



UK assisted dying bill hopes to end 'inhumane' suicides

Philippines to re-open to vaccinated foreign tourists



BELGOROD, Russia: A woman walks past a monument to the soldiers killed in action during wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya in the village of Shebekino outside Belgorod, a few kilometers from Ukrainian border. —AFP

Biden to send troops to eastern Europe

US keeps pressure on Russia amid Ukraine diplomacy push

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden is maintaining pressure on Russian leader Vladimir Putin over Ukraine after announcing a small troop deployment to eastern Europe even as top Pentagon officials backed a renewed push for diplomacy. As Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged Western leaders to avoid stirring "panic" over the massive Russian troop buildup on his country's borders, Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron agreed on the need for de-escalation.

Neither Putin nor his European and American counterparts had until now appeared ready to give ground in the weeks-long crisis, the worst in decades between Russia and the West.

But according to a Macron aide, Putin told the French leader in a call lasting more than an hour that he had "no offensive plans." In Washington, Biden nevertheless said Friday he would soon send a small number of US troops to bolster the NATO presence in eastern Europe as tensions remain heightened.

The United States already has tens of thousands of troops stationed across mostly Western Europe. At the Pentagon, top officials urged a focus on

diplomacy while saying that Russia now had enough troops and equipment in place to threaten the whole of Ukraine.

Any such conflict, warned the top US general, Joint Chiefs Chairman Mark Milley, would be "horrific" for both sides. "If that was unleashed on Ukraine, it would be significant, very significant, and it would result in a significant amount of casualties," Milley said.

But speaking alongside Milley, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said there "is still time and space for diplomacy." "Mr Putin can do the right thing as well," said Austin. "There is no reason that this situation has to devolve into conflict."

During his talks with Macron, Putin "expressed no offensive plans and said he wanted to continue the talks with France and our allies," the aide to the French president said. Their conversation "enabled us to agree on the need for a de-escalation," the aide told journalists. Putin "said very clearly that he did not want confrontation."

Complex threat

Since October, Russia has amassed more than

100,000 combat troops and equipment, as well as support forces, along its frontier with Ukraine and more recently in Belarus, which borders Ukraine on the north. Western officials say Russia has also mustered more air and sea assets in the region, creating a complex threat like none seen since the Cold War.

Moscow has demanded wide-ranging security guarantees, including that Ukraine never be allowed to join NATO. Those demands have been the subject of intensive negotiations, with the West warning of far-reaching consequences if diplomacy fails and Russia attacks.

"We don't need this panic," Zelensky told a news conference with foreign media, expressing concern over "signals even from respected leaders." He said he sought to avoid hurting his country's already battered economy. Later this week, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to speak with Putin and add to the chorus of Western leaders urging him to back down.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki is due in Kyiv on Tuesday to meet the president and prime minister. "Poland supports Ukraine in preventing Russia's aggression," Polish government spokesman

Piotr Muller tweeted. "We will do everything possible to maintain peace in Europe."

Russia's concerns not addressed

To Macron, Putin made clear that the written responses from the West to his demands this week had fallen short of Russia's expectations, the Kremlin said. "The US and NATO responses did not take into account Russia's fundamental concerns including preventing NATO's expansion," Putin said, according to the Kremlin's readout of the call.

He added that the West had ignored the "key question," that no country should strengthen its security at the expense of others, adding Russia would "carefully study" the responses, "after which it will decide on further actions." Russia has also demanded a pullback of NATO forces deployed to eastern European and ex-Soviet countries that joined the alliance after the Cold War.

In a sign of continued tensions, Russia announced Friday evening it had added several EU officials to a list of people banned from entering the country, saying they were responsible for "anti-Russian policies." —AFP



MOSCOW: A medical worker wearing a full personal protective equipment (PPE) walks outside a COVID-19 hospital in Moscow yesterday amid the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic. —AFP

COVID death toll crosses 5.6m globally

LONDON: The number of global deaths from COVID-19 soared by a fifth worldwide in the last week to 9,050 per day, according to AFP's database. The coronavirus has killed at least 5,635,702 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources on Friday. The US has recorded the most COVID deaths with 878,467, followed by Brazil with 625,085, India on 492,327 and Russia 329,443. Taking into account excess mortality linked to Covid-19, the WHO estimates the overall death toll could be two to three times higher.

Vaccine mandate accord?

An accord between rich nations and developing countries on intellectual property waivers for COVID-19 vaccines could be just weeks away, the head of the World Trade Organization, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala says.

Merck pill 'active' against Omicron

Merck's anti-COVID pill remains "active" against the Omicron variant, the US drugmaker says, citing results from six laboratory studies.

Iceland to lift curbs

Iceland aims to lift all its COVID-19 curbs by mid-March, which would end a three-stage easing plan presented by the government. Meanwhile, Russia reported more than 100,000 daily coronavirus cases for the first time yesterday as the country weathers a surge of infections driven by the highly contagious Omicron variant. —AFP

India caps week of military pageantry with drone show

NEW DELHI: India ended a week of military pageantry yesterday with a synchronized drone display showcasing its homegrown tech industry, in patriotic celebrations marking a milestone in the country's independence history.

A thousand aircraft flew in formation in the night skies above the capital New Delhi, flashing the saffron, white and green of the national flag, before rearranging themselves into a silhouette of independence hero Mahatma Gandhi.

The light show closed a series of extravagant sunset troop manoeuvres for India's Beating Retreat, a music-filled drill ceremony for soldiers returning to base that has its origins in 17th-century British military tradition.

It is staged each year three days after the country's annual celebrations to mark the anniversary of India's 1950 republican constitution. The event has special significance this year as the nation of 1.4 billion people prepares to mark 75 years since the end



NEW DELHI: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (center, right) with India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh (Center left) poses for a photograph with the National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets during Prime Minister's NCC Rally in New Delhi on Friday. —AFP

of British colonial rule in August.

This year's Beating Retreat sparked a minor local controversy over the decision by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to drop the Christian hymn "Abide With Me" from the ceremony's featured

songs. The hymn, said to be a favorite of the London-educated Gandhi, was dropped because it was a sign of the country's colonial past, media reports said, quoting government sources. The song had been a permanent fixture of the ceremony since 1950. —AFP

English & Math

INSTITUTE FOR PRIVATE TRAINING
معهد الجامعة الأمريكية الدولية
للتدريب الأهلي
AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Kuwaiti Arabic

Prepare for university placement tests

aiu.edu.kw/ipt
22262500

Professional language course