

News in brief

◆ **Iranian President** Masoud Pezeshkian said in an interview published on Saturday that the United States, Israel and Europe were waging “total war” against his country. “In my opinion, we are at total war with the United States, Israel and Europe. They want to bring our country to its knees,” Pezeshkian told the official site of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, six months after Israel and the US launched strikes on Iran. France, Britain and Germany were behind the reimposition of UN sanctions on Iran in September connected to its nuclear programme. “This war is worse than the one launched against us by Iraq. On closer inspection, it is far more complex and difficult,” he added, referring to the 1980-88 conflict between the neighbouring countries that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.



Iran president says US, Israel, Europe waging ‘total war’ on country

◆ **Israeli Prime Minister** Benjamin Netanyahu is due to meet US President Donald Trump in Florida tomorrow, an Israeli official told AFP, in what is seen as a crucial visit for the next steps of the fragile Gaza truce plan. It will be Netanyahu’s fifth visit to see key ally Trump in the United States this year. His trip comes as the Trump administration and regional mediators push to proceed to the second stage of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. An Israeli official on Saturday said Netanyahu would leave for the US on December 28 and meet with Trump a day later in Florida, without providing a specific location. Trump told reporters in mid-December that Netanyahu would probably visit him in Florida during the Christmas holidays. “He would like to see me. We haven’t set it up formally, but he’d like to see me,” Trump said before leaving for his Mar-a-Lago resort.

◆ **A 6.6-magnitude** earthquake struck off Taiwan’s northeastern coast on Saturday, the US Geological Survey (USGS) said, the second major tremor to hit the island within days. Taiwan’s weather agency, which put the magnitude at 7.0, said the quake hit at 23:05 pm (1505 GMT) at a depth of 73 kilometres (45 miles) in the sea off Yilan county, southwest of Taipei. The Yilan County Fire Bureau told AFP there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage. Local media said the quake caused buildings in the capital Taipei to sway and was felt across Taiwan. Taiwan is frequently hit by earthquakes due to its location on the edge of two tectonic plates near the Pacific Ring of Fire, which the USGS says is the most seismically active zone in the world. On Wednesday, a 6.0-magnitude tremor struck the island’s southeast. In April 2024, a 7.4-magnitude earthquake killed 17 people as it triggered landslides and severely damaged buildings around Hualien city.

6.6-magnitude earthquake hits off Taiwan: USGS



SPOTLIGHT

Thailand and Cambodia declare truce after weeks of clashes

AFP | Bangkok, Thailand

Thailand and Cambodia agreed to an “immediate” ceasefire yesterday, the two countries said in a joint statement, pledging to end border clashes that killed dozens of people.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the announcement “as a positive step towards alleviating the suffering of civilians... and creating an environment conducive to achieving lasting peace”, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

At least 47 people were killed and more than a million displaced in three weeks of fighting with artillery, tanks, drones and jets, according to official tallies.

The conflict spread to nearly every border province on both sides, shattering an earlier truce for which US President Donald Trump took credit.

Cambodia and Thailand agreed to the ceasefire that took effect at 12 pm (0500 GMT), said the declaration signed by the Southeast Asian neighbours’ defence ministers at a border checkpoint on the Thai side.

The truce applies to “all types of weapons, including attacks on civilians, civilian objects and infrastructures, and military objectives of either side, in all cases and all areas”.



Cambodia’s defence minister Tea Seiha (L) and Thailand’s defence minister Nattaphon Narkphanit (R) posing with documents

Both sides agreed to freeze all troop movements and allow civilians living in border areas to return home as soon as possible, the statement said.

They also agreed to cooperate on demining efforts and combatting cybercrime, while Thailand was to return 18 captured Cambodian soldiers within 72 hours.

Thai Defence Minister Nattaphon Narkphanit said the initial three-day window would be an “observation period to confirm that the ceasefire is real”.

He called the truce “a door to a peaceful resolution” in a speech earlier on Saturday.

Displaced Cambodian Oeum Raksmei told AFP she was “very happy that people can return home” if the fighting stops.

“But I dare not return home yet. I am still scared,” said the 22-year-old, who has sheltered with her family in Cambodia’s Siem Reap province.

Withdraw forces

Saudi-led coalition warns Yemen separatists



Yemeni militants gather to mobilize fighters in the Harf Sufyan district, located north of the capital Sanaa

● **STC had warned on Friday that they were undeterred after strikes**

● **Yemen’s government urged the Saudi-led coalition to support its forces in Hadramawt**

● **Raids followed clashes between the separatists and a tribal leader close to Saudi**

AFP | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

The Saudi-led coalition warned yesterday it would back Yemen’s government in any military confrontation with separatist forces and urged them to withdraw “peacefully” from recently-seized provinces.

The statements came a day after reported Saudi air strikes on separatist positions in Yemen’s Hadramawt province -- and after Washington called for restraint in the rapidly escalating conflict.

General Turki al-Malki, the spokesman for the coalition, said they would act “directly and at the appropriate moment... to protect civilian life”, according to the Saudi news agency SPA.

Saudi Defence Minister Khalid bin Salman posted on X that troops from the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) should “peacefully hand over” two regional governorates to the government. “It’s time,” he posted, “at this sensitive moment, to let reason prevail by withdrawing from the two provinces and doing so peacefully.”

The STC had warned on Friday that they were undeterred after strikes blamed on Saudi Arabia hit their positions, in the latest escalation since they seized large swathes of territory in the Hadramawt and Mahrah provinces. There were no immediate reports of casualties in the strikes.

In recent weeks, separatists backed by the United Arab Emirates and seeking to revive the formerly independent state of South Yemen have made territorial gains. On Saturday, hundreds of Yemeni tribesmen gathered in Aden to ask the STC’s leaders to announce the independence of South Yemen, according to the separatist-affiliated Aden Independent Channel. The channel aired footage of a large crowd marching and waving the South Yemen independent

territory. The areas where they were deployed are located at the edges of territory seized in recent weeks by the UAE-backed STC.

“We have not received military instructions to move towards the two provinces,” the official said, requesting anonymity to discuss sensitive matters. The Houthis pushed the government out of Yemen’s capital Sanaa in 2014 and secured control over most of the north.

The STC told AFP on Friday that Saudi Arabia had conducted two strikes, while a video aired on separatist-affiliated media showed a plume of smoke rising from the desert. The raids followed area clashes on Thursday between the separatists and a tribal leader close to Saudi Arabia, which the STC said killed two separatist fighters.

US urges restraint

In Washington, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said: “We urge restraint and continued diplomacy, with a view to reaching a lasting solution.”

Following Friday’s raids, Yemen’s government urged the Saudi-led coalition to support its forces in Hadramawt, after separatists seized most of the country’s largest province.

The government asked the coalition to “take all necessary military measures to protect innocent Yemeni civilians in Hadramawt province and support the armed forces”, the official Yemeni news agency said.

A Yemeni military official said on Friday that around 15,000 Saudi-backed fighters were amassed near the Saudi border but had not been given orders to advance on separatist-held

territory. The areas where they were deployed are located at the edges of territory seized in recent weeks by the UAE-backed STC.

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On Friday, the UAE welcomed Saudi efforts to support security in Yemen.

Russia pummels Kyiv ahead of Zelensky’s US visit

AFP | Kyiv, Ukraine

Russia pummelled Ukraine’s capital with drones and missiles yesterday, killing a woman and cutting power to hundreds of thousands, ahead of President Volodymyr Zelensky’s latest talks with US leader Donald Trump.

Zelensky said the attack showed Russia did not want to end its invasion launched in February 2022 that has left tens of thousands dead.



A woman and a child holding a Christmas star stand next to a destroyed Russian tank displayed at the Mykhailivska Square during a Christmas procession in Kyiv

Ahead of the Ukrainian president’s talks in Florida with Trump on Sunday, Russia said Kyiv and its EU backers were trying to “torpedo” a US-brokered plan to stop the fighting.

On top of the fatality, the barrage of drones and missiles wounded dozens and cut power and heating to hundreds of thousands of Kyiv region residents during freezing temperatures, Ukraine authorities said.