

Chinese aircraft, ships remain around Taiwan

Says the island’s defence ministry after drills end

REUTERS, Taipei

Chinese warplanes and navy ships were still in the waters around Taiwan, the island’s defence ministry said yesterday after the end of three days of war games, as Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen criticised Beijing for its “irresponsible” behaviour.

China began the exercises on Saturday after Tsai returned to Taipei following a meeting in Los Angeles with US House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

China, which warned the US not to allow Tsai to visit or meet McCarthy, has never renounced the use of force to bring the democratically governed island under Beijing’s control. Taiwan’s government strongly disputes China’s claims.

Although China said on Monday night the drills had



ended, Taiwan’s defence ministry said it had spotted nine Chinese ships and 26 aircraft, including J-16 and Su-30 fighters, carrying out combat readiness patrols around the island yesterday morning.

Taiwan’s air force, navy and shore-based missile crews are closely monitoring and responding, it added. Taiwan’s government has repeatedly denounced the drills, but said it will not escalate or provoke.

Writing on her Facebook page shortly before midnight on Monday, Tsai said that as president, “I represent my country to the world”, and that her visits abroad, including stops in the United States, are not new and what Taiwan’s people expect.

“However, China used this to launch military exercises, causing instability in Taiwan and the region. This is not a responsible attitude for a major country in the region,” she said. China simulated precision attacks and blockades of Taiwan during the drills, sending up dozens of fighter jets and bombers.

Taiwan’s defence ministry said that on Monday, 91 Chinese military aircraft flew in missions around the island.



Filipino activists stage a protest against the annual Philippines-US joint military exercises or Balikatan, outside the Armed Forces of the Philippines headquarters, in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines yesterday. More than 17,000 Philippine and US soldiers began their largest ever joint military drills yesterday, as ties between the long-term allies warm over shared concerns about China’s assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region. PHOTO: REUTERS

Leaked US intel document ‘untrue’

Says South Korea amid spying allegations

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korea said yesterday that information contained in a purportedly leaked US confidential document that appeared to be based on internal discussions among top South Korean security officials was “untrue” and “altered”.

Several documents have been recently posted on social media offering a partial, month-old snapshot of the war in Ukraine, sparking a diplomatic row between the US and some allies.

One of the documents gave details of internal discussions among South Korean officials about US pressure on Seoul to help supply weapons to Ukraine, suggesting the US could have been spying on South Korea, one of its most important allies, and inviting condemnation from the Asian nation’s lawmakers.

The office of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said in a statement that suspicions his office in Seoul was monitored are “utterly false” and that any attempts to shake its alliance with the US is an act “compromising national interest”.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin held phone talks with his South Korean counterpart yesterday during which the two sides agreed that much of the document on South Korea has been fabricated, Yoon’s office said. It did not elaborate on which part of the document was untrue.

South Korea’s defence ministry said that during the phone conversation that took place at the request of Austin, the Pentagon chief explained about recent media reports on the leak and vowed to closely communicate with South Korea on the issue.

The revelation comes just weeks before Yoon is scheduled to meet with US President Joe Biden in Washington, on April 26.

Some lawmakers of South Korea’s main opposition Democratic Party expressed “strong regret” on Monday over the alleged surveillance, calling it a clear violation of national sovereignty and a major security failure of the Yoon administration.

Kim Tae-hyo, South Korea’s Deputy National Security Adviser, said the latest controversy will not have an impact on South Korea’s alliance with the US, as he departed for Washington ahead of Yoon’s visit.

“The US is the country with the world’s best intelligence capabilities and since (Yoon’s) inauguration we have shared intelligence in almost every sector,” Kim told reporters.

‘Irresponsible’

Pakistan condemns India’s decision to hold G20 meetings in J&K

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday condemned India’s decision to hold Group of 20 meetings in the disputed Himalayan territory of Kashmir next month, calling the move “irresponsible”. Kashmir is claimed in full but ruled in part by the two nuclear-armed neighbours who have fought two of their three wars over control of the region. India currently holds the rotating year-long presidency of the G20 and is set to host a leaders’ summit in New Delhi in early September. On Friday, India released a full calendar of events leading up to the summit, which included G20 and Youth 20 meetings in Kashmir’s summer capital of Srinagar and in Leh, in the neighbouring region of Ladakh, in April and May. Pakistan’s foreign ministry issued a statement condemning the choice of venues in disputed territory. “India’s irresponsible move is the latest in a series of self serving measures to perpetuate its illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir,” it said.



OCCUPIED WEST BANK

Israeli soldiers kill two Palestinians

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli soldiers shot dead two Palestinian gunmen who opened fire at a military post near a Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank yesterday, Israel’s Defence Minister said. “Their successful operation prevented an attack against Israeli citizens,” Defence Minister Gallant said in a statement. Earlier, the military had said its forces “neutralised” two gunmen and found rifles and handguns at the scene. There was no immediate comment from Palestinian officials. Israeli-Palestinian violence has surged this year, with frequent military raids amid a spate of Palestinian attacks. More than 90 Palestinians, most of them fighters in militant groups but some of them civilians, have been killed and at least 19 Israelis and foreigners have died since January. Tensions are running especially high as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the Jewish Passover coincide. An Israeli police raid on the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem last week triggered rocket attacks on Israel.



People walk past strewn material from a makeshift camp for migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan African countries after it was dismantled by the police, in front of the UNHCR headquarters in Tunis, Tunisia yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka again delays local polls

Defies top court order

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka again postponed local polls yesterday in defiance of a court order, delaying a de facto referendum on President Ranil Wickremesinghe’s efforts to restore the bankrupt island nation’s finances. The elections were originally slated for last month but Wickremesinghe’s administration refused to finance them, saying the money was needed to pay for salaries and pensions. His government was rebuked by the Supreme Court and ordered to release the funds for a rescheduled vote on April 25, but so far that has not happened. The delayed polls are to pick local councillors but would be the first electoral test for Wickremesinghe since he took office. “A new date will be announced if a firm date is given by the government to release necessary funds or there is another decision of the Supreme Court,” the election commission said in a brief statement.

AI news presenter appears in Kuwait

AFP, Kuwait City

A Kuwaiti media outlet has unveiled a virtual news presenter generated using artificial intelligence, with plans for it to read online bulletins.

“Fedha” appeared on the Twitter account of the Kuwait News website on Saturday as an image of a woman, her light-coloured hair uncovered, wearing a black jacket and white T-shirt.

“I’m Fedha, the first presenter in Kuwait who works with artificial intelligence at Kuwait News. What kind of news do you prefer? Let’s hear your opinions,” she said in classical Arabic.

The site is affiliated with the Kuwait Times, founded in 1961 as the Gulf region’s first English-language daily.

Abdullah Boftein, deputy editor in chief for both outlets, said the move is a test of AI’s potential to offer “new and innovative content”.

In future Fedha could adopt the Kuwaiti accent and present news bulletins on the site’s Twitter account, which has 1.2 million followers, he said. “Fedha is a popular, old Kuwaiti name that refers to silver, the metal. We always imagine robots to be silver and metallic in colour, so we combined the two,” Boftein said.

The presenter’s blonde hair and light-coloured eyes reflect the oil-rich country’s diverse population of Kuwaitis and expatriates, according to Boftein.

“Fedha represents everyone,” he said. Her initial 13-second video generated a flood of reactions on social media, including from journalists.

The rapid rise of AI globally has raised the promise of benefits, such as in health care and the elimination of mundane tasks, but also fears, for example over its potential spread of disinformation.



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