

## International

## Ukraine recaptures land near Bakhmut

## Human rights in Russia 'significantly deteriorated' since war: UN expert

KYIV: Ukraine said on Monday its forces had recaptured small clutches of land from Russian forces along the southern front and near Bakhmut, regions where Kyiv's troops have focused their slow-moving counter-offensive. Kyiv launched its bid to wrest back territory controlled by Moscow in June, after stockpiling Western-supplied weapons and recruiting assault battalions.

Its efforts have focused on the war-battered town of Bakhmut in the eastern Donetsk region, as well as several points along the frontline in the south, towards Crimea. "Two square kilometers (0.77 square miles) were liberated in the Bakhmut sector," Deputy Defense Minister Ganna Malyar said on state media.

Her announcement came one day after Kyiv said its forces had retaken Klishchivka, a village south of Bakhmut, which was captured by Russian forces in May after one of the longest and bloodiest battles of the war. Malyar also said Ukrainian forces had clawed back 5.2 square kilometers in the south, where its forces are working to push deeper at two points along the front.

But Ukraine's progress against entrenched Russian positions has been limited since June, spurring debate among Kyiv's Western allies over its military strategy. Russian forces meanwhile have pursued their aerial bombardment campaign, targeting Ukraine's southern regions and maritime export hubs in particular. Ukraine said on Monday its air defense systems had downed a swarm of attack drones and nearly 20 cruise missiles in Russia's latest aerial barrage over-

night. "A total of 24 strike UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) were recorded around the Mykolaiv and Odesa regions. Eighteen attack drones were shot down by air defense units," the air force said on social media.

## 'Significantly deteriorated'

It added that its forces had shot down all 17 cruise missiles fired by Russian forces overnight. Kyiv has at the same time stepped up its aerial attacks on Russia. Moscow said it repelled Ukrainian drones over outer Moscow and two border regions — as well as over several parts of occupied Crimea. Crimea, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014, has been targeted throughout the war but attacks there have intensified as Kyiv vows to recapture the Black Sea peninsula.

And since Ukraine launched its counter-offensive, Russia has weathered waves of drone attacks that have damaged buildings, including in the capital Moscow. But Russian officials have downplayed their significance. "Drones were intercepted over the western, southwestern, northwestern and eastern parts of the Crimean peninsula: Istra and Domodedovo districts of Moscow region, Belgorod and Voronezh regions," the defense ministry said.

Kyiv announced the territorial gains as Beijing said China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, would begin a four-day visit to Russia for security talks on Monday. China and Russia are strategic allies, with both countries frequently touting their "no limits" partnership and economic and military cooperation. China's foreign ministry said Wang would hold security consultations



LVIV: Children play in the fountain in front of the Opera and Ballet Theatre in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv on Sept 17, 2023. — AFP

at the invitation of Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of Russia's Security Council. The visit was due a day after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un left Russia following a rare six-day trip, which appeared to solidify his country's ties with President Vladimir Putin and fanned Western fears Pyongyang could provide Moscow

with weapons. A top United Nations expert meanwhile warned that respect for human rights inside Russia had substantially worsened since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year. "The situation of human rights in the Russian Federation has significantly deteriorated since its in-

vasion of Ukraine in February 2022," UN Special Rapporteur Mariana Katzarova said in her first report on Russia. Russia has criminalized criticism of the military, and law enforcement officials have detained thousands for protesting or speaking out against the invasion. — AFP

## Inside the S Korean factory that could be key for Ukraine

CHANGWON: At a sprawling South Korean arms factory, a high-tech production line of robots and super-skilled workers were rapidly churning out weapons Friday that could, eventually, play a role in Ukraine. Since the Russian invasion last year, the Hanwha Aerospace factory in the southern city of Changwon has expanded production capacity three times, workers told AFP, as South Korea ramps up arms exports while traditional behemoths like the United States struggle with production shortages.

Longstanding domestic policy bars Seoul from selling weapons into active conflicts, but even so it signed deals worth \$17.3 billion last year, including a \$12.7 billion agreement with NATO member and key Kyiv ally Poland, for K9 Howitzers, K2 tanks, and more. And with North Korea's Kim Jong Un in Russia touring space centers and weapons factories, experts say the South may be forced to review its careful balancing act on the Ukraine war — which Seoul has condemned, even as it resists calls to supply weapons directly to Kyiv.

On the assembly line Friday were rows of War-

saw-bound Howitzers, an artillery weapon a bit like a super-mobile cannon. Hanwha Aerospace, South Korea's largest defense contractor, is racing to meet delivery targets for the 14-wheeled, 47-tonne K9 Howitzers, which have a firing range of 40 kilometers (25 miles) — much longer than a tank, although the K9 needs to be stationary to shoot.

Poland ordered 212 K9s last year and Seoul has already delivered 48 of them — a pace "no one else can achieve," Lee Kyoung-hun, Hanwha's production leader told AFP. "We are capable of delivering products in the shortest time frame possible," said Lee, adding that it took between three and four months to build one Howitzer from scratch.

Seoul has long harbored ambitions to join the ranks of the world's top arms exporters — aiming to be the fourth largest, behind the US, Russia and France — something that is now possible, industry research indicates. It has already sold artillery shells to Washington — but with a "final user" agreement in place meaning the United States would be the military that uses the munitions. Experts have said this allows the United States to then provide their own shells to Kyiv. South Korea's arms industry has one key advantage over others globally: it's always been "ready for war," said Choi Dong-bin, Hanwha Aerospace's senior vice president.

Hostilities in the 1950 to 1953 Korean War ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty, and Seoul remains technically at war with nuclear-armed Pyongyang. This gives the country an advantage globally in

weapons production. Choi said, as Seoul has the capacity to mass-produce quickly and easily whenever it gets an order. "The fact that we're maintaining production line is another boon. At this moment we're receiving many orders from overseas and we are able to respond quickly to their demands and deliver products in a short period of time," he said.

Seoul's weapons are also well-tested: "These are deployed on the ground," on one of the world's most heavily fortified borders, Choi said. "Because they are deployed (in South Korea), it has the capacity to perform in any part of the world," he added. Heavily-sanctioned North Korea lacks Seoul's high-tech weaponry — but it does have stockpiles of outdated Soviet-era munitions. Kim met Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday, and experts have warned the internationally-isolated pair might have agreed a deal involving Pyongyang supplying artillery shells and anti-tank missiles in exchange for satellite technology from Moscow.

Any such deal could change Seoul's calculations, experts say, as although South Korea has condemned Russia's invasions of Ukraine, it has resisted calls to step up support to Kyiv, in part as it has long called on Moscow to help manage Kim Jong Un. But if Moscow starts buying weapons from Pyongyang — something that would violate rafts of UN sanctions — it could both change the course of the Ukraine war and force Seoul's hand, said Choi Gi-il, professor of military studies at Sangji University. "If that were to happen, I think it will be more than 50-50 prob-



CHANGWON: A South Korean engineer works on a part of a K-9 self propelled howitzer at Hanwha Aerospace factory in Changwon on Sept 15, 2023. — AFP

ability that South Korea-manufactured weapons exported to Poland would be deployed to help Ukraine fend off the Russians," he said.

The export of South Korean weaponry, especially the K9 howitzers, would be "of great value to Kyiv," he said. "It's always better to have more howitzers in war and both Russia and Ukraine don't have enough of them," he said, adding that Ukraine was mostly using Soviet-era outdated weapons. "But K9s stand out as among the most recent, overwhelming conventional weapons. It will mean so much for Kiev to have them on the frontlines." — AFP

## US, Iran swap prisoners in \$6bn deal

DOHA: Arch-foes the United States and Iran each released five detainees on Monday in a prisoner swap deal that also gives Tehran access to \$6 billion in long-frozen oil funds. The five Americans freed by Iran, including a businessman arrested in 2015, landed in Doha just before 5:40 pm (1440 GMT) on a Qatari jet, hours after the unblocked funds were credited to Iranian accounts in Qatari banks.

The five were greeted on the tarmac before walking in the setting sun to a terminal building, three of them with their arms round each other's shoulders. One of them praised US President Joe Biden for ignoring the political backlash and taking the "incredibly difficult decisions" that freed them. "Thank you President Biden for ultimately putting the lives of American citizens above politics," Siamak Namazi

said in a statement.

Two of the Iranian detainees arrived in Qatar, Iranian media said. The other three released by the United States have opted to remain there or in a third country, Tehran said. The trigger for the exchange was the release of the \$6 billion in funds, frozen by US ally South Korea under sanctions against Iran, to the Iranian accounts. Washington has denied the \$6 billion is a ransom payment, insisting the money will be used for humanitarian purposes.

"We hope to have total access to the Iranian assets today," Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani told a news conference in Tehran earlier on Monday. "The prisoner exchange will take place on the same day and five Iranian citizens imprisoned in America will be released." As the prisoners were released, Biden granted clemency to the five Iranians and announced sanctions against Iran's ex-president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the country's intelligence ministry. The sanctions were imposed over alleged deceit over the disappearance of Bob Levinson, a former FBI agent who disappeared in Iran in mysterious circumstance and is presumed dead.

Iran generated the \$6 billion through oil sales

to South Korea, which blocked the funds after the United States under former president Donald Trump reimposed sanctions as he withdrew from a landmark nuclear accord. Iran's central bank governor said Iran would seek damages from South Korea for withholding the funds. The equivalent of €5.57 billion (\$5.95 billion) was deposited in six Iranian accounts with two Qatari banks on Monday, he said.

"We're making a complaint on behalf of Iran against South Korea for not giving access to these funds and the reduction in value of these funds in order to receive damages," Mohammadreza Farzin said on state TV. The five Americans of Iranian descent — all considered Iranian nationals by Tehran, which rejects dual nationality — were released to house arrest when the deal was agreed last month. They included Namazi, a businessman arrested in 2015 on spying charges which his family has rejected. The others are wildlife conservationist Morad Tahbaz, venture capitalist Emad Sharqi, and two others who wished to remain anonymous.

Last week, the official IRNA news agency identified the five Iranian prisoners. They include Reza Sarhangpou and Kambiz Attar Kashani, both accused of violating US sanctions against Tehran. A third prisoner, Kaveh Lotfolah Afrasiabi, was detained at his home near Boston in 2021 and charged

with being an Iranian government agent, according to US officials. The two others, Mehrdad Moein Ansari and Amin Hasanzadeh, were said to have links to Iranian security forces.

Biden's administration has insisted Iran will only be allowed to use the unfrozen funds to buy food, medicine and other humanitarian goods. Iran, which has been deeply hostile to the US since the 1979 Islamic Revolution overthrew the pro-Western monarch, has denied any restrictions on use of the funds. Iran's Kanani has insisted the money will allow Tehran to "purchase all non-sanctioned goods", not just food and medicine.

Biden took office with hopes of restoring the landmark 2015 nuclear agreement, under which Iran promised to constrain its contested nuclear work in return for sanctions relief. But months of talks failed to produce a breakthrough. Prospects for resolving the dispute sank further after protests broke out in Iran last year following the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, who had been arrested for allegedly violating the country's Islamic dress code for women. The release of the prisoners comes just days after the first anniversary of her death, and as Biden and Iran's president, Ebrahim Raisi, are in New York for the annual UN General Assembly, although they are not expected to meet. — AFP

## 20% of people in Kuwait are...

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by excessive consumption of high-energy foods, a lack of satiety and escalating consumption even when the body doesn't require it. This condition is specifically associated with foods containing sugar, wheat or both.

Dr Hashash pointed out that "food addiction" operates on the same neurological mechanisms as drug addiction, targeting the same neurotransmitters in the brain that affect reward centers, triggered by dopamine release, resulting in feelings of happiness or euphoria. Over time, individuals require larger quantities of food to achieve the same feelings of happiness and euphoria, as dopamine receptors decrease, mirroring the mechanisms of drug addiction.

She explained "food addiction" is assessed using tools designed to reflect diagnostic criteria for other addiction disorders, such as loss of control over consumption and a strong desire to continue despite negative health consequences. The Yale Food Addiction Scale, introduced in 2009, is a valid psychological tool specifically designed to assess food addiction using diagnostic criteria.

Dr Hashash noted that women are more suscep-

tible to this type of addiction, with research results indicating that approximately 24 percent of women are affected by it. In general, individuals over the age of 35 have a prevalence rate of about 22.2 percent, while those with excess weight have a rate of approximately 24.9 percent. Individuals with eating disorders have the highest prevalence rate at around 57.6 percent.

She also highlighted that food addiction rates increase in cases of anxiety, depression and social isolation, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Addictive foods are those containing sugars, wheat or both, such as pizza, chocolate, potato chips, French fries, burgers, cheese, pastries, soft drinks and others.

Dr Hashash mentioned that the symptoms of addiction cannot be identified through blood tests but rather through various behaviors, such as a strong desire for food even after just having eaten a healthy meal, an inability to stop eating even when feeling full, finding excuses to indulge in desired foods, multiple unsuccessful attempts to quit consuming these foods and other various behaviors.

She recommended consulting a gastroenterologist to determine if there is any organic cause contributing to these addictive behaviors, using behavioral and therapeutic techniques. Additionally, she advised preparing a list of pros and cons related to lifestyle choices and engaging in regular physical activity.



DOHA: US citizens Siamak Namazi, Emad Sharqi and Morad Tahbaz disembark from a Qatari jet upon their arrival at Doha International Airport in Doha on Sept 18, 2023. — AFP