

RED SEA CRISIS US military strikes more missiles in Yemen

AFP, Washington

The US military said yesterday it had struck more devices and missiles in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen that were prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea.

The strikes occurred on Saturday between 4:00-5:00 pm (1300-1400 GMT) north of the city of Hodeida, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on social media.

American "forces successfully conducted self-defense strikes against two unmanned surface vessels (USV) and three mobile anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM)... that were prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea," the statement said.

The Houthi-run Al-Masirah television on Saturday night reported three strikes on the Salif port area.



Displaced members of Palestinian Abu Mustafa family, who fled their house due to Israeli strikes, prepare food as they shelter at the border with Egypt, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. The photo was taken on Saturday and released yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russian strikes hit Kyiv, southern Ukraine

Gas pipeline, residential buildings damaged; Kyiv destroys 40 out of 45 Shahed attack drones

REUTERS

Russia launched drone attacks overnight on Kyiv and southern Ukraine, injuring at least one civilian and damaging a gas pipeline and residential buildings in the river and sea port of Mykolaiv, Ukraine's military said yesterday.

Ukraine's Air Force said on the Telegram messaging app that its air defence systems destroyed 40 out of 45 Russia-launched Shahed attack drones overnight.

"The air alert in the capital lasted almost two hours," Serhiy Popko, the head of Kyiv's military administration, said on Telegram.

He added that over Kyiv all the drones were downed on their approach. According to preliminary information, there were no casualties nor destruction in or near the capital. Skies over Kyiv were declared clear soon before 4:00 am (0200 GMT).

Ukraine's southern military command said on Telegram its air defence systems were engaged for more than five hours and destroyed 26 Russia-launched Shahed drones over several southern regions, chiefly over the Mykolaiv region near the Black Sea.

At least one civilian was injured in the southern Ukraine attack, the military said.

"The priority for the enemy was again the coastal strip of infrastructure and agro-industrial facilities," the military said.

Falling debris from a downed drone and the blast wave damaged residential buildings and a gas pipeline in Mykolaiv, the military command said.

Four drones downed over the Black Sea port of Odesa, the military said.

Both Russia and Ukraine have increased their air attacks away from the frontline in recent months, targeting each other's critical energy, military and transport infrastructure.

LYON MUSEUM Activists throw soup at Monet painting

AFP, Dijon

Climate activists hurled soup at a Monet painting on Saturday in a museum in southeast France, the latest action by a campaign group that pulled a similar stunt on Mona Lisa last month.

The Musee des Beaux-Arts in France's third largest city said in a communique that the attack on Claude Monet's "Le Printemps" (Spring) took place at 3:30 pm local time Saturday.

The 1872 painting was protected by glass, but will still undergo a close inspection and restoration, the museum said. The museum said it would file a complaint, adding that two activists were arrested.

Riposte Alimentaire ("Food counterattack") claimed the attack in a posting on X, with a woman identifying herself 20-year-old Ilona saying "we have to act now before it is too late."

'Death to Israel'

Iran anniversary marchers chant amid regional tensions over Gaza

REUTERS, Dubai

Hundreds of thousands of people chanted "Death to Israel" in rallies across Iran to mark the Islamic Revolution's 45th anniversary yesterday, with some burning US and Israeli flags amid the ongoing Israeli offensive in Gaza.

President Ebrahim Raisi, in a televised speech, accused Tehran's arch-foe the United States and some Western countries of backing "the Zionist regime's (Israel) crimes against humanity in Gaza".

State TV said millions had turned out at rallies and it showed large crowds chanting "Death to Israel, Death to America!", a common practice during state-organised rallies on the anniversary of the 1979 revolution that toppled the US-backed monarch.

State media published a picture of some marchers hanging an effigy of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by a noose.

Israel's four-month-old offensive on Palestinian group Hamas in Gaza has rippled across the Middle East, with groups backed by Iran mounting attacks on Israeli and US targets.

Earlier this month, US forces carried out strikes against Iran-aligned groups in Iraq, Syria and Yemen in retaliation for a deadly attack on US troops at a remote outpost in Jordan.

Backing the Palestinian cause has been a pillar of the Islamic Republic since the revolution that overthrew the US-backed Shah, and a way for the Shia-dominated country to fashion itself as a leader of the Muslim world.

Hamas is part of Iran's "Axis of Resistance", a regional alliance that includes Lebanon's Hezbollah, the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad, Shia militia groups in Iraq and the Houthis who control a large part of Yemen.

Iran, which says all members of the alliance make their own decisions independently, has repeatedly declared that Tehran will not directly intervene in Gaza-related hostilities unless it is itself attacked by Israel or the United States.

The revolution anniversary marchers yesterday included soldiers, students, clerics and senior political and military officials. Black-clad women with small children were among those flocking streets across the country, many carrying portraits of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The anniversary come ahead of March 1 legislative elections, the first national vote since a large-scale protest movement shook Iran after the death of Mahsa Amini on September 16, 2022. Amini, 22, died after being arrested for allegedly violating the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women.



TAIWAN STRAIT Taiwan detects more Chinese balloons

REUTERS, Taipei

Taiwan's defence ministry said yesterday it had detected eight Chinese balloons crossing the Taiwan Strait in the previous 24 hours, of which five flew across Taiwan, the second day in a row is has reported a large number of balloons.

Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory despite the strong objections of the government in Taipei, has complained since December about the balloons, saying they are a threat to aviation safety and attempt at psychological warfare.

In its daily report on Chinese military activities, Taiwan's defence ministry said it spotted the first balloon on Saturday morning and the last one mid-afternoon, having spotted the same number of balloons on Friday.

Five crossed the northern and central part of Taiwan, according to a map provided by the ministry.

China's defence ministry did not answer calls seeking comment yesterday. Both China and Taiwan are currently celebrating the Lunar New Year holiday, the most important festival in the Chinese-speaking world.

POST-POLLS PAKISTAN

What happens next as no party gains majority

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's national election ended with no party winning a majority in parliament, in polls marred by militant violence, political turmoil and questions of transparency.

Former prime ministers and bitter rivals Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan both declared victory, adding to the uncertainty as the country faces numerous challenges that need to be addressed quickly, including negotiating a new International Monetary Fund programme to keep a struggling \$350 billion economy afloat.

Next, a prime ministerial candidate has to show a simple majority of 169 seats in the National Assembly when the house is called in coming days.

The Assembly consists of 336 seats of which 266 are decided through direct voting on polling day. There are also 70 reserved seats - 60 for women and 10 for non-Muslims - allotted according to the strength of each party in the house to determine the final position of parties in the Assembly.

Here are four scenarios on what could happen next:

SHARIF STRIKES DEAL TO HEAD COALITION
Sharif's party, PML-N, which won 75 seats, strikes a deal with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the son of assassinated former premier Benazir Bhutto, which won 53 seats, to pull together a majority in parliament.

The MQM-P and PML-N, after an hour-



long meeting earlier yesterday, have reached a "principle agreement" to work together in the upcoming government, according to a statement released by the Nawaz Sharif-led party.

The PML-N and PPP, along with other smaller parties, form a coalition government in which Sharif or his brother is prime minister and important positions are given to other parties.

The two parties were in government together for 16 months till August, with Bhutto Zardari as foreign minister and Sharif's brother Shehbaz as prime minister.

INDEPENDENTS SWEEP TO POWER
Imran Khan's independent candidates, who won 93 seats, join a smaller party in parliament in order to form a single bloc to fulfil a requirement for them to be allocated reserved seats. That would push them closer to a majority and allow them to put up a candidate for prime minister.

They can also strike a deal with other parties to support a consensus candidate, which also means Khan's supporters are in power, and can push to have their jailed leader released under an agreement.

ZARDARI PUSHES TO HEAD COALITION GOVT
While Sharif and Khan's candidates won the most seats, no party can form government without the PPP. With both looking to keep the other out of power, the PPP strikes a deal to make the young Bhutto Zardari prime minister.

NO DEAL, ARMY STEPS IN
Uncertainty drags on with no one able to form government. Pakistan's army steps in to restore order and takes power as it has done three times before in the country's 76-year history - the last time in 1999 to overthrow Sharif's government. The army has already called on political parties to show "maturity and unity".

'I would not protect you'

Trump threatens to 'encourage' attack of Nato members behind on payments

AFP, Washington

White House hopeful Donald Trump said on Saturday evening he would "encourage" Russia to attack members of Nato who had not met their financial obligations, his most extreme broadside against the military alliance he has long expressed skepticism about.

With US lawmakers debating new aid for Ukraine ahead of the second anniversary of Russia's invasion, the former president has repeatedly said it was unfair to commit the United States to defending Nato's 30 other member nations.

Speaking at a campaign rally in South Carolina on Saturday evening, Trump described a conversation with a fellow head of state at an unspecified Nato meeting.

"One of the presidents of a big country stood up and said, 'Well, sir, if we don't pay, and we're attacked by Russia, will you protect us?' I said, 'You didn't pay, you're delinquent!'"

"No, I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want. You got to pay. You got to pay your bills."



Supporters of Hazara Democratic Party protest against the alleged skewing in Pakistan's national election results, near the Press Club in Quetta, Pakistan yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP