

China stages mock missile strikes on Taiwan

REUTERS, Taipei

China staged mock missile strikes and dispatched fighter jets carrying live missiles along with bombers yesterday, state broadcaster CCTV said, as part of exercises Beijing has said were launched to punish Taiwan's new President Lai Ching-te.

The bombers set up several attack formations in waters east of Taiwan, carrying out mock attacks in co-ordination with naval vessels, it added, as China tested its ability to control key areas of Taiwan.

The two days of drills in the Taiwan Strait and around groups of Taiwan-controlled islands near the Chinese coast, which a Taiwanese official said also included mock bombing of foreign vessels, started just three days after Lai took office on Monday. Taiwan has condemned China's actions.

China views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory and denounces Lai as a "separatist". It strongly criticised his inauguration speech.

PRO-GAZA SIT-IN UK police arrest 16 at Oxford Univ

REUTERS, Oxford

British police said they had arrested 16 people on suspicion of aggravated trespass at the University of Oxford on Thursday, after pro-Palestinian protesters held a sit-in at the university vice-chancellor's office.

The Oxford Action for Palestine group (OAP) said university authorities called police after students began their protest at administration offices, as has happened at other campuses in Britain, the United States and elsewhere during the conflict in Gaza.

"Officers attended Wellington Square at Oxford University, at around 8:00am this morning following reports that protesters had gained access to a private office within one of the buildings," Thames Valley Police said in a statement.

One of the 16 people arrested had also been arrested on suspicion of common assault, police said. No arrests had been made at separate protests elsewhere in the city.



US and Israeli activists protest in support of Palestinians in Gaza, outside the US Consulate in Jerusalem yesterday. Israel launched its assault on the southern city of Rafah this month, forcing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to flee a city that had become a refuge to around half of the population's 2.3 million people. PHOTO: REUTERS

Food bound for Gaza rots in the sun

Egypt's Rafah border crossing stays shut as Israel steps up offensive in southern Gaza city

REUTERS, Al-Arish

Some of the food supplies waiting to enter the Gaza Strip from Egypt have begun to rot as the Rafah border crossing remains shut to aid deliveries for a third week and people inside the Palestinian enclave face worsening hunger.

Rafah was a main entry point for humanitarian relief as well as some commercial supplies before Israel stepped up its military offensive on the Gaza side of the border on May 6 and took control of the crossing from the Palestinian side.

Egyptian officials and sources say humanitarian operations are at risk from military activity and that Israel needs to hand the crossing back to Palestinians

before it starts operating again.

Israel and the United States have called on Egypt, which is also worried about the risk of Palestinians being displaced from Gaza, to allow the border to reopen.

Meanwhile the backlog of aid on the road between the Egyptian side of the crossing and the town of al-Arish, about 45 km (28 miles) west of Rafah and an arrival point for international aid donations, has been building up.

One truck driver, Mahmoud Hussein, said his goods had been loaded on his vehicle for a month, gradually

spoiling in the sun. Some of the foodstuffs are being discarded, others sold for cheap. "Apples, bananas, chicken and cheese, a lot of things have gone rotten, some stuff

has been returned and is being sold for a quarter of its price," he said, crouching under his truck for shade.

"I'm sorry to say that the onions we're carrying will at best be eaten by animals because of the worms in them."

Aid deliveries for Gaza through Rafah began in late October, two weeks after the start of the Israeli offensive.

The flow of relief has often been slowed by Israeli inspections and military activity inside Gaza and the amount reaching the enclave's 2.3 million residents has been far below needs, aid officials say.

A global hunger monitor has warned of imminent famine in parts of Gaza. Since May 5, no trucks have crossed through Rafah and very few through the nearby Israeli crossing of Kerem Shalom, according to UN data.

The amount of aid waiting in Egypt's northern Sinai was now very large, and some had been stuck for more than two months, said Khaled Zayed, head of the Egyptian Red Crescent in the area.



Nazrul's 125th birth anniv today

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issued separate messages paying rich tributes to the memory of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam.

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs has organised a three-day programme from May 25 to 27 at the National Museum in the city's Shahbagh area.

Deputy Leader of the Jatiya Sangsad Begum Matia Chowdhury will be present as the chief guest on the opening day of the programme.

Led by State Minister for Cultural Affairs Naheed Ezaher Khan, the cultural ministry will place wreaths at the grave of the poet on DU premises around 6:30am.

Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar and private television channels will live telecast the inaugural ceremony and air special programmes and print media will bring out special supplements highlighting the birth anniversary of the national poet.

Bangla Academy will pay respect to the national poet by placing wreaths at his grave near the Dhaka University mosque and Nazrul's portrait at Nazrul Mancha on the academy premises at 8:00am today.

58 constituencies

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Seeking a third successive term in office since 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has in his campaign focused on Hindutva, alleged corruption and caste politics by opposition bloc leaders. On the other hand, the opposition parties concentrated on unemployment, inflation and caste-based approach to development.

As the campaigning reached fever pitch, the Election Commission intervened on Wednesday directing BJP leaders to refrain from making speeches on religious and communal lines and cautioning Congress against potentially divisive statements regarding castes and the socioeconomic composition of the armed forces.

Indian security forces kill eight Maoist rebels

AFP, Raipur

Indian security forces have killed at least eight Maoist insurgents, police said yesterday, the latest clash in a decades-long conflict being waged in the country's central forests.

The guerrillas were shot dead over two days in a remote part of the central state of Chhattisgarh, where several deadly assaults on rebel encampments have occurred this year.

Security forces had cordoned off a forested area in Dantewada district after receiving intelligence that insurgent cadres were meeting there.

Seven rebels were killed on Thursday while another was shot dead yesterday, police inspector general Om Prakash Pal told AFP.

"The Maoists were engaged in intermittent firing" at security forces all through Thursday, he said.

A large quantity of weapons

including automatic firearms had been recovered from the site of the gun battle, he added.

More than 100 Maoists have been killed in India this year, according to police figures, the vast majority in Chhattisgarh.

The insurgents, who are known as Naxalites and say they are fighting for the rural poor, have been carrying out guerrilla attacks since 1967.

India has deployed tens of thousands of security personnel to battle the Maoist rebels across the insurgent-dominated "Red Corridor", which stretches across central, southern and eastern states but has shrunk considerably over the past decade.

It has also pumped millions of dollars into infrastructure development in remote areas and claims to have confined the insurgency to 45 districts in 2023, down from 96 in 2010.

Depression forms in the Bay of Bengal

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Meanwhile, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) said that the cyclone will gain strength and become a severe cyclonic storm by this evening before crossing the coast tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.

The latest cyclone, to be named Remal, may severely impact the Sundarbans if it makes landfall on the Indian coast and the timing coincides with high tide.

Cyclone Aila, which devastated the Sundarbans and vast areas of Bangladesh and West Bengal after making landfall on May 25, 2009, with a wind speed of 120 km/h. Yaas, on the other hand, had a maximum wind speed of 140 km/h.

At least eight major cyclones struck Bangladesh's coast in the month of May between 2009 and 2021, leaving around 400 people dead.

Cyclone Aila hit the coast on May 25, 2009, and resulted in the loss of 150 lives; Cyclone Mahasen claimed 17 lives after it hit the coast on May 16, 2013; Cyclone Roanu made landfall on May 21, 2016, causing 26 fatalities; Cyclone Akash made landfall on May 14, 2017, leading to 14 deaths; Cyclone Mora hit the coast on May 30, 2017, resulting in 18 deaths; Cyclone Fani struck on May 4, 2019, claiming 17 lives; Cyclone Amphan hit on May 21, 2020, leading to 20 fatalities; and Cyclone Yaas made landfall on May 26, 2021, causing at least two deaths.



People gather at the site of a landslide in Maip Mulitaka in Papua New Guinea's Enga Province yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

MASSIVE LANDSLIDE

Hundreds feared dead in Papua New Guinea village

REUTERS, Sydney

Hundreds are feared dead after a massive landslide flattened dozens of homes and buried families alive in a remote village in northern Papua New Guinea (PNG) early yesterday, a resident said.

More than 50 homes, many with people still asleep inside, were buried when the landslide hit Kaokalam village around 3:00 am, villager Ninga Role told Reuters by phone. The death toll was nearly 300, among them his brother and cousin, he said.

The Australian Broadcasting Corp and other local media reported that more than 100 people had been killed. One man who turned back to try to save his two children was buried along with his extended family, Role said.

Social media footage posted by Role showed people clambering over rocks, uprooted trees and mounds of dirt searching for survivors. Women can be heard weeping in the background.

"It's very impossible, the area covered by the landslide is large and there are rocks and trees everywhere," Role said. "It's very difficult to get them out."

The village is in Enga province, about 600 km (370 miles) north of the capital Port Moresby. Prime Minister James Marape said in a statement he had yet to be fully briefed but that authorities were responding to the disaster.

Myanmar junta revives plans for China-backed dam

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta has revived plans for a \$3.6 billion Chinese-backed dam in the north of the country that was suspended more than 10 years ago following huge public opposition.

The project to build the 6,000-megawatt Myitsone dam in northern Kachin state was ended in 2011 under a previous junta.

Its opponents said the dam on the Ayeyarwady river — which would have exported around 90 percent of the power it generated to China — would cause huge environmental damage and bring little benefit to the country.

The junta announced a new "leading group" for the hydropower project in a notice dated April 24 and released on an obscure government portal on Tuesday.

The group is made up of 11 members, including the deputy minister for electricity, and will "conduct and manage research, technical solutions and public relations" for the project, the notice said.

It will work with China's State Power Investment Corporation's (SPIC) Yunnan International Power Investment Company on "research, technical solutions, and public relations," it added, without giving details.

SPIC is a Chinese state-owned group and one of the biggest utility companies in the country.

Iran denies foul play in Raisi helicopter

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the helicopter had been found by Iranian drones early on Monday but the "complexity of the area, fog and low temperature" hindered the work of search and rescue teams.

The army said "more time is needed" to investigate the crash and that it would announce more details later.

Raisi was laid to rest in his hometown of Mashhad on Thursday concluding days of funeral ceremonies in some of Iran's major cities including the capital attended by throngs of mourners.

Among the people killed in the incident was foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian who was also buried on Thursday in the town of Shahre Ray south of the capital.

IS behind deadly Moscow concert hall attack: Russia

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday said for the first time that the Islamic State group coordinated the March concert hall assault in Moscow, the country's deadliest terror attack in two decades.

IS has claimed responsibility on multiple occasions for the March 22 attack which killed over 140 people, but Moscow has repeatedly tried to link Ukraine and the West to the attack.

FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency that "preparations, the financing, the attack and the retreat of the terrorists were coordinated via the internet by members of Khorasan Province (IS-K)," an IS branch active

in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Bortnikov did not discard the Ukrainian angle in his statements yesterday, saying that "upon completing the attack, the terrorists received clear instructions to move toward the Ukrainian border, where from the other side a 'window' had been prepared for them".

"The investigation continues, but it can already be said with certainty that Ukrainian military intelligence is directly implicated in the attack", he said.

Ukraine has repeatedly denied involvement.

Gummen in camouflage stormed the Crocus City Hall venue on the outskirts of Moscow before setting the building on fire.