

At least 13 people were killed in central Somalia on Saturday after a suicide bomber detonated explosives in a restaurant packed with local officials and politicians, aljazeera.com reported.

China says Russia's concerns 'should also be respected'

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Saturday urged the West to respect Russia's concerns over Ukraine and questioned if an eastward NATO expansion would guarantee peace.

"Ukraine should be a bridge linking East and West, not a frontline," Wang Yi told the Munich Security Conference on video-link, AFP reported. "All parties have the right to raise their concerns, while the reasonable concerns of Russia should also be respected and heeded," he said speaking through an interpreter.

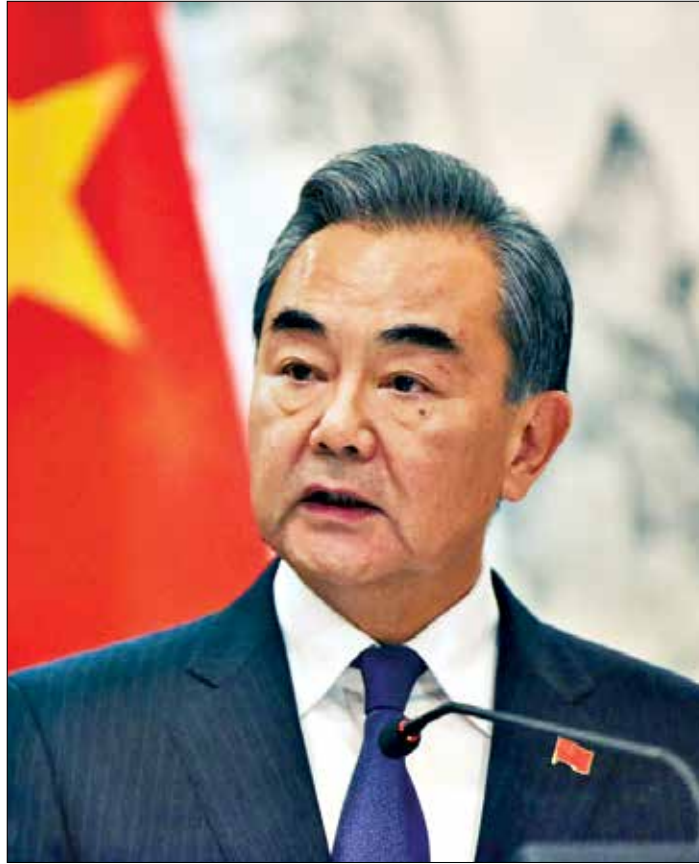
Late last year, Russia asked the United States for certain security guarantees in an attempt to defuse the escalation of tensions over Ukraine. Russia demanded promises from the West that NATO won't expand eastward. It has also called on the US to commit to pulling out all of its troops from Central and Eastern Europe.

The United States delivered a reply in late January in coordination with NATO allies to Russia. The Russian president, however, said the West had ignored Moscow's key concerns in its response.

The United States keeps accusing Russia of planning to attack Ukraine by stationing as many as 190,000 troops in and around Ukraine's borders. Russia has rejected the allegations, saying the military build-up is defensive in nature.

In a major step to de-escalate the situation, Moscow announced last week that some of the troops deployed in areas bordering Ukraine would return to their bases. It also released footage showing tanks and armored vehicles being loaded onto railway flatcars.

The US and its NATO allies, however, claim they have seen no significant withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine's border.



REUTERS/YONHAP

13 die as Storm Eunice leaves many in Europe without power

Emergency crews Saturday battled to restore power to hundreds of thousands of homes in Britain after Storm Eunice carved a deadly trail across Western Europe and left transport networks in disarray.

At least 13 people were killed by falling trees, flying debris and high winds in Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Poland, according to emergency services, AFP reported.

Train operators in Britain urged people not to travel, with timetables in chaos after most of the network was shut down when Eunice on Friday brought the largest wind gust ever recorded in England – 122 miles (196 kilometres) per hour.

The train network in the Netherlands was also paralysed, with no Eurostar and Thalys international services running from Britain and France after damage to overhead power lines.

France was also grappling with rail disruption, and about 75,000 households were without power.

The UK was worst hit by power cuts with nearly 400,000 homes cut off nationwide after one of the most powerful tempests since the "Great Storm" hit Britain and northern France in 1987, sparking the first-ever "red" weather warning for London on Friday.

The Met Office, Britain's meteorological service, issued a less-severe "yellow" wind warning for much of the south coast of England and South Wales on Saturday, which it said "could hamper recovery efforts from Storm Eunice".

Scientists said both the 1987 storm and Eunice packed a "sting jet", a rarely seen

phenomenon borne out of the Atlantic that magnified the effects on Friday.

'Explosive storms'

Ferries across the Channel, the world's busiest shipping lane, were suspended, before the English port of Dover reopened

at London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports and Schiphol in Amsterdam. One easyJet flight from Bordeaux endured two aborted landings at Gatwick – which saw wind gusts peak at 78 miles per hour – before being forced to return to the French city.

London's rush-hour streets, where activity has been slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels, were virtually deserted Friday as many heeded government advice to stay at home.

The London Fire Brigade declared a "major incident" after taking 550 emergency calls in just over two hours – although it complained that several were "unhelpful", including one from a resident complaining about a neighbour's garden trampoline blowing around.

The RAC breakdown service said it had received unusually low numbers of callouts on Britain's main roads, indicating that motorists were "taking the weather warnings seriously and not setting out".

Experts said the frequency and intensity of the storms could not be linked necessarily to climate change.

Therefore, he said, "flooding from coastal storm surges and prolonged deluges will worsen still further when these rare, explosive storms hit us in a warmer world".



GEOFF CADDICK/AFP

Storm Eunice brought the largest wind gust ever recorded in England – 122 miles (196 kilometres) per hour.

meteorological phenomenon borne out of an unusual confluence of pressure systems

Friday afternoon. Hundreds of flights were cancelled or

Ottawa crackdown: Police arrest 100 after three-week protest

Police arrested scores of demonstrators and towed away vehicles Friday in Canada's besieged capital, and a stream of trucks started leaving under the pressure, raising authorities' hopes for an end to the three-week protest against the country's COVID-19 restrictions.

By evening, at least 100 people had been arrested, mostly on mischief charges, and nearly two dozen vehicles had been towed, including all of those blocking one of the city's major streets, authorities said. One officer had a minor injury, but no protesters were hurt, interim Ottawa Police Chief Steve Bell said, AP reported.

Police "continue to push forward to take control of our streets," he said, adding: "We will work day and night until this is completed."

Those arrested included four protest leaders. One received bail while the others remained jailed.

The crackdown on the self-styled Freedom Convoy began in the morning, when hundreds of police, some in riot gear and some carrying automatic weapons, descended into the protest zone and began leading demonstrators away in handcuffs through the snowy streets as holdout truckers blared their horns.

Tow truck operators – wearing neon-green ski masks, with their companies' decals taped over on their trucks to conceal their identities – arrived under police escort and started removing the hundreds of big rigs, campers and other vehicles parked shoulder-to-shoulder near Parliament.

Scuffles broke out in places, and police repeatedly went nose-to-nose with the protesters and pushed the crowd back amid cries of "Freedom!" and the singing of the national anthem, "O Canada." Later police on horses



JUSTIN TANG/THE CANADIAN PRESS VIA AP

Protesters react as Toronto mounted police unit moves in to disperse them as police take action to put an end to the protest in Ottawa, Canada, on Feb. 18, 2022.

were used to push back the crowd for a time.

Police said late in the afternoon that protesters had assaulted officers and tried to take their weapons. Some began dismantling equipment at a stage where they had played music for weeks, saying they didn't want it to get destroyed.

Many protesters stood their ground in the face of one of the biggest police enforcement actions in Canada's history, with officers drawn from around the country.

"Freedom was never free," said trucker Kevin Homaund, of Montreal. "So what if they put the hand-

cuffs on us and they put us in jail?"

But a steady procession of trucks began leaving Parliament Hill in the afternoon.

Police would not disclose how many protesters or vehicles remained downtown. All indications were that police would be working into the weekend to clear the area.

The capital and its paralyzed streets represented the movement's last stronghold after weeks of demonstrations and blockades that shut down border crossings into the U.S. and created one of the most serious tests yet for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. They also shook Canada's reputation for civility, with some blaming America's influence.

Authorities had hesitated to move against the protests, in part because of fears of violence. The demonstrations have drawn right-wing extremists and veterans, some of them armed.

With police and the government facing accusations that they let the protests get out of hand, Trudeau on Monday invoked Canada's Emergencies Act. That gave law enforcement extraordinary authority to declare the blockades illegal, tow away trucks, arrest the drivers, suspend their licenses and freeze their bank accounts.

The Freedom Convoy demonstrations initially focused on Canada's vaccine requirement for truckers entering the country but soon morphed into a broad attack on COVID-19 precautions and Trudeau's government.

Ottawa residents complained of being harassed and intimidated by the truckers and obtained a court injunction to stop their incessant honking.

Canadians have largely embraced the country's COVID-19 restrictions, with the vast majority vaccinated, including an estimated 90% of the nation's truckers. Some of the vaccine and mask mandates imposed by the provinces are already falling away rapidly.

The biggest border blockade, at the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, disrupted the flow of auto parts between the two countries and forced the industry to curtail production. Authorities lifted the siege last weekend after arresting dozens of protesters.

Hezbollah successfully flies reconnaissance drone over Israeli-occupied territories

Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement said it has flown a drone over the Israeli-occupied territories for a reconnaissance mission, adding that the aircraft returned untouched after completing the mission successfully.

On Friday, "The Islamic resistance launched 'Hassan' drone into the occupied Palestinian territories," Hezbollah said in a statement, adding that the unmanned aerial vehicle roamed "the targeted area for 40 minutes on a reconnaissance mission, which extended along 70 kilometers," Press TV reported.

"Despite all of the enemy's numerous and consecutive attempts to down it, the aircraft 'Hassan' returned from the occupied territories safely after carrying out the required mission successfully," the statement added.

The Israeli military confirmed the flyover, saying an interceptor missile that was fired at the aircraft and warplanes that were scrambled failed to intercept it.

The latest development comes as the leader of Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, said on Wednesday the resistance movement has developed the capability to make rockets and drones on its own. "We have started manufacturing drones," he said, addressing the Israeli regime rulers.



wionews.com

A missile system fires as a reconnaissance drone belonging to Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement flies over the Israeli-occupied territories.

Reports said Israeli warplanes flew over the Lebanese capital, Beirut, at low altitudes for several minutes later on Friday, and a loud sound was heard.

Lebanon fought off two Israeli wars, in 2000 and 2006. On both occasions, battleground contribution by Hezbollah proved an indispensable asset, forcing the Israeli military into a retreat.

Hezbollah was established following the 1982 Israeli invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon. The movement drove out Israeli forces from Lebanon in May 2000.

Since then, the resistance group has grown into a powerful military force, dealing repeated blows to the Israeli military, including during a 33-day war in July 2006.

Boris Johnson hands in police questionnaire on 'partygate'

Boris Johnson has completed and returned the questionnaire he was sent by Scotland Yard, in which he was expected to defend his attendance at alleged parties under investigation.

The prime minister was asked by police to fill in the form on Friday, February 11, as part of the "Operation Hillman" investigation into social gatherings in breach of COVID rules between May 20, 2020 and April 16, 2021, theguardian.com reported.

No. 10 confirmed the prime minister has complied with a Metropolitan Police request for his answers to be submitted within a week of receiving the form last Friday.

Downing Street has previously said his responses will not be made public.

Officers involved with Operation Hillman, which is examining whether COVID restrictions were broken in Downing Street and across Whitehall, sent formal questionnaires to about 50 people as they look into the details of alleged COVID rule-breaking.

It comes as a union representing civil servants said it had pushed for officials involved in the investigation to be able to consult notes on the evidence they gave to the Sue Gray inquiry to help inform their Met Q&A.

Gray carried out an inquiry into claims of lockdown breaches at the top of government but has only published an interim report while she waits for the police investigation to be completed.

Out of 16 events Gray reviewed, police are investigating 12 of them, including as many as six that the prime minister is reported to have attended.

Dave Penman, the general secretary of the Association of First Division Civil Servants (FDA), said the decision to allow the notes to be viewed followed an effort by the union, which represents senior and middle management public servants.

"To be clear, this has been agreed after a request from us, the FDA, their trade union," he tweeted. "They will only be able to see what they said in their own interview, to assist them in completing the questionnaires from the Metropolitan Police, who have raised no objection to this."

It is understood the Met had no objection. Gray said it was not "standard practice in internal investigations such as this" to share notes with interviewees, but said in a letter seen by the Guardian that she had decided "as an exceptional measure" that they would get "limited access".



VICTORIA JONES/PA