



killed in airstrike by Turkey in northern Syria, including Syrian government soldiers

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SHIVAMOGGA

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Blasts rock Crimea ammo depot

Russia blames the explosions in Mayskoye on an 'act of sabotage' without naming anyone

KYIV

EXPLOSIONS and fires ripped through an ammunition depot in Russia-annexed Crimea on Tuesday in the second suspected Ukrainian attack on the peninsula in just over a week...



File photo of rising smoke at the beach at Saky after explosions were heard from the direction of a Russian military airbase near Novofedorivka, Crimea | AP

Russia blamed the blasts in the village of Mayskoye on an 'act of sabotage' without naming the perpetrators.

Separately, the Russian business newspaper Kommersant quoted local residents as saying plumes of black smoke also rose over an air base in Crimea's Gvardeyskoye.

Ukraine stopped short of publicly claiming responsibility for any of the blasts, including those that destroyed nine Russian planes at another Crimean air base last week.

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Kyiv recognise Crimea as part of Russia as a condition for ending the fighting, while Ukraine has vowed to drive Moscow's forces from the peninsula on the Black Sea.

Videos posted on social media showed thick columns of smoke rising over raging flames in Mayskoye, and a series of explosions could be heard.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the fires damaged a power plant, power lines, railroad tracks and apartment build-

ings. Crimea's regional leader, Sergei Aksyonov, said two people were injured.

Ukrainian officials warned on Tuesday that Crimea would not be spared the ravages of war: Rather than a travel destination, "Crimea occupied by Russians is about warehouses of explosives and high risk of death for invaders and thieves,"

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said on Twitter: Russia blamed last week's ex-

plosions on an accidental detonation of munitions, but satellite photos and other evidence—including the dispersed blast sites—pointed to a Ukrainian attack, perhaps with anti-ship missiles, according to military analysts.

Putin blames US for trying to prolong conflict

Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Washington on Tuesday of drawing out the war in Ukraine, as explosions rocked a Russian military facility on the Kremlin-controlled peninsula of Crimea.

A British Defense Ministry intelligence update said vessels in Russia's Black Sea Fleet are in an extremely defensive posture in the waters off Crimea, with ships barely venturing out of sight of the coastline.

US, South Korea to begin military drills

SEOUL

UNITED States and South Korea will begin their biggest combined military training in years next week in the face of an increasingly aggressive North Korea, which has been ramping up weapons tests and threats of nuclear conflict against Seoul and Washington.

The allies' summertime drills, named Ulchi Freedom Shield, will take place from August 22 to September 1 in South Korea and include exercises simulating joint attacks, front-line reinforcements of arms and fuel, and removals of weapons of mass destruction.

The drills underscore Washington and Seoul's commitment to restore large-scale training after they cancelled some of their regular drills and downsized others to computer simulations in recent years to create space for diplomacy with North Korea.

While the United States and South Korea describe their ex-

ercises as defensive, Ulchi Freedom Shield will almost surely draw an angry reaction from North Korea, which describes all allied training as invasion rehearsals and has used them to justify its nuclear weapons and missiles development.

China, North Korea's main ally, expressed concern over the expansion of US military exercises with its Asian allies, saying they could worsen tensions with the North. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin didn't offer a specific answer when asked whether Beijing believes the trilateral drills in Hawaii were in some way directed at China.

"North Korea has repeatedly expressed its concern" over the joint drills, Wang said in a briefing in Beijing on Tuesday.

"The negative impact of the military exercises on the situation on the Korean Peninsula is worth paying attention to. All parties should act prudently and stop any actions that may increase tension and confrontation and damage the mutual trust," he said.

MORE EXPOSURE

Sunak pledges civil service overhaul if elected UK PM

LONDON

RISHI Sunak, the British Indian former Chancellor on Tuesday pledged a major overhaul of the country's civil service to create a sharper, leaner bureaucracy if he takes charge at 10 Downing Street on September 5.

Contesting against Liz Truss, Sunak wants civil servants to spend at least a year of their career outside government roles in industry to widen their experience.

"I'll press ahead with cuts to back office Civil Service headcount, recruiting and retaining the brightest and best. I'll strengthen civil servants' experience beyond Whitehall, allow ministers to bring in more external expertise, and bring in performance pay so we have a truly Rolls Royce service delivering for and accountable to the British people," he said.

"The future of the United Kingdom is bright but our union must work together, each nation shoulder to shoulder, to get there. We must defeat the collective challenges threatening the health of our public services. Under my plans, the UK government will play its part, but the same must be reciprocated by Holyrood," said Sunak.

Speaking ahead of hustings in Perth, Scotland, to convince Tory members who will be voting in the postal and online votes to elect a new party leader, Truss said she was "absolutely passionate about Scotland and the United Kingdom" and committed to delivering jobs, growth as well as opportunity.

Australian ex-PM Morrison took on extra powers in secret

CANBERRA

AUSTRALIAN Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Tuesday accused his predecessor Scott Morrison of trashing democracy after revealing that while Morrison was in power, he took on five ministerial roles without the knowledge of most other lawmakers or the public.



Scott Morrison, Former Prime Minister of Australia | AP

Albanese said Morrison had been operating in secret, keeping the Australian people in the dark and misleading Parliament over who was in charge of what portfolios.

"This has been government by deception," Albanese said.

Adding to revelations first detailed over the weekend by News Corp. media, Albanese said that between March 2020 and May 2021, Morrison was appointed minister of health, finance, home affairs, treasury and industry—moves which appeared to have given Morrison equal powers to the ministers already appointed to those positions.

"It is completely extraordinary that these appointments

were kept secret by the Morrison government from the Australian people," Albanese told reporters in Canberra.

Morrison defended taking on the extra portfolios, saying they were a safeguard during the pandemic and that he would have made the appointments public had he needed to use the powers involved.

"Sometimes we forget what was happening two years ago and the situation we were dealing with. It was an unconventional time and an unprecedented time," Morrison said.

He pointed to the coronavi-

rus hospitalisation of the then-British prime minister. "Boris Johnson almost died one night," Morrison said. "We had ministers go down with Covid."

Morrison used his additional powers on at least one occasion, to overturn a decision by former minister Keith Pitt to approve a contentious gas project off the New South Wales coast.

Pitt said in a statement he was unaware Morrison had joint oversight over his ministerial portfolio and that he stands by the decisions he made at the time.

In a more detailed account published on Facebook later Tuesday, Morrison wrote that the gas project was the only matter he got directly involved with and that "I believe I made the right decision in the national interest."

In Australia, elected politicians are selected by the prime minister before being sworn in by the governor-general in a formal ceremony that is usually publicly recorded.

China slaps sanctions on Taiwan leaders

BEIJING

CHINA imposed visa bans and other sanctions on Tuesday on Taiwanese political figures as it raises pressure on the self-governing island and the US in response to successive congressional visits.

The sanctions come a day after China announced more military exercises in the seas and skies surrounding Taiwan because of what it called collusion and provocation between the US and Taiwan. There's been no word on the timing and scale of the Chinese exercises.

The targets of China's latest sanctions include Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the US, Bihim Hsiao and legislators Ker Chien-ming, Koo Li-hsiung, Tsai Chi-chang, Chen Jiau-hua and Wang Ting-yu, along with activist Lin Fei-fan.

They will be barred from traveling to mainland China, Hong Kong and Macao, and from having any financial or personal connections with people and entities on the mainland, according to the ruling Communist Party's Taiwan Work Office.

The measures were designed to resolutely punish those considered diehard elements supporting Taiwan's independence, reported China's official Xinhua News Agency.

Premier Su Tseng-chang, leader of the legislature You Sikun and Foreign Minister Joseph Wu were already on China's sanctions list and will face more restrictions, Xinhua said.

China accuses the US of encouraging the island's independence through the sale of weapons and engagement between US politicians and the island's government.



File photo: A missile is fired during a joint training between the United States and South Korea at an undisclosed location in South Korea | AP

Kenya's Odinga TO challenge his election loss

NAIROBI

KENYAN opposition figure Raila Odinga said on Tuesday he'll challenge the results of the close presidential election with all constitutional and legal options after Deputy President William Ruto was declared the winner.

"Let no one take the law into their own hands," Odinga said to his often passionate support-

ers. In Kisumu, a city in his western Kenya stronghold, some residents said they were tired of going into the street and being tear-gassed.

"What we saw yesterday was a travesty and blatant disregard of the constitution," Odinga said, calling the election results null and void.

The 77-year-old Odinga has pursued the presidency for a quarter-century. His campaign

has seven days after Monday's declaration to file a petition with the Supreme Court, which would then have 14 days to make a ruling.

On Tuesday, the local Elections Observation Group announced that its highly regarded parallel voting tally "corroborates the official results" in an important check on the process.

EXPRESS READ

NEW SCOTTISH LAW MAKES PERIOD PRODUCTS FREE

London: A law has taken effect in Scotland to ensure period products are available free of charge to anyone who needs it. Under the new law, schools, colleges and local government bodies must make a range of period products such as tampons and sanitary pads available for free in their bathrooms. The Scottish government invested millions of pounds since 2017 to fund free period products in educational institutions, but the law makes it a legal requirement. A mobile phone app also helps people find the nearest place such as a community centre. The bill was introduced by Scottish Parliament lawmaker Monica Lennon, who had campaigned against 'period poverty'.

IRAQ'S FINANCE MINISTER QUILTS OVER POLITICAL CRISIS

Baghdad: Iraq's finance minister resigned on Tuesday over the country's worst political crisis in years involving an influential Shiite cleric and his Iran-aligned rivals. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said, Finance Minister Ali Allawi resigned during a Cabinet meeting Tuesday to protest the political conditions. They said Oil Minister Ihsan Abdul-Jabbar will become acting finance minister. Allawi's decision came weeks after members of influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's parliamentary bloc resigned from parliament and his supporters stormed the parliament building in Baghdad. Al-Sadr later demanded that parliament be dissolved and early elections held.

RESTRICTING OPENING HOURS

"Tourist visas will not stop completely, but their number will be significantly reduced," Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto told reporters.

Tourist visas from Russia will be limited by restricting the allotted opening hours for tourism visa applications, as an outright ban based on nationality is not possible, Haavisto said.

"This means that other types of visas—visits to relatives, family contacts, work, study—will be given preference and more time," the minister explained.

Finland to drastically cut RUSSIAN TOURIST VISAS

Finland will limit Russian tourist visas to 10% of current volumes as of September 1 due to rising discontent over Russian tourism amid the war in Ukraine, the government said on Tuesday.



HUMANITARIAN VISA

Currently, Finland processes around 1,000 Russian visa applications a day.

Finland will look into establishing a specific humanitarian visa category, which the country currently lacks.

"This could make the situation in certain circumstances much easier for journalists or NGO workers", Haavisto said.

INCREASE IN FLOW OF RUSSIAN TOURISTS

Finland applied for NATO membership after political and popular support for the alliance soared following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, but it remains Russia's only EU neighbour without restrictions on tourist visas for Russian citizens.

After Russia lifted its Covid travel restrictions on July 15, the number of Russian tourists heading to Finland has steadily increased, spurring discontent.

While the numbers are still well below pre-Covid levels, there were more than 230,000 border crossings in July—up from the 125,000 seen in June.

It's not right that Russian citizens can enter Europe, the Schengen area, be tourists... while Russia is killing people in Ukraine. It's wrong. Sanna Marin, Finland PM.

QuoteExpress THE WAY TO GET STARTED IS TO QUIT TALKING AND BEGIN DOING

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