

Moscow halts grain deal after bridge to Crimea struck

Russia halted participation on Monday in the year-old UN-brokered deal which lets Ukraine export grain through the Black Sea, just hours after a blast knocked out Russia's bridge to Crimea in what Moscow called a strike by Ukrainian sea drones.

The Kremlin said there was no link between the attack and its decision to suspend the grain deal, over what it called a failure to meet its demands to implement a parallel agreement easing rules for its own food and fertilizer exports, Reuters reported.

"In fact, the Black Sea agreements ceased to be valid today," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on a conference call. "Unfortunately, the part of these Black Sea agreements concerning Russia has not been implemented so far, so its effect is terminated."

Russia said two civilians were killed and their daughter wounded in what Moscow cast as a terrorist attack on the road bridge, a major artery for Russian troops fighting in Ukraine, Reuters reported.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, the grain deal's sponsor, said he still believed Putin wanted it to continue. The Russian and Turkish foreign ministers would talk later on Monday, he told reporters.

"I hope that with this discussion, we can make some progress and continue on our way without a pause," Erdogan said.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said it would consider rejoining the grain deal if it saw "concrete results" on its demands.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy raised the prospect of resuming grain exports without Russia's participation, suggesting Kyiv would seek Turkey's support to effectively negate the Russian de facto blockade imposed last year. The blast on the road bridge to Crimea could have a direct impact on Moscow's ability to supply its troops in southern Ukraine, and reveals the vulnerability of Russia's own Black Sea infrastructure to devices such as sea-borne drones: small, fast remote-controlled boats packed with explosives.



Images showed a section of the road bridge had come down and traffic was halted in both directions, although a parallel railway bridge was still operational. Blasts were reported before dawn on the 19-km (12-mile) bridge, which Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered built after the reunification of the peninsula with

Russia in 2014. Kyiv gave no official account of the blasts but Ukrainian media quoted unidentified officials as saying Ukraine's Security Service was behind it. Ukraine has long maintained that the bridge was built illegally, and its use by Russia for military supplies makes it a legitimate target. It was last hit by a

massive explosion and fire in October.

Any interruption in exports from Russia's suspension of the Black Sea grain deal could drive up food prices across the globe, especially in the poorest countries. Ukraine and Russia are both among the world's biggest exporters of grain and other foodstuffs.



A view through a train window shows the section of a road split and sloping to one side following an alleged attack on the Crimea Bridge, that connects the Russian mainland with the Crimean peninsula across the Kerch Strait, in this still image from video taken on July 17, 2023.

● REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Israeli settlers attack Palestinian villages in WB



PRESS TV - Israeli settlers attacked several Palestinian villages and set a number of cars on fire across the West Bank on Sunday, while receiving protection from Israeli troopers. Settlers physically assaulted Palestinians during the late-night rampage at the entrance to the village of Beitin, located 5 kilometers northeast of Ramallah, broke the windshields of several cars and set fire to them, official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported citing local sources. According to the report the attack took place as Israeli soldiers stood meters away and watched on.

Rights group urges help for migrants on Libya border



AFP - An Arab rights group called Monday for international help for 360 sub-Saharan migrants who Libyan authorities say were rescued after having been abandoned in the desert by Tunisian police on the border with Libya. The Cairo-based Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR) said it welcomed Libya's reception of the migrants who had "experienced difficult humanitarian conditions" before being picked up by Libyan border guards.

World reels from wildfires, floods as US, China discuss climate crisis



A view of smoke billowing from mountain of a raging wildfire in Tjarafe, on the Canary Island of La Palma, Spain, on July 16, 2023.

● REUTERS

Global temperatures headed towards alarming highs and extreme weather proliferated as the world's two biggest polluters, China and the United States, sought on Monday to reignite climate talks.

With scientists saying the target of keeping global warming within 1.5 degrees

Celsius of pre-industrial levels is moving beyond reach, evidence of the crisis was everywhere, Reuters reported.

A remote town in China's arid northwest, Sanbao, registered a national record of 52.2 Celsius (126 Fahrenheit).

Wildfires in Europe raged

ahead of a second heat wave in two weeks that was set to send temperatures as high as 48C. In the US, a quarter of the population fell under extreme heat advisories, partly due to a heat dome that has settled over western states.

"In many parts of the world, today is predicted to be the hottest day on record," tweeted Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organisation.

"The #ClimateCrisis is not a warning. It's happening. I urge world leaders to ACT

now." In a resumption of diplomacy on global warming between the two superpowers, U.S. climate envoy John Kerry met Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua in Beijing, urging joint action to cut methane emissions and coal-fired power.

"In the next three days we hope we can begin taking some big steps that will send a signal to the world about the serious purpose of China and the US to address a common risk, threat, challenge to all of humanity created by humans themselves," Kerry said, noting the proliferation of storms and fires.

"It is toxic for both Chinese and for Americans and for people in every country on the planet."

Prolonged high tempera-

tures in China are threatening power grids and crops and raising concerns about a repeat of last year's drought, the most severe in 60 years.

Typhoon Talim was gaining strength and due to make land at night along China's southern coast, forcing the cancellation of flights and trains in the regions of Guangdong and Hainan.

In South Korea, torrential rains left 40 people dead as river levees collapsed causing flash floods.

An anticyclone nicknamed Charon - who in Greek mythology was the ferryman of the dead - could cause Europe to break its highest recorded temperature of 48.8C, possibly on the Italian island of Sardinia.

Tourists in the Italian capi-

tal cooled themselves under giant fans set up outside the Colosseum and took turns to drink from a fountain near the Spanish Steps.

In Spain, temperatures could rise to as high as 44C in some regions. However, a forest fire on the island of La Palma in the Canaries that forced the evacuation of 4,000 people was being brought under control as temperatures fell, local official Sergio Rodriguez said in an interview on TVE.

The EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service says 2022 and 2021 were the continent's hottest summers on record.

As many as 61,000 people may have died in Europe during heatwaves last summer, with a repetition feared this season.

Concerns about Iran's foothold in Africa



By Hassan Hanizadeh
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OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

During President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran's recent visit to three African countries, namely Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, the Israeli media expressed concern and issued warnings regarding Tehran's growing influence on the African continent. Interestingly, just three

days after Raisi's trip, Israel's foreign minister also made a visit to Kenya, which further underscores the significance of the situation.

Under Raisi's government, Iran has pursued a pragmatic foreign policy over the past two years, successfully fostering regional convergence. One key development in this regard was the Tehran-Riyadh agreement, which played a pivotal role in de-escalating tensions in the region and replacing confrontation with cooperation. Through the imple-

mentation of this realistic policy of engagement, the Iranian government was able to enhance its standing and influence in the region. Concomitantly, this regional integration resulted in Israel facing increased isolation in the Middle East.

Israel had envisioned numerous plans to secure a strong foothold among regional Arab nations and expedite the so-called Abraham Agreement, which aimed to normalize relations with Muslim-majority countries of the region. However, these

endeavors have yet to bear fruit and have instead led to Israel's further isolation. It is therefore unsurprising that Israel views the current situation through the lens of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Raisi's recent tour of three African nations has paved the way for cross-continental collaboration between Iran and Africa. The African nations hold a generally favorable view of Iran and demonstrate respect toward it. This untapped continent presents a vast market ready to embrace

Iranian products. With a well-structured plan in place, the Islamic Republic has set an ambitious target of increasing its trade volume with the African continent, encompassing all 54 countries, to \$600 billion annually. This ambitious objective reflects Tehran's extensive strategies to establish a robust presence in Africa. Notably, these plans do not sit well with the Israelis, who fear that just as Tehran's policies have marginalized them in the Middle East, they may face a similar fate in Africa.

Simultaneously, Benjamin Netanyahu is grappling with internal challenges. His cabinet faces persistent protests from Israelis for its policies, with demonstrations lasting for 28 consecutive weeks. Additionally, the far-right cabinet has been subjected to extensive pressure and criticism from Western countries, particularly US President Joe Biden, further weakening its position and isolating the cabinet.

Hence, it appears that the Israeli foreign minister's prompt visit to Kenya, a

mere three days after the Iranian president's visit, stems from concerns regarding Tehran's growing influence and presence in African countries. The Israelis seek to impede Iran's cooperation with the African continent, which offers lucrative commercial and economic prospects. However, their endeavors seem to be ineffective in this realm as Iran possesses significant capabilities in energy, industry, services, and agriculture, all of which are of great interest to African nations.