



Japan PM tells Biden that new era requires more military muscle

Lebanese protest arrest of blast victim's brother

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KREMINNA: Ukrainian servicemen stand near a tank on the frontline near Kreminna, Lugansk region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

UK sending heavy tanks to Ukraine

‘Western tanks will not only strengthen us on the battlefield, but also send the right signal’

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Saturday pledged to provide Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine, making it the first Western country to supply the heavy tanks Kyiv has been calling for. The pledge saw a swift reaction from Russia which warned it would only “intensify” the conflict. “Bringing tanks to the conflict zone, far from drawing the hostilities to a close, will only serve to intensify combat operations, generating more casualties, including among the civilian population”, the Russian embassy in the UK said.

Sunak said the tanks were a sign of the UK’s “ambition to intensify our support to Ukraine”, according to a readout of a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Ukraine’s European allies have sent Kyiv more than 300 modernised Soviet tank since Russia invaded in February 2022.

But they have so far held off on dispatching the Western-made heavy tanks that Ukraine has repeatedly requested to

push forward against Russian invaders. Zelensky thanked the UK on Twitter for making decisions that “will not only strengthen us on the battlefield, but also send the right signal to other partners”.

Heavy losses

Ukraine’s forces have taken heavy losses in the battles of Soledar and Bakhmut in recent months and have called on the country’s allies to give it more support. Russia said on Friday its forces had wrested control of the war-scarred town of Soledar in east Ukraine, its first claim of victory in months of battlefield setbacks, although Ukraine said fierce fighting was still under way.

“To win this war, we need more military equipment, heavy equipment,” Andriy Yermak, head of Ukraine’s presidential office, said. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba also said that he had spoken with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and “emphasised the need” for

Ukraine to receive Western-type tanks.

Sunak’s formal offer follows reports that he was preparing to sign off on sending four British Army Challenger 2 main battle tanks to eastern Europe immediately, with eight more to follow shortly afterwards. The prime minister’s office has not yet confirmed the exact number of tanks it will send to Kyiv.

Seize the moment

A Downing Street spokesman said Sunak and Zelensky agreed on the “need to seize on this moment” after Ukrainian victories had “pushed Russian troops back”. “The Prime Minister outlined the UK’s ambition to intensify our support to Ukraine, including through the provision of Challenger 2 tanks and additional artillery systems,” the spokesman said.

The issue of heavy tanks has long been a key one for Kyiv and many experts see providing Ukraine with modern tanks as a vital building block in its

ability to win against Russia. Germany has been especially hesitant of supplying heavy tanks.

It has delivered powerful mobile artillery and air defences but remains fearful of an escalation with Moscow if its tanks face off directly against their Russian opposite numbers. The Downing Street spokesman added that Sunak and Zelensky “welcomed other international commitments including Poland’s offer to provide a company of Leopard tanks”.

“The Prime Minister stressed that he and the whole UK Government would be working intensively with international partners to deliver rapidly the kind of support which will allow Ukraine to press their advantage, win this war and secure a lasting peace,” he said.

The UK announcement comes ahead of next week’s meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, which coordinates arms supplies to Kyiv, at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. —AFP

Bolsonaro to be investigated in Jan 8 riot probe

BRASILIA: Brazilian far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro will be included in an investigation into the origins of the January 8 sacking of government buildings in Brasilia, a Supreme Court judge announced Friday. The probe of the former leader comes at the request of the office of the prosecutor general (PGR), which cited a video Bolsonaro had posted “questioning the regularity of the 2022 presidential elections.”

By doing so, “Bolsonaro would have publicly incited the commission of a crime,” the PGR said in a statement. Thousands of so-called “bolsonaristas” invaded the seats of government in Brasilia Sunday, breaking windows and furniture, destroying priceless works of art, and leaving graffiti messages calling for a military coup in their wake.

The Bolsonaro video was posted online two days after the violent storming of the presidency, Congress and Supreme Court and later deleted. The PGR explained that even though the video came after the uprising, it may serve as “a probative connection” that justified “a global investigation of the acts performed before and after January 8, 2023 by the defendant.”

Supreme Court Judge Alexandre de Moraes made the announcement Friday green-lighting Bolsonaro’s inclusion in the probe into what the PGR said was the “instigation and intellectual authorship” of the rioting. In a note seen by AFP Friday, Bolsonaro’s defense denied any involvement by the ex-president.

Bolsonaro “never had any relationship or participation in these movements,” the note said, blaming the violence on “infiltrators.” Bolsonaro had for years sought to cast doubts on the reliability of Brazil’s internationally praised election system, and had suggested he would not accept a defeat.

He never publicly acknowledged new President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva victory, and left for the United States, where he remains, two days before his successor’s inauguration.

‘Collusion’

As they move to identify the masterminds and financiers of the violent uprising that invited many parallels with the January 6, 2021 storming of the US Capitol, Brazilian authorities on Friday also tightened the screws on a former Bolsonaro minister. Anderson Torres, who was Bolsonaro’s last justice minister, is wanted under a Supreme Court warrant for alleged “collusion” with the rioters. He also stands accused of “omission” in his most recent job as security chief for the capital Brasilia which was the target of the destructive ire of protesters. He was fired after the violent revolt against leftist Lula.

Like his former boss Bolsonaro, Torres was in the United States when the riots erupted, and is expected back in Brazil any day. Lula’s new justice minister Flavio Dino, who replaced Torres, said Friday the authorities would give Torres until Monday to present himself. If he fails to show up, “through international mechanisms, we will launch the procedures for extradition next week, since there is an arrest warrant,” Dino told reporters in the capital.

The minister also confirmed the discovery at Torres’ home of a draft decree proposing emergency steps for the possible “correction” of the October election that Bolsonaro lost to Lula by a razor-thin margin. —AFP

Peru president insists ‘I will not resign’

LIMA: Peruvian President Dina Boluarte has insisted she will not step down, after another day of protests and roadblocks across the country saw calls for her resignation and the arrest of a trade union leader with alleged links to Maoist rebels. Supporters of ousted president Pedro Castillo have marched and barricaded streets throughout the South American country since December, demanding new elections and the removal of Boluarte.

“Some voices that have come from the violent and radical factions are asking for my resignation, provoking the population into chaos, disorder and destruction,” Boluarte said in an address on state TV Friday night. “I will not resign. My commitment is with Peru.”

Boluarte lamented that the protests have at times turned violent, as at least 42 people have been killed in clashes with security forces, including a police officer burned alive in a vehicle. Hundreds more have been injured.

“I cannot stop reiterating my regret for the deaths of Peruvians in these protests,” she said. “I apologize for this situation.” But she rejected the possibility of calling a constitutional assembly as demanded by protesters, pointing to the difficulties Peru’s neighbor Chile has had in drafting and approving a new constitution. “That cannot happen overnight,” Boluarte added. Earlier on Friday—the tenth consecutive day of unrest, after a new-year lull—police announced the arrest of Rocio Leandro, a union leader from the Ayacucho region.

Leandro, who has alleged links to Maoist rebels, is accused of financing protests and recruiting demonstrators. Police spokesman Oscar Arriola claimed his arrest proved that remnants of the Shining Path Maoist rebels were involved in the protests. He said Leandro was a former Shining Path member known as “Comrade Cusi.”

Roadblocks and border closures

The head of US diplomacy for Latin America, Brian Nichols, wrote on Twitter that Washington is “deeply concerned about ongoing violence in Peru & saddened by the injuries & deaths.” “We support peace on all sides & the gov’t stated commitments



AREQUIPA: Demonstrators hold a blockade in the Pan-American highway at La Joya to demand the resignation of Peruvian President Dina Boluarte in Arequipa, Peru. —AFP

to address the challenges gripping the country,” he added. The head of a delegation from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Guatemalan lawyer Stuardo Ralon, called for an “impartial and effective” investigation into allegations of excessive force by authorities.

He also noted “a strong stigmatization by racial and regional ethnic factors, particularly in the messages reproduced by some authorities who have referred with generalizations towards all indigenous and peasant people as terrorists.” Protestors blocked roads in the capital Lima, and in several regions in the historically marginalized south.

A protest in the border city of Tacna, 1,200 kilometers (750 miles) southeast of Lima, led neighbor Chile to temporarily close the crossing between the two countries. The city of Arequipa in the south—the second-largest in the country and one of Peru’s main tourist hotspots—had been practically blocked off from all transport links with the neighboring regions of Cusco and Puno.

Several regional governors and professional associations, including lawyers and teachers, joined the

calls for Boluarte to resign. “How many more deaths will Dina Boluarte’s presence in the presidency cost?” asked Puno governor Richard Hancco, whose area has become the epicenter of clashes between protesters and security forces.

That region, close to the border with Bolivia, was where 18 people died following violent clashes on Monday night.

Ministers resign

Opposition legislator Susel Paredes told local radio that time was running out for Boluarte and that the resignation of labor minister Eduardo Garcia on Thursday was “the beginning of the end” for the president.

Two other ministers resigned Friday: The heads of the interior ministry and the Ministry of Women. Peru has been riddled with political instability in recent years. Boluarte, 60, is the sixth person to hold the presidency in five years. Castillo, who was being investigated in several fraud cases during his tenure, has been remanded in custody for 18 months, charged with rebellion. —AFP