

Karachi

Japan PM warns 'today's Ukraine could be tomorrow's East Asia'

Japan's new Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba warned in his first policy speech Friday that "today's Ukraine could be tomorrow's East Asia" while also dubbing the country's low birth rate a "quiet emergency"...

Khamenei says Iran's allies 'will not back down' in war with Israel

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Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei addressed the nation on Friday, vowing that his forces would not back down in the country's missile strike on its country's arch-enemy.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's address in Tehran was the first since Iran launched its second ever attack on Israel, and also the first since exchanges of fire pining Hezbollah fighters against Israeli troops escalated into full-blown war in Lebanon.

Nearly a year after Palestinian militant group Hamas launched the deadliest attack on Israel in its history on October 7, Israel announced it was shifting its focus to securing its border with Lebanon.

Israel says its objective is to allow 60,000 Israelis displaced by a year of cross-border rocket attacks launched by Hezbollah to return to their homes.

Israel's attacks on Hezbollah strongholds around Lebanon have killed more than 1,400 people since September 23, according to the Lebanese health ministry, and forced hundreds of thousands more to flee their homes in a country already mired in economic crisis.

They have also killed a host of Hezbollah commanders, an Iranian general and, in their biggest blow to the group in decades, assassinated its leader, Hassan Nasrallah.

Speaking to a crowd of thousands in Farsi-speaking Iran, he said in Arabic: "The resistance in the region will not be down with these martyrdoms, and will win."

The address comes as Israel weighs retaliation for Hezbollah's Beirut rocket attack which Tehran said was revenge for the killing of Nasrallah and other top figures.

The escalation has left people in Lebanon fearful that there will be no

swift end to the violence engulfing their country.

In Beirut, 35-year-old displaced nurse Fatima Sarkis said people were "scared for our children, and this war is going to be long".

Iran said it would step up its response if Israel counterattacked. Israel intercepted most of the 200 missiles launched by Iran, though the attack has sparked fear in Israel of more violence to come.

In the West Bank, a Palestinian was killed by shrapnel.

Rony Eli-Yu, 37, an Israeli on a pilgrimage to Ukraine's Uman, said it was "a miracle, not a single rocket killed a single Jew" in the attack.

With fears of further violence drawing in more countries in the region, US President Biden said that "we can avoid" all-out war in the Middle East, but that "there is a lot to do yet, a lot to do yet".

He also said that a parliamentary meeting for talks with Lebanese officials, Lebanon's official National News Agency reported.

North Korea's Kim threatens to use nukes if attacked

North Korea leader Kim Jong Un said his country would use nuclear weapons "without hesitation" if attacked by the South and ally the United States, state media reported Friday.

Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points in decades, with Seoul this week staging a military parade that it showcased its bunker-busting "monster" missile and President Yoon Suk Yeol warned Kim that using nukes would mean the end of his regime.

Pyeongang has also been bombarding the South with balloons carrying bags of trash, and a fresh flurry was seen floating over Seoul early Friday by AFP reports. Seoul's military confirmed it had detected the balloon launches overnight.

If an enemy's forces were "encroaching upon the sovereignty" of the North, Pyongyang would "use without hesitation" all the offensive forces it has possessed, including nuclear weapons, Kim said, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

Images in state media showed Kim, clad in his customary leather jacket, speaking at a training event for special operations forces.

There, he slammed Yoon for his "end of regime" comments and "clamoring" about his country's alliance with the United States.

Seoul, which does not have nuclear weapons of its own, is covered by the US nuclear umbrella, and Washington has stationed tens of thousands of troops in the country since the Korean war ended in 1953 without a peace treaty.

Kim said it was Seoul and Washington who were "destroying regional security and peace". KCNA reported, while branding South Korea's leader "an abnormal man".

On Tuesday, fighter jets flew over downtown Seoul and tanks rolled through the streets, as South Korea deployed for the first time its largest ballistic missile, the Hyunmoo-5, which is capable of destroying underground bunkers.

An American B-1B heavy bomber also staged a flyover of the ceremony early Tuesday, flanked by F-15K jets. Washington periodically deploys nuclear assets to the Korean peninsula, underscoring its protection of the South from Pyongyang's growing threat.

At the event marking South Korea's Armed Forces Day, Yoon said that if the North "attempts to use nuclear weapons, it will face the resolute and overwhelming response of our military and the US and Republic of Korea alliance."

"That day will be the end of the North Korean regime," he added.

North Korea is expected to scrap a landmark inter-Korean agreement signed in 1991 at a parliamentary meeting next week. Seoul's unification ministry said Wednesday, as part of Kim's drive to officially define the South as an enemy state.

Over 100 feared dead in Nigeria boat accident

Over 100 people are feared dead after a boat carrying mostly women and children capsized in Nigeria, rescue workers said as they pulled more bodies from the River Niger on Thursday.

Around 300 passengers were on their way to celebrate the Muslim festival Mawlid in north-central Niger State when the accident took place on Tuesday, the state emergency agency said.

Thirty-six dead bodies have been found and 150 survivors rescued, spokesman Ibrahim Auda Hussein told AFP.

"We have recovered 20 more bodies today. This brings to 36 the number of bodies recovered from the river."

There was "no possibility" of finding others alive, he said. "There is no way one can survive three days underwater. The work now is to recover all the missing bodies."

The agency did not specify the cause of the sinking in Ghajibo community, near Mokwa, but said it took place after dark at around 8:30 pm (19:30 GMT).

Boat accidents are common on Nigeria's poorly regulated waterways, particularly during the rainy season when rivers and lakes swell.

Nigeria's waterways authority has tried in the past to prohibit night-time travel on rivers and says overloading vessels is a crime, but crews often break regulations.

Last month, an overloaded boat sank while carrying more than 200 passengers on the River in Zamfara State. Over 40 are believed to have died.

In June 2023, over 100 people died when a riverboat carrying around 250 passengers capsized in north-central Kwara state, one of the country's deadliest waterway accidents in years.

In a statement late on Thursday, Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu expressed sympathy for the victims and called for an investigation into recent boat accidents.

"President Tinubu commiserates with the families of the victims and prays for the repose of the souls of the dead," the presidency said.

The president urged officials to make sure boat operators violating the ban on travelling at night were brought to justice.

Tinubu also thanked emergency workers and praised local divers helping in the search.

Lack of election observers for Tunisia vote reflects crackdown

The barring of independent election observers from Sunday's presidential vote in Tunisia reflects a broad crackdown on rights groups ahead of the ballot which President Kais Saied is widely expected to win, activists say.

The Tunisian electoral board, ISE, says it will not allow observers from I Watch and Mourakoub to monitor the vote, alleging they received suspicious foreign funds.

The two watchdogs have been monitoring Tunisian elections for fraud since the 2011 uprising that ousted former dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

His ouster ushered in the Arab Spring regional uprisings, all of which failed except in Tunisia which, for a time, became the only democracy to emerge from the Middle East movements against authoritarianism.

But the north African country's path changed dramatically soon after Saied's democratic election in 2019.

He orchestrated a sweeping power grab that included dissolving parliament and replacing it with a legislature with limited powers.

He has jailed opposition figures and critics, and his five-year term drew new scrutiny on rights groups ahead of I Watch, Soufiane Ferchichi, a senior campaigner at I Watch, told AFP the electoral board, ISE, accused the group of "being neutral" weeks after the report came out.

Ferchichi acknowledged that his organisation received foreign funds.

But it was done "in a legal framework, with donors that the Tunisian state recognises, such as the European Union".

ISE has not responded to AFP's query on the matter.

Mourakoub called the suspicious funding allegations baseless.

In a statement, it said it had "always conducted (election) observations impartially, without ever taking sides with any political faction".

Said "refuses any independent or critical body to observe these elections", said Roudiane Ben Amor, spokesman for the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights (FTDES). AFP

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Taliban's battle with IS opens door to foreign cooperation

Afghanistan's Islamic State group is staging a growing number of bloody international attacks, presenting a rare but complicated opportunity for foreign cooperation with the Taliban government to counter the jihadists.

Since ousting US-led forces three years ago, the Taliban government has declared counter-terrorism its high priority and pledged militants planning foreign attacks will be rooted out.

But while the Taliban seized a vast stockpile of military gear when they took over, analysts doubt they can eradicate the group because of technological shortcomings in their intelligence gathering.

"The Taliban has limitations on what it can do," said Anton Y. Zelin of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Between March 2023 and March 2024, IS-K planned 21 international attacks in nine countries, he said, compared to just eight plots the previous year.

A 2023 UN Security Council report said that the Taliban have quietly reached out requesting intelligence and logistical support to fight IS-K, "offering itself as a counter-terrorism partner".

Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP that some countries being affected by this group are allied in being cooperated with in some areas and we also occasionally share information with them.

chaotic evacuation from Kabul airport in August 2021 - killing some 170 Afghans alongside 13 US troops.

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An IS-K gun attack in May saw six people, including three Spanish tourists, killed in Afghanistan. Last month, the group claimed two more domestic attacks, killing a total of 20 people, AFP

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