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Putin puts Russia's...

nuclear power. The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations responded to the news from Moscow while appearing on a Sunday news program.

President Putin is continuing to escalate this war in a manner that is totally unacceptable, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said. And we have to continue to condemn his actions in the most strong, strongest possible way.

The practical meaning of Putin's order was not immediately clear. Russia and the United States typically have the land- and submarine-based segments of their strategic nuclear forces on alert and prepared for combat at all times, but nuclear-capable bombers and other aircraft are not.

If Putin is arming or otherwise raising the nuclear combat readiness of his bombers, or if he is ordering more ballistic missile submarines to sea, then the United States might feel compelled to respond in kind, according to Hans Kristensen, a nuclear analyst at the Federation of American Scientists. That would mark worrisome escalation and a potential crisis, he said.

The alarming step came as street fighting broke out in Ukraine's second-largest city and Russian troops squeezed strategic ports in the country's south, advances that appeared to mark a new phase of Russia's invasion following a wave of attacks on airfields and fuel facilities elsewhere in the country.

Around the same time as Putin's nuclear move, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's office said on the Telegram messaging app that the two sides would meet at an unspecified location on the Belarusian border. The message did not give a precise time for the meeting.

The announcement came hours after Russia announced that its delegation had flown to Belarus to await talks. Ukrainian officials initially rejected the move, saying any talks should take place elsewhere than Belarus, where Russia placed a large contingent of troops. Belarus was one of the places from where Russian troops entered Ukraine.

Earlier Sunday, the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, was eerily quiet after huge explosions lit up the morning sky and authorities reported blasts at one of the airports. Only an occasional car appeared on a deserted main boulevard as a strict 39-hour curfew kept people off the streets. Terrified residents instead hunkered down in homes, underground garages and subway stations in anticipation of a full-scale Russian assault.

The past night was tough more shelling, more bombing of residential areas and civilian infrastructure," Zelensky said.

Until Sunday, Russia's troops had remained on the outskirts of Kharkiv, a city of 1.4 million about 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) south of the border with Russia, while other forces rolled past to press the offensive deeper into Ukraine.

Videos posted on Ukrainian media and social networks showed Russian vehicles moving across Kharkiv and Russian troops roaming the city in small groups. One showed Ukrainian troops firing at the Russians and damaged Russian light utility vehicles abandoned nearby.

The images underscored the determined resistance Russian troops face while attempting to enter Ukraine's bigger cities. Ukrainians have volunteered en masse to help defend the capital, Kyiv, and other cities, taking guns distributed by authorities and preparing firebombs to fight Russian forces.

Ukraine's government also is releasing prisoners with military experience who want to fight for the country, a prosecutor's office official, Andriy Sinyuk, told the Hromadske TV channel Sunday. He did not specify whether the move applied to prisoners convicted of all levels of crimes.

Putin hasn't disclosed his ultimate plans, but Western officials believe he is determined to overthrow Ukraine's government and replace it with a regime of his own, redrawing the map of Europe and reviving Moscow's Cold War-era influence.

The pressure on strategic ports in the south of Ukraine appeared aimed at seizing control of the country's coastline stretching from the border with Romania in the west to the border with Russia in the east. A Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, said Russian forces had blocked the cities of Kherson on the Black Sea and the port of Berdyansk on the Azov Sea.

He said the Russian forces also took control of an airbase near Kherson and the Azov Sea city of Henichesk. Ukrainian authorities also have reported fighting near Odesa, Mykolaiv and other areas.

Cutting Ukraine's access to its sea ports would deal a major blow to the country's economy. It also could allow Moscow to build a land corridor to Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014 and until now was connected to Russia by a 19-kilometer (12-mile) bridge, the longest bridge in Europe which opened in 2018.

Flames billowed from an oil depot near an airbase in Vasylkiv, a city 37 kilometers (23 miles) south of Kyiv where there has been intense fighting, according to the mayor. Russian forces blew up a gas pipeline in Kharkiv, prompting the government to warn people to cover their windows with damp cloth or gauze as protection from smoke, the president's office said.

Ukrainian military deputy commander Lt.-Gen. Yevhen Moisiuk sounded a defiant note in a message aimed at Russian troops.

Unload your weapons, raise your hands so that our servicemen and civilians can understand that you have heard us. This is your ticket home, Moisiuk said in a Facebook video.

The number of casualties so far from Europe's largest land conflict since World War II remains unclear amid the fog of combat.

Ukraine's health minister reported Saturday that 198 people, including three children, had been killed and more than 1,000 others wounded. It was unclear whether those figures included both military and civilian casualties. Russia has not released any casualty information.

Ukraine's U.N. ambassador, Sergiy Kyslytsya, tweeted Saturday that Ukraine appealed to the International Committee of the Red Cross to facilitate repatriation of thousands of bodies of Russian soldiers. An accompanying chart claimed 3,500 Russian troops have been killed.

Laetitia Courtois, ICRC's permanent observer to the U.N., told The Associated Press that the situation in Ukraine was a limitation for our teams on the ground and we therefore cannot confirm numbers or other details.

The United Nations' refugee agency said Sunday that about 368,000 Ukrainians have arrived in neighboring countries since the invasion started Thursday. The U.N. has estimated the conflict could produce as many as 4 million refugees, depending how long it continues.

Zelensky denounced Russia's offensive as state terrorism. He said the attacks on Ukrainian cities should be investigated by an international war crimes tribunal and cost Russia its place as one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

As Russia pushes ahead with its offensive, the West is working to equip the outnumbered Ukrainian forces with weapons and ammunition while punishing Russia with far-reaching sanctions intended to further isolate Moscow.

The U.S. pledged an additional USD 350 million in military assistance to Ukraine, including anti-tank weapons, body armor and small arms. Germany said it would send missiles and anti-tank weapons to the besieged country and that it would close its airspace to Russian planes.

The U.S., European Union and United Kingdom agreed to block selected Russian banks from the SWIFT global financial messaging system, which moves money around more than 11,000 banks and other financial institutions worldwide, part of a new round of sanctions aiming to impose a severe cost on Moscow for the invasion. They also agreed to impose restrictive measures on Russia's central bank.

Responding to a request from Ukraine's minister of digital transformation, tech billionaire Elon Musk said on Twitter that his satellite-based internet system Starlink was now active in Ukraine and that there were more terminals en route.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, meanwhile, said Sunday that his country was committing 100 billion euros (USD 112.7 billion) to a special fund for its armed forces, raising its defense spending above 2% of gross domestic product. Scholz told a special session of the Bundestag the investment was needed "to protect our freedom and our democracy."

Putin sent troops into Ukraine after denying for weeks that he intended to do so, all the while building up a force of almost 200,000 troops along the countries' borders. He claims the West has failed to take seriously Russia's security concerns about NATO, the Western military alliance that Ukraine aspires to join. But he has also expressed scorn about Ukraine's right to exist as an independent state.

Russia claims its assault on Ukraine is aimed only at military targets, but bridges, schools and residential neighborhoods have been hit.

Ukraine's ambassador to the U.S., Oksana Markarova, said Ukraine was gathering evidence of shelling of residential areas, kindergartens and hospitals to submit to an international war crimes court in The Hague as possible crimes against humanity. The International Criminal Court's prosecutor has said he is monitoring the conflict closely.

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss warned Sunday that Putin could use the most unsavory means, including banned chemical or biological weapons, to

defeat Ukraine.

I urge the Russians not to escalate this conflict, but we do need to be prepared for Russia to seek to use even worse weapons, Truss told Sky News. (AP).

Ukraine, Russia diplomats...

evacuated as many as 688 more nationals from war-hit Ukraine on three Air India flights and said it was in touch with the other countries in that region to ensure the return of all its stranded citizens as concerns mounted over their safety.

Approximately 13,000 Indians are in Ukraine as of now, Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, who received the evacuees at the Delhi airport this morning, said.

Around a thousand Indians have already been flown out of Romania and Hungary and another 1,000 have been evacuated from Ukraine through the land routes, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla told a media briefing.

Scenes of tearful reunion were seen at the Delhi airport after two Air India flights from Romanian capital Bucharest and one from Hungarian capital Budapest arrived in Delhi with 688 Indian nationals on Sunday.

IndiGo also said it will operate two flights to Budapest via Istanbul on Monday and Tuesday from Delhi to bring back Indians.

The first evacuation flight from Bucharest with 219 people on board had landed in Mumbai a day earlier under Operation Ganga and many of the returnees reached their home states.

Shringla said he held separate meetings with the ambassadors of Ukraine and Russia and shared with them the locations of the Indian citizens in Ukraine for ensuring their protection.

The foreign secretary said though the border crossings to Hungary and Romania are functioning, the exit point to Poland has been clogged with lakhs of Ukrainians and foreign nationals trying to leave the strife-torn country through it.

India is using the land routes to evacuate its citizens as Ukraine has closed its airspace for civilian aircraft following the Russian attack.

Shringla said that Indians who are near the borders with Hungary Romania and Slovakia are being guided towards the respective border points in phases.

"We are aware of a number of Indian citizens, particularly students, who continue to be in cities in the east and south-east of Ukraine.

"Unfortunately, these areas are live conflict areas and it is generally deemed unsafe for people to move around freely. We will try to find suitable evacuation modalities for them," he said.

He said approximately 2,000 Indian citizens were in Kyiv and many of them have begun to move to the western part of the country.

Shringla said the Indian embassy in Ukraine suggested that those who are located in the eastern areas including Kyiv should start moving westwards to avoid the areas of increasing conflict and that they should come near the border points.

"We have also contacted the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva. Our Permanent Representative in Geneva has spoken to the President of the ICRC," he said.

"The ICRC is commencing its operation in Ukraine. We have told them to please make sure that as and when they start their operation, they should be cognizant of the needs of our citizens and wherever possible escort them out," he added.

Early this morning, Scindia welcomed the evacuees of the AI1942 flight at the Delhi airport by handing out roses to them.

Scindia told reporters at the airport terminal that approximately 13,000 Indians are stranded in Ukraine as of now.

"You know it is an extremely sensitive situation there (Ukraine). In this situation, we are talking with each Indian national, including students, through telecommunications," he said.

"We will bring them back as soon as possible," he said.

Addressing the returnees, Scindia said, "I know you all have been through a very, very difficult time, a very, very trying time. But know this that the PM is with you at every step, the Indian government is with you at every step, and 130 crore Indians are with you at every step."

The Ukrainian airspace has been closed for civil aircraft operations since February 24 morning when the Russian military offensive began. Therefore, the Indian evacuation flights are operating out of Bucharest and Budapest.

Scindia said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in touch with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and talks are being held so that everyone is brought home safely.

The minister said talks are also on with the Russian government, and the Indian government will breathe easy only after every stranded Indian is evacuated from Ukraine.

"So, please pass on this message to all your friends and all your colleagues that we are with them and we will guarantee their safe passage back," Scindia said.

Home Deptt to...

interventions wherever required."

"All the Government Department(s)/Office(s) shall ensure guidelines related to social distancing and Covid Appropriate Behaviour (CAB) are followed strictly while conducting in-person meetings/interactions etc," it added.

"All offices to regulate the attendance of its employees in such a manner so as to ensure that appropriate Social Distancing Norms are maintained," it added.

All deputy commissioners have been asked to keep track of positivity rate in medical blocks under their jurisdictions. The order calls for intensified measures for Covid-19 management and restriction of activities.

Testing, tracking, treating and vaccination needs to be strengthened in these blocks with proportion of RT-PCR tests in the mix being scaled up to 70 per cent, excluding travellers, it further added.

Active COVID-19 cases...

country so far under the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive has exceeded 177.44 crore.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

The country crossed the grim milestone of two crore on May 4 and three crore on June 23 last year.

The 243 new fatalities include 181 from Kerala and 19 from Karnataka.

A total of 5,13,724 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 1,43,695 from Maharashtra, 65,161 from Kerala, 39,919 from Karnataka, 38,002 from Tamil Nadu, 26,119 from Delhi, 23,450 from Uttar Pradesh and 21,172 from West Bengal.

The ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

Srinagar acid attack...

major and minor surgeries so far had some peace when she heard that the Jammu and Kashmir Police has filed a charge sheet against all the three accused.

"She was having sleepless nights and often woke up in the dead of night with a shout to the family members to save her from the monster who disfigured her by throwing acid on her," Arizoo said in a choked voice.

She said that she had informed her sister about the police charge sheet.

"Generally she is quiet after the incident but that day she hoped to see that justice is delivered sooner," she said.

Her cousin Sajjad Misgar, who is accompanying the family to Chennai, said doctors have performed three surgeries on her eyes so far but since her left eye has shrunk badly due to the impact of the acid, whether she will get back her vision remains uncertain.

"The doctors are trying their best and gave her a stem cell treatment to build the pressure in her eyes. Let us keep our fingers crossed and I am sure that our prayers and efforts of the hospital will allow my sister to regain her sight," Misgar said.

Besides the eye surgeries, three skin grafting procedures have been done to reconstruct her face, he said.

Advocate Mir Naveed Gul, representing the woman's family, recalled his first meeting with her and said "she is definitely a brave woman who has managed to raise her voice against the injustice. I am sure one day she will be up on her feet and see with her own eyes when the judicial system deals with the accused in this case."

The Jammu and Kashmir Police recently filed a 1,000-page charge sheet against three people -- Sajid Altaf Rather and Mohammad Saleem Kumar alias Tota, and a juvenile against whom the police have prayed for being treated

as an adult as per the amended Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, whereby youngsters in the age group of 16-18 can be tried under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) if they are accused of heinous crimes.

The accused were charged under sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy) and 326-A (voluntarily causing grievous hurt by use of acid) of the IPC.

"We have filed a water-tight charge sheet and we will make a plea to the court for a daily hearing in this case. If a daily hearing is not possible, we would request the honourable court for a speedy trial," Senior Superintendent of Police (Srinagar) Rakesh Balwal had said.

The charge sheet was filed within three weeks of the incident to ensure swift and exemplary punishment to the accused and to deter those who may be having such "barbaric" tendencies, officials said.

"The maximum punishment under these sections is life sentence and the minimum is 10 years but we will press for maximum so that it acts as a deterrent," Balwal had said.

J&K's Wushu player...

UT. I wish Sadia more success in future", Lieutenant Governor said in a tweet.

Sadia Tariq, who hailed from Bemina, Srinagar, has consecutively bagged gold medals in 19th and 20th Junior National Championship held in Haryana and Jalandhar respectively. In the Moscow Wushu Stars Championship, Sadia won the gold medal by defeating a local favourite at the event.

Sadia, who came into sports at a young age, did his schooling from Presentation Convent Srinagar and started playing in school events when she was in her first grade. "When I was in my first grade our fitness teacher came to our class and announced about the sports tourney in our school, I was the first one to register for the event", Sadia said.

Appreciating her parents support from the very young age, Sadia elatedly said, "I remember my father just told me if I am interested in sports, he will always support me. I was very happy and choose taekwondo as the game and from the very next day I started my training".

After training for a year, Sadia started to participate in district and division level sports events. "I went for my first competition from school level which was organized by Indian Army at Bandipora district and I won bronze medal. I started getting appreciation from my coaches and school administration which kept my morale high in this field", said Sadia.

After her success in local events, the star Wushu player started to participate in national level events. "After winning bronze medal in local events, my coaches appreciated me and encouraged me to participate in national level events and the same year I went to New Delhi for participation in 3rd open India taekwondo championship and won bronze medal", a happy Sadia remarked.

Sadia then started to play on regular basis and featured in many events like sub-juniors National Taekwondo championship where she won her first gold medal. In 2018, Sadia won bronze medal in Hyderabad for International Junior Taekwondo Championship and also participated in Imphal, Nagaland for 64th National school games.