

IRAN'S STRIKE ON US BASES

WORLD REACTIONS

"All is well! Missiles launched from Iran at two military bases located in Iraq. Assessment of casualties & damages taking place now. So far, so good! We have the most powerful and well equipped military anywhere in the world, by far! I will be making a statement tomorrow morning."



Iran supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

"Last night, a slap in the face was delivered. . . . An important incident has happened. The question of revenge [Soleimani's killing] is another issue. Military actions in this form are not sufficient for that issue. What is important is that America's corrupt presence must come to an end in this region."

"Iran took and concluded proportionate measures in self-defence. . . . We do not seek escalation or war, but will defend ourselves against any aggression."

Iran FM Mohammad Javad Zarif



"The latest rocket attacks on air bases in Iraq used by US and coalition forces, among them European forces, are yet another example of escalation and increased confrontation."

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell

"We condemn this attack on Iraqi military bases hosting Coalition – including British – forces. We are concerned by reports of casualties and use of ballistic missiles."

UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab



"The German government strongly condemns this aggression... it is now primarily up to the Iranians to refrain from further escalation."

German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer

"The priority is more than ever for a de-escalation. France remains determined to work to ease tensions and is in contact with all the parties."

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian



"It is not in the interest of any party that the situation in the Middle East worsens further. We call on the parties concerned to exercise restraint."

China foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang

IRAQ WAS INFORMED

"We received an official verbal message from the Islamic Republic of Iran that the Iranian response to the assassination of Qasem Soleimani had begun or would begin shortly, and that the strike would be limited to where the US military was located in Iraq without specifying the locations".

Iraq's prime minister's office

TIME FOR AN IRAQI RESPONSE

"Its time for an Iraqi response. That response will be no less than the size of the Iranian response. That is a promise. . . . The International Resistance Regiments have been formed in order to execute a harsh, deliberate response to the American terrorist forces."

Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary network



US President Donald Trump



Where Iran's strength lies?

Outgunned, Tehran invests in means to indirectly confront superpower enemy

REUTERS, Dubai

Iran's launching of more than a dozen missiles at American-led forces in Iraq on Wednesday came after years of preparing for a confrontation with its superpower foe, whose forces are vastly larger and more advanced.

The Gulf country has more than 500,000 active-duty personnel, including 125,000 members of its elite Revolutionary Guards, according to a report last year by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. But international sanctions and restrictions on arms imports have made it hard for Iran to develop or buy more sophisticated weaponry.

To compensate for the imbalance, Iran has developed "asymmetrical" responses - ballistic missiles, deadly drones and a web of militia allies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, among other things - with the aim of being able to inflict pain while avoiding the traditional battlefield.

"From a conventional military perspective they would get absolutely hammered," said a British former military commander who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the matter. "Their conventional military is very, very sparse and quite old and quite out of date. They've spent all their money on asymmetric attack capabilities. In that regard they're very well prepared."

Until Wednesday, the strategy had deterred a direct conflict with the US as tensions spiked since Washington quit a multi-lateral nuclear deal in 2018 and reimposed sanctions.

Gulf rival Saudi Arabia recently witnessed the



damage that missile and drone assaults can cause, after a strike on its oil facilities last year briefly halved production and knocked out 5% of global crude supply. Riyadh and Washington blamed Iran for the attack, a charge Tehran denied.

Iran has built the largest stockpile of ballistic missiles in the Middle East. Some are based on the older, widely used "Scud" designs, with a range of at least 750km (466 miles). Others, based on the North Korean No Dong, can reach up to 2,000km, within reach of Israel or southeast Europe, according to a US Defense



A woman reacts to the news of a Ukrainian plane crash in Iran at the arrival gate of the Boryspil airport outside Kiev, yesterday. A Ukrainian airliner carrying 176 people from seven countries crashed shortly after takeoff from Tehran yesterday, killing all on board

PHOTO: AFP

2019 second hottest year on record: EU

AFP, Paris

2019 was the second hottest year on record and ended the hottest decade in history, the European Union's climate monitoring service said yesterday.

Data released by the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) showed that worldwide temperatures last year were second only to 2016, in which temperatures were boosted 0.12 degrees Celsius by an exceptionally strong El Nino natural weather event.

The average temperature in 2019 was only a few hundredths of a degree below the 2016 level.

The five last years have been the hottest on record, and the period of 2010-2019 was the hottest decade since records began, C3S said.

Globally temperatures in 2019 were 0.6 Celsius warmer than the 1981-2010 average. Earth's temperature over the last five years was 1.1C-1.2C warmer than pre-industrial times.

Last year was Europe's hottest ever.

2019 was just 0.04C cooler than 2016, which saw temperatures boosted by a once-in-a-century strength El Nino.

C3S also said that atmospheric carbon concentrations continued to rise in 2019, reaching their highest levels on record.

The United Nations said last year that manmade greenhouse gas emissions needed to tumble 7.6 percent each year to 2030 in order to limit temperature rises to 1.5C. Current pledges by countries to cut their emissions put Earth on a path of several degrees warming by the end of the century.

The first week of 2020 has seen climate-related disasters such as the fires ravaging southeastern Australia and flooding kill dozens of people in Indonesia.

No sign of cooler weather or rain

Says Australia's weather agency; bushfires smoke reaches Brazil

AGENCIES

Australia's weather agency yesterday said it saw no sign of cooler weather or significant rainfall in the next few months, an unwelcome forecast for authorities who have warned that only a large downpour will halt bushfires sweeping across the country.

"There is nothing indicating that things will cool down over the next few months," Karl Braganza, Head of Climate Monitoring at the Bureau of Meteorology told reporters in a briefing about the agency's 2019 climate review.

"I'd optimistically say less dry rather than wet," Braganza said. "There is no indication that we will see significantly above average rainfall."

Australia has been battling large bushfires for weeks. A three-year drought that has left the countryside tinder-dry and that experts have linked to climate change has helped

SNIPERS TO CULL UP TO 10,000 CAMELS

Snipers took to helicopters in Australia on Wednesday to begin a mass cull of up to 10,000 camels as drought drives big herds of the feral animals to search for water closer to remote towns, endangering indigenous communities. Local officials in South Australia state said "extremely large" herds have been encroaching on rural communities -- threatening scarce food and drinking water, damaging infrastructure,

and creating a dangerous hazard for drivers. Camels were first introduced to Australia in the 1840s to aid in the exploration of the continent's vast interior, with up to 20,000 imported from India in the six decades that followed. Australia is now thought to have the largest wild camel population in the world, with official estimates suggesting more than one million are roaming the country's inland deserts.

fuel the crisis.

More than 10.3 million hectares (25.5 million acres) of land - an area the size of South Korea - have been razed since September, killing 26 people and killing or injuring an estimated one billion animals, including livestock.

More than 100 fires remain alight and authorities have said the largest

of the blazes will only be doused by significant rainfall.

The bureau's annual report confirmed that 2019 was Australia's hottest, driest year on record.

Meanwhile, smoke from bushfires raging across Australia reached Brazil on Tuesday, an arm of the National Institute for Space Research said on Twitter.

'Millions' strike in protest at Indian govt policies

AFP, New Delhi

Millions went on strike throughout India yesterday, unions said, as workers angry at the government's labour policies brought travel chaos across the country.

The widespread action was in opposition to what unions called the "anti-worker and anti-people policies" of right-wing Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

They highlighted the recent privatisation of public firms and natural resources and demanded a rise in the minimum wage and pensions. Farmers and students joined some of the protests called by 10 trade unions who claim 250 million members between them.

Bus and train services and state-owned banks bore the brunt of the national strike action that was staged in defiance of government warnings of "consequences" for anyone who took part.

Protesters blocked roads and railway tracks, while those at rallies also chanted slogans against the government's new nationality law that opponents say is anti-Muslim and has sparked widespread demonstrations.

In West Bengal state, strikers targeted railways and key highways and burned tyres on a main road in the state capital of Kolkata. Protesters carried red flags at rallies in the city.

The eastern states of Bihar and Odisha, Maharashtra in the west, Haryana in the north and Kerala and Karnataka in the south were also hit by the action.

The government had warned strikers that they would face "consequences" including having wages deducted and other disciplinary action if they joined the protest.

But the strike added to pressure on the Modi government already hit by widespread protests over the nationality law passed on December 11. More than 25 people have been killed in the protests. Growing unrest in universities has added to social tensions.

NEWSIN brief

Philippines to evacuate workers from Iraq

AFP, Manila

The Philippines will dispatch cargo planes and a ship to help evacuate Filipino migrant workers from Iraq after ordering its citizens to leave following an Iranian missile strike targeting US troops, officials said yesterday. Manila issued the mandatory evacuation order for its nationals after the Islamic republic carried out its first act of promised revenge for the US killing last week of a top Iranian general. About 1,600 Filipino workers are in Iraq.

Guaido calls for new Venezuela protests

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela opposition leader Juan Guaido called Tuesday for three days of protests against President Nicolas Maduro, hours after he was sworn in for another term as National Assembly speaker following a standoff with the armed forces. Guaido was barred from entering the assembly by the National Guard for around half an hour in dramatic and chaotic scenes, while a rival claimant to the speaker's post occupied the chair.

35 Turkish soldiers sent to Libya so far

AFP, Ankara

Turkey has deployed 35 military personnel to Libya but they will not take part in any fighting, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, according to local media yesterday. "The soldiers will not fight. Other soldiers who will be deployed later will also not enter any combat," Erdogan told his ruling party, according to the Hurriyet daily. He said the soldiers were carrying out training and coordination tasks for Libya's UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli. Turkey's parliament last week approved a military deployment to support the Tripoli government against an assault by military strongman Khalifa Haftar.



Furore after top Bollywood star attends student demo

One of Bollywood's top stars sparked a social media storm yesterday, attracting admiration and vitriol after showing solidarity with students who were attacked at an Indian university this week. Deepika Padukone, 34, the country's top-earning female celebrity according to Forbes India, broke the mould when she attended a demonstration in New Delhi's prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on Tuesday evening. The protest came two days after masked attackers went on a rampage inside the campus, leaving 34 students and faculty members injured. The violence at JNU is the latest in a series of clashes that have killed at least two dozen people amid protests over a controversial new citizenship law Modi's government passed in December.

4 killed in car bombing near Somalia parliament

At least four people were killed and 10 wounded when a car bomb exploded close to a checkpoint near Somalia's parliament in the capital Mogadishu yesterday, police said. A plume of thick black smoke was seen over the city and witnesses said a number of vehicles were on fire. Islamist group Al-Shabaab claimed the attack, after a spike in activity in recent days by the Al-Qaeda linked group which has seen it inflict mass casualties in Somalia and attack a US military base in Kenya. Mogadishu is regularly hit by attacks by Al-Shabaab, which has fought for more than a decade to topple the Somali government.

Facebook exec says it helped put Trump in White House

A senior Facebook executive on Tuesday said the world's biggest social network unintentionally helped put Donald Trump in the White House but warned against dramatic rule changes. The Trump campaign did effectively use Facebook to rally support for his presidential run, and the social network should be mindful of that without making moves that stifle free political discourse, Andrew Bosworth said in a lengthy post on his personal Facebook page triggered by The New York Times publishing an internal memo he wrote. Bosworth contended Trump was not elected because of Russia or misinformation or Cambridge Analytica, but rather because he ran "the single best digital ad campaign I've ever seen from any advertiser." SOURCE: AFP



Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (R) speak as they attend an inauguration ceremony of a new gas pipeline "TurkStream" in Istanbul, yesterday. After a surprise visit to Syria, Putin went to Istanbul yesterday where he inaugurated the gas pipeline linking Turkey and Russia. The leaders were also expected to discuss regional issues.

PHOTO: AFP