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UAE-trained Giants Brigades set to 'repel' Houthi attacks

Houthis warn of further attacks on UAE



JIZAN: A general view shows the Jizan region of southwest Saudi Arabia near the Yemeni border. Houthi fire from Yemen this month on the UAE, traditionally a haven of security in a turbulent Middle East, stirred alarm at home and abroad, but for many Saudis it's nothing new. — AFP

DUBAI: A UAE-trained militia said yesterday some of its fighters remained on the front lines in key Yemeni conflict zones as part of defensive measures after driving out the Houthi rebels. The Giants Brigades said it had begun repositioning its forces after pushing the insurgents back from oil-rich Shabwa province and stopping short of launching a northward offensive towards the strategically vital city of Marib.

The surprise announcement followed two drone and missile attacks by the Houthis on the United Arab Emirates, the first of which killed three oil workers. Having lost ground to the Emirati-trained forces, the Houthis have warned of further attacks on the UAE unless such operations are halted. The wealthy Gulf state pulled out of Yemen in 2019 but remains an influential player in a Saudi-led coalition supporting the internationally recognized government against the Iran-backed rebels.

"The forces completed their mission in liberating the district of Shabwa and securing it and pushed the Houthis out of the district of Harib, south of Marib," a Giants Brigades official, who spoke on condition of anonymity said. "The force that was repositioned did not leave the front lines, but rather began putting up defensive measures to

repel any military attacks by the Houthis. "What is not yet liberated in Marib (province) is left up to the government which has hundreds of thousands of soldiers, and it is their turn to kick out the Houthis from Marib."

The Houthis and pro-government troops have been engaged in months-long battles in the south, north and west of Marib city, the government's last northern holdout. The Giants Brigades, fighting as part of the Saudi-led pro-government coalition, dealt a serious blow to the Houthi campaign after moving into Shabwa. After their defeats in Shabwa, the rebels seized a UAE-flagged ship on January 3 before launching a deadly strike on Abu Dhabi on January 17. A second strike a week later was intercepted.

An Emirati official said Thursday that Houthi attacks would not become a "new normal" for the UAE, vowing a robust defense. "This is not going to be the new normal for the UAE," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity. "The UAE has world class defense capabilities and is constantly seeking to update them." The Yemen conflict, which erupted in 2014, has killed hundreds of thousands of people directly or indirectly and left millions on the brink of famine, according to the UN. — AFP

Cabinet 'will not' attend a special COVID session

KUWAIT: The government will not be able to attend the special session today to address the measures it has taken to counter the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), said a minister yesterday. Speaking to KUNA, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Mohammad Al-Rajhi affirmed that the Cabinet (and the Ministry of Health in specific) was eager to answer MPs' inquiries on

the government's COVID-19 countermeasures. However, its request to postpone the session for another date was refused.

He added that recent COVID-19 developments and the increase in infection rates required the full attention of the ministry to minimize virus exposure - noting that the Cabinet asked the parliament's

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Powerful winter storm slams into eastern US

WASHINGTON: A powerful winter storm packing heavy snow and high winds pummeled the US East Coast yesterday, forcing the cancellation of thousands of flights as severe weather alerts were sounded across a region of around 70 million people. With blizzard warnings in effect, cities like New York and Boston bore the brunt of the storm yesterday morning, but the far-reaching system also hit the Mid-Atlantic.

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BOSTON: Heavy winds and snow cause near white-out conditions on Clarendon St as Winter Storm Kenan bears down yesterday in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

Six rockets target Baghdad airport, damaging plane

BAGHDAD: Six rockets were fired at the Iraqi capital's airport, causing damage but no casualties, security sources said - the latest in a string of attacks the US blames on Iran-linked militias. The rockets hit Baghdad International Airport's runways or parking areas, one of the sources said. "One civilian plane has been hit and damaged," this source, based at the interior ministry, said.

A second security source confirmed the attack consisted of six rockets that fell around civil installations at the airport, damaging a stationary plane. A third source identified the plane as a Boeing 767 belonging to the state-owned Iraqi Airways, noting that it was not in service and was undergoing repairs. The attack was not immediately claimed.

Recent months have seen rocket and drone attacks target the US embassy in Baghdad's high-security Green Zone, a US diplomatic facility at the airport and troops belonging to a US-led coalition stationed at Iraqi bases. The attacks are rarely claimed but are routinely pinned on pro-Iran factions, who demand that US troops who were

deployed to help Iraqi forces fight the Islamic State group leave the country.

The US-led coalition ended its combat mission in Iraq in December, four years after Iraq's government declared victory over the jihadists. But roughly 2,500 American soldiers and 1,000 coalition soldiers will remain deployed in Iraq to offer training, advice and assistance to national forces. On January 3, US forces downed two armed drones that targeted the coalition at Baghdad airport, according to a coalition source.

On January 13, three people, including two children, were wounded by a rocket that hit a school in the Green Zone, while

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BAGHDAD: A handout picture shows a damaged stationary aircraft on the tarmac of Baghdad airport, after rockets reportedly targeted the runway, on January 28, 2022. — AFP

Philippines to re-open to tourists

MANILA: The Philippines will re-open to fully vaccinated tourists from most countries on February 10 and lift quarantine requirements, officials said, nearly two years after closing its borders to contain the coronavirus. Tourism operators across the archipelago nation famed for its beaches and dive

spots have been devastated by a plunge in international visitors and restrictions on domestic travel.

Their misery was worsened by a super typhoon that smashed into the country in December, wiping out resorts, restaurants and bars in popular tourist destinations. "The tourism industry can now recover and it can contribute big to jobs, livelihoods and the country's economic growth," presidential spokesman Karlo Nograles told a briefing.

A previous plan to welcome back tourists from December 1 was suspended after the emergence of the hyper-contagious Omicron variant that has since ripped through the

Philippines. Friday's announcement allows for the resumption of visa-free travel for short visits by nationals from the 157 countries who already enjoyed permit-free entry to the Philippines before the pandemic began.

Fully vaccinated tourists from countries on the list will need to test negative for COVID-19 shortly before flying to the Philippines and will not have to quarantine on arrival. The list excludes China, the Philippines' fastest-growing tourist market, as well as Taiwan and India. But it includes Manila's remaining top-10 tourism sources, such as the United States, South Korea, Japan, Australia, Canada, and Britain. —AFP (See Page 7)



QUEZON CITY: People walk past vegetables on sale at a market in Quezon city, suburban Manila. — AFP