

Beijing: It is US not China that shipping arms to Ukraine

Beijing strongly denied on Monday US claims that China was considering arming Russia in its war against Ukraine, as it reiterated a call for dialogue to end the conflict.

On Sunday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Beijing was now "considering providing lethal support" to Moscow ranging "from ammunition to the weapons themselves", according to AFP.

"It is the United States and not China that is endlessly shipping weapons to the battlefield," China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said Monday, when asked about the US claims. "We urge the United States to earnestly reflect on its own actions, and do more to alleviate the situation, promote peace and dialogue, and stop shifting blame and spreading false information," Wang told a regular briefing.

Conflict in Ukraine is a sensitive issue for Beijing, which has sought to position itself as neutral while offering diplomatic backing to its strategic ally Russia. "It is clear to the international community who is



● SERGEI SUPINSKY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

calling for dialogue and fighting for peace, and who is adding fuel to the fire and encouraging opposition," Wang added, reiterating a call for support for a Chinese proposal to end the war. On Saturday, China said it would publish this week a

proposal to find a "political solution" to the Ukraine crisis, with Beijing's top diplomat telling a conference the country is "on the side of dialogue". Wang Yi told the Munich Security Conference that China was against attacks on nuclear power plants,

opposed the use of biochemical weapons and was willing to work with "all parties". Later on Monday, the EU's foreign policy chief warned China against providing weapons to Russia for its war on Ukraine. Josep Borrell said he told

Wang Yi that "for us, it would be a red line in our relationship. He told me that they are not going to do it, that they don't plan to do it. But we will remain vigilant". The US and many European countries are the main arms suppliers to Ukraine.

"It is clear to the international community who is calling for dialogue and fighting for peace, and who is adding fuel to the fire and encouraging opposition," Wang said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Burkina Faso marks end of French military operations



Reuters - France and Burkina Faso have officially marked the end of French military operations in the West African nation.

In January, Burkina Faso gave France one month to withdraw its troops as it ended a military accord that allowed French troops to fight insurgents on its territory, citing a wish for the country to defend itself.

PA 'backtracks' on UN anti-Israel resolution

AL JAZEERA - The Palestinian Authority (PA) has reportedly backtracked on pushing for a United Nations Security Council draft resolution condemning illegal Israeli settlement activity after pressure from Washington, according to several reports.

The Reuters news agency said on Monday that the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which had drafted the resolution along with PA officials, informed the UNSC that the resolution and the vote would be dropped. Reports by several other US and Israeli news outlets citing diplomatic sources said the PA agreed to drop pursuit of the vote amid pressure from the US government.

North Korea fires more missiles into Pacific



REUTERS - North Korea launched two more ballistic missiles off its east coast on Monday, with the powerful sister of the country's leader saying North Korea's use of the Pacific as a "firing range" would depend on the behaviour of US forces.

The launches come just two days after North Korea fired an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) into the sea off Japan's west coast, prompting the United States to hold joint air exercises with South Korea and separately with Japan on Sunday, Reuters wrote.

Israel's observer status suspended: African Union

The African Union said that Israel's observer status at the bloc was suspended which is why it was not invited to attend the weekend summit. The news came after Israeli envoy Sharon Bar-li was removed from the African Union's annual summit in Ethiopia on Saturday as she attempted to attend using a non-transferable invitation issued only to Israel's ambassador to the African Union, Aleli Admasu, Al Jazeera reported. Video circulating on social media showed guards es-

corting Bar-li out of the AU assembly hall in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. "The status is suspended until such time as this committee can deliberate ... and so we did not invite Israeli officials to our summit," AU Commission chief Moussa Faki Mahamat told reporters on Sunday. The incident highlighted a spat within the pan-African bloc over a unilateral 2021 decision by Mahamat to give Israel observer status, triggering protests by several member states. Israel blamed South Africa

and Algeria for kicking out its observer delegation. Israel obtained observer status after two decades. It had previously held the role at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) but was long thwarted in its attempts to regain it after the OAU was disbanded in 2002 and replaced by the AU. Last year's AU summit suspended a debate on whether to withdraw the accreditation and established a committee of heads of state to address the issue.

The Palestinian Authority has repeatedly urged African leaders to withdraw Israel's AU accreditation, denouncing its "apartheid regime". The South African government said the African Union's decision to award Israel the status was "even more shocking in a year in which the oppressed people of Palestine were hounded by destructive bombardments and continued illegal settlements of the land". South Africa backs the Palestinian cause, with formal



● REUTERS

diplomatic relations established in 1995, a year after the end of apartheid. It downgraded its embassy in Tel Aviv to a liaison office in 2019.

Downpour kills at least 36 in Brazil



● AFP

Heavy rain caused flooding and landslides that have killed 36 people on the northern coast of Brazil's Sao Paulo state, officials said Monday, while fatalities could rise.

Sao Paulo's state government said in a statement that 35 died in the city of Sao Sebastiao and a 7-year-old girl was killed in neighboring Ubatuba. On Monday morning, more than 500 people were continuing search and rescue efforts, AP reported. Some of the

hardest-hit cities that are under a state of emergency, including Sao Sebastiao, Ubatuba, Ilhabela and Bertiooga, canceled their Carnival festivities as rescue teams continued a search for the injured and missing under the rubble.

"Our rescue teams are not managing to get to several locations; it is a chaotic situation," said Felipe Augusto, the mayor of Sao Sebastiao. Later, he added there are dozens of people missing and that 50 houses collapsed in the city due to the landslides.

Augusto posted on social media several videos of widespread destruction in his city, including one of a baby being rescued by locals lined up on a flooded street. Sao Paulo state government said in a statement that precipitation in the region has surpassed 600 millimeters (23.6 inches) in one day, one of the highest amounts ever in Brazil in such a short period.

Biden vows support as long as needed in surprise visit to Kiev

U.S. President Joe Biden paid an unannounced visit to Ukraine on Monday to meet with President Volodymyr Zelensky in a defiant display of Western solidarity with Ukraine days before the one-year anniversary of Russia's military operation.

"One year later, Kiev stands," Biden declared after meeting Zelensky at Mariinsky Palace. Jamming his finger for emphasis on his podium, against a backdrop of three flags from each country, he continued: "And Ukraine stands. Democracy stands. The Americans stand with you, and the world stands with you," AP reported.

Biden spent more than five hours in the Ukrainian capital, consulting with Zelensky on next steps, honoring the country's fallen soldiers and seeing U.S. Embassy staff in the besieged country.

The visit comes at a crucial moment: Biden is trying to keep allies unified in their support for

Ukraine as the war is expected to intensify with spring offensives.

Zelensky is pressing allies to speed up delivery of promised weapon systems and calling on the West to provide fighter jets — something that Biden has declined to do.

Biden promised to stand with Ukraine as long as it takes. Since the beginning of war, tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians and soldiers on both sides have died, cities have been reduced to rubble and millions of refugees have fled.

The U.S. president promised a further \$500 million worth of weaponry, including artillery ammunition, anti-armor systems and air defense radars, plus tighter sanctions on Russia.

"This visit of the U.S. president to Ukraine, the first for 15 years, is the most important visit in the entire history of Ukraine-U.S. relations," Zelensky said.



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U.S. President Joe Biden (L) walks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at St. Michael's Golden-Domed Cathedral during an unannounced visit, in Kiev, Ukraine, on February 20, 2023.

● EVAN VUCCI/POOL VIA REUTERS