

Russia tells Macron: Don't forget Napoleon when you talk of regime change

Russia on Sunday scolded Emmanuel Macron over remarks about wanting to see Russia defeated, saying Moscow still remembered the fate of Napoleon Bonaparte and accusing the French president of duplicitous diplomacy with the Kremlin.

Macron told paper Le Journal du Dimanche France wanted Russia to be defeated in Ukraine but had never wanted to "crush" it, Reuters reported.

"About 'Never': France did not begin with Macron, and the remains of Napoleon, revered at the state level, rest in the centre of Paris. France - and Russia - should understand," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

"In general, Macron is priceless," she said, adding that his remarks showed the

West had engaged in discussions about regime change in Russia while Macron had repeatedly sought meetings with the Russian leadership. Macron has drawn criticism from some NATO allies for delivering mixed messages regarding his policy on the war between Ukraine and Russia, with some considering Paris a weak link in the Western alliance.

On Friday, Macron urged allies to step up military support for Ukraine, but also said he did not believe in regime change and that there would have to be negotiations at some point.

"Let's be clear, I don't believe for one second in regime change, and when I hear a lot of people calling for regime change I ask them, 'For which change? Who's next? Who is your leader?'"

Meanwhile, Russia's ambassador to the United States said on Sunday that Washington is trying to demonize Moscow and foment the crisis in Ukraine with allegations of Russian crimes against humanity.

The Biden administration formally concluded that Russia has committed "crimes against humanity" during its nearly year-long conflict in Ukraine, Vice President Kamala Harris said on Saturday.

"We regard such insinuations as an unprecedented attempt to demonize Russia in the framework of the hybrid war unleashed against us," Ambassador Anatoly Antonov said in a statement on the Russian Embassy's Telegram messaging platform.

"There is no doubt that the purpose of such attacks by



Washington is to justify its own actions to fuel the Ukrainian crisis."

French President Emmanuel Macron reacts as he delivers a speech during a plenary meeting of the Forum for the Islam of France at the Elysee Presidential Palace, in Paris, on February 16, 2023.

● LUDOVIC MARIN/POOL VIA REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Türkiye ends quake rescue efforts in all but two provinces



● REUTERS

AFP - Türkiye has ended rescue efforts in all provinces except the two hardest hit by last week's massive quake that killed tens of thousands of people, the Turkish disaster agency said Sunday.

"In many of our provinces, search and rescue efforts have been completed. They continue in Kahramanmaraş and Hatay provinces," the agency's chief Yunus Sezer told reporters in Ankara.

Thousands still missing days after cyclone hit New Zealand



REUTERS - The death toll from Cyclone Gabrielle in New Zealand climbed to 11 on Sunday as thousands of people remained missing a week after the storm struck the country's North Island. The cyclone hit the island's northernmost region on Feb. 12 and tracked down the east coast, inflicting widespread devastation. Prime Minister Chris Hipkins has called Gabrielle New Zealand's biggest natural disaster this century.

Israel trying to divert public opinion from internal problems

The Saturday night strikes were the first since the earthquake shook the country.

Israel frequently launches airstrikes on Syria which has repeatedly urged the international organizations to condemn the aggression and take actions against Tel Aviv. However, Western countries, which failed to topple Bashar al-Assad by supporting militants and terrorists in the 12-year war in Syria, have turned a blind eye on such Israeli crimes. Russia's Foreign Ministry

strongly condemned the latest airstrike, calling it a "flagrant violation" of international law.

"We strongly urge the Israeli side to stop armed provocations against the Syrian Arab Republic and refrain from steps that are fraught with dangerous consequences for the entire region," spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry also strongly condemned the fatal air raid attack.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani

said while the Syrian nation is grappling with the aftermath of the devastating temblor, Israel and the Daesh terrorist group seek to aggravate the pains and miseries of the Syrian people.

Kanaani was referring to a recent Daesh attack that killed at least 53 people in Syria.

Meanwhile, Israel on Sunday accused Iran of launching an attack on an oil tanker belonging to an Israeli billionaire in the Persian Gulf.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

claimed that Iran was responsible for a reported attack that occurred last week on the vessel.

The ship's manager confirmed on Saturday that it was lightly damaged on February 10 in an attack by an airborne object while sailing through the Arabian Sea.

Launching attack on Syria and leveling accusations against Iran come at a time when the new Israeli cabinet is under domestic pressure for its policies. It seems that the new Israeli cabinet led by Netanyahu is trying to divert pub-

lic opinion from internal political tensions.

Israel has been the scene of protests over the past weeks against the new cabinet.

Tens of thousands of protesters returned to the streets on Saturday night to fight a plan to overhaul the court system that the justice minister says he is determined to carry out.

The marches have attracted huge crowds on a weekly basis since early January, when Netanyahu's cabinet took aim at the Supreme Court.

They oppose legislation

that Netanyahu and his right-wing and religious allies hope to pass that would limit the Supreme Court's powers to rule against the legislature and the executive, while giving lawmakers decisive powers in appointing judges.

Proponents say the Supreme Court needs to be reined in from overreaching into the political sphere. Critics say the plan will weaken the courts, endanger civil liberties and harm the economy along with ties with Western allies.

Arab states need new approach towards Syria: Saudi FM

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said consensus was building in the Arab world that isolating Syria was not working and that dialogue with Damascus was needed "at some point" to at least address humanitarian issues, including a return of refugees.

Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud's remarks at a Munich security forum on Saturday mark a shift from the early years of Syria's 12-year war when several Arab states including Saudi Arabia backed militants that fought Syrian government, according to Reuters.

The minister said without a path towards "maximalist goals" for a political solution, another approach was "being formulated" to address the issue of Syrian refugees in neighbouring states and suffering of civilians, especially after the devastating earthquake that hit Syria and Turkey.

"So that's going to have to go through a dialogue with the government in



Damascus at some point in a way that achieves at least the most important of the objectives especially as regards the humanitarian angle, the return of refugees, etc," he said.

Asked about reports that he would visit Damascus following visits by his Emirati and Jordanian counterparts after the earthquake, Prince Faisal said he would not comment on rumours.

Riyadh has sent aid planes to government-held territory in Syria as part of earthquake relief efforts after initially sending aid only to the country's militant-held northwest.

U.S., Japan, South Korea stage air drills after North's ICBM launch

The United States held joint air exercises bilaterally with South Korea and Japan involving strategic bombers on Sunday, a day after North Korea fired a Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in a "sudden launching drill".

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the exercise, in which South Korea's F-35A, F-15K and U.S. F-16 fighters escorted American B-1B bombers, demonstrated the allies' "overwhelming" defence capabilities and readiness posture, according to Reuters.

"(The exercise) strengthened the combined operation capability and affirmed the United States' ironclad commitment to the defence of the Korean Peninsula and the implementation of extended deterrence," the South's military said in a statement.

Japan flew F-15s over the Sea of Japan with the U.S. Armed Forces' B-1 bombers and F-16s in tactical exercises, Japan's Defense Ministry said in a statement, calling the security



environment "increasingly severe" after the latest North Korea missile landed within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The air drills came a day after North Korea launched a long-range ballistic missile into the sea off Japan's west coast, following a warning of a strong response to upcoming military drills by South Korea and the United States.

North Korea's state media KCNA said the country conducted a "sudden launching drill" on Saturday in an "actual proof" of its efforts to turn the "capacity of fatal nuclear counterattack on the hostile forces into an irresistible one".

The 2nd Air Wing of Japan Air Self-Defense Force's F-15s fighters hold a joint military drill with the U.S. F-16s fighters at Sea of Japan, off Japan's southernmost main island of Kyushu, Japan, on February 19, 2023.

● JAPAN DEFENSE MINISTRY

Scotland's health minister to run for country's leadership



● PA MEDIA

REUTERS - Scottish Health Minister Humza Yousaf said on Saturday he would run in the leadership contest to replace Nicola Sturgeon as Scottish National Party (SNP) leader and first minister.

Yousaf becomes the first to publicly announce his intention to stand in the race after Sturgeon's surprise resignation earlier in the week saying she had become too divisive and too tired to carry on.