

INTERNATIONAL

LATEST CEASEFIRE BREACH

Sudan's warring parties trade blame

AFP, Khartoum

Sudan's warring sides yesterday accused each other of being behind breaches of the latest ceasefire that was negotiated by the US and Saudi Arabia, now in its third day.

The one-week truce was violated only minutes after it came into effect on Monday night, with residents of the capital Khartoum reporting air strikes and artillery fire shaking the city.

Breaches have since persisted of the ceasefire agreement, which is meant to allow for much-needed humanitarian aid to reach war-ravaged parts of the northeast African country.

It is the latest of a series of truces that have all been systematically violated.

Since April 15, Sudan's capital and other parts of the country have been gripped by brutal urban warfare between the regular army, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

But though the current ceasefire has been violated, it has allowed for a lull in fighting that has seen frightened residents cautiously venture out of their homes, some for the first time in weeks.

Many have gone out for supplies of food and water or to seek much-needed medical attention after nearly six weeks of war that have sharply depleted vital supplies and

pushed the healthcare system to the brink of collapse.

In a statement issued late Wednesday, the RSF, which is led by Mohammed Hamdan Daglo, sought to place the blame for ceasefire breaches on the army led by Sudan's de facto leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

The army "launched a series of unwarranted attacks today", the RSF said, adding that "our forces decisively repelled these assaults".

"Our forces successfully shot down a SAF MiG jet fighter," it said, reiterating however that it remained "committed to the humanitarian truce" and called on the "aggressors to respect the ceasefire".

The army responded yesterday morning, saying it had "countered an attack on armoured vehicles by the militias of the Rapid Support Forces in a clear violation of the truce".

The United States and Saudi Arabia, which brokered the ceasefire, on Wednesday pointed to reports "indicating that both sides violated the agreement" but said "fighting in Khartoum appeared to be less intense".

But desperately needed aid has yet to reach the capital despite the brief lull.

The conflict has so far killed over 1,800 people, according to the latest figures from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.



Evacuees from Zaporizhzhia region walk along a platform after arriving by an evacuation train at the railway station in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv yesterday, amid Russia's military invasion on Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

Net migration to UK hits 'record' 606,000
PM Sunak vows to cut immigration

AFP, London

Net migration in the UK hit a record 606,000 in 2022, official figures showed yesterday, heaping pressure on the government, which has pledged to cut dependency on foreign labour.

Responding to the figures, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak described legal immigration levels as "too high". "It's as simple as that and I want to bring them down," he told ITV in an interview.

Measures announced earlier this week to tighten the number of international students allowed to bring their families with them would have a significant impact, he added.

Immigration has long been a key political issue in the UK and was one of the main battlegrounds of the Brexit referendum in 2016, which saw the country leave the European Union.

In 2021, net migration – the difference between the number of people leaving the UK and those arriving -- was 488,000.

Jay Lindop, director of the centre for international migration at the Office for National Statistics (ONS), said world events such as the end of the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine played a part in the increase.

China's squeeze on civil rights in Hong Kong, which led to the UK relaxing entry rules for holders of British overseas passports, also had an impact.

"A series of unprecedented world events throughout 2022 and the lifting of restrictions following the coronavirus pandemic led to record levels of international immigration to the UK," said Lindop.

REUTERS

A state-sponsored Chinese hacking group has been spying on a wide range of US critical infrastructure organizations, from telecommunications to transportation hubs, Western intelligence agencies and Microsoft MSFT.

It has been targeting the US island territory of Guam, home to strategically important American military bases, Microsoft said in a report, adding that "mitigating this attack could be challenging".

While China and the United States routinely spy on each other, analysts say this is one of the largest known Chinese cyber-espionage campaigns against American critical infrastructure.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said yesterday the hacking allegations were a "collective disinformation campaign" from the Five Eyes countries, a reference to the intelligence sharing grouping of countries made up of the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the UK.

Mao said the campaign was launched by the US for geopolitical reasons and that the report from Microsoft analysts showed that the US government was expanding its channels of disinformation beyond government agencies.

"But no matter what varied methods are used, none of this can change the fact that the United States is the empire of hacking," she told a regular press briefing in Beijing.

It was not immediately clear how many organizations were affected, but the US National Security Agency (NSA) said it was working with partners including Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the UK, as well as the US Federal Bureau of Investigation to identify breaches. Canada, UK, Australia and New Zealand warned they could be targeted by the hackers too.

Microsoft analysts said they had

"moderate confidence" this Chinese group, which it dubbed as 'Volt Typhoon', was developing capabilities that could disrupt critical communications infrastructure between the United States and Asia region during future crises.

"It means they are preparing for that possibility," said John Hultquist, who heads threat analysis at Google's Mandiant Intelligence.

The Chinese activity is unique and worrying also because analysts don't yet have enough visibility on what this group might be capable of, he added.

There is greater interest in this actor because of the geopolitical situation."

As China has stepped up military and diplomatic pressure in its claim to democratically governed Taiwan, US President Joe Biden has said he would be willing to use force to defend Taiwan.

Security analysts expect Chinese hackers could target US military networks and other critical infrastructure if China invades Taiwan.

The NSA and other Western cyber agencies urged companies that operate critical infrastructure to identify malicious activity using the technical guidance they issued.

"It is vital that operators of critical national infrastructure take action to prevent attackers hiding on their systems," Paul Chichester, director at the UK's National Cyber Security Centre said in a joint statement with the NSA.

Microsoft said the Chinese hacking group has been active since at least 2021 and targeted several industries including

communications, manufacturing, utility, transportation, construction, maritime, government, information technology, and education.

NSA cybersecurity director Rob Joyce said the Chinese campaign was using "built-in network tools to evade our defenses and leaving no trace behind." Such techniques are harder to detect as they use "capabilities already built into critical infrastructure environments," he added.

As opposed to using traditional hacking techniques, which often involve tricking a victim into downloading malicious files, Microsoft said this group infects a victim's existing systems to find information and extract data.

Guam is home to US military facilities that would be key to responding to any conflict in the Asia-Pacific region. It is also a major communications hub connecting Asia and Australia to the United States by multiple submarine cables.

Bart Hoggeveen, a senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute who specializes in state-sponsored cyber attacks in the region, said the submarine cables made Guam "a logical target for the Chinese government" to seek intelligence.

"There is high vulnerability when cables land on shore," he said. New Zealand said it would work towards identifying any such malicious cyber activity in its country.

"It's important for the national security of our country that we're transparent and upfront with Australians about the threats that we face," Australia's Minister for Home Affairs and Cyber Security Clare O'Neil said.



South Korea's K-2 tanks fire as an AH-64 Apache helicopter flies during a South Korea-US joint military drill at Seungjin Fire Training Field in Pocheon, South Korea yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

CAMBODIA ELECTION

Opposition party loses bid to overturn ban

AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodia's main opposition party yesterday lost a bid to overturn its ban from the upcoming elections, paving the way for long-serving leader Hun Sen to run a one-horse race. Last week, the National Election Committee (NEC) refused to register the Candlelight Party -- the chief challenger to Hun Sen -- for the July polls after it failed to submit certain documents. The Constitutional Council said in a statement it had rejected the appeal against NEC's ruling. "We are so regretful... Our party was rejected (from the polls), we are so disappointed," Candlelight Party (CP) spokesman Kimsour Phirith told AFP. He said CP had hoped to take part in the elections "to restore the base of democracy in our country".

3 killed in Japan gun, knife attack

AFP, Tokyo

A woman and two male police officers were killed in a shooting and stabbing attack at a farm in central Japan yesterday, media reported. A suspect, believed to be a farmer in his 30s, was holed up inside a building after the incident, which also left a fourth person injured, the reports said. Residents were urged by authorities to stay indoors in the semi-rural area around the city of Nakano in Nagano region, where the attack took place. NHK and other major outlets said the woman was stabbed and the two police officers were shot in the attack. Police did not immediately confirm details when contacted by AFP. A witness told NHK he had been working at a farm nearby when "a woman came running from the road saying 'help me', and she fell down". "Behind her came a man wearing camouflage and carrying a large knife, who stabbed her in the back," the 72-year-old witness said.

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