

China says military drills 'successfully completed'



Huizhong Wu/AP

International Desk

China's military on Monday said it had "successfully completed" exercises around Taiwan, following three days of war games circling the self-ruled island which Beijing considers as its own territory. "From April 8 to 10, the Eastern Theatre Command of the Chinese PLA successfully completed various tasks for the war-preparedness patrol around Taiwan island and the 'Joint Sword' exercise, and comprehensively tested the integrated joint combat ability of multiple military branches under actual combat conditions," the Eastern Command said in a social media post, AFP reported. Beijing announced the drills on Saturday, after Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen returned to Taipei following a meeting in California with U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Japan has been following China's military drills around Taiwan "with great interest," Reuters quoted a top government spokesperson as saying on Monday. Japan has long worried about China's military activities in the area, given how close southern Japanese islands are to Taiwan. The southern Japanese island of Okinawa hosts a major U.S. Air Force base, and last August when China staged war games to protest the visit of then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taipei, Chinese missiles landed within Japan's exclusive economic zone. The European Union also expressed concern on Monday, saying Taiwan's status should not be changed by force as any escalation, accident or use of force there would have huge global implications. The US has said it is watching China's drills closely. However, The Kremlin on Monday backed China's three-day drills, saying Beijing had a "sovereign right" to respond to "provocative acts." "We have witnessed multiple acts that were provocative in their character towards the Chinese People's Republic," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, AFP reported. "China has the sovereign right to respond to these provocative acts, including with military manoeuvres, in strict accordance with international law."

Russia plans air defence reform, to bolster defences near Finland: Comdr

Russia plans to overhaul its air defence forces after gaining new experience in the war in Ukraine and will also bolster its air defences to counter Finland's accession to the NATO military alliance, a commander in Russia's aerospace forces said.



The Finnish and European Union flags flutter at the border crossing between Finland and Russia, as Finland becomes member of NATO, in Vaalimaa, Finland, on April 4, 2023.

● TOM LITTLE/REUTERS

Since Russia launched its "special military operation" in Ukraine on Feb. 24 last year, the fighting has descended into a grinding artillery war with extensive use of drones and missiles, testing the air defences of both Russia and Ukraine, Reuters reported.

In an interview published on Monday with the Red Star newspaper, Lieutenant General Andrei Demin, deputy commander-in-chief of aerospace forces, said air defence forces had faced a number of challenges in the face of Ukrainian strikes.

Russia, he said, had added more than 50 mobile radar stations and A-50 early warning and control aircraft patrolled 24 hours a day while missile and anti-aircraft installations in regions next to Ukraine had been bolstered.

In Ukrainian regions under Russian control, air defence units had been set up to defend key installations, Demin said, while Russia had ramped up production of the RLK-MC anti-drone system.

Reforms "are undoubtedly planned and will be implemented," Demin told the defence ministry's newspaper. "The purpose of the upcoming changes is the development of the armed forces, aimed at improving the air defense system of the Russian Federation."

Demin said that Russia would also bolster its defences after Finland, which shares a 1,300-km (800-mile) border with Russia, joined NATO.

"In these conditions, the air defense forces are working out issues of protecting the state border in the north-west of the country in accordance with the increased threat level," Demin said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Deadly blast hits police vehicle in Pakistan



● AP

AFP - A bomb blast in the southwest of Pakistan killed at least four people and wounded 15 others on Monday, officials said. The bomb targeted a police vehicle in a busy market in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan Province, which is home to a separatist insurgency and several armed groups. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a separatist group, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Biden says he will run again in 2024: NBC



REUTERS - U.S. President Joe Biden said on Monday he plans to run for reelection in 2024 but was not prepared to announce it yet.

"I plan on running ... but we're not prepared to announce it yet," Biden said in an interview with NBC's "Today" show before the White House Easter Egg Roll. He has said he intends to be the Democratic candidate in 2024 but has not made a formal announcement.

Saudi, Omani envoys hold peace talks with Houthi leaders in Sana'a



The head of the Houthi Supreme Political Council, Mahdi al-Mashat, meets with Saudi and Omani delegations at the Republican Palace in Sana'a, Yemen, on April 9, 2023.

● SABA/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

Saudi and Omani delegations held talks with Houthi officials in Yemen's capital Sana'a on Sunday, Houthi-run media said, as Riyadh seeks a permanent ceasefire to end its military involvement in the country's long-running war. The visit indicates progress in the Oman-mediated consultations between Riyadh and Sana'a, which run in parallel to U.N. peace efforts. The peace initiatives have gained momentum after Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to re-establish ties

in a deal brokered by China, Reuters reported. Oman, which shares borders with Yemen, has been trying for years to bridge differences between Yemen's warring parties. The envoys, who landed late on Saturday, met with the head of Houthi Supreme Political Council, Mahdi al-Mashat, in Sana'a's presidential palace, Houthi news agency SABA reported. President Al-Mashat reiterated the group's position that it seeks an "honourable peace" and that the Yemeni

people aspire to "freedom and independence", SABA said.

Both sides will negotiate ending hostilities and the lifting of a Saudi-led blockade on Yemeni ports, it added.

Sources have told Reuters that the Saudi-Houthi talks are focused on a full reopening of Houthi-controlled ports and the Sana'a airport, payment of wages for public servants, rebuilding efforts and a timeline for foreign forces to exit the country.

Israeli forces kill Palestinian teenager in a raid on a refugee camp

Israeli forces killed one Palestinian teenager and injured two others in a raid on a refugee camp near Jericho in the occupied West Bank on Monday, AFP quoted the Palestinian Health Ministry as saying. Wafa reported that confrontations broke out soon after Israeli forces raided the Aqabat Jaber refugee camp on Monday morning, with dozens of armored vehicles and special forces, to arrest activists.

The report added that Israeli troops fired shots indiscriminately at local residents, hitting one in the head, chest and stomach. He later succumbed to his serious gunshot wounds. Two other Palestinians were struck in the lower parts of the body, Press TV reported. The Israeli army said its forces were operating in the Aqabat Jaber camp near Jericho, without providing further details.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health later identified the victim as 15-year-old Mohammad Fayez Balhan. Local sources said Israeli soldiers had surrounded the camp from all sides before entering it to detain activists. Meanwhile, more than 1,500 Israeli settlers broke into the courtyard of the Al-Aqsa Mosque through the Moroccan Gate and toured it under the protection of the regime's forces. Israeli settlers also

provocatively performed rituals in the sacred site. Media reports said the occupation forces had earlier stormed the mosque, and removed the Palestinian worshippers from the holy site to pave the way for the settlers' incursions. Hardline Israeli officials and settlers regularly storm the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied city, a provocative move that infuriates Palestinians.



Deceased Palestinian teenager Mohammad Fayez Balhan

● TWITTER

Drifting boat in Mediterranean supplied with fuel but no rescue



REUTERS - A merchant ship has supplied fuel and water to a boat with around 400 migrants on board which is in distress between Greece and Malta but Maltese authorities have ordered it not to conduct a rescue, German NGO Sea-Watch International said on Monday. The vessel, which departed from Tobruk in Libya amid a sharp rise of migrant boats crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa, was reported to be adrift and taking on water by support service Alarm Phone early on Sunday.