

US INTEL AGENCY SpaceX building spy satellite network

REUTERS, Washington

SpaceX is building a network of hundreds of spy satellites under a classified contract with a US intelligence agency, five sources familiar with the program said, demonstrating deepening ties between billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk's space company and national security agencies.

The network is being built by SpaceX's Starshield business unit under a \$1.8 billion contract signed in 2021 with the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), an intelligence agency that manages spy satellites, the sources said.

The plans show the extent of SpaceX's involvement in US military projects and illustrate a deeper Pentagon investment into low-Earth orbiting satellite systems aimed at supporting ground forces.



A man hands out bags of flour during the distribution of humanitarian aid in Gaza City yesterday, amid Israeli offensive in the Palestinian enclave. Trucks of flour have reached northern Gaza for distribution to areas that have had no aid in four months, Palestinian media reported.

PHOTO: AFP

Putin tightens grip on power in Russian election Thousands stage symbolic protest at polling stations

REUTERS, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin was poised to tighten his grip on power yesterday in a Russian election that is certain to deliver him a landslide victory, though thousands of opponents staged a symbolic noon protest at polling stations.

Putin, who rose to power in 1999, is set to win a new six-year term that would enable him to overtake Josef Stalin and become Russia's longest-serving leader for more than 200 years.

The election comes just over two years since Putin triggered the deadliest European conflict since World War Two by ordering the invasion of Ukraine. He casts it as a "special military operation".

War has hung over the three-day election: Ukraine has repeatedly attacked oil refineries in Russia, shelled Russian regions and sought to pierce Russian borders with proxy forces - a move Putin said would not be left unpunished.

While Putin's re-election is not in doubt given his control over Russia and the absence of any real challengers, the former KGB spy wants to show that he has the overwhelming support of Russians. Several hours before polls were due to close at 1800 GMT, the nationwide turnout surpassed 2018 levels of 67.5 percent.

Supporters of Alexei Navalny, who died in an Arctic prison last month, had called on Russians to come out at a "Noon against Putin" protest to show their dissent against a leader they cast as a corrupt autocrat.

There was no independent tally of how many of Russia's 114 million voters took part in the opposition demonstrations, amid extremely tight security involving tens of thousands of police and security officials.

Reuters journalists saw an increase in the flow of voters, especially younger people, at noon at some polling stations in Moscow, St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, with queues of several hundred people and even thousands.

Drop Rafah invasion plan 'in name of humanity'

WHO urges Israel as 1.2m people in the border city do not have anywhere safe to move to

AGENCIES

The head of the World Health Organisation appealed to Israel "in the name of humanity" not to launch an assault on Rafah, where most of Gaza's population is sheltering.

"I'm gravely concerned about reports of an Israeli plan to proceed with a ground assault on Rafah," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on X, formerly Twitter, on Saturday evening.

"Further escalation of violence in this densely populated area would lead to many more deaths and suffering," he added.

"In the name of humanity, we appeal to Israel not to proceed and instead to work towards peace."

An evacuation planned by the Israeli army ahead of launching its assault was not a practical solution, he argued.

"The 1.2 million people in Rafah do not have anywhere safe to move to. There are no fully functional, safe health facilities that they can reach elsewhere in Gaza," he said. "Many people are too fragile, hungry and sick to be moved again..."

"This humanitarian catastrophe must not be allowed to worsen."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved the military's "plans for action in Rafah," according to a statement Friday, which gave no details or a timeline.

The United Nations and the



United States have also repeatedly warned against such a military operation, reports AFP.

Netanyahu has for weeks vowed to continue the offensive, having promised to destroy Hamas.

Israel has carried out relentless bombardment and a ground invasion that has killed at least 31,645 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the health ministry.

Volunteer doctors said they're struggling to provide medical care to people in Rafah.

Rafah lacks the healthcare facilities to treat this many people and a shortage of medicines and supplies is worsening the suffering, reports Al Jazeera online.

"It's impossible for medical facilities to accommodate this number of patients. We're operating in a camp housing around 1.5 million people. We receive medications to cover a week, but they run out in just one day," Ahmed Saad, volunteer at medical point in Rafah, said.

Samar Gregea, a displaced Palestinian from Gaza City, said: "We're facing shortages of medications, especially pediatric medicines. There are a lot of patients in the camp, with all children suffering from malnutrition, and the widespread presence of hepatitis A. Children require foods high in sugars, like dates, which are currently unavailable."

NOVEMBER ELECTION

Trump warns of 'bloodbath' if he's not elected

AFP, Vandalia

Donald Trump told a rally in Ohio on Saturday that November's presidential election will be the "most important date" in US history, painting his campaign for the White House as a turning point for the country. Days after securing his position as the presumptive Republican nominee, the former president also warned of a "bloodbath" if he is not elected - though it was not clear what he was referring to, with the remark coming in the middle of comments about threats to the US auto industry. "The date - remember this, November 5 - I believe it's going to be the most important date in the history of our country," the 77-year-old told rally-goers in Vandalia, Ohio, repeating well-worn criticisms that his rival, President Joe Biden, is the "worst" president. Criticizing what he said were Chinese plans to build cars in Mexico and sell them to Americans, he stated: "We're going to put a 100 percent tariff on every single car that comes across the line, and you're not going to be able to sell those cars if I get elected." "Now if I don't get elected it's going to be a bloodbath for the whole - that's going to be the least of it, it's going to be a bloodbath for the country. That'll be the least of it." As Trump's comment gained traction on social media, Biden's campaign released a statement calling the Republican a "loser" at the ballot box in 2020 who then "doubles down on his threats of political violence."

21 dead after bus collides with tanker in Afghanistan 38 injured

AFP, Kabul

Twenty-one people were killed and 38 injured yesterday in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province when a bus collided with an oil tanker and a motorbike, provincial officials said. Deadly traffic accidents are common in the country, due in part to poor roads, dangerous driving on highways and a lack of regulation. "On Sunday morning, 21 people were killed and 38 people were injured due to a collision between a tanker, a motorcycle and a passenger bus," the provincial information department said in a post on X. The accident took place on the Herat-Kandahar highway in Grishk district of Helmand province, it added.

The collision caused the vehicles to ignite, Helmand governor spokesman Mohammad Qasim Riyaz told AFP.

Images shared by the information department on social media showed charred, twisted metal scattered across the highway and the crushed cabin of the tanker.

Clean up crews were on site removing the debris, according to officials. Of the injured, 11 were seriously hurt and 27 had minor injuries. The passenger bus was travelling from Herat city to the capital Kabul when it first collided with a motorbike carrying two people, killing both riders, Helmand traffic management officials said, according to the information department. The bus driver lost control and crashed with an oil tanker travelling in the opposite direction from the southern city of Kandahar to Herat, sparking a fire.



Members of the 'flying squad' of the Election Commission of India search vehicles ahead of the upcoming general elections, in Chennai, India yesterday. India will elect a new parliament in seven phases between April 19 and early June, the country's election authority said on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

GUJARAT HOSTEL

Five foreign students hurt in mob attack

NDTV ONLINE

Five international students were injured after a mob stormed a Gujarat University hostel on Saturday night and attacked students from African countries, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, allegedly for offering namaz.

The police have arrested two men after the state home minister Harsh Sanghavi has directed top police officials to arrest the accused as soon as possible and ensure a fair probe.

The students have said that there is no mosque on the Ahmedabad-based campus, so they had gathered inside the hostel to offer taraweeh - a namaz offered at night during Ramadan. Soon after, a mob armed with sticks and knives stormed the hostel, attacked them and vandalised their rooms, the students have alleged. The students have said the security guard of the hostel tried to stop the mob, but failed.

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