

Russia has sufficient stockpile of cluster bombs, Putin warns



● EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview published Sunday that Russia has a "sufficient stockpile" of cluster munitions, and warned that Russia "reserves the right to take reciprocal action" if Ukraine uses the controversial weapons.

In his first comments on the delivery of cluster munitions to Ukraine from the US, Putin said that Russia has not used cluster bombs in its war in Ukraine so far. The use of cluster bombs by both Russia and Ukraine has been widely documented, including by The Associated Press and international humanitarian organizations, and cluster rounds have been found in the aftermath of Russian strikes, AP reported.

"Until now, we have not done this, we have not used it, and we have not had such a need," he said.

Rossviya TV reporter Pavel Zarubin published excerpts of the interview to his Telegram channel Sunday ahead of a scheduled broadcast Sunday night. The Pentagon said Thursday that cluster munitions provided by the US had arrived in Ukraine.

The munitions, which are bombs that open in the air and release scores of smaller bomblets, are seen by the US as a way to get Kyiv critically needed ammunition to help bolster its offensive and push through Russian front lines. US leaders debated the thorny issue for months, before President Joe Biden made the final decision last week.

Cluster bombs have long been criticized by humanitarian groups, and some US allies, because those used in previous conflicts have had a high "dud rate," meaning that they often leave behind unexploded bomblets that can harm civilians long after a battle has ended.

Iraqi PM, Syria's Assad hold talks on security, water in Damascus

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani held talks with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus on Sunday in the first such visit by an Iraqi premier since the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011.

Assad and Sudani discussed securing their shared 600km border from security threats, including Daesh terrorist group, and agreed to enhance cooperation to reduce drug smuggling, they said during a joint news conference, Reuters reported. Sudani said they also discussed ways to combat drought conditions in both countries caused by a reduction in rainfall, climate change and upstream damming by Turkey. "We need to cooperate to get our fair share of water," Sudani said.

Sudani said Iraq supported the lifting of sanctions on Syria, put in place and expanded by the US and European countries since 2011.

Iraq and Syria, which have close economic, military and political ties to regional heavyweight Iran, maintained relations throughout Syria's war even as other Arab states withdrew their ambassadors and closed their embassies in Syria. Baghdad and Damascus, along with Shia armed groups, cooperated in the fight against Daesh, which spread from Iraq into Syria and at one point controlled more than a third of both countries.

Farhad Alaaldin, foreign affairs adviser to the prime minister, said before the meeting that Sudani was set to discuss combatting the flow of the amphetamine Captagon and possibilities for reopening a Mediterranean oil export pipeline, which could help Iraq diversify its export routes. Sudani's visit comes as other countries, including Saudi Arabia, rebuild relations with Damascus after years of tensions.

● SYRIAN PRESIDENCY/
HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

China, Russia to start joint air and sea drill



REUTERS – A Chinese naval flotilla set off on Sunday to join Russian naval and air forces in the Sea of Japan in an exercise aimed at "safeguarding the security of strategic waterways", according to China's Defence Ministry. Codenamed "Northern/Interaction-2023", the drill marks enhanced military cooperation between China and Russia since the war began in Ukraine.

Heavy rains, flooding leave 37 dead in S. Korea



AFP – Rescuers battled on Sunday to reach people trapped in a flooded tunnel in South Korea, where at least 37 people have died and nine are missing after heavy rains caused flooding and landslides. South Korea is at the peak of its summer monsoon season, and there has been heavy rainfall for the last four days, causing a major dam to overflow. The Interior Ministry reported that 37 people were killed and another nine were missing nationwide in the heavy downpours, mostly buried by landslides or after falling into a flooded reservoir.

'Heat storm' stretches into southern Europe, health alerts issued

Italy issued hot weather red alerts for 16 cities on Sunday, with meteorologists warning that temperatures will hit record highs across southern Europe in the coming days. On the Spanish island of La Palma, meanwhile, at least 4,000 people had to be evacuated as a forest fire burned out of control, authorities said, Reuters

reported. Spain, Italy and Greece have been experiencing scorching temperatures for several days already, damaging agriculture and leaving tourists scurrying for shade.

But a new anticyclone dubbed Charon, who in Greek mythology was the ferryman of the dead, pushed into the region

● CANARIAS VIA TWITTER/
HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

from north Africa on Sunday and could lift temperatures above 45 Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) in parts of Italy early this week.

"We need to prepare for a severe heat storm that, day after day, will blanket the whole country," Italian weather news service Meteo.it warned on Sunday. "In some places ancient heat records will be broken."

Greece closed the ancient Acropolis during the hottest part of the day on Friday to protect tourists.

Italy's Health Minister Orazio Schillaci said authorities were keeping

a close eye on Rome and urged people to take care. "Going to the Colosseum when it is 43C (109.4F) is not advisable, especially for an elderly person," he told Il Messaggero newspaper on Sunday, saying people should stay indoors during the hottest part of the day, between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Besides the Italian capital, health alerts were in place from the central city of Florence to Palermo in Sicily and Bari, in the southeast of the peninsula.

In Spain, forecasters warned of the risk of

forest fires and said that it would not be easy to sleep during the night, with temperatures unlikely to fall below 25C (77F) across the country.

The heatwave will intensify from today, with temperatures reaching 44C (111.2F) in the Guadalquivir valley near Seville in the south of the country, forecasters predicted.

Europe's highest recorded temperature of 48.8C (119.8F), registered in Sicily two years ago, could be exceeded in the coming days, notably on the Italian island of Sardinia, meteorologists have said.

Israeli plot against Iran-US talks



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OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The recent removal of Robert Malley from his position as the US special representative in Iran affairs has prompted a range of analyses and discussions. This decision garnered significant attention due to reports of talks between Iran and the United States taking place in Oman, Qatar, and even New York, leading to the development of a potential framework for a temporary or short-term deal.

Over the past two years, Iran's negotiations with the United States regarding the revival of the 2015 nuclear agreement (JCPOA) or the lifting of sanctions have unfolded in three distinct stages. The first stage occurred during the final months of Iran's previous government and the initial months of successor, with chief negotiator Abbas Araqchi at the helm.

The second stage, which took place last year, was led by Ali Baqeri Kani, the deputy foreign minister for political affairs, and involved discussions with Western parties to the JCPOA, culminating in reaching the threshold of signing an agreement. However,

due to the outbreak of the Ukrainian war, the agreement was not finalized.

The third stage encompassed recent dialogue between the Iranian side and the United States in Oman, Qatar, and New York. As per media reports, during this phase, the two parties had come to a conclusion to sign a political understanding, rather than a long-term agreement, which also included prisoner exchange. However, it appears that these negotiations have encountered opposition and faced obstacles at this particular stage.

From my perspective, each of the three negotiation stages, which were on the brink of reaching an agree-

ment, ultimately failed due to an external conspiracy. The responsibility for leading this opposition movement also falls on the Israelis. The Russians might had also come to assist the Israelis in disrupting the talks between Iran and the United States.

Recent media reports stated that Israel intended to provide its anti-aircraft system, known as the Iron Dome, to Ukraine. However, following discussions between Israeli and Russian officials, the transfer of the Iron Dome to Ukraine was canceled. Additionally, the delivery of Russian Su-35 fighter jets, which were supposed to be provided to Iran by the Russians despite Israeli ob-

jections, has not yet taken place.

Simultaneously, opponents of the Islamic Republic of Iran based overseas exerted considerable pressure on Malley, questioning his motives for engaging in negotiations with Iranian representatives and attempting to reach an agreement. There appears to be a foreign conspiracy orchestrated by those who do not wish to see a reduction in tensions between Iran and America, aiming to prevent the negotiations from reaching a conclusive outcome. It is important to note that managing or reducing tensions is distinct from establishing a full-fledged relationship between the two

countries. The current focus lies in the management and control of tensions to prevent their further escalation.

The political understanding sought by Malley was meant to serve this purpose, and it had the potential to lay the groundwork for negotiations for a lasting agreement following the US presidential election, particularly if the Democrats were to emerge victorious once again.

Nevertheless, Malley has faced domestic pressure, potentially due to his actions, including consultations held with Iranian expatriates, which may be deemed as a violation of American domestic law. His

case is currently under investigation.

However, there is still optimism as his deputy, Abram Paley, has assumed Mali's position, and the United States has affirmed its intention to resume working with Iran in a similar fashion as before.

I remain hopeful that talks between Iran and America, whether conducted in Oman, Qatar, New York, or elsewhere, will recommence soon and reach a conclusion within the next month or two. Prolonging the negotiations until the eve of the US presidential election presents challenges due to increased pressure and tensions from the opposition and Republicans.