

Drones attack Russian refineries near major oil port



Drone attacks deep inside Russia have intensified in recent weeks with strikes on Moscow, oil pipelines and even the Kremlin ahead of a Ukrainian counter-offensive

Drones attacked two oil refineries just 40-50 miles (65-80 km) east of Russia's biggest oil export terminals on Wednesday, sparking a fire at one and causing no damage to the other, according to Russian officials. Drone attacks deep inside Russia have intensified in recent weeks with strikes on Moscow, oil pipelines and even the Kremlin ahead of a Ukrainian counter-offensive, Reu-

ters reported. At around 0100 GMT a drone struck the Afipsky oil refinery in Russia's Krasnodar region, causing a fire which was later extinguished, Governor Veniamin Kondratyev said. The Afipsky refinery lies 50 miles east of the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk, one of Russia's most important oil export gateways. The plant can process around 6 million tonnes (44 million bar-

rels) of oil each year. Novorossiisk, together with the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) terminal, bring about 1.5% of global oil to market. Last year, CPC exported via the South Ozereyevka terminal 58.7 million tonnes of oil, mainly from Kazakhstan, while the terminal of Sheskharis at Novorossiisk handled about 30 million tonnes of oil. Another drone crashed

into the Ilsky refinery, which lies around 40 miles east of Novorossiisk, Russian state-owned news agency RIA reported, citing local officials. According to the refinery's web site, its five processing units have the combined capacity of 3 million tonnes per year. There was no immediate information on who launched the drones but Russia has accused Ukraine of increased at-

tacks on targets inside the country, including on Moscow on Tuesday. Ukraine almost never publicly claims responsibility for attacks inside Russia or on Russian-controlled territory in Ukraine. Refineries across Russia have been frequently attacked by drones following the start of what the Kremlin casts as the "special military operation" in Ukraine in February 2022.

UAE withdraws from US-led maritime coalition



The United Arab Emirates has withdrawn from a US-led maritime coalition in the Persian Gulf, it said Wednesday. The UAE "withdrew its

participation" in the 38-nation Combined Maritime Forces two months ago, a Foreign Ministry statement said, without giving reasons for the

move. "As a result of our ongoing evaluation of effective security cooperation with all partners, two months ago, the UAE withdrew its participation in the Combined Maritime Forces," a Foreign Ministry statement said. The Bahrain-headquartered CMF was established in 2001, initially as a partnership between 12 nations. A CMF spokesperson said the UAE remains a partner nation, despite putting its participation on

hold. "The CMF still includes 38 partner nations, of which the UAE is one," Commander Timothy Hawkins told AFP. Earlier this month, the US said it was sending reinforcements to the Persian Gulf, which carries at least a third of the world's sea-borne oil. The commander of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, Vice-Admiral Brad Cooper, later transited through the Strait of Hormuz in a guided-missile destroyer along with

British and French naval commanders. Iran has been adamantly opposed to the presence on Western military forces in the region, arguing Persian Gulf littoral states are capable of maintaining peace and security in the body of water. "The UAE remains committed to responsibly ensuring the safety of navigation in its seas," the UAE statement said, adding that the major oil exporter is "committed to peaceful dialogue and diplomatic engagement".

Azerbaijan stoking Israeli war ...

Presently, Israel finds itself isolated on multiple fronts. It confronts unprecedented internal protests and faces widespread international condemnation following its strikes on the Gaza Strip and the desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. In order to divert attention from its domestic and foreign policy failures, Israel employs psychological and propaganda warfare tactics against Iran. Several Arab nations, which had been pursuing

normalization with Israel, have now become hesitant, leaving Azerbaijan as Israel's sole partner within the Muslim world. Consequently, the Islamic Republic of Iran possesses the capability to exert pressure on Baku through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) by advocating for the suspension or even expulsion of Azerbaijan from the organization. This leverage arises from the fact that the OIC's mission explicitly endorses opposition to Israel and

support for Palestine. Simultaneously, as Israel grapples with regional isolation, Iran garners attention and favor from regional states. Tehran's position is further fortified by the ongoing de-escalation efforts in West Asia. These developments significantly compound Israel's concerns. At the same time, the Republic of Azerbaijan also finds itself isolated within the Caucasus due to its declared intentions to launch an invasion on Armenia, which has drawn severe

criticism from the international community, including Russia. Essentially, Baku has been ostracized from the regional dynamics of the Caucasus. Instead of relying on Israel as a means of overcoming its isolation, Azerbaijan would be wise to mend relations within the Caucasus region and seek to resolve disputes with Armenia while upholding territorial integrity and refraining from border alterations. Dependence on Israel will only serve to deepen Baku's isolation within the region and the broader Islamic world.

NEWS IN BRIEF

N Korea satellite launch fails



REUTERS

AP - North Korea's attempt to put its first reconnaissance satellite into space failed Wednesday. After an unusually quick admission of failure, North Korea vowed to conduct a second launch after it learns what went wrong. The South Korean military said it was salvaging an object presumed to be part of the crashed North Korean rocket in waters 200 kilometers west of the southwestern island of Eocheongdo.

Qatar PM, Taliban chief hold secret talks

REUTERS - The Qatari prime minister held secret talks with the leader of the Taliban this month on resolving tension with the international community, a source briefed on the meeting said, signaling a new willingness by Afghanistan's rulers to discuss ways to end their isolation. The May 12 meeting in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar is the first the reclusive Taliban chief is known to have held with a foreign leader. US President Joe Biden's administration was briefed on the talks and is "coordinating on all issues discussed" by the pair including furthering dialogue with the Taliban, said the source.

Republicans threaten to oust McCarthy over debt deal



POLITICO - Conservatives are threatening to oust Kevin McCarthy from the speakership over his recent deal with President Joe Biden. Rep. Dan Bishop (R-N.C.) on Tuesday became the first House conservative to explicitly threaten the push. The procedure would essentially trigger a vote of no confidence against McCarthy. It would only take one House member to decide to trigger the vote, which would then require a simple majority to oust the speaker.

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