

INTERNATIONAL

8 killed in Pak air strikes on Afghanistan

Taliban retaliates

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghanistan's Taliban said yesterday that Pakistan carried out two air strikes on its territory, killing five women and three children, and it fired heavy weapons at Pakistani forces along the border in retaliation.

The neighbouring countries have traded blame over who is responsible for a recent spate of Islamist militant attacks in Pakistan. Pakistan says the attacks were launched from Afghan soil; Afghanistan's ruling Taliban deny this.

"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan does not allow anyone to compromise security by using Afghan territory," Zabiullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Taliban administration, said in a statement. The strikes killed five women and three children in the eastern border provinces of Khost and Paktika, he added.



Displaced Palestinians fleeing from the area in the vicinity of Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital walk along the coastal highway as they arrive at the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. Inset, Palestinians evacuate a youth, wounded in reported Israeli fire, on the beach near the Nuseirat refugee camp.

PHOTO: AFP

POLLS IN INDIA
Home secys of six states removed

NDTV ONLINE

India's Election Commission yesterday issued orders for the removal of six Home Secretaries - including the top bureaucrats from Gujarat, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh.

The poll panel also directed the transfer of West Bengal's Director-General of Police.

The re-shuffle, not an uncommon move by the EC before major polls, also includes the transfer of the Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand Home Secretaries, as well as senior officials attached to the offices of the Mizoram and Himachal Pradesh chief ministers.

The ECI on Saturday said voting in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls will begin on April 19 and run over seven phases till June 1.

The ECI's move comes after a meeting of Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar and his two associates.

This step comes as part of the polls panel's commitment to ensure a level playing field for all political parties in the forthcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, as well as by-polls for 26 seats in 13 states.

West decries Putin's landslide election win

China, India, Iran, North Korea vow closer ties

REUTERS, London

Western governments yesterday lined up to condemn Vladimir Putin's landslide election victory as unfair and undemocratic, but China, India, Iran and North Korea congratulated the veteran Russian leader on extending his rule by a further six years.

The contrasting reactions underscored the geopolitical fault lines that have gaped wider since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago, triggering the deepest crisis in relations with the West since the end of the Cold War.

Arriving in Brussels yesterday, EU foreign ministers roundly dismissed the election result as a sham ahead of agreeing sanctions on individuals linked to the mistreatment and death of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

"Russia's election was an election without choice," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said at the start of the meeting.

Playing on Moscow's reference to its war in Ukraine as a "special military operation", French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne said Paris had taken note of the "special election operation".

"The conditions for a free, pluralistic and democratic election were not met," his ministry said.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said the election outcome highlighted the "depth of

repression" in Russia.

"Putin removes his political opponents, controls the media, and then crowns himself the winner. This is not democracy," Cameron said.

France, Britain and others condemned the fact that Russia had also held its election in occupied regions of Ukraine that it claims to have annexed during

was "obviously not free nor fair". President Joe Biden has not yet commented.

In sharp contrast, Chinese President Xi Jinping congratulated Putin, and said Beijing would maintain close communication with Moscow to promote the "no limits" partnership they agreed in 2022, just before Russia invaded Ukraine. "I believe that



the war.

The Kremlin dismissed such criticism, saying the 87 percent of the vote won by Putin during the three-day election showed that the Russian people were consolidating around him.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russia's election had no legitimacy.

A White House spokesperson on Sunday said Russia's election

under your leadership, Russia will certainly be able to achieve greater achievements in national development and construction," Xi told Putin in his message, according to Xinhua News.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi echoed that message, saying he looked forward to strengthening New Delhi's "time-tested special and privileged strategic partnership" with Moscow.

Russia-Nato conflict one step from WW3: Putin

REUTERS, Moscow

Vladimir Putin yesterday warned the West that a direct conflict between Russia and the Nato would mean the planet was one step away from World War Three.

French President Emmanuel Macron last month said he could not rule out the deployment of ground troops in Ukraine in the future, with many Western countries distancing themselves from that while others, especially in eastern Europe, expressed support.

Asked by Reuters about the Macron remarks and the risks and possibility of a conflict between Russia and Nato, Putin quipped: "everything is possible in the modern world."

"It is clear to everyone, that this will be one step away from a full-scale World War Three. I think hardly anyone is interested in this," he said.

Putin added, though, that Nato military personnel were present already in Ukraine, saying that Russia had picked up both English and French being spoken on the battlefield.

What are Putin's top challenges in new six-yr term?

REUTERS, London

Vladimir Putin has won six more years in the Kremlin with a landslide victory in an election where he faced no serious competition. Looking ahead, he faces important challenges.

UKRAINE WAR

Russia controls nearly a fifth of Ukraine, barely changed since late 2022. Putin has not defined territorial goals but his ally Dmitry Medvedev said last month that Russia aimed to bite off much more of Ukraine, including Odesa and eventually Kyiv.

- Putin could just let the war grind on, calculating that time is on his side and awaiting the outcome of the US election in November.

- Putin could escalate by embarking on a new military mobilisation, on top of the call-up of 300,000 men he ordered in September 2022.

TRADE AND ENERGY

Russia has lost most of its lucrative European energy market because of sanctions and the blowing up of the Nord Stream gas pipelines. Progress on three major projects will be a gauge of his success in pivoting Russian trade eastwards:

- A new "gas hub" in Turkey to enable Russia to reroute its gas exports

- A new pipeline, the Power of Siberia 2, to bring another 50 billion cubic metres a year of Russian gas to China via Mongolia

- An expansion of the Northern Sea Route, made possible by the melting of Arctic sea ice, to link Murmansk near Russia's border with Norway to the Bering Strait near Alaska.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The New START treaty that caps the number of strategic nuclear warheads that Russia and the United States can deploy is due to expire in February 2026. If it lapses, both sides could then expand their arsenals without limits. Russia says it is ready to engage in "strategic dialogue" with the US but that this must include all issues affecting

its security, including Ukraine.

DOMESTIC ECONOMY

The economy grew 4.6 percent year-on-year in January, thanks to a massive increase in military production, but labour shortages and low productivity pose problems. Defence and security make up about 40 percent of the budget, squeezing other areas like education and health. Wages are rising, especially in regions where defence industries are concentrated. But Putin has failed to deliver on a 2018 promise to achieve a "decisive breakthrough" in living standards, and real incomes overall have stagnated for past decade.

Near-term priorities are to cut inflation, running at 7.6%, and to reduce budgetary strains. Putin has signalled this will mean higher taxes for firms and wealthier individuals. Further out, he wants to raise life expectancy and boost the birth rate with measures to support families.

RENEWING THE ELITE

Putin will be 77 by the end of his new term - though still younger than U.S. President Joe Biden when he was sworn in. Some leading figures in Putin's circle are older than he is, including FSB security chief Alexander Bortnikov (72), Security Council head Nikolai Patrushev (72) and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (74 this week). Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov (both 68) have kept their jobs despite fierce criticism from some pro-war commentators over Russia's military failings in Ukraine. Putin has long shown himself to be reluctant to shake up his team, and critics have accused him of prizing loyalty over competence.



Somali forces, foreign navies prepare raid

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request for comment.

On Sunday, the Puntland police said they seized a vehicle that was transporting narcotics to be supplied to the pirates on board the Abdullah.

Meanwhile, a senior official of KSRM, the parent organisation of SR Shipping that owns MV Abdullah, expressed strong opposition against any forceful intervention.

"The company does not support military action that might endanger the lives of our crew," a senior official of KSRM told The Daily Star yesterday.

Bangladesh government has strongly requested respective navies not to launch a forceful intervention.

"We want to resolve the crisis through negotiation," he added.

Contacted last night, a foreign ministry official said, "Bangladesh is in favour of a peaceful resolution that does not put the Bangladeshi lives at risk."

When asked about the Reuters report, he said, "Why would anyone make a public statement before attacking a hijacked ship?"

The officer requested not to be named.

On March 12, the pirates attacked MV Abdullah around 1:30pm (Bangladesh time), when it was around 500 nautical miles off the Somali coast, sailing from Maputo in Mozambique to Al Hamriyah in the UAE with 58,000 tonnes of coal.

After reaching near the Somali coast on March 14, the pirates changed the ship's location twice and anchored the ship around 4 nautical miles off Somalia's Gadabjiran coast.

However, the pirates were yet to contact the ship's owning firm or any third party for ransom as of yesterday.

Shipping and security experts have said it is not unusual as the pirates may take time to fix the ransom

amount and assess the situation.

Two reliable sources told The Daily Star that soon after the hijacking, the ship's UK-based insurer P&I (protection and indemnity) Club engaged a global crisis management firm called Crisis 24 to analyse the situation and chalk out the necessary plans.

On March 16, a senior official of KSRM said pirates made first contact after over two weeks during the hijacking of the firm's other ship MV Jahan Moni in 2010.

In December 2010, KSRM's MV Jahan Moni was hijacked by pirates in the Arabian Sea. Twenty-five crew members and the wife of the chief officer were rescued nearly 100 days after they were held hostage.

At the peak of their attacks in 2011, Somali pirates cost the global economy an estimated \$7 billion, including hundreds of millions of dollars in ransom payments.

A series win built on the right process

FROM PAGE 1

fast bowlers in particular showed up for the Tigers. Taskin Ahmed got the new ball to move and picked up three wickets. Shoriful Islam produced nippy deliveries that beat the bat. Mustafizur Rahman, meanwhile, repaid the faith put in him by picking up two crucial wickets.

"We're playing in different kinds of wickets now; we are looking at the bigger picture," head coach Chandika

Hathurusingha had said ahead of the third ODI yesterday. Hathurusingha clarified the "bigger picture" as their efforts to play and adapt to wickets "where bowlers and batters both come into play in the game."

The team's plans would have added more challenges at home but Tanzim Hasan Sakib, whose aggression and ability to bowl on flat surfaces served the team well in Ebadot Hossain's absence.

Rishad's bowling was effective

and then how he overcame pressure to stage a winning partnership with Mushfiqur Rahim would also go down as one of the finds in this series.

Tanzid Hasan Tamim, coming in as a concussion substitute for Soumya Sarkar, showed no signs of being unprepared during a career-best 81-ball 84 yesterday.

So far, it has been a good outing in terms of fixing the process to compete in all conditions.



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IMPORTANT DEADLINES

- **Application opens:** March 15, 2024, Friday (12:01 AM)
- **Last date of application and admit card download:** April 15, 2024, Monday (11:59 PM)
- **Written test:** April 19, 2024 (Friday); 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM
- **Viva-voce:** April 26 & 27 (Friday & Saturday)
- **Class starts:** June 07, 2024



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