



A Palestinian youth hurls rocks from a rooftop toward Israeli security forces during confrontations with them, following a demonstration against the expropriation of land by Israel, in the village of Kfar Qaddum near the Jewish settlement of Kedumim in the occupied West Bank yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

'Technical malfunction' India says it accidentally fires missile into Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

India's military accidentally fired a missile into neighbouring Pakistan, New Delhi's defence ministry said yesterday, calling it "deeply regrettable".

Hindu-majority India and Muslim Pakistan have fought three wars since independence from British colonial rule in 1947, two of them over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

Their shared border has a heavy military presence on both sides, and at times tensions have spiralled to the point of raising fears of an atomic exchange.

"In the course of a routine maintenance, a technical malfunction led to the accidental firing of a missile" on Wednesday, India's defence ministry said.

It did not specify the type of missile, but said it landed "in an area of Pakistan".

The incident was "deeply regrettable", it said, adding that it was "a matter of relief that there has been no loss of life due to the accident".

The statement came hours after Islamabad's foreign ministry condemned what it called an "unprovoked violation of its airspace by an Indian origin 'super-sonic flying object'".

India's charge d'affaires in Islamabad had been summoned to the foreign office for a "strong protest", it added.

North Korea tests new ICBM system

Calls for satellite site 'expansion'; US threatens fresh sanctions on Pyongyang

AFP, Washington

Two recent missile tests conducted by North Korea were of a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) system, marking a "serious escalation" by Pyongyang that will be punished with fresh sanctions, a senior US official said Thursday.

North Korea's Kim Jong Un called for the "expansion" of a key satellite station, state media said yesterday, adding that the February 27 and March 5 tests were focused on developing a reconnaissance satellite.

But the Pentagon said Thursday that rigorous analysis concluded they were of a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) system.

Analysts say that North Korea uses ostensibly peaceful satellite development as a fig leaf for full-range ICBM development as there is significant overlap in technology.

Fuelling speculation of an imminent ICBM test, KCNA reported yesterday that Kim had visited the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground and called for it to be "modernised" and expanded "to enable large carrier rockets to be launched there".

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said the two recent tests "involved a new intercontinental ballistic missile system" that Pyongyang had first showcased at a military parade in October 2020.

Dubbed a "monster missile", the Hwasong-17 is likely designed to carry multiple warheads and has never been

test-fired.

While neither of the two recent launches displayed ICBM range or capability, they were clearly intended "to evaluate this new system before conducting a test at full range in the future, potentially disguised as a space launch", Kirby said.

South Korea and

Japan both confirmed the US assessment.

North Korea will mark the 110th anniversary of the birth of founder Kim Il Sung on April 15, and analysts predict Pyongyang will conduct an ICBM or satellite launch as part of the celebrations.

Any such launch would mark the end of Pyongyang's self-imposed moratorium since 2017 and send military tensions soaring on the Korean peninsula and beyond.

The North has carried out three ICBM tests, the last in November 2017 of a Hwasong-15 -- deemed powerful enough to reach the continental United States.

Before its ICBM tests in 2017, the North had carried out a series of powerful rocket launches that it insisted were part of a civilian space program.

Those launches were made from the Sohae Satellite Launching Station on the northwest coast -- the site of Kim's recent visit.

Both a military reconnaissance satellite and a long-range ICBM that can carry warheads are top of North Korea's laundry list of strategic weapons set out by leader Kim last year.



18m probably died of Covid

AGENCIES

More than 18 million people - three times higher than official records suggest - have probably died because of Covid, say researchers. Their report comes two years to the day from when the World Health Organization first declared the pandemic. The Covid-19 excess mortality team at the US's Washington University studied 191 countries and territories for what they call the true global death figure, reports BBC. Some deaths

were from the virus, while others were linked to infection. Meanwhile, a Chinese city of nine million people was ordered to lock down yesterday, as authorities scramble to halt a fresh Covid-19 outbreak. Changchun, the capital of Jilin province and an important industrial base, has ordered residents to work from home.



Iran nuclear talks paused

AFP, Vienna

The EU said yesterday that the talks it is chairing on the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear accord must be paused, days after fresh demands from Russia complicated negotiations. The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell tweeted that the pause was "due to external factors," despite the fact that "a final text is essentially ready and on the table". The current round of negotiations started in late November between Britain, China, France, Germany, Iran and Russia, with the US taking part indirectly. They had reached most of the way toward their aim -- the revival of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which began unravelling when former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018. However, last week Russia said it was demanding guarantees that the Western sanctions imposed on its economy following its invasion of Ukraine would not affect its trade with Iran. As with the original JCPOA in 2015, Moscow had been expected to play a role in the implementation of any fresh deal, for example by receiving shipments of enriched uranium from Iran.

Leave London residence

UK urges ex-Myanmar
envoy

REUTERS, London

Britain has urged Myanmar's former ambassador to leave the official London residence where he has continued to live since he was ousted for criticising last year's military coup, citing pressure from the junta, according to emails seen by Reuters. Kyaw Zwar Minn was locked out of his embassy last April by his own staff after calling for the release of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, detained alongside most of her government in the February 1 coup. The coup sparked global outrage and sanctions against Myanmar's military. Since his ouster, Minn has stayed at the London residence, a mansion surrounded by wire and CCTV cameras, refusing to hand it back to the embassy which he says is now run by representatives of an illegitimate government.



'Stop daydreaming'

Mamata takes a dig at BJP over state elections euphoria, urges united front ahead of 2024 polls

NDTV ONLINE

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee yesterday rejected Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's suggestion that the BJP's victory in the four states reflects the mood of the nation for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

"The BJP should stop daydreaming," she said.

The Trinamool Congress chief cast a shadow of doubt over the BJP's record win in Uttar Pradesh, along with those in other states, saying it wasn't a popular mandate but a victory with the help of "election machinery and central forces and agencies".

She also said there was no point in counting on the Congress to defeat the BJP in 2024, reviving the pitch for a united coalition of opposition parties a day after state election results gave the ruling party at the centre a massive boost.

"If a DM (Varanasi's Additional District Magistrate) is suspended is for removing an EVM (Electronic Voting Machine), then it is a huge thing, I feel Akhilesh [Yadav]

has been made to lose. There was loot," she said.

"If the BJP has won, it has not won by the popular vote. It's not a popular mandate, it's a machinery mandate," she added.

Talking about the 2024 elections, she said, "I say that all political parties that want to fight BJP must work together. There is no point in depending on the Congress. Congress was earlier capturing the entire country through their organisation, but they are not interested anymore, and they are losing their credibility. There are so many regional political parties. All must be working together and the decision on this can definitely be taken."

Outperforming a 14-per cent vote-share jump by Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party and its allies, the BJP on Thursday scripted a spectacular comeback in Uttar Pradesh - the first double term for a party in 37 years, and also retained Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa, while Arvind Kejriwal's AAP swept Punjab with a three-fourth majority.



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (C) gestures to his supporters during a roadshow in Ahmedabad, India yesterday. Modi's party BJP won India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh with a big majority, according to the count on Thursday of a state assembly vote that could offer clues to the national mood before a 2024 general election. PHOTO: AFP