

# Putin warns new missiles could target 'decision-making centres'

Moscow, Russia

President Vladimir Putin yesterday said Russia would have to deploy missiles targeting "decision-making centres" if Washington sends missiles to Europe.

The announcement comes after the US said it would withdraw from a key Cold War-era arms treaty over what it said were Russian violations, prompting a mirror move from Moscow.

"Russia does not intend to be the first to deploy such missiles in Europe," Putin said during an annual state of the nation address.



Russian President Vladimir Putin delivers his annual state of the nation address in Moscow



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VLADIMIR PUTIN

"If (the US) develops and deploys them in Europe... this will dramatically exacerbate the international security situation, creating serious threats to Russia," he said.

"I'm saying this clearly and openly, Russia will be forced to deploy weapons that can be used... against the decision-making centres that are behind the missiles systems which threaten us."

He earlier accused Washington of using "far-fetched accusations" to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement.

Putin said he understood con-

cerns about the bilateral deal, namely that other countries could continue to develop weapons that are banned for the US and Russia.

"The current state of affairs of course raises questions," he told the audience of lawmakers and celebrities.

"Our American partners should have been honest... and not use far-fetched accusations against Russia to justify their unilateral withdrawal from the treaty," he added.

The United States has repeatedly accused Russia of violating the INF by developing banned weapons and this month Presi-

dent Donald Trump said Washington was starting a process to withdraw from the treaty.

In a tit-for-tat move, Putin said Moscow was also leaving the treaty and beginning work on new types of weapons that would breach the agreement.

Many analysts say abandoning the treaty effectively signalled the start of a new arms race.

The INF deal was signed in 1987 by then US president Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and resolved a crisis over Soviet nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles targeting Western capitals.

## Indian court orders tycoon to pay debt or go to jail

New Delhi, India

India's top court told billionaire tycoon Anil Ambani yesterday he must pay his debts to Sweden's Ericsson or go to jail, the latest twist in a saga that forced his telecom company to file for bankruptcy.

Ambani's debt-laden Reliance Communications is some \$4 billion dollars in debt after a brutal telecom price war that pitched him against his brother Mukesh -- India's richest man -- and gripped the country's business community.

Judges found Anil Ambani, 59, had refused to pay telecom giant Ericsson 5.5 billion rupees (\$77 million) as previously ordered by the Supreme Court.

They ruled the billionaire will be jailed for three months if 4.5 billion rupees are not stumped up within four weeks.

Ambani's firm said it will comply with the ruling and pay the debt. Some 1.0 billion rupees have already been deposited with the court, which



Anil Ambani

said the sum will be handed to Ericsson.

Earlier this year, Reliance Communications said it had decided to start insolvency proceedings after failing to sell assets to pay back lenders.

The dispute started when Ericsson sought to recoup 16 billion rupees from Reliance Communications. They reached a settlement last May, but the Indian company failed to meet the payment deadlines.

## Trump signs 'Space Force' directive

Washington, United States

President Donald Trump signed an order Tuesday outlining his vision for a new "Space Force" that could one day become a separate military branch on an equal footing to the Army and Navy.

Trump wants to create a space force to protect satellites, tackle vulnerabilities in space and assert US dominance in orbit.

"We have to be prepared," Trump told reporters after signing the directive.

"My administration has made the creation of a space force a national security issue."

Space Force would be the sixth branch of the military alongside the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard.

The order calls for Congress to draft legislation that would establish Space Force as a branch that falls under the Air Force, similar to how the Navy oversees the Marine Corps.

Defense Department spokesman Charlie Summers said the



US President Donald Trump shows his signature on the Space Policy Directive-4 (SPD-4) at the White House in Washington, DC.

Pentagon would submit its legislative proposal within the coming weeks.

With the new directive, "Trump is posturing the United States to compete, deter, and win in a complex multi-domain environment characterized by

great power competition," Summers said in a statement.

The Air Force said a space force would work "to ensure unfettered access to, and freedom to operate in space, and to provide vital capabilities to joint and coalition forces."

But the creation of Space Force is by no means a done deal, as it must be vetted and approved by Congress.

Lawmakers and defense officials have reacted with skepticism, wary of the cost and added bureaucracy.

## Nice Carnival



Statues depicting US President Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin as evil clowns parade on the first day of the 135th Nice Carnival which runs until March 2 with the theme "King of Cinema," in Nice, French Riviera. Nice is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Victorine Studios, the Mecca of the film industry on the Côte d'Azur, which since 1919 has welcomed many French and foreign renowned directors. The Nice Carnival is 6 carnival parades, by day or by night, made up of 17 floats and more than 1000 dancers and musicians from all over the world.

## Statue of US sailor kissing nurse vandalized with '#MeToo'

Washington, United State

A statue depicting the famous scene of a sailor kissing a woman in New York's Times Square as people celebrate the end of World War II has been vandalized with red spray paint spelling out #MeToo.

The graffiti covers the ankle-to-knee area of the left leg of the woman being kissed, said police in Sarasota, Florida where the statue is on loan to the city.

The vandalism is believed to have been committed Monday, a day after the death of the sailor in the iconic photo, George Mendonsa, at the age of 95.

In that image, taken by photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt for Life magazine, Mendonsa is seen ecstatically bending over and kissing a woman in a white nurse's uniform.

Eisenstaedt has described watching the sailor running



Picture courtesy of BBC

along the street and grabbing any girl in sight.

The #MeToo arose to defend victims of sexual assault, harassment and abuse.

Sarasota police said there is no surveillance video from the area of the vandalism and or known witnesses. They estimated damage as costing \$1,000 to fix.

## Trump nominates successor to head of Russia probe

Washington, United States

The Trump administration announced Tuesday it was nominating a successor to deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein, a move that confirms the departure of the Justice Department official who until recently oversaw the Russia probe. Rosenstein will be replaced by Jeffrey Rosen, the current deputy secretary of the Department of Transportation, President Donald Trump's spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said. The decision is subject to confirmation in the Senate.

US media had previously reported Rosenstein planned to resign mid-March. His departure was widely expected following the confirmation of new Attorney General Bill Barr last week.