

US destroyer downs 14 drones in the Red Sea

**CENTCOM blames
Yemen's rebels**

AFP, Washington

An American destroyer on Saturday shot down more than a dozen drones in the Red Sea launched from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, the US military said, as the impact of the Israel-Hamas conflict spreads to global shipping lanes.

"The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS CARNEY... operating in the Red Sea, successfully engaged 14 unmanned aerial systems launched as a drone wave from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen," US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

The aerial vehicles were "assessed to be one-way attack drones and were shot down with no damage to ships in the area or reported injuries," according to the statement.

CHURCH IN GAZA

Mother, daughter killed by Israeli soldier

AFP, Jerusalem

A Christian mother and daughter were shot dead by an Israeli soldier on grounds of a Catholic church in Gaza City on Saturday, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem said.

"Around noon (1000 GMT) today... a sniper of the IDF (Israeli army) murdered two Christian women inside the Holy Family Parish in Gaza," where Christian families have been sheltering since the Israel-Hamas war broke out, the patriarchate said in a statement.

"Nahida and her daughter Samar were shot and killed as they walked to Sister's Convent. One was killed as she tried to carry the other to safety," it added. Seven more people were wounded by gunfire as they tried to protect others, the statement said.

According to the Vatican press agency, citing Pierbatista Pizzaballa, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, the victims were an elderly woman and her daughter.

Approached for comment, the Israeli army said it was looking into the incident, which took place on the grounds of the Gaza Strip's only Catholic church.



A woman laments as medics transport a Palestinian man injured in Israeli bombardment, at Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, amid ongoing battles between Israel and Hamas.

PHOTO: AFP

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR IN GAZA

Hamas turns streets into deadly maze

Vast tunnel network remains a major challenge for Israeli troops, say experts

REUTERS, Jerusalem

The Israeli army's death toll in Gaza is already almost twice as high as during a ground offensive in 2014, a reflection of how far it has pushed into the enclave and of Hamas' effective use of guerrilla tactics and an expanded arsenal.

Israeli military experts, an Israeli commander and a Hamas source described how the Palestinian group has used a big weapons stockpile, its knowledge of terrain and a vast tunnel network to turn Gaza's streets into a deadly maze.

At their disposal they have arms ranging from drones rigged with grenades to anti-tank weapons with powerful twin charges.

Israel's military said yesterday that 121 soldiers had been killed since the ground campaign began on October 27, when tanks and infantry began to push into Gaza's cities and refugee camps.

That compares with 66 in the 2014 conflict, when Israel launched a more limited three-week ground incursion but the goal then was not to eliminate Hamas.

"There is no comparing the scope of this war to 2014, when our forces mostly operated no deeper than a kilometre inside Gaza," said Yaacov Amidror, a retired Israeli major-general and former national security adviser who is now at the Jewish Institute for National



Security of America (JINSA).

He said the army "has yet to find a good solution for the tunnels," a network hugely expanded in the past decade.

Since the war began on October 7, close to 19,000 people have been killed in Gaza, sparking international demands for a ceasefire and even calls from Israel's staunch ally the United States for a shift in strategy and more precise strikes.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday Israel would wage war "until absolute victory". Israeli officials have said it could take months before being complete.

"It has been a challenge from day one," Ophir Falk, foreign policy adviser to Netanyahu, told Reuters,

saying the offensive had come with a "huge price" in Israeli soldiers.

"We know that we're going to probably have to pay an additional price to complete the mission."

Hamas has posted videos on its Telegram channel this month showing fighters with bodycams weaving through buildings to launch shoulder-held rockets at armoured vehicles. One of them, posted on December 7, was from Shejaiya, east of Gaza City, an area where both sides reported heavy fighting.

In another post on December 5, a camera emerges from a tunnel, like a periscope, to scan an Israeli camp where soldiers rested. The post said it was later hit by an underground blast. Reuters could not verify the videos.

HOUSE BREACH

India's PM Modi calls for probe, not debate

REUTERS, Mumbai

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for a detailed investigation into last week's major security breach of parliament, countering demands from opposition parties for a debate in the chamber on the incident.

"What happened is very serious," Modi told the Dainik Jagran newspaper in an interview published yesterday, his first comments on Wednesday's breach. "There is no need to debate this, there should be a detailed investigation into this."

Police arrested six people, filing terrorism charges against four, after a man jumped into the lower house chamber while members were in session, shouted slogans and set off a smoke canister. A second man tried to follow him. Both were caught by lawmakers and security personnel, and taken away.

The incident occurred on the 22nd anniversary of an attack on parliament complex in which more than a dozen people were killed, including five gunmen.

Members of parliament told local media the two men had chanted slogans, including "dictatorship won't be accepted".

MIGRANT CRISIS

Over 60 drown in shipwreck off Libya: IOM

REUTERS, Cairo

Sixty-one migrants, including women and children, drowned following a shipwreck off Libya, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Libya said.

IOM, in a post on social media platform X, quoted survivors as saying the boat, carrying around 86 people, departed the Libyan city of Zwara, about 110 km (68 miles) from the capital, Tripoli.

"The central Mediterranean continues to be one of the world's most dangerous migration routes," IOM said on Saturday.

Deadly incidents this year included one in June, when a fishing boat packed with hundreds of migrants sank off Greece after departing from Tobruk, Libya. The voyage, which was supposed to end in Italy, resulted in 78 recorded deaths with the fate of 518 others unknown, according to an IOM report.

Drowning was the main cause of death on migration routes globally in the first half of 2023, with 2,200 recorded fatalities in the period, according to the IOM report.

The central Mediterranean route was the deadliest, accounting for a total of 1,727 deaths and disappearances along its shores in the period, the IOM report said. The majority of the deaths were recorded in Tunisia, followed by Libya, it said.

Ukraine shoots down 2 missiles, 20 drones

Russia foils 33 drone attacks in three border regions with Ukraine

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine said yesterday that it had repelled two Russian missile and 20 drone attacks overnight, as Moscow reported downing 33 drones fired from Ukraine. "The Russian occupying forces attacked with the Iskander-K cruise missile, the Kh-59 guided air missile... as well as 20 Shahed-type strike drones," the Ukrainian air force said in a statement. Ukraine



forces shot down the drones and the Kh-59 missile, while the "Iskander-K cruise missile did not reach its goal," the air force said. It said the missiles were launched from Crimea and the occupied Kherson region, without saying if there were any victims or damage. Russia in

turn said that it had foiled 33 drone attacks in three border regions with Ukraine. The Russian defence ministry said in a statement its air defence systems "destroyed and intercepted 33 Ukrainian unmanned aerial vehicles over the territories of the Lipetsk, Rostov and Volgograd regions". Drone attacks have been almost daily occurrences in Russia's border regions, though mass attacks are less common. The capital Moscow and its outskirts have also been targets of Ukrainian drone attacks.

Russia, meanwhile, bombards Ukrainian towns almost daily. Last week, it launched a massive drone attack on Kyiv, where about 50 people were wounded by debris.

1,896 candidates

FROM PAGE 1

Ahead of the 2018 general election, the number of valid candidates stood at 1,841 after some 670 candidates pulled out. A total of 39 political parties, including the AL and the BNP, took part in that election.

In 2014, around 335 candidates withdrew their candidature and the number of valid candidates was 390 in 147 seats. Only 12 political parties contested that parliamentary polls amid boycott by the BNP and several other opposition parties. The election saw 153 MPs getting elected unopposed.

WITHDRAWAL ENDS

A total of 125 aspirants will run in 15 constituencies of the Dhaka metropolitan area this year, said Sabirul Islam, returning officer of Dhaka metropolitan area.

Twenty-seven candidates in these constituencies have withdrawn their nomination papers. Among them are 13 nominees from Zaker Party, seven from the JP, and one each from the AL, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal

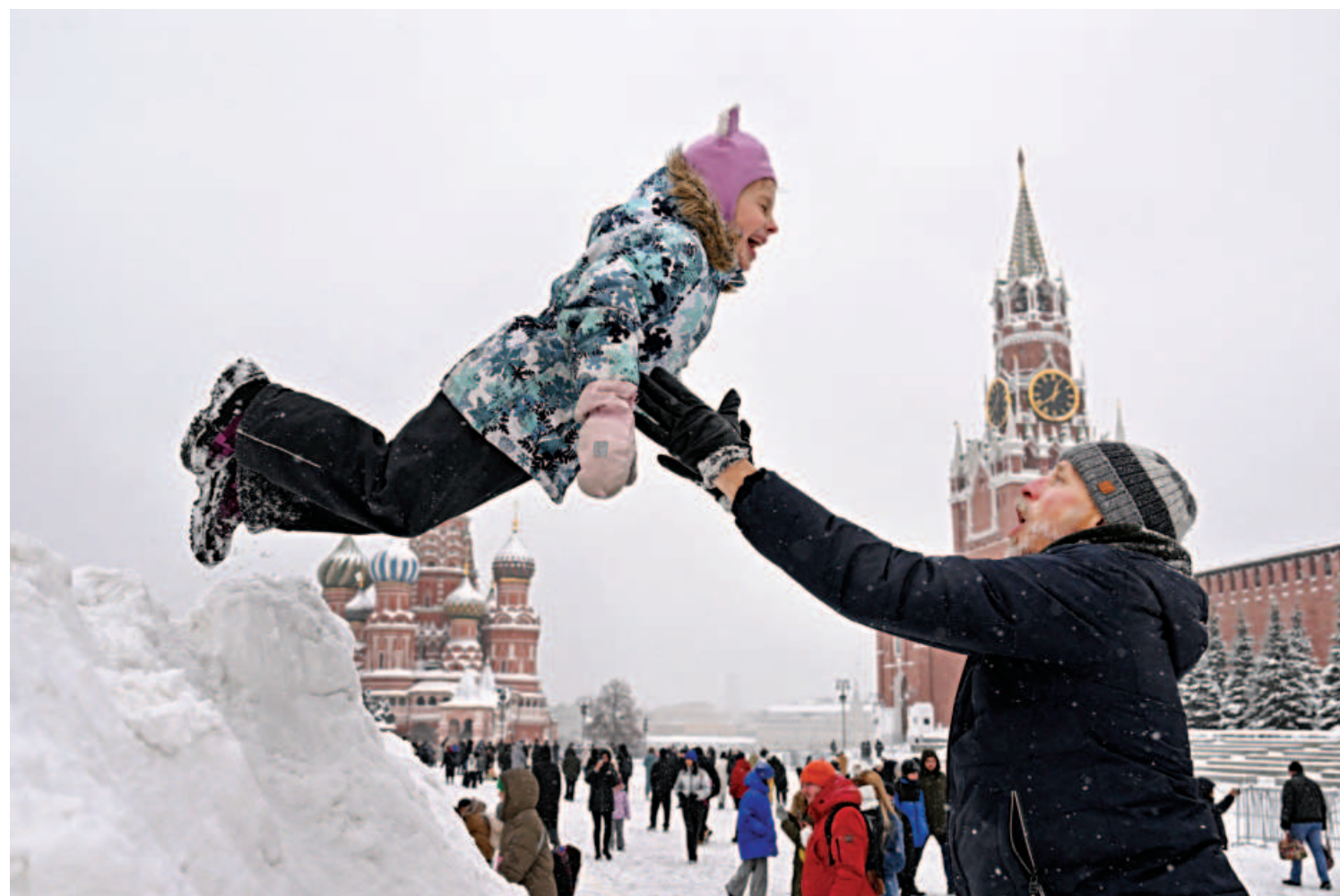
(JSD), Jatiya Party (Manju), Bangladesh Sangskritik Muktijote and Islami Oikya Jote.

Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader (Dhaka-17) and its leaders Kazi Firoze Rashid (Dhaka-6) and Salma Islam (Dhaka-17), and AL's Habib Hasan (Dhaka-18) have withdrawn their candidature.

Five candidates in 16 seats of Chattogram have withdrawn their candidature. Among them are Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua, and Bangladesh Kallyan Party Chairman Syed Muhammad Ibrahim.

A total of 54 nominees of Zaker Party have withdrawn their nomination papers in 82 constituencies of 15 districts, report our district correspondents.

JP Joint Secretary General Salauddin Khoka has withdrawn his candidature from Narayanganj-4. Another JP contender pulled out from a seat in Chandpur and one from another constituency in Rangamati.



A child jumps from a pile of snow on Moscow's snow-covered Red Square yesterday. The height of snowdrifts in Moscow, Russia reached 38 centimetres yesterday, breaking an 82-year-old record in the entire history of meteorological observations.

PHOTO: AFP

9 dead, several hurt in India factory blast

REUTERS, Mumbai

At least nine workers were killed and several injured in a blast at an explosives factory in Nagpur, a central district in Maharashtra state yesterday morning, a local police officer told Reuters over the phone.

The blast occurred around 8:30 am (0300 GMT) at a factory run by Solar Industries India SLINNS, the police officer surnamed Salve said. The factory manufactures industrial and military explosives, as well as propellants and warheads for India's defence sector, according to Solar Industries' website.

The injured were shifted to nearby hospitals, Salve said. Salve was part of the team that went to the site of the explosion yesterday morning.

The police are still investigating the cause of the blast, which occurred in the factory's packing area.