deployment of heavy weapons in southern Ukraine

**KYIV, Ukraine:** Russian strikes battered the northeast Ukraine region of Kharkiv Thursday, killing at least five people, hours ahead of the first face-to-face meeting since the start of the war between the Turkish and Ukrainian leaders.

Moscow meanwhile denied it had deployed any heavy weapons at the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine where a recent escalation in fighting has increased fears of a nuclear disaster.

The head of the Kharkiv region Oleg Syneghubov said Moscow's forces had launched eight missiles from Russian territory at around 0430 local time (0130 GMT) striking across the city.

"Three people died, including a child. Eight people, including two children, were rescued," the emergency services said. Syneghubov posted images from the scene of one strike showing the smouldering remains of several burnt out buildings and twisted wreckage of destroyed vehicles nearby.

In separate strikes on the town of Krasnohrad south west of Kharkiv, bombardments that damaged

residential buildings left two dead and two more injured, he said. "Kharkiv. 175 days of horror. Daily terror, missile strikes on residential areas and civilians," a senior presidential aide, Mykhaylo Podolyak, wrote on social media.

### A 'political solution'

The strikes in the war-scarred east of the country come a day after bombardments killed at least seven in the city and as the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and UN chief Antonio Guterres were convening in the western city of Lviv.

The two were key brokers of a deal last month with Moscow and Kyiv allowing the resumption of grain exports from Ukraine after Russia's invasion blocked essential global supplies.

A spokesman for Guterres said that the UN chief, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Erdogan will discuss the grain deal, as well as "the need for a political solution to this conflict".

He added that he had "no doubt that the issue of the nuclear power plant" would be raised. In his reg-

ular nightly address on Wednesday, Zelensky said he and Guterres would "work to get the necessary results for Ukraine". The UN chief is slated to travel on Friday to Odessa, one of three ports involved in the grain exports deal-hammered out in July under the aegis of the UN with Ankara's mediation.

He will then head to Turkey to visit the Joint Coordination Centre, the body tasked with overseeing the accord. According to the UN, the first half of August saw 21 freighters authorised to sail under the deal carrying more than 563,000 tonnes of agricultural products, including more than 451,000 tonnes of corn. The first wartime shipment of UN food aid for Africa reached the Bosphorus Strait on Wednesday carrying 23,000 tonnes of wheat.

### 'Provocation'

Russia's defence ministry meanwhile said Thursday its forces had not deployed heavy weapons at the Zaporizhzhia plant, accusing Kyiv of preparing a "provocation" at the station. "Russian troops have no heavy weapons either on the territo-

ry of the station or in areas around it. There are only guard units," the ministry said in a statement.

Zelensky touched on the Zaporizhzhia plant in his address on Wednesday, saying Ukrainian diplomats and scientists were in "constant touch" with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with the goal of sending a mission by the watchdog to the occupied nuclear facility.

"The Russian army must withdraw from the territory of the nuclear power plant and all neighbouring areas, and take away its military equipment from the plant," he added. "This must happen without any conditions and as soon as possible." Earlier Wednesday, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Russia's seizure of the plant "poses a serious threat to the safety and the security of this facility (and) raises the risks of a nuclear accident or incident".

Also calling for a Russian withdrawal and inspections by the IAEA, Stoltenberg accused Moscow of using "the ground around the nuclear power plant as a staging area, as a platform, to launch artillery attacks on Ukrainian forces, and this is reckless". — AFP

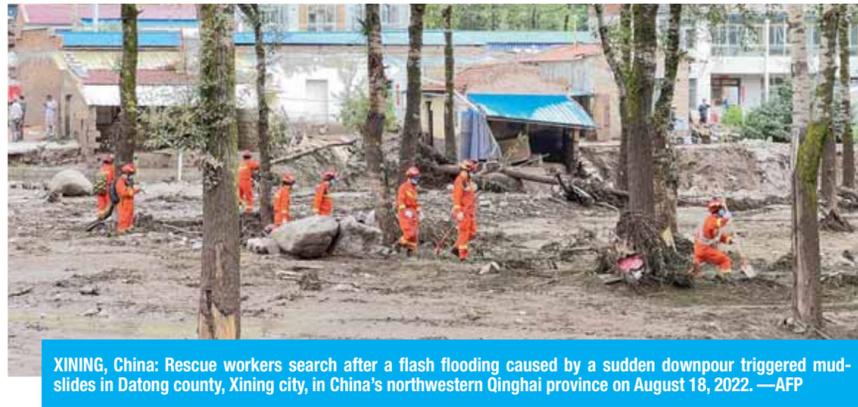
## 16 killed, many missing in China floods

**BEIJING:** Sixteen people were killed and many left missing in flash flooding in northwest China, state media reported Thursday, as the country battles extreme weather that has shuttered factories and caused rolling power cuts.

The deluge comes during a summer of soaring temperatures and torrential rains in China, with multiple cities clocking their hottest days on record and floods causing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of damage.

Floods hit this week in a mountainous region of Datong county in Qinghai province, affecting more than 6,200 people from six villages, state broadcaster CCTV said. Photos of the aftermath showed roads covered in mud, uprooted trees, damaged homes and rescue workers carrying shovels.

"As of noon on the 18th, 16 people have been killed," added CCTV, saying that rescue work was ongoing. At least 18 people are missing and 20 have since been rescued, and a "frontline headquarters" has been set up to organise the emergency response, according to state media reports. "The rescue work is progressing in an orderly manner," the report said, adding that sudden heavy rainfall



XINING, China: Rescue workers search after a flash flooding caused by a sudden downpour triggered mud-slides in Datong county, Xining city, in China's northwestern Qinghai province on August 18, 2022. — AFP

Wednesday night had triggered the situation.

### Extreme weather

Scientists say extreme weather across the world has become more frequent due to climate change, and will likely grow more intense as temperatures rise. Severe flooding in southern China in June displaced more than half a million people and caused an estimated \$250 million in damage.

On Wednesday, Chinese authorities warned that heavy rains were also expected to hit northern regions of the country including the capital Beijing

and its neighbouring Tianjin and Hebei. Earlier this week, President Xi Jinping called on officials in the northeastern Liaoning province to "ensure the safety of people's lives in flood control", state media reported.

Meanwhile, millions of people in southwest China are facing rolling power cuts after a crushing heat-wave led to an electricity supply crunch that has forced factories to halt work. Sichuan province relies heavily on dams to generate its electricity but the heat has caused reservoirs to dry up, exacerbating the energy shortage. — AFP

## Rushdie attack awakens old demons for Arab writers

**CAIRO:** Only ever found in incomplete, clandestine translations in Arabic, "The Satanic Verses" could have gone largely unnoticed in the Arab world, were it not for the Iranian religious edict against its author Salman Rushdie.

Then supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's fatwa calling for Rushdie's death, issued on February 14, 1989, struck a nerve with Arab authors, themselves often in danger of ruffling authoritarian feathers and "offending moral values".

When the novel came out in September 1988, sparking mass protests in India, Pakistan and elsewhere, the Arab world was more focused on the first Palestinian intifada, or uprising, against Zionist entity and the Iran-Iraq war.

In Britain and in Rushdie's native India, the book

attracted both praise and ire, with tens of thousands railing against it for "insulting" the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). Part of the controversy centred on fictional dream sequences involving the Prophet in the work of magical realism, which the Muslim protesters derided as blasphemous.

British-Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif said, however, that the real shock to many readers of Rushdie's novel was "the language he used to describe the Prophet". It was "the jokey, familiar language he generally used to describe his characters—a radical departure from the usual veneration tone people are used to," she said.

A few days after the Iranian fatwa, a group of 40 Arabic intellectuals published an open letter from Damascus titled "In Defence of a Writer's Right to Live". "We are not here to defend the book, but its author and his right to live and write," they declared, decrying a history of book burning and persecution of writers dating back to the Middle Ages.

Lebanese writer Fawwaz Traboulsi, one of the signatories back then, reiterated the sentiment on Facebook last Sunday—a day after Rushdie was stabbed during a lecture in upstate New York.



TEHRAN: Iranians check newspapers at a bookshop in Tehran on August 13, 2022, a day after a man stabbed British author Salman Rushdie, the target of a 1989 Iranian fatwa calling for his death, during a literary event in New York state. — AFP

Rushdie, 75, was airlifted to a nearby hospital, where he underwent emergency surgery for life-threatening injuries. His condition remains serious but he has shown signs of improvement. — AFP

## Indian FM defends ties with Myanmar

**BANGKOK:** India's foreign minister on Thursday defended his country's ties with the Myanmar junta, despite growing international concerns about recent executions and the legitimacy of elections planned for next year.

Myanmar's decade-long experiment with democracy was halted last year and the country has since spiralled into bloody conflict after the military ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in a coup. It has become a global pariah, with some western countries downgrading relations and levelling economic sanctions against the junta.

But India, China and Russia have continued to engage with the regime, including conducting ministerial visits. Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said New Delhi's position on Myanmar has been consistent over decades and goes back to the country's struggle for freedom against colonialism.

"Our relationship is not something which should be judged... by the politics of the day," Jaishankar told an audience at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. As a direct neighbour India could not avoid dealing with the military junta regime because of border issues such as organised crime, coronavirus and Indian insurgents in Myanmar, he said.

"We also have to manage our border relationship and the complexities of being a neighbour," he said. Earlier this year New Delhi's incoming ambassador to Myanmar presented his credentials to coup leader Min Aung Hlaing-making India one of the few nations to recognise the junta as a legitimate government.

Jaishankar said as an immediate neighbour, India had an empathy and an understanding that was different from other countries far away that were pontificating about Myanmar's democracy. Despite their engagement with the junta, "we deeply believe that Myanmar is best served by being a democracy-by reflecting what are the sentiments and wishes of its people," he said. Diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional bloc have so far proven fruitless. Last week, Myanmar's ruling junta moved to restrict the country's 92 political parties from meeting foreigners or international organisations ahead of an election expected next year. — AFP