



A person crosses a street during a snowstorm in Washington, DC, US, on Monday. A winter storm hammered the capital and other parts of the mid-Atlantic, with official forecasts of five to 10 inches (12.7 to 25.4 centimeters) of snow in Washington.

PHOTO: AFP

‘No one can win nuke war’

World powers make rare pledge to prevent nuclear weapons spread

AGENCIES

China, Russia, Britain, the United States and France have agreed that a further spread of nuclear arms and a nuclear war should be avoided, according to a joint statement by the five nuclear powers published by the Kremlin on Monday.

It said that the five countries - which are the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council - consider it their primary responsibility to avoid war between the nuclear states and to reduce strategic risks, while aiming to work with all countries to create an atmosphere of security.

“We affirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,” the English-language version of the statement read. “As nuclear use would have far-reaching consequences, we also affirm that nuclear weapons — for as long as they continue to exist — should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression, and prevent war.”

Chinese Vice FM Ma Zhaoxu said the joint statement could help increase mutual trust and “replace competition among major powers with coordination and cooperation,” adding that China has a “no first use” policy on nuclear weapons, state news agency Xinhua reported.

However, China’s foreign ministry yesterday said it would continue to “modernise” its nuclear arsenal and called on the United States and Russia to reduce their own stockpiles.

Beijing says the US and Russia still possess 90 percent of the nuclear warheads on Earth. The United States has said China is expanding its nuclear arsenal with as many as 700 warheads by 2027 and possibly 1,000 by 2030.

Geopolitical tensions between Moscow and Western countries have increased over concerns about Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine. Ties between Beijing and Washington have been strained over a series of issues.

Beijing says the US and Russia still possess 90 percent of the nuclear warheads on Earth, vows to continue to modernise nuclear arsenal.

FIGHTING NEAR YEMEN’S MARIB

Nearly 200 killed

AFP, Dubai

About 200 fighters have been killed in fresh clashes near the strategic Yemeni city of Marib, military and medical sources said yesterday, as the seven-year war witnesses a surge in violence.

More than 125 Huthi rebels were killed in air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition and clashes with pro-government forces in Shabwa and Al-Bayda provinces, bordering Marib, medical sources told AFP.

The pro-government Giants Brigade, backed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, also lost 70 fighters, Yemeni government sources said. The clashes took place over the past 24 hours.

The Saudi-led coalition has been fighting for nearly seven years in support of Yemen’s government against the Huthis, in a conflict that has displaced millions and created the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, according to the United Nations.

As hostilities escalate, the rebels on Monday said they had seized a military ship flying a United Arab Emirates flag. The coalition insisted it was carrying medical supplies.

In September, the rebels intensified their efforts to take Marib, a provincial capital which is the government’s last northern stronghold.

Recent weeks have seen another spike with Saudi air strikes on rebel territory multiplying, while the Huthis have ramped up missile and drone assaults on the kingdom.

Thirty-nine wounded arrived at Shabwa’s Ataq hospital in just one day on Sunday, according to a Medecins Sans Frontieres team that arrived in late December.

Analyst Stephane Lacroix of Paris’s Sciences Po university said the Huthis were in a “relatively strong position, unwilling to negotiate and trying to get the Saudi coalition to basically surrender”.

“The Saudis... have launched a major offensive to put as much pressure as possible on the Huthis to try to force them into a compromise. For the moment, that hasn’t been working,” he told AFP.

IRAN PRESIDENT ON SOLEIMANI KILLING

Try Trump or face revenge



AFP, Tehran

Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi vowed revenge against Donald Trump unless the former US president is tried over the killing of Qassem Soleimani, as Tehran marked two years since the revered commander’s death.

The Islamic republic and its allies across the Middle East held emotional commemorations for General Soleimani and his Iraqi lieutenant who were assassinated in a US drone strike at Baghdad airport on January 3, 2020.

Tehran’s arch enemies were targeted on the day of the anniversary in unclaimed drone and cyber attacks -- with two armed unmanned aerial vehicles intercepted by the US-led coalition in Iraq over Baghdad airport, and hackers attacking Israeli media sites.

Soleimani headed the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, with links to armed groups in Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Syria and Yemen.

Raisi, addressing Tehran’s largest prayer hall, said: “The aggressor and the main assassin, the then president of the United States, must face justice and retribution” alongside former

US secretary of state Mike Pompeo “and other criminals”.

“Otherwise, I will tell all US leaders that without a doubt the hand of revenge will emerge from the sleeve of the Muslim nation.”

Trump -- under whom tensions over Iran’s nuclear programme escalated, leading to a new and painful sanctions regime -- ordered the assassination which brought the enemies to the brink of a direct military confrontation.

Washington said at the time that Soleimani was planning imminent action against US personnel in Iraq.

The night-time strike destroyed a convoy carrying Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy leader of Iraq’s Hashed al-Shaabi coalition of pro-Iranian armed groups, and others.

Iran responded days later by firing missiles at bases hosting US troops in Iraq. No one was killed in the attacks.

Amid the heightened tensions Iran also accidentally downed a Ukrainian passenger jet on January 8, 2020, killing all 176 people aboard.

Commemorations were held this year across Iran as well as at Baghdad airport, in the holy Iraqi Shia city of Najaf, in Gaza City and elsewhere.



SEXUAL ASSAULT LAWSUIT

Prince Andrew to urge judge to dismiss case

AFP, New York

Prince Andrew’s lawyers were scheduled to use a court hearing yesterday to urge a New York judge to throw out a sexual assault lawsuit brought against the British royal in the United States.

His attorneys are expected to argue that a once-confidential settlement between accuser Virginia Giuffre and late disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein unveiled on Monday protects Andrew from litigation.

Giuffre alleges that Epstein lent her out for sex with his wealthy and powerful associates, including Andrew, an allegation the prince has repeatedly and strenuously denied.

A deal made public for the first time Monday by a New York court shows that Giuffre agreed to drop a civil case against Epstein for \$500,000 in Florida in 2009. The settlement contained a provision that purports to protect “other potential defendants” from being sued related to alleged sexual abuse committed by Epstein, who killed himself in jail two and a half years ago.

Giuffre sued the prince for unspecified damages last year, alleging he sexually assaulted her in 2001 when she was 17 and a minor under American law.

S Africa parliament fire contained

AFP, Johannesburg

A fire that devastated South Africa’s parliament was finally contained yesterday after a two-day battle, firefighters said, as a man appeared in court to face charges of starting the blaze.

Flames broke out in the Cape Town complex before dawn on Sunday, spreading to the National Assembly, whose roof collapsed, and threatening national treasures housed in an older section.

The blaze was initially declared under control on Monday but then flared up again, fanned by strong winds.

A 49-year-old man, Zandile Christmas Mafe,

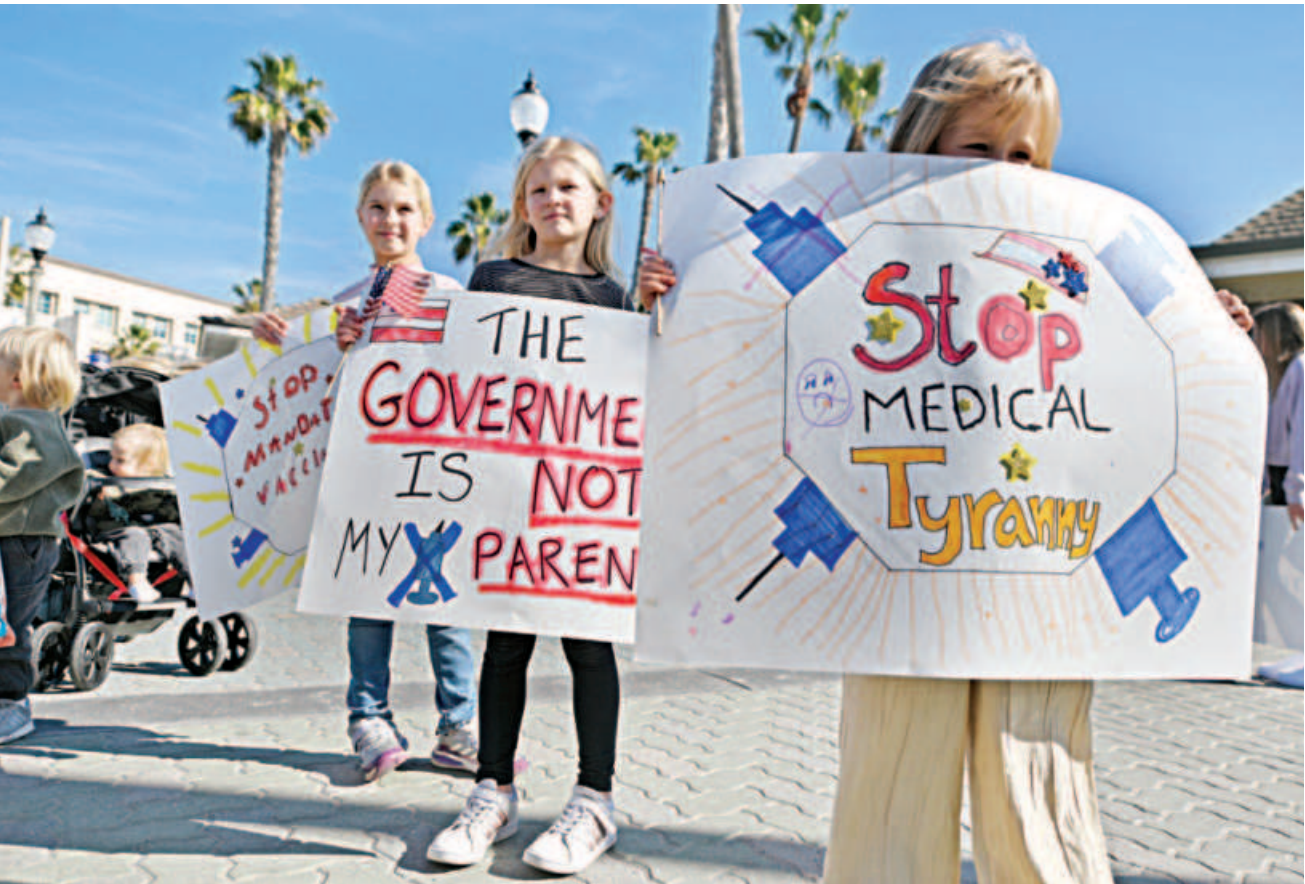


was arrested in the complex on Sunday.

He yesterday appeared briefly in court to answer charges of breaking into and “setting fire to parliamentary buildings” and intention to steal property, including “laptops, crockery and documents”.

Bearded and dressed in a grey shirt with knee-length shorts, he removed his mask on arriving in court and turned to present his face to the TV cameras and press photographers.

He was remanded in custody until January 11 pending further inquiries, which depend on when investigators can gain access to the building.



People demonstrate against Covid-19 vaccine mandates for students in Huntington Beach, California, US, on Monday. The United States recorded more than one million Covid-19 cases on Monday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, as the Omicron variant spread at a blistering pace.

PHOTO: AFP



If Trump and Pompeo are not tried in a fair court for the criminal act of assassinating General Soleimani, Muslims will take our martyr’s revenge. The aggressor, murderer and main culprit - the then president of the United States - must be tried and judged under the (Islamic) law of retribution, and God’s ruling must be carried out against him.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi