

Jordan stepped in to stop Iran drones

NDTV ONLINE

As Iran fired over 300 drones and missiles, Jordan joined Israel's allies in intercepting them.

The development, arguably as surprising as Iran's first direct attack on Israel, comes in the wake of Jordan's strong criticism of the Benjamin Netanyahu dispensation for Israel's offensive in Gaza that has left over 33,000 dead.

The response by King Abdullah II, which has been panned by pro-Palestine voices, is in effect a delicate balancing act by a militarily weak country that cannot risk war with its neighbour. In its statement, Jordan said it shot down Iranian drones in an act of self-defence and not to help Israel.

Even before Iran's drone strikes, King Abdullah had made clear that he would not allow the Iranians "to play" in his territory as they do in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.



A boy stands by rubble before a heavily damaged building on the eastern side of the Maghazi camp for Palestinian refugees in the central Gaza Strip yesterday amid Israeli offensive in the Palestinian enclave. PHOTO: AFP

4 Israeli soldiers hurt by blast in Lebanon Says Israeli military official

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Four Israeli soldiers were wounded in an explosion hundreds of metres inside Lebanese territory, an Israeli military official said yesterday.

It appeared to be the first such incident to become known since the Gaza offensive erupted in October, leading to months of exchanges of fire between Israel and Lebanon's armed group Hezbollah.

Hezbollah said in a statement that its fighters planted explosive devices in the Tel Ismail area near the border on the Lebanese side. It said that when a patrol of Israel's Golani Brigade crossed into Lebanon and arrived at the area where the devices were planted, Hezbollah detonated them, leading to deaths and injuries.

Earlier yesterday, the military said four soldiers were injured, one severely, as a result of an explosion of an unknown source during overnight activity along the northern border and that the incident was under review.

Around 60,000 Israelis have been evacuated from the country's northern border area, and 18 people - civilians and soldiers - have been killed on the Israeli side of the border, according to Israeli tallies.

Meanwhile, Iran said yesterday that the Israel-linked ship it seized on the weekend had violated international maritime law and was undergoing "necessary investigations".

Iranian authorities had previously offered little information about why the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps seized the ship MSC Aries ship near the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday.

"The ship was directed into the territorial waters of Iran because it violated international maritime laws," foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said.

The ship's crew failed to "adequately respond to questions from Iranian authorities," he told a briefing. "It is certain that this ship belongs to the Zionist regime," Kanani added.

IRAN'S ATTACK ON ISRAEL Biden in 'very tough spot' trying to stop escalation

AFP, Washington

Iran's attack on Israel gives Joe Biden a familiar dilemma, but on steroids - how to balance support for a difficult ally while preventing the nightmare scenario of a wider war?

Tensions with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over Israel's offensive in Gaza were papered over as the US president offered "ironclad" support, including shooting down Iranian drones.

But the White House said it would not support an Israeli counterattack and warned Israel to "think carefully" about escalation that could trigger a full-blown regional conflict.

The question then for Biden, who is facing a tough reelection battle against Donald Trump in November, is what if Netanyahu goes ahead anyway, as he has done in Gaza?

"It puts him in a very tough spot" Colin Clarke, Director of Research at the Soufan Group, told AFP.

"I think he's suspicious of Netanyahu's motives here... that Netanyahu is attempting to broaden the war throughout the region to deflect from how poorly the war is going for him in Gaza."

Biden has been trying to avoid a regional war that could suck the United States back into the Middle East.

The 81-year-old has, however, struggled to use the leverage provided by the United States being Israel's main military supplier, especially given a long history of tense relations with Netanyahu.

Biden has been increasingly critical of the death toll in the Palestinian territory and even went as far as suggesting the US could limit military aid, but so far to little effect.

Iran's attack has seen Biden go back to showing overt support - but at the same time scrambling to stop the crisis spiraling.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Netanyahu was "well aware" Biden did not want a "wider war".

Biden himself warned Netanyahu of the potential dangers in a call on Saturday night at a time of "heightened emotion".

"The president had a discussion about trying to slow things down, think through things," a US official said.

The hope was that "in the light of day" Israel would see it had had

a "spectacular success" against Iran's attack, added the official.

Washington's calculus looks to be that Iran also got what it wanted, with a show of force in retaliation for Israel's strike in Damascus earlier this month that killed a key Iranian general, but with minimal damage.

"However, I fear the status quo will be short-lived," said James Ryan, Executive Director of the Middle East Research and Information Project, warning of a "dangerous spiral".

"I expect Biden to attempt to restrain Israeli responses, but Netanyahu has already shown a willingness to test any kind of limit Biden wishes to impose," he added. "It's all very cynical now, unfortunately."

Biden's options for restraining Israel are likely to be limited at this stage to tough language in private and making threats in public.

"They've got themselves into a corner in many ways," said Clarke.

"I think they've overplayed their hand a little bit by saying the administration is considering cutting off weapons to the Israelis. It's never going to happen - I think it's an empty threat, especially in an election year," Clarke added.

Modi warns of 'black money' in political funding

REUTERS, New Delhi

A Supreme Court decision to scrap a controversial political funding system has pushed contributions to parties towards "black money", or illegal funds, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in remarks broadcast yesterday. India's top court in February scrapped as unconstitutional a seven-year-old election funding system through instruments called "electoral bonds" that allowed individuals and companies to make unlimited and anonymous donations to political parties. Corporate funding of political parties is a sensitive matter in India and, while there is no suggestion that funds from the bonds scheme were improper, opposition parties allege that Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party used its powers to coerce funding. In his most detailed defence of the scrapped system days before India begins voting in a general election, Modi denied accusations and said companies had also donated to the opposition. He said the system was more transparent than previous ones, but added that there was room for policy improvement. "In decision-making, we learn and improve. It is very possible to improve in this too. But today we have completely pushed the country towards black money," Modi said in an interview to ANI. "And that is why I say everyone will regret it. When they will think honestly, everyone will regret it." Data released on orders of the SC in March showed Modi's BJP was the largest beneficiary of scrapped system.

Trump's landmark criminal trial begins in New York

AFP, New York

Donald Trump's New York criminal trial opened yesterday in a historic first for a US ex-president and a seismic twist to an already explosive 2024 presidential election, where the scandal-plagued Republican is seeking to return to power. "Good morning Mr Trump," Judge Juan Merchan said to the defendant in the courtroom, where the Republican sat with hunched shoulders and a stern expression.

Jury selection was due to start shortly, but given the notoriety of the case it could take as much as two weeks for defense lawyers and prosecutors to agree on the panel of 12 jurors. Trump, wearing his trademark red tie, white shirt and blue suit, struck a defiant stance, telling a throng of journalists on arrival at the gritty Manhattan courthouse that his trial was an "outrage" and an "assault on America." He then strode into the courtroom, walking past nine rows of wooden benches and took his seat. The 77-year-old is accused of falsifying business records in a scheme to cover up an alleged extramarital sexual encounter with adult film actress Stormy Daniels to shield his 2016 election campaign from a last-minute upheaval. The hush money affair is one of four criminal cases hanging over Trump.



A banner depicting a flying missile with text in Persian reading "I will not abandon my homeland" is displayed along a street in central Tehran, Iran yesterday. Iran urged Israel not to retaliate militarily to an unprecedented attack, which Tehran presented as a justified response to a deadly strike on its consulate building in Damascus. PHOTO: AFP

6 Ukrainians killed in Russian shelling

AFP, Kyiv

Russian shelling killed six people in the eastern Ukraine region of Donetsk, authorities said yesterday, as Moscow's forces aim to push deeper into the war-battered industrial region.

The region's governor said attacks late Sunday on the mining town of Siversk, which is flanked by Russian forces, had claimed the four lives.

"The city was shelled yesterday

evening with multiple rocket launchers. It has now been established that four men aged 36 to 86 died as a result of this shelling," Vadym Filashkin wrote on social media.

Siversk, which had an estimated pre-war population of 11,000 people, has come under persistent Russian shelling since Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

Russia claimed to have annexed the entire Donetsk region in September 2022 despite not fulling

controlling the region.

In the northeastern Kharkiv region, a Russian aerial bomb killed two people in the village of Lukyantsi on Monday, regional governor Oleg Synegeubov said.

The Russian military used a guided aerial bomb on the village near the Russian border.

Officials have warned that the eastern front line has become increasingly precarious as Ukraine struggles to secure more arms from allies and recruit more troops.

Gunmen kill Pakistani once linked to murder of 'Indian spy'

REUTERS, Lahore

Gunmen shot dead a man once charged with the 2013 killing of an Indian national jailed in Pakistan for alleged spying, according to officials and a police report, against a backdrop of fraught relations between the rival South Asian powers.

Ties have been on ice since a suicide bomb attack on an Indian military convoy in Kashmir in 2019 that India traced to Pakistan-based militants. India responded with an airstrike on what New Delhi said was a militant training camp in Pakistan. Islamabad said the target was a seminary only.

The convicted spy, Sarabjit Singh, died in hospital in 2013 after having been attacked with bricks and blades by two fellow inmates in a Pakistani jail.

Two police officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters yesterday that one of Singh's suspected attackers in 2013 had been identified as former inmate Amir Sarfraz Tamba, and the police record seen by Reuters said the same.