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FIRST WAR CRIMES TRIAL FOR RUSSIAN SOLDIER BEGAN

A Ukrainian Court, in Kyiv, began hearings Friday in the case against Sgt. Vadim Shishimarin. He was the first Russian soldier to go on trial for alleged war crimes, in which he was accused of shooting a 62-year-old civilian in the northeastern Ukrainian region in late February. Shishimarin is a member of Russia's 4th Guards Kantemirovskaya tank division, is in Ukrainian custody. He is charged with violating "the laws and customs of war combined with premeditated murder," for which he could face up to 15 years in prison if found guilty, said by Iryna Venediktova, Ukraine's prosecutor general, in a statement on Facebook. Shishimarin is accused of killing an unarmed civilian who was pushing a bicycle on the side of a road in the village of Chupakhivka, firing several rounds from his Kalashnikov rifle on February 28. Iryna Venediktova said on Twitter that after Shishimarin shot an unarmed civilian, along with four other soldiers, they had been trying to flee from the Sumy region in a stolen car.

Read more on:

- [BBC NEWS, "Ukraine begins first war crimes trial of Russian soldier", 14 May 2022.](#)
- [The Washington Post, "Ukraine begins first war crimes trial of Russian soldier", 13 May 2022.](#)

HUGE EXPLOSION AT SARATOGA HOTEL

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A historical five-star hotel in Cuba called Saratoga Hotel had a massive explosion late Friday morning. This hotel is a 19th-century building with 96 rooms and visiting celebrities and stars. However, the hotel had been closed once for refurbishment and reopened again in 2005. Friday, 6th May 2022 is the date as the explosion occurred. Police and fire rescues are combing through rubble for survivors. There are 22 people dead, and 64 others are injured, including 14 minors. According to the data, a child and a pregnant woman were among those dead people. There are also potential survivors trapped in the basement of the destroyed building. Buses and cars around the hotel were completely destroyed. Cuban presidential office said Everything indicates that the explosion was caused by a gas leak is the cause of the explosion. The school located behind the Hotel is unaffected, and the students are all evacuated. The president of Cuba, Miguel Diaz-Canel, visited the site of the explosion and the hospital where the victims were sent to. He said the explosion was not a bomb nor an attack, it was a regrettable accident.

Read more on:

- [BBC NEWS, "Saratoga Hotel: 26 dead after huge explosion in Havana", 7 MAY 2022.](#)



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PUTIN SAYS RUSSIA WILL RESPOND IF NATO BOLSTERS SWEDEN, FINLAND MILITARILY

President Vladimir Putin said on Monday that there was no threat to Russia if Sweden and Finland joined NATO, but cautioned that Moscow would respond if the U.S.-led alliance bolstered military infrastructure in the new Nordic members. Speaking in Moscow at a summit of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, he said Russia must look closely at what he described as the US-led military alliance's plans to increase its global influence. He further said that the enlargement of NATO was being used by the United States in an "aggressive" way to aggravate an already difficult global security situation.

The Russian leader said there was no direct threat from NATO expansion which included those countries, "but the expansion of military infrastructure into this territory would certainly provoke our response". "What that (response) will be - we will see what threats are created for us," said Mr Putin, adding: "Problems are being created for no reason at all. We shall react accordingly."

Read more on:

- [REUTERS, "Putin sees no threat from NATO expansion, warns against military build-up", 17 May 2022.](#)

NORTH KOREA FIRES BALLISTIC MISSILE AMID RISING TENSIONS

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North Korea launched a ballistic missile toward its eastern water, South Korean and Japanese officials said, days after Kim Jong Un vowed to bolster his nuclear arsenal "at the fastest possible pace" and threatened to use it against rivals. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that the missile was fired from the North's capital region and flew to the waters off its eastern coast. It called North Korea's repeated ballistic missile launches "an act of grave threat" to undermine international peace and security and a violation of UNSC resolutions banning any ballistic launch by the North. Japanese Vice Defense Minister Makoto Oniki said the missile was believed to have landed in waters outside the Japanese Exclusive Economic Zone. There has been no report of damage or injury from vessels and aircraft in the area. However, it was not immediately known exactly what kind of missile North Korea launched. An observer said Kim aims to use his expanded arsenal to win international recognition of North Korea as a nuclear state, which he believes would help force the United States to relax international economic sanctions on the North Korea.

Read more on:

- [NBC NEWS](#), "North Korea fires ballistic missile amid rising tensions", 4 MAY 2022.



SRI LANKA LOST AROUND 1 MILLION TAXPAYERS SINCE 2019 TAX CUTS

Sri Lanka lost around 1 million taxpayers in the last two years after the Gotabaya Rajapaksa regime announced sweeping tax cuts in 2019 in its bid to spur growth, Finance Minister Ali Sabry has revealed, as the island nation faced an unprecedented economic crisis. These sweeping tax cuts led to a credit rating downgrade in the following year, prompting Sri Lanka to get alienated in international financial markets. Sri Lanka's foreign reserves dropped sharply from a healthy level of USD 8,864 million in June 2019 to USD 2,361 million in January 2022, according to official estimates. The prolonged and intermittent lockdowns caused by the pandemic prevented the economy from achieving what was originally expected from the tax cuts, Sabry was quoted as saying by the Daily Mirror newspaper. In 2018, Sri Lanka's tourism industry boomed and generated USD 4.4 billion in revenue, and it dropped to USD 200 million in 2021, mainly due to COVID-19, he said. Sabry on Wednesday had called the 2019 tax cuts a "historic mistake."

Read more on:

- [THE ECONOMIC TIMES](#), "Sri Lanka lost around 1 million taxpayers since 2019 tax cuts", 7 May 2022.

JOHN LEE: EX-SECURITY CHIEF SET TO BECOME NEW LEADER OF HONG KONG

Mr Lee replaces outgoing chief executive Carrie Lam. His appointment is being widely seen as a move by the Chinese government to tighten its grip on the city. Hong Kong's leaders are selected by a closed-circle committee of around 1,500 members, who are nearly all pro-Beijing loyalists - although this time there was only one contender for them to elect.

In 2020, he also backed the imposition of a controversial national security law which criminalized most forms of political protest and dissent, and reduced the city's autonomy. He was elevated to the leadership ranks last year, in a sign, analysts said, of Beijing's intention to focus on security in Hong Kong. His role in the implementation of the law led to US sanctions against him and a dozen other officials, and a YouTube block on his 2022 election campaign.

Read more on:

- [BBC NEWS, "Hong Kong's John Lee: Ex-security chief becomes new leader", 8 April 2022,](#)



NORTH KOREAN LEADER SLAMS OFFICIALS IN RESPONSE TO COVID OUTBREAK

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un slammed his country's response to its first confirmed COVID-19 outbreak as immature, accusing government officials of inadequacies and inertia as fever cases swept the country, stated by the media report. North Korea reported 232,880 more people with fever symptoms, and six more deaths after country revealed the COVID outbreak last week. It did not say how many people had tested positive for COVID-19. read more Presiding over a politburo meeting of the ruling Workers' Party on Tuesday, Kim said the "immaturity in the state capacity for coping with the crisis" increased the "complexity and hardships" in fighting the pandemic, according to KCNA. Since its first acknowledgement of the COVID-19 outbreak, the North has reported 1.72 million patients with fever symptoms, including 62 deaths as of Tuesday evening. Yet the North also said the country's virus situation was taking a "favourable turn," adding the party meeting discussed "maintaining the good chance in the overall epidemic prevention front."

Read more on:

- [REUTERS, "North Korean leader Kim slams officials' 'immaturity' in response to COVID outbreak", 18 May 2022,](#)