

US warship downs missile fired from Yemen

AFP, Washington

A US Navy warship shot down a missile yesterday that was fired at it by Yemen's

Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who have carried out two months of attacks on international shipping, the military said.

US and British forces carried out two rounds of joint strikes aimed at reducing the Houthis' ability to target vessels transiting a key maritime traderoad and Washington has also launched a series of unilateral air raids, but the Houthis have vowed to continue their attacks.

"Iranian-backed Houthi militants fired one anti-ship ballistic missile from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen toward Arleigh-Burke class destroyer USS Carney (DDG 64) in the Gulf of Aden," the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement on social media.



Palestinians carry some belongings as they flee Khan Younis to safer areas further south in the southern Gaza Strip through the city's western exit on the outskirts of its refugee camp yesterday, amid Israeli ground offensive in the Palestinian enclave.

PHOTO: AFP

Won't negotiate with Hungary

Says Swedish PM on Nato bid

AFP, Stockholm

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said yesterday he would "not negotiate" with Hungary over Sweden's Nato bid despite Budapest now the sole holdout after Turkey's ratification.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban this week invited Kristersson to Budapest to discuss the issue "at your earliest convenience", an invitation Kristersson on Thursday accepted.

"I'm happy to go to Budapest ... We have a lot to talk about ... but we're not negotiating the Nato membership, there are no negotiations on this," Kristersson told Swedish television TV4. "But we could talk about how we will best cooperate in Nato," he said.

Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom on Tuesday said there was "no reason to negotiate" with Hungary.

Kristersson said yesterday that while he was willing to travel to Budapest, a meeting with Orban at the European Union Council in Brussels on February 1 was more practical. "We'll see each other on Thursday next week at the European Council and we can begin discussing things then," he said.

For a visit to Budapest, "we'd have to find a date for this, things like this aren't usually done in haste. I suspect that his calendar, like mine, is quite full."

Orban's invitation came just days after Hungary criticised Sweden for not taking steps to strengthen bilateral relations.

Budapest has often denounced what it called Sweden's "openly hostile attitude", accusing Swedish representatives of being "repeatedly keen to bash Hungary" on rule-of-law issues.

Taiwan detects 23 Chinese warplanes around island

REUTERS, Taipei

Taiwan's defence ministry said it detected 23 Chinese air force planes operating around Taiwan and carrying out "joint combat readiness patrols" with Chinese warships yesterday, ahead of high-level China-US talks in Thailand.

China, which views Taiwan as its own territory, has over the past four years regularly sent warplanes and warships into the skies and waters around the island as it seeks to assert sovereignty claims that the Taipei government rejects.

Taiwan's defence ministry said that starting around 4:00 pm yesterday it had detected 23 Chinese aircraft including Su-30 fighters and drones operating off northern and central Taiwan and to the island's southwest.

Gaza starves as Israel's offensive expands

WHO chief breaks down describing 'hellish' conditions in enclave

REUTERS, Gaza

In battered, hard-to-reach north Gaza, rare aid deliveries get mobbed by desperate, hungry Palestinians and aid workers report seeing people thin and visibly starving with sunken eyes.

Hunger stalks the entire Gaza Strip, the tiny enclave where 2.3 million people have been living under Israel's bombardment since October 7. The United Nations warned this week that pockets of the territory face famine.

While areas near the Egyptian border get limited supplies of imported food, people in the north and centre of the strip, where fighting has been fiercest, face catastrophic aid workers say.

The head of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called for a ceasefire and a "true solution" to the Israel-Palestinian conflict in an emotional plea to the global health body's governing body on Thursday where he described conditions in Gaza as "hellish".

"I'm a true believer because of my own experience that war doesn't bring solution,

except more war, more hatred, more agony, more destruction. So let's choose peace and resolve this issue politically," Tedros told the WHO Executive Board in Geneva during a discussion about the Gaza health emergency.

"The food situation in the north is absolutely horrific. There's almost no food available and everybody we talk to begs for food," said Sean Casey, a World Health Organization (WHO) coordinator in Gaza.

No comprehensive data on hunger is available for Gaza, with aid agencies struggling to move and communicate amid the fighting. They plan to assess malnutrition by measuring around children's arms for signs of wasting flesh.

A UN-backed report in December said the whole population of Gaza faced crisis levels of hunger and a growing risk of famine.

Medics in Gaza hospitals describe babies born sick to malnourished mothers, infants losing weight, mothers unable to produce breast milk and injured patients too weak from hunger to fight off infection.

In a Rafah hospital ward, paediatric doctor Jabr al-Shaer pointed to a baby whose weight

had plummeted to 5.5 kg (12 pounds) from 7.5 kg a month and a half ago.

"This is bad. It impacts his immunity. He constantly has inflammation in the chest and gastroenteritis," he said. His mother, Shorouq Shaaban, who is breastfeeding her baby, has little to eat herself. Like most other people in southern Gaza she now lives on a little bread and canned food.

The UN children's agency Unicef projects that over the coming weeks more than 10,000 children in Gaza risk wasting, one of the most serious results of malnutrition, which can stunt physical growth and brain development.

"We saw a lot of very thin people just sitting around and staring into space looking wasted," said Nick Maynard, a British surgeon who worked in central Gaza in December and early January with the charity Medical Aid for Palestinians. "There was very clear evidence of people who were now malnourished," he said.

Ayadil Saparbekov, a WHO doctor in northern Gaza, said he had particularly seen children showing signs of wasting, and described people coming to beg for food, raising hands to mouths to mime eating.

US halts new natural gas export facilities Cites climate crisis

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden's administration announced yesterday it was pausing new liquefied natural gas (LNG) export facilities, citing the urgent need to tackle the climate crisis by accelerating the transition from fossil fuels. It comes as the president looks to shore up his liberal base in a tough election rematch later this year against likely Republican candidate Donald Trump, who has falsely called human-caused global warming a "hoax" and vowed to torpedo his Democratic opponent's climate agenda. "This pause on new LNG approvals sees the climate crisis for what it is: the existential threat of our time," said Biden in a statement. "While MAGA Republicans willfully deny the urgency of the climate crisis, condemning the American people to a dangerous future, my Administration will not be complacent." The US is the world's leading LNG exporter, averaging 11.6 billion cubic feet (328 million cubic metres) per day according to the tracker CEDIGAZ, with seven terminals currently in operation. Under the plan, new export applications would be subjected to an indefinite review considering climate and wider environmental and economic impacts.

Hubble finds water

FROM PAGE 12

"The planet GJ 9827d could be half water, half rock," said Bjorn Benneke of the Universite de Montreal, who co-led the research. "And there would be a lot of water vapour on top of some smaller rocky body."

"Until now, we had not been able to directly detect the atmosphere of such a small planet. And we're slowly getting in this regime now," he added. Over a period of three years, Hubble observed the planet during 11 transients, or events in which it crossed in front of its star.

During transients, starlight is filtered through the planet's atmosphere, allowing astronomers to

use Hubble's instruments to analyse the patterns of colours (wavelengths), which revealed the telltale signature of water molecules.

Even if GJ 9827d has a water-rich atmosphere, its hot, Venus-like temperature of 800 degrees Fahrenheit (425 Celsius) would make it an uninhabitable steamy world.

Nevertheless, the Hubble discovery paves the way to future study of GJ 9827d and similar planets, especially by the James Webb Space Telescope, which can use its high resolution infrared images to look for more atmospheric molecules including carbon dioxide, and methane.

Aliss leaves Sylhet baffled

FROM PAGE 12

Unlike Sylhet, who used four seam-bowling options and just one spinner in Samit, Comilla used four spinners in the match, who collectively took eight to bowl out Sylhet for just 78 in 16.2 overs, the lowest team total so far in this year's BPL - resulting in a 52-run victory.

Aliss claimed four for 17 while Zakir Hassan scored 41 off 34 balls, an effort that saved the hosts from further ignominy.

With the win, Comilla, the defending champions, have jumped to the second spot in the points table with two wins and one loss. Sylhet are languishing at the bottom with no points after three games.

Meanwhile Khulna Tigers, the surprise package of this year's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) so far, registered their third consecutive victory, defeating Ranpur Riders by 28 runs in the first match of the Sylhet phase earlier in the day.

Prior to the start of the tournament, Khulna were not considered among the favourites on paper. But Anamul Haque Bijoy's side have punched above their weight so far and are currently leading the points-table.

The local players put their hands up in their earlier two victories, with spinner Nahidul Islam and captain Anamul coming up with player of the match performances.

Yesterday, however, it was Khulna's Sri Lankan recruit Dasun Shanaka's all-round showing that made all the difference.

Shanaka first scored a crucial 40 off 33 balls alongside Mohammad Nawaz's 55 off 34 balls to help Khulna post 160-6.

He then bagged 4 for 13 from his three overs to help bundle out Rangpur for 132 in 18.4 overs as Mohammad Nabi's 30-ball 50 went in vain.

With their win over Rangpur, Khulna also broke the 'bat second and win the match' trend in this year's BPL as in all eight matches of the first Dhaka phase, the chasing teams had ended up victorious.

Rangpur now are at a spot of bother in the table, having suffered two defeats in three games.

Shakib Al Hasan, who recently rejoined the Rangpur team after an eye checkup in Singapore, was in action but couldn't make a mark, going wicketless in his four overs and scoring just two with the bat.



PHOTO: BANGLADESH EMBASSY IN THE NETHERLANDS

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators in front of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague, the Netherlands, as judges rule on emergency measures against Israel following accusations by South Africa that the Israeli military operation in Gaza is a state-led genocide. The photo was taken yesterday.

Biting cold piles misery on poor

FROM PAGE 1

Spraying pesticides has become difficult due to the foggy weather, he said.

Labourer Paku Barman, 54, of Dakkhin Bathina village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila said they struggle to work in the field due to the cold wind. As it is peak time for preparing land for Rabi crops, he has to work on the field, he said.

The number of patients, especially children and elderly people, receiving treatment at hospitals and clinics in Thakurgaon for cold-related diseases is on the rise.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Rakibul Alam, resident medical officer at Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital, said some 130 child patients,

mostly suffering from cold-related diseases, were taking treatment at the child ward.

Besides, many elderly people have been hospitalised with cold-related diseases, he added.

Aloka Rani, 40, of Jhargaoon village in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, said she admitted her seven-month-old daughter on Thursday night, who was suffering from pneumonia.

Sajjat Shahin, senior child consultant at the hospital, said children get diarrhoea and their respiratory tracts are easily infected in the cold weather.

In many cases, guardians hospitalise their children late, he said. Mahbubur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Thakurgaon, said

about 35,000 blankets have already been distributed, but the number is inadequate against the demand.

[Our correspondents in Thakurgaon and Dinajpur contributed to this report.]

24 univs

FROM PAGE 12

"technical issues" and feedback from vice-chancellors of all GST cluster universities at a meeting on Wednesday, the committee decided to delay the application process to ensure smooth holding of tests.

Currently, there are three cluster admission tests - GST, agriculture, and another one with Ruet, Cuet and Kuet. Under this system, universities are grouped together to admit students based on their choices and merit.

Police probe finds addl SP, OC guilty

FROM PAGE 12

Chowdkar, Anowar Chowdkar, and Saidul Shaikh, were arrested on May 30 last year on charges of robbing two men.

Officers Rasel and Mostafizur face charges under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act in a case recorded by the court on June 7. The court accepted the statements of the four men and directed the Shariatpur SP to probe the matter and take action if the officers are found guilty.

Asked why the court has not acknowledged the probe report, Public Prosecutor Mirza Hazrat Ali said he would not make comments on the "sensational" case.

Of the victims, only Bakul could be contacted by these correspondents. He said he would not comment on the matter.

His father Rashid Chowdkar said, "Some influential people of Shariatpur are pressuring us to enter a negotiation. But we have not settled it with anyone yet."

He added that his son was tortured in custody because he failed to meet the cops' demand for a large sum of money.

Three of the victims are involved in farming while Anwar is a migrant worker in Malaysia.

Accused officers Rasel is now attached to the range Deputy Inspector General Office in Chattogram and Mostafizur to the range DIG office in Barishal. They will face departmental actions, police sources said.

Neither of the two could be reached for comment.

[Our Shariatpur correspondent contributed to this report.]