



Zionist entity heads towards snap election

Philippines' Ressa says 'business as usual' despite news outlet's shutdown order

Page 7

Page 6



MADRID, Spain: US President Joe Biden (C) and other leaders depart after posing for the official group photograph during the NATO summit at the Ifema congress centre in Madrid. — AFP

US to reinforce Europe's defences

An army brigade will rotate in and out of Romania

MADRID: The United States will reinforce Europe's defences with a wave of new military deployments, President Joe Biden announced Wednesday, as more Russian missiles smashed into Ukrainian cities. News of the US plan came as NATO leaders met to welcome Sweden and Finland as candidates to join the alliance, a double blow to Russia's President Vladimir Putin and his bid to redraw Europe's security map.

Biden boasted that the US announcement was exactly what Putin "didn't want" and Moscow reacted with predictable fury, denouncing Sweden and Finland's entry plan as "destabilising" and accusing an "aggressive" NATO of seeking to contain Russia. As Western leaders met in Madrid, in Ukraine officials complained that Russian missiles had hit civilian housing and businesses in and around the cities of Dnipro, Mykolaiv and Kharkiv, leaving at least seven dead and 14 wounded.

In Kremenchuk, the town where a Russian missile on

Monday destroyed a shopping centre and—according to local officials—killed at least 18 civilians, clearing operations continued. A giant crane was working near the site of the impact and in the rubble-strewn parking area shopping trolleys piled with clothes and household goods lay abandoned. Western leaders have dubbed the Kremenchuk strike a war crime, and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has demanded that UN investigators visit. Russia said it targeted a Ukrainian depot storing Western arms.

'What needs to be done'

The Russian defence ministry said it had inflicted severe casualties on Ukrainian troops defending the town of Lyssychansk, in the eastern Donbas region, and said the Kharkiv attack had hit Ukrainian command centres and a training base for foreign "mercenaries".

Moscow's February 24 invasion of pro-Western Ukraine triggered massive economic sanctions and a

wave of support for Zelensky's government, including deliveries of advanced weapons. At this week's summit, two formerly neutral European countries—Sweden and Russia's north-western neighbour Finland—will be accepted as candidates to join NATO and Washington has announced that it will shift the headquarters of its 5th Army Corps to Poland. An army brigade will rotate in and out of Romania, two squadrons of F-35 fighters will deploy to Britain, US air defence systems will be sent to Germany and Italy and the fleet of US Navy destroyers in Spain will grow from four to six.

"That's exactly what he didn't want but exactly what needs to be done to guarantee security for Europe," Biden said, of Putin's efforts to roll back Western influence and re-establish influence or control over territories of the former Russian empire. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said NATO's expansion was "the opposite" of what Putin hoped for, and said that the leaders meeting at the summit would "state clearly that

Russia poses a direct threat to our security". Moscow rose to the bait.

Weapons shipments

"The summit in Madrid confirms and consolidates this bloc's policy of aggressive containment of Russia," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said, Russian news agencies reported. "We consider the expansion of the North Atlantic alliance to be a purely destabilising factor in international affairs."

The Swedish and Finnish leaders are to be welcomed as candidates for full membership in the alliance, after Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan agreed to lift his threat of a veto—the NATO ally accuses Stockholm and Helsinki of harbouring wanted Kurdish militants. Turkey announced Wednesday that it would request the extradition of 33 alleged "terrorists" under the terms of the agreement signed Tuesday with Sweden and Finland to allow them to make membership bids.—AFP

Spain to 'fully' cooperate with migrant death probes

MADRID: Madrid will offer "total collaboration" with the Spanish and Moroccan investigations into the deaths of 23 migrants during a mass attempt to enter Spain's Melilla enclave, Pedro Sanchez said Wednesday. The Spanish premier's remarks came a day after the United Nations denounced authorities on the border between Morocco and Spain for using "excessive force", describing it as "unacceptable".

The tragedy happened at dawn on Friday, when around 2,000 migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, tried to break through the fence from Morocco into Melilla, one of Spain's two tiny North African enclaves.

"I regret the loss of human life and express my solidarity with the families of the migrants who died," Sanchez told Cadena Ser radio, pledging his government would work with investigators to understand what happened. Sanchez stressed that three investigations had been opened, one by Moroccan prosecutors, one by Spain's public prosecutor and a third by the Spanish rights ombudsman. "We have to trust these institutions and I pledge the government's total collaboration with their efforts to clarify what happened," he said. Moroccan authorities said some of the victims had fallen while trying to scramble over the fence, giving an initial toll of 18 dead, but later raising it to 23 after another five migrants died of their injuries.

Few details about the incident were available, but Spanish media showed footage of people on the ground, some with bloodied hands and torn clothes. The death toll was by far the worst recorded in years of attempts by migrants to cross into Spain's Ceuta and Melilla enclaves, which have the EU's only land borders with Africa, making them a magnet for those desperate to escape grinding poverty and hunger.

In Morocco, prosecutors are pressing charges against 65 migrants, mostly Sudanese, for trying to storm the border, a defence lawyer in Rabat said. Spain's public prosecutor on Tuesday opened its own investigation "to clarify what happened", citing the "seriousness and gravity" of the incident.

Images of the violence provoked an unusually strong response from the United Nations, which hit out at the border authorities. "We saw the use of excessive force by the authorities, which needs to be investigated because it is unacceptable," said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's spokesman Stephane Dujarric on Tuesday. "People who are on the move have human rights and those need to be respected and we're seeing them all too often disrespected. We've seen it on both sides of the border," he added.—AFP



SAN ANTONIO: Residents of San Antonio cry as they attend a vigil for the victims found in an abandoned truck in San Antonio, Texas on June 28, 2022. — AFP

US opens probe after 51 migrants die in sweltering trailer

SAN ANTONIO, United States: The death toll of undocumented migrants who were abandoned in a scorching-hot trailer in Texas rose to 51 Tuesday, as President Joe Biden blamed "criminal" professional smugglers for the tragedy. Rebeca Clay-Flores, a Bexar County official, reported the new tally of "39 men and 12 women" dead, following the Monday discovery of the tractor-trailer on an isolated road in her district.

She did not say how many survivors remained in hospital, but the number could be around 11 based on initial figures that officials gave, including possibly four children. The Department of Homeland Security announced it had opened a criminal investigation, as Biden took aim at human smuggling gangs.

"The tragic loss of life in San Antonio, Texas that took place yesterday is horrifying and heartbreaking," he said in a statement. "This incident underscores the need to go after the multi-billion dollar criminal smuggling industry preying on migrants and leading to far too many innocent deaths," he said.

Intense heat

Federal law enforcement agents on Tuesday arrested

two men at the address linked to the tractor-trailer's registration, court documents showed. Juan Francisco D'Luna-Bilbao and Juan Claudio D'Luna-Mendez, both Mexican nationals whose US tourist visas had expired, were illegally in possession of multiple firearms, the documents alleged.

A third person, suspected of being the driver of the tractor-trailer, was arrested nearby while "very high on meth," reported the local daily San Antonio Express-News, citing a law enforcement officer. According to Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, of the dead whose identities are known, 22 were from Mexico, seven from Guatemala and two from Honduras.

"It's a tremendous misfortune," he told reporters. It was the deadliest single incident involving migrants along the southern border in memory, and drew more attention to the risks that hundreds of thousands of people face seeking to enter the United States from Mexico without permission.

On Monday, the high temperature in San Antonio was 103 degrees Fahrenheit (39.4 degrees Celsius), and the temperature in the unvented trailer would have been much higher. By Tuesday afternoon, authorities had removed the trailer from where it had been abandoned with its human cargo, on a narrow road sandwiched between train tracks and auto junkyards. Replacing it were makeshift crosses adorned with artificial flowers.

"I feel that if these people walk hundreds of miles to get over here, it wouldn't hurt us to walk maybe one mile to put the crosses and candles," said Angelita Olvera, who lives nearby. "Hopefully, whoever had them in the trailer will pay the consequences," she said.—AFP

Critics round on UK govt over net-zero targets 'failure'

LONDON: Environmental campaigners, business groups and opposition politicians all urged the UK government Wednesday to ramp up delivering climate change policies after an expert panel warned it was failing to make adequate progress.

Britain's Climate Change Committee (CCC) last year praised the government for its net-zero strategy to be carbon neutral by 2050, and a series of targets to be met along the way. But its latest annual progress report found "scant evidence of delivery against these headline goals so far", prompting wide-ranging criticism of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's administration. "Time is running out," Greenpeace UK's political campaigner, Ami McCarthy, said, accusing ministers of stalling "on greening our homes, delivering renewables and moving our food production system away from meat".

"The government must roll up its sleeves and deliver the benefits of a climate friendly economy for all." The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) echoed the sentiment, saying "delivery must now be the government's watchword—both in the short and long-term".

"Weathering the cost-of-living crisis requires urgent action on energy efficiency to help bring down household bills," its decarbonisation director Tom Thackray added. "Delivering an affordable, resilient and net-zero energy network would also help put pounds back in people's pockets and propel the UK's net-zero journey forward."

'Under-delivery'

The CCC, an independent body established under 2008 climate change legislation to advise the government, said although there were some "bright spots" of progress, in most areas "the likelihood of under-delivery is high". A "clear and effective programme" was needed to achieve the goals, it added, noting renewed focus on insulating homes and reducing emissions from farming was needed. The average land temperature in Britain had risen by around 1.2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels and sea levels had risen by 16 centimetres since 1900, the body said last year.

Episodes of extreme heat were becoming more frequent, and it warned that further delay in taking action to mitigate the risks would lead to higher costs in the future. "The UK is a champion in setting new climate goals, now we must be world-beaters in delivering them," said CCC chairman John Gummer, a member of Britain's House of Lords. "In the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, the country is crying out to end its dependence on expensive fossil fuels," he added.—AFP