

## International

# Russia says strike on Odessa port hit Western-supplied weapons

## Ukraine's Kherson to be 'liberated' from Russia by September: Official

KYIV: Russia said Sunday that its missile barrage on a Ukrainian port central to a freshly-inked grain export deal had destroyed Western-supplied weapons, after the attack sparked an outcry from Ukraine's allies.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denounced Saturday's strike on the Odessa port—which came just one day after the warring sides struck a deal to resume exports from the facility—as “Russian barbarism”.

Turkey helped broker the accord and said immediately after the double cruise missile hits that it had received assurances from Moscow that Russian forces were not responsible.

logue with Moscow was becoming increasingly untenable. “This apparent Russian barbarism brings us even closer to obtaining the very weapons we need for our victory,” Zelensky said in a late-night address to the nation. Under the deal brokered by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and United Nations chief Antonio Guterres, Odessa is one of three designated export hubs.

### Kherson to be 'liberated'

Meanwhile, a Ukrainian official said Sunday that the country's southern region of Kherson, which fell to Russian troops early in their February invasion, would be recaptured by Kyiv's forces by September. “We can say that the Kherson region will definitely be liberated by September, and all the occupiers' plans will fail,” Sergiy Khlan, an aide to the head of Kherson region, said in an interview with Ukrainian television.

The Ukrainian army, emboldened by deliveries of Western-supplied long-range artillery have been clawing back territory in the southern Kherson region in recent weeks. “We can say that a turning point has occurred on the battlefield. We see that the Armed Forces of Ukraine are prevailing in their most recent military operations,” Khlan said. “We see that our armed forces are advancing openly. We can say that we are switching from defensive to counteroffensive actions,” he added. Russian forces seized the region's main city, also called Kherson, on March 3. It was the first major city to fall following the start of Moscow's military operation in Ukraine in late February. The region, important for Ukrainian agriculture, lies next to the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014.

### Mykolaiv attacks

Ukrainian officials said grain was being stored in the port at the time of the strike, although the food stocks did not appear to have been hit. Guterres—who presided



ODESSA: A handout image made available by the Odessa City Council Telegram channel on July 24, 2022, shows Ukrainian firefighters battling a fire on a boat burning in the port of Odessa after missiles hit the port on July 23, 2022. —AFP

over the signing ceremony Friday—“unequivocally” condemned the attack. The United States “strongly condemned” the attack, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying it “casts serious doubt on the credibility of Russia's commitment to yesterday's deal”.

Until Sunday, there was no response from Moscow, but Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said Russia had denied carrying out the attack. “The Russians told us that they had absolutely nothing to do with this attack,” he told state news agency Anadolu. Odessa region officials said the strikes left people wounded and damaged port infrastructure in Odessa, without speci-

fying the number or severity of the injuries.

The first major accord between the countries since Russia's February invasion of Ukraine aims to ease the “acute hunger” the UN says an additional 47 million people are facing because of the war. Ukraine, at the signing, warned it would conduct “an immediate military response” should Russia violate the accord and attack its ships or stage an incursion around its ports.

Zelensky said responsibility for enforcing the deal fell to the UN, which along with Turkey is a co-guarantor of the agreement. Turkey said it was committed to the accord after the attack. —AFP



### Attack sparks outcry from Ukraine allies

But Russia's defense ministry rolled back on the denial Sunday, saying the strikes had destroyed a Ukrainian military vessel and arms delivered by Washington. “High-precision, long-range missiles launched from the sea destroyed a docked Ukrainian warship and a stockpile of anti-ship missiles delivered by the United States to the Kyiv regime,” it said.

“A Ukrainian army repair and upgrade plant has also been put out of order.” The port attack has cast a shadow over the milestone agreement aimed at relieving a global food crisis that was hammered out over months of negotiations and signed in Istanbul.

Zelensky said the strikes on Odessa showed Moscow could not be trusted to keep its promises and that dia-

## Greece battles fierce wildfires amid heatwave

ATHENS: Greece on Sunday battled three wildfires across the country which forced hundreds to evacuate, as soaring temperatures raised fears of more blazes. The country is in the grip of a heatwave that began on Saturday and is expected to last 10 days. Temperatures were set to rise to 42 degrees Celsius (107 degrees Fahrenheit) in some regions.

Experts blame climate change for the soaring temperatures and warned that the worst is yet to come.

Fires raged in the north, east and south of Greece, including on the island of Lesbos. Officials ordered the evacuation of around 200 people on Sunday afternoon from Vryssa village on Lesbos as flames crept closer, some 500 meters (1,600 feet) from houses, the deputy mayor of western Lesbos told Skai radio. Elderly women carried plastic bags with only a few personal belongings as they boarded the first buses to leave the village. Thick clouds of smoke were already engulfing the first houses of Vryssa.

The blaze broke out a day earlier, causing the evacuation of hundreds of tourists and residents from the beachside village of Vatera. At least four houses were destroyed in Vatera, state TV ERT reported, and fires damaged an unknown number of shops, hotels and beach bars in the village.

Dozens of firefighters early on Sunday clamored to control the blaze, with four water-dropping planes and two helicopters in operation. In the northeastern region of Evros, a wildfire was ablaze for a fourth day in Dadia National Park, known for its black vulture colony. The fire has already destroyed nearly 500 hectares (1,220 acres) of woodland.

More than 300 firefighters battled to control the



VRISA, Greece: Smoke ascends over the village of Vrisa, in the southern part of the Greek island of Lesbos, as the wildfire burns near tourist resorts for the second day, forcing vulnerable residents to flee on July 24, 2022. —AFP

fire in Evros and by late Saturday the thick smoke forced the evacuation of the village of Dadias. It was unclear how many people were evacuated. “The most important thing for us is the safety of the villagers and all forces (which) will be deployed there,” Evros governor Dimitris Petrovits told Athens News Agency.

The fire had already passed the raptor birds observatory and was closing in on the buildings of the protected area management unit. Petrovits said collecting and treating injured animals was a high priority for the authorities. In the Peloponnese, a southern peninsula, a fire that broke out early Saturday forced the evacuation of Chrysokelaria village.

By midday on Sunday, firefighters had managed to contain the fire. A wildfire in mountains near Athens on Wednesday also damaged homes and forced hundreds of people to evacuate after gale-force winds earlier in the week. Greece's worst wildfire disaster killed 102 people in 2018 in the coastal suburb of Mati, east of Athens. The latest fires come after a heatwave and wildfires last year destroyed 103,000 hectares and claimed three lives in Greece. Fires in parts of France, Spain and Portugal have already burned more land so far this year than was destroyed by flames in all of 2021. The area, some 517,881 hectares, is equivalent to the size of Trinidad and Tobago. — AFP

## Egypt small farms play big role but ...

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acres) - an area the size of a football pitch - till 35 percent of arable land. Yet they produce some 47 percent of Egypt's field crops, the FAO calculates. Larger farms focus more on exports - a dynamic that came to a head when Russia invaded Ukraine.

### 'Patriotic duty'

Egypt, the world's leading importer of wheat, relied on Russia and Ukraine for 80 percent of its imports, providing the flour for Egypt's traditional flat bread. Ordinary Egyptians eat bread at almost every meal, and Egypt's wheat farmers ramped up production to 40 percent of the country's needs. “Without the 40 percent of wheat that we produce domestically,” rural sociolo-

gist Saker Al-Nour told AFP, the consequences of the war “would be much worse.”

In March, Cairo ordered farmers to grow wheat, calling the “compulsory delivery” orders a “patriotic duty.” By June, farmers had provided more than 3.5 million tons, according to the supply ministry, over half the domestic supply goal to August, and equal to the total amount supplied in 2021.

Compulsory crop deliveries were a pillar of president Gamal Abdel Nasser's socialist policies in the 1960s, but those policies were dropped amid the structural adjustment programs of the 1990s.

With them went the former subsidies on seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers which have steadily shrunk over the decades. “Instantly, when things got tough, it went back to compulsory delivery, but this time without the services that came with it,” Nour said. To encourage farmers to grow wheat, the government had previously set domestic prices higher than imports. But the unprecedented surge in global prices undermined that.

“Now I owe money to the pesticide guy, to the fertil-

izer guy,” Aboueldahab said. “So if someone comes along and bids a low price, what am I supposed to do?” One solution is for smallholders to join together and harness the power of technology. Entrepreneur Hussein Abou Bakr launched a start-up finance company called Mozare3, ‘farmer’ in Arabic, which offers farmers financing solutions and agronomy support. It also helps farmers “become a bloc”, in the absence of effective local cooperatives and sets prices “as a form of protection” against market fluctuations.

Nour warns smallholders have “very limited negotiating power, especially when they don't have the storage capacity for their harvest”.

But with illiteracy among smallholders at 32 percent, according to the FAO, offline village associations are necessary. As climate change bites, Nour warns bottom-up approaches are essential. These associations could, for example, communicate extreme weather events quickly and directly to farmers whose crops are at risk. These tools exist, the sociologist said. “We just need to make them available to small farmers.” — AFP

2.3 million residents, around 40 women are staying in only two specialized refuges.

When AFP visited one of them, a woman with bruises covering one side of her face sat in a corner. She was about to return to her husband, rather than risk losing access to her children. “The law is not on women's side all the time in the Gaza Strip,” said Aziza Elkahlout, a spokeswoman for the social development ministry which runs one of the refuges. “We thought of opening the safe house because of the injustice women are exposed to,” she added, blaming the blockade for Gaza's dire living conditions. But such reasoning is inadequate for Suleiman Baraka, who says the authorities are partly responsible for his daughter's killing. “The government helps the offender because it doesn't take any immediate decisions,” said Istabraq's father. —AFP

daughter turns 11 or a son reaches nine. Noha Khaziq, 31, stayed with her abusive husband because they had four children. He killed her in February. “Her husband tied her up and left her at home so that she couldn't escape and get out. When he returned she was dead,” said her brother Abdelaziz, who shares his sister's green eyes. “We feel satisfied with the death sentence ruling against the husband, five months after the heinous crime, but we demand the sentence be enforced quickly,” said the 28-year-old. The Khaziq family has not seen Noha's children since she was killed, because custody was granted to their father's relatives.

### 'Not on women's side'

Fifteen years since the blockade of Gaza began, it is almost impossible for women fleeing violence to leave the Palestinian enclave. In a territory home to

## Pope heads to Canada to make amends for Indigenous abuses

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE, Undefined: Pope Francis left Rome on Sunday for Canada for a chance to personally apologize to Indigenous survivors of abuse committed over a span of decades at residential schools run by the Catholic Church. The head of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics will be met at Edmonton's international airport by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The Pope's plane took off from Rome shortly after 9:00 am local time (0700 GMT). The 10-hour flight constitutes the longest since 2019 for the 85-year-old pope, who has been suffering from knee pain that has forced him to use a cane or wheelchair in recent outings.

The pope was in a wheelchair on Sunday and used a lifting platform to board the plane, an AFP correspondent accompanying him said. Francis' Canada visit is primarily to apologize to survivors for the Church's role in the scandal that a national truth and reconciliation commission has called “cultural genocide”. Before he left, the pope said on Twitter he was making a “penitential pilgrimage” that “might contribute to the journey of reconciliation already undertaken”.

He will be joined on the visit by his diplomacy chief, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's second most senior official. From the late 1800s to the 1990s, Canada's government sent about 150,000 First Nations, Metis and Inuit children into 139 residential schools run by the Church, where they were cut off from their families, language and culture. Many were physically and sexually abused by headmasters and teachers. Thousands of children are believed to have died of disease, malnutrition or neglect. —AFP

## Proposed law will save KD 100m...

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The plan will save Kuwait's budget around KD 100 million per year, and will bring justice and equality in the system. It includes increasing developmental spending as money allocated for salaries will be redirected to development projects. Social assistance for needy Kuwaitis will be reduced through clear conditions that grant assistance to limited income Kuwaitis and residents - and not to Kuwaitis who live outside the country.

Budget for food supplies will be reduced. Squandering (in subsidies) will be reduced and items will only be sent to groups who need them. This will guard against smuggling and thefts. The financial support for Kuwaitis in the private sector will be reviewed. No Kuwaiti in the private sector will receive financial support if his/her salary exceeds a certain ceiling. The plan showed that reducing budget spending and excesses will be focused on the areas with higher number of expats.

“Employment in the public sector is projected to be limited to areas that have shortage in national manpower, such as the health and education ministries,” said the sources. “The government looks to halt Kuwaitis' employment in administrative fields, which is something it hopes may encourage Kuwaitis to work in the private sector.” The plan would focus on changing the current direction of the state's budget. “The KD 13 billion currently spent on salaries can be redirected to development projects,” said the sources, noting that allocations for salaries could be reduced by as low as KD 2 billion within five years from the date of implementing the plan.

## Gaza's women see no escape...

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### Tied up, left to die

Men convicted of killing their wives can be jailed or face the death penalty. But the sentence is reduced if they commit a so-called “honor killing”, in which a relative is murdered because they are deemed to have brought shame to the family. UN Women says such “outdated and discriminatory laws” impede justice. Additionally, those seeking to escape domestic violence risk losing their children. If a wife obtains a divorce, custody passes to the ex-husband once a