

# US, UK forces strike Houthis again

## 8 Rounds Of Hits Over Past Month Have Failed To Stop Attacks On Ships In Red Sea

Washington: US and British forces carried out a new round of strikes on Monday in Yemen, targeting a Houthi underground storage site as well as missile and surveillance capabilities used by the Iran-aligned group against Red Sea shipping, the Pentagon said.

The Houthis, who control the most populous parts of Yemen, have said their attacks are in solidarity with Palestinians as Israel strikes Gaza.

The Houthi attacks have disrupted global shipping and stoked fears of global inflation. They have also deepened concern that fallout from the Israel-Hamas war could destabilise West Asia.

In the latest response, US and British forces carried out strikes at eight different locations in Yemen, with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands, according to a joint statement signed by the six countries.

"Our initial evidence from last night's strikes is...that all



Houthi fighters rally in support of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and against the US strikes on Yemen outside Sanaa on Monday

intended targets were destroyed," British PM Rishi Sunak told parliament on Tuesday. Sunak also said Britain and US were working closely on new sanctions measures to be announced in the coming days.

A senior US military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said roughly 25 to 30 munitions were fired, some of them from warplanes launched from a US aircraft carrier.

Eight rounds of strikes

over the past month have failed so far to stop Houthi attacks against shipping.

The Houthis' military spokesman, Yahya Sarea, said on Tuesday that the US-British alliance had carried out 18 air strikes: 12 in the capital Sanaa, three in the port city of Hodeidah, two in Taiz and one in Al-Bayda province. "These attacks will not go unanswered or unpunished," he said.

US officials say the strikes

have degraded the Houthis' ability to carry out complex attacks. But they have declined to offer any specific numbers of missiles, radar, drones or other military capabilities destroyed so far. "We are having the intended effect," the US military official told Pentagon reporters.

Speaking after the latest strikes, British foreign minister David Cameron said the action had sent a clear message to the Houthis. "We will continue to degrade their ability to carry out these attacks whilst sending the clearest possible message that we back our words and our warnings with action," he said.

President Joe Biden said last week that air strikes would continue while acknowledging they might not be halting the Houthi attacks. Last week, the Houthis fired two anti-ship ballistic missiles at a US-owned tanker ship that hit the water near the vessel but caused no injuries or damage. REUTERS

# Crude now below \$80/barrel, govt may offer pre-poll relief

## Oil Cos Making Profit Of ₹11 On A Litre Of Petrol & ₹6 On Diesel

Sanjay Dutta | TNN

**New Delhi:** Consumers can look forward to a reduction in fuel prices as oil once again turns Narendra Modi's friend, giving government enough room to put some money into people's pocket and bring down the cost of living ahead of seeking a third term.

Rating agency ICRA on Tuesday said the sharp decline in oil prices since Sept last year has bumped up marketing margins of state-run fuel retailers, which control 90% of the market, to Rs 11 per litre on petrol and Rs 6 on diesel, reversing double-digit losses seen through periods of elevated crude prices since Feb 2022.

The return to profitability comes on the back of benchmark crude prices hovering below \$80 per barrel as subdued demand outlook, combined with rising production in Libya and Norway, partly offset apprehen-



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sions over a wider conflict breaking out in West Asia. Petrol and diesel prices have been frozen since May 2022 when the Centre reduced excise duty for the second time to soften the impact of crude surging above \$100 per barrel after the Ukraine conflict.

The fuel retailers have been swinging between loss and profit with the rise and fall of oil. The only constants were the pump prices that

did not change even when low oil prices made selling petrol and diesel profitable.

Though the retailers made profit between July and Sept 2023 and again since Oct — ahead of the state elections, they did not cut pump prices, ostensibly to recoup past losses. But private retailers Jio-BP and Rosneft-backed Naya-ra cut petrol and diesel prices by Re 1 per litre.

The reason was more po-

litical than economic. The International Energy Agency and brokerages at that time had projected the oil market tightening towards 2023 end and through early 2024. So retailers were allowed to build up a profit buffer as a cushion to absorb losses in case crude prices shot up as projected. If prices had been cut then, it would have been difficult to raise them again before the Lok Sabha polls if oil prices hardened as projected.

Contrary to expectation, oil has remained benign. The latest IEA monthly oil report has projected global oil supply growing faster than demand this year, indicating adequate supply in the market, while the OPEC+ grouping has projected a balanced market. Given that the new government will have the next 12 months till March 31, 2025 to work out its math, this is perhaps the best time — economically and politically — to cut fuel prices.

# After 4 decades of bloody insurgency, Ulfa disbands

Prabin.Kalita@timesgroup.com

**Guwahati:** Ulfa, the armed secessionist outfit that for most of its 44-year existence waged a violent campaign for an "independent Asom", consigned itself to the pages of history on Tuesday after a formal dissolution based on its tripartite peace deal with the Centre and the Assam government last Dec.

The outfit's last general council meeting offered an unconditional apology for what it said were "inadvertent mistakes" and other acts of "commission" by its cadre.

While the outfit that came into being in the courtyard of the Ahom-era Rang Ghar monument in upper Assam's Sivasagar on April 7, 1979, now officially stands disbanded, undivided Ulfa's commander-in-chief Paresh Barua continues to head the anti-talks Ulfa (Independent) faction.

Erstwhile Ulfa general secretary Anup Chetia, who served a jail term in Bangladesh, said the decision to disband was ratified at a designated camp in central Assam's Mangaldoi in the presence of about 900 cadre from nine designated camps.

Chetia said the meeting also decided to form a new social organisation, Asom Vikash Mancha, with him as its chief conven-



The decision to disband Ulfa was ratified at a designated camp in central Assam's Mangaldoi

er. "This organisation will be a common platform for all willing ex-cadre to undertake various development schemes and become self-sufficient, besides contributing to social causes," he said.

The meeting appealed to the BJP-led state government to allot land parcels where the designated camps stood to ex-Ulfa cadre for agriculture. They will deposit arms and ammunition stored at these camps.

Besides Chetia, chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, vice-chairman Pradip Gogoi, finance secretary Chitrabon Hazarika, cultural secretary Pranati Deka Hazarika, foreign secretary Shasha Dhar Choudhury, publicity secretary Mithinga Daimary, deputy commander-in-chief Raju Barua and working council Pranjit Saikia attended the last meeting.

# Maldives ignores India, lets Chinese spy vessel dock

**Sachin.Parashar**  
@timesgroup.com

**New Delhi:** India's ties with the Maldives seemed set to take another hit with Male effectively declaring that it would allow a dual use "spy" Chinese vessel, Xiang Yang Hong 03, to make a port call, regardless of Delhi's concerns about the vessel's research activities.

The Maldives foreign ministry on Tuesday said the port call was meant only for rotation of personnel and replenishment, and that the vessel would not conduct research in Maldivian waters.

After repeated objections by India, Sri Lanka, another Indian Ocean neighbour, had announced earlier this year a 1-year moratorium on such visits by research/survey ships that can accumulate data for both scientific and military purposes.



AP

Muizzu govt's decision will deliver another blow to Maldives' ties with India

According to Male's statement, the Maldives has always been a welcoming destination for vessels of friendly countries, and continues to host both civilian and military vessels making port calls for peaceful purposes.

The vessel is expected to arrive in the Maldives anytime in the first week of February. The announcement also came days after a meeting that President Mohamed Muizzu had with the chief of the US Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral John

Acquino. The commander had in the meeting spoken about the "longstanding relationship" between the two countries and reiterated the US commitment to strengthening Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF). It's not known though if he also voiced US concerns about the alleged collection of data by Chinese research vessels in the Indian Ocean for military purposes.

The ship's docking will likely deepen Maldives' discord with India over its efforts to limit defence cooperation with Delhi, even as Muizzu claims that India will continue to play a key role in supporting MNDF. After he asked India to pull out its troops, the Maldives also reneged on its agreement with India that allowed the Indian Navy to carry out hydrographic surveys in Maldivian waters.

# Turkiye likely to approve Sweden's Nato entry bid after a long delay

## If Cleared, Hungary Remains The Only Opposing Member

**Ankara:** Turkiye's parliament is widely expected to approve Sweden's Nato membership bid on Tuesday, clearing the biggest remaining hurdle to expanding the Western military alliance after 20 months of delays. At the time of going to press, Turkish legislators were debating the bill.

Turkiye's general assembly, where President Tayyip Erdogan's ruling alliance holds a majority, is set to vote on the application that Sweden first made in 2022 following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Once parliament has ratified the move, Erdogan would be expected to sign it into law within days, leaving Hungary as the only member state not to have approved Sweden's accession.

Hungary had pledged not to be the last ally to ratify, but its parliament is in recess till around mid-Feb. PM Viktor Orban said on Tuesday he invited his Swedish counterpart to visit and negotiate his country joining the bloc. "I don't see any reason to negotiate in the current situation, though ... we can have a dialogue and continue to discuss questions," Swedish foreign minister Tobias Billstrom told Swedish news agency TT.



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Sweden's government had no comment on Turkiye's parliamentary process.

Turkiye and Hungary maintain better relations with Russia than other members of the US-led Nato. While opposing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Turkiye has criticised Western sanctions on Moscow, which has cautioned that it would respond if Nato bolstered military infrastructure in the two Nordic states.

Sweden, whose membership bid marked a historic shift in its security policy, would enhance Nato defences in the Baltic Sea region. Ankara's delays have frustrated some of its Western allies and enabled it to extract some concessions.

When Sweden and Finland asked to join Nato in 2022, Tur-

kiye surprised some members in raising objections over what it said was the two countries' protection of groups that Ankara deems terrorists. It endorsed Finland's membership in April last year but, along with Hungary, has kept Sweden waiting. Ankara had urged Stockholm to toughen its stance on local members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which the European Union and United States also deem a terrorist group.

In response, Stockholm introduced a new anti-terrorism bill that makes being a member of a terrorist organisation illegal. Sweden, Finland, Canada and the Netherlands also took steps to relax Turkiye arms-export policies.

Erdogan, who sent Sweden's bid to parliament in October, has linked Sweden's ratification to US approval of sales of F-16 fighter jets to Turkiye. The White House backs the sale and some analysts expect a deal to swiftly follow Turkiye's ratification of Sweden's bid. But there is no clear time frame for the US Congress to approve it, and Turkiye faces some congressional opposition over delaying Nato enlargement and its human rights record. REUTERS

# Nagaland to hold parleys with N-E States over decision to fence Indo-Myanmar border

KOHIMA, Jan 23 (PTI)

THE Nagaland Government will discuss with other north-eastern States sharing border with Myanmar regarding the Centre's decision to fence the international border with the neighbouring country, said Deputy Chief Minister Y Patton.

Patton said this on the sidelines of a programme held at police headquarters.

Asked about the Nagaland Government's stand and the state Cabinet's meeting with Assam Chief Minister and Convenor of North East Democratic Alliance, Himanta Biswa Sarma in Dimapur recently, he said the Nagaland Government will be meeting other north-eastern States sharing the Indo-Myanmar border and then will approach the Centre.

"We will be discussing the

## 'Scrapping FMR avoidable'

AIZAWL, Jan 23 (PTI)

MIZORAM'S apex student body Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reconsider the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and scrap the Free Movement Regime.

The MZP expressed concern and opposition to the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border.

matter (fencing the border) with other north-eastern States and approach the Centre on the Union Government's decision to seal the Indo-Myanmar border," he said.

# Absurd that India doesn't have permanent UNSC seat: Musk

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: India received a surprise boost in its long-standing aspiration for a permanent seat at UN Security Council (UNSC), with the world's richest person and prominent public communicator Elon Musk endorsing

► **EDIT: Absurdity Called UNSC**

sing New Delhi's candidacy for the global high table.

"At some point, there needs to be a revision of the UN bodies... India not having a permanent seat on the Security Council, despite being the most populous country on Earth, is absurd," Musk posted on his platform X on Mon-



day, appearing to respond to a similar post by UN secretary general Antonio Guterres.

Earlier, Guterres, without mentioning India, had tweeted, "How can we accept that Africa still lacks a single Permanent Member in the Security Council? Institutions must reflect today's world, not

that of 80 years ago."

Musk, who is South Africa-born, agreed, saying, "Africa collectively should also have a permanent seat imo (in my opinion)."

In his post, Guterres said Summit of the Future at UN in Sept "will be an opportunity to consider global governance reforms & re-build trust".

No one is holding their breath expecting a breakthrough at the summit. US will be in the throes of a poll campaign, Russia is mired in war, and China is expected do what it can to stymie India. France and Great Britain will also resist ceding their veto.

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