

## International

# Moscow on red alert after Crimea hit by 'drone attack'

## Ukraine recaptures almost entire region of isolated peninsula

KYIV: Ukraine's Russian-annexed Crimean peninsula was targeted by a drone attack, Kremlin-installed authorities said, adding that Moscow's forces there were "on alert". The strike came as Kyiv claimed another territorial victory and just days after Moscow said it was strengthening its position on the Crimean peninsula. "There is an attack with drones," the governor of the Sevastopol administrative region in Crimea, Mikhail Razvozhayev, said on Telegram. "Our air defense forces are working right now." He said two drones had "already been shot down". Razvozhayev said no civilian infrastructure had been damaged and called on residents to "remain calm."

Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014 after nationwide pro-democracy demonstrations that led to the ouster of Ukraine's Kremlin-friendly president. It used the peninsula, which hosts several important Russian military bases, as a launching pad for its February invasion of Ukraine. But in recent months Ukrainian forces have been pushing a counter-offensive in the south towards Crimea and earlier this month reclaimed Kherson, the capital of the region bordering the annexed peninsula.

There have been several explosions at or near Russian military installations in Crimea since February, including a coordinated drone attack on a key Russian naval port at Sevastopol in October. Last week the Moscow-aligned governor of the territory, Sergei Aksyonov, said authorities were strengthening positions on the peninsula. "Fortification work is being carried out... with the aim of guaranteeing the security of all Crimeans," he said.

## Fears of retaliation in just-liberated Kherson

KHERSON: The Ukrainian welder pondered the afterlife while whispering wedding vows to the nurse with whom he had three children in just-liberated Kherson. Andriy Krivov was bracing for Russia's retaliation following its retreat from the city on which it underpinned its campaign along Ukraine's entire southern front. The booms of Ukrainian artillery echoed inside the empty cathedral as the humbly-dressed couple bowed before the Orthodox priest.

The retreating Russians fired back salvos from the east bank of the Dniro River running down the slope from the singing church choir. The rockets raised dust over the ruined roads and mined fields encircling the city Russia held from the war's start until last week. Krivov was fairly certain they would soon start hitting Kherson itself. "We could die tomorrow," the 49-year-old said after finally marrying the woman with whom he had spent most of his life. "Kherson is now part of the front. And when they start bombing, we want to stand before God as man and wife."

### Retreat and retaliation

Russia's retreat from the city it hoped to make its central base in Ukraine's occupied south has reshaped the nearly ninth-month war. Kherson's importance to the Kremlin-both because of its link to Russian-annexed Crimea and Ukraine's Odessa port to the west-spared it from destruction. Its carefully-staged recapture in the third month of Kyiv's broader counterassault stymied President Vladimir Putin's plans to seize Ukraine's entire southern coast. Kherson now stands in the crossfire of a Ukrainian push into the eastern parts of its eponymous region-

### 'Not tired'

Ukraine said Tuesday it had recaptured almost the entire region of an isolated peninsula off the Black Sea, where fighting is ongoing. "We are restoring full control over the region. We have three settlements left on the Kinburn Spit to officially no longer be a region at war," said Mykolaiv regional governor Vitaly Kim on social media.

The southern spit jutting into the Black Sea is divided in two: in the west, as part of the Mykolaiv region and to the east as part of the Kherson region. It is cut off from territory controlled by Ukraine's forces by the Dniro river, which flows through the Kherson region. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told the European Union in an online press conference that its support was crucial, warning against "fatigue" towards the war. "If we Ukrainians are not tired, the rest of Europe has neither moral nor political right to be tired," he said.

### Aid and gas

Kuleba called on the EU to implement a fresh round of sanctions against Russia, urging particular attention to measures that slow down and stop Russia's missile industry. "I call on my colleagues in the EU... to put aside any doubts or, as the fashionable phrase goes, 'fatigue' and to start and quickly conclude the ninth sanctions package," he said.

The US government said Tuesday it would provide another \$4.5 billion in financial backing for "supporting core government services." As much of Ukraine's energy grid is pounded by Russian strikes, the World Bank has warned the country faces severe

and possibly even Crimea itself. The danger will linger because most think Ukraine wants to strike before the Russians have a chance to regroup.

"Russia gains more from a pause, which is why Ukraine has an incentive to keep pushing," said Rob Lee of the US-based Foreign Policy Research Institute. Western officials say Russia still managed to pull out most of its forces and set up defensive lines on the Dniro's east bank. Fears of Russia's retaliation on a city it no longer has strategic incentive to save played on the welder's mind on his way to church. "The chances are very high that they will start bombing us now," he said while holding nurse Natalia's hand.

### Two different fronts

Lydia Belova was ready to suffer. The 81-year-old former poultry farmer patiently waited her turn to fill up plastic jugs from a hose running from a local spring. The Russians cut off Kherson's power and destroyed most of its infrastructure on their way out. Belova spent eight-and-a-half months watching Russian soldiers ransack stores and hunt down those who stood up to their rule. She figured that hardship was worth the price for pushing the Russians a little further back. "Freedom is always more important," she said. "Water is not a big deal. We can stand in line. But Ukraine—we must defend it." This determination highlights the main distinction of Ukraine's southern front from the battles being waged across its east.

Neither Kherson nor its neighboring Zaporizhzhia region were under Russian control prior to the war. But Russia imposed indirect rule over parts of eastern Lugansk and Donetsk during an insurgency its proxies launched in 2014. Those opposed to Putin there-many of them younger Ukrainian speakers from birth-had eight years to relocate further west. The largely Ukrainian-speaking south is confronting Putin's forces for the first time.

munications and housing, whose ministries employ the overwhelming majority of expats.

The lawmaker inquired in his questions about the number of expat employees in each ministry and the strategy of each ministry to implement the Kuwaitization of jobs in their ministries. He also asked about the reasons for not replacing expat employees with Kuwaitis and the nature of jobs taken by expats.

Following a meeting by the priorities committee with the government on Wednesday, MP Fahhad said the government and MPs are in agreement over three key legislations covering conflict of interests, raising salaries of retired Kuwaitis and financial aid to housewives. He said the three legislations will be sent to the Assembly for approval in December. The lawmaker said the government also informed them that its program for the next four years will be approved by the Cabinet next week and sent to the Assembly for debate.

issued a statement early Wednesday saying: "We are shocked at this tragic event." The company added that it was "praying for those impacted, the community and our associates. We're working closely with law enforcement, and we are focused on supporting our associates."

Virginia state Senator Louise Lucas, who represents the Chesapeake region, said she was "heartbroken that America's latest mass shooting took place... in my district". "I will not rest until we find the solutions to end this gun violence epidemic in our country that has taken so many lives," she wrote on Twitter. Congressman Bobby Scott of Virginia tweeted: "Tragically, our community is suffering from yet another incident of senseless gun violence just as families are gathering for Thanksgiving."

The incident occurred three nights after a gunman opened fire inside an LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs, killing five people and injuring at least 18, in what is being investigated as a possible hate crime. Authorities said that suspect, identified as 22-year-old Anderson Lee Aldrich, had used a long rifle at the club, where partygoers were marking the Transgender Day of Remembrance, which pays tribute to trans people targeted in violent attacks. So far in 2022, the Gun Violence Archive website has tracked more than 600 mass shootings in the United States - defined as an incident with four or more people shot or killed, not including the shooter. —AFP



CRIMEA: This aerial picture shows restoring works on damaged parts of the Kerch Bridge that links Crimea to Russia, which was hit by a blast. —AFP

energy supply disruption amid frigid weather. "The Kremlin wants to transform the cold this winter into a weapon of mass destruction," Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky told a meeting of French mayors in a video message. Meanwhile Russian energy giant Gazprom accused Ukraine of diverting natural gas supplies transiting to Moldova, and threatened to curtail deliveries through a key pipeline to Europe in response. —AFP



KHERSON: A woman takes water from Dniro river in Kherson, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

Kherson hospital director Iryna Starodumova watched the invasion expose fundamental rifts among her staff. The exhausted doctor lost half her workers prior to the Kremlin's annexation of all four battle-torn region in late September. A portion of those who stayed once the borders were effectively sealed appeared to accept Russian rule.

"I never suspected in my 42 years here that I was working with people whose views differed from those we all thought we shared," she said. "The (pro-Russians) came in, did their job and took their views home with them," she said during one of her rare breaks. "We tried to be tolerant." The church pastor was less forgiving. Protodeacon Andriy's Kherson cathedral housed the remains Grigory Potemkin—a storied commander under Catherine the Great. His name is now broadly associated with fake villages built to please the tsarina during a tour of her new holdings along the Dniro. —AFP

## Americans urged to get vaccinated

WASHINGTON: True to form, America's outgoing top infectious disease official, Anthony Fauci, used what may be his final White House appearance Tuesday to convey a simple message. "Please for your own safety and for that of your family, get your updated COVID-19 shot as soon as you're eligible," said the 81-year-old, hammering home a public health mantra in the face of slow booster uptake.

Vaccines targeting Omicron's sublineages BA.4 and BA.5 have been widely available since summer, but so far only 11 percent of the eligible over-five population in the United States have received them. Boosting the case, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a study that showed the new shots reduced the risk of infection by around 30 percent among people who had the last of their doses two or three months earlier.

President Joe Biden's Covid coordinator Ashish Jha also announced a "six-week sprint" to increase shots in arms by the end of the year and blunt the impact of an expected winter wave. Influenza and RSV, which are rebounding after two years of containment during lockdowns, are already adding to the burden on the health care system and could get worse.

But Fauci offered a hopeful assessment about prospects as cold weather settles in. Between the vaccinated and those with prior infections, he said he hoped "there's enough community protection that we're not going to see a repeat of what we saw last year at this time," even as newer variants emerge. Fauci will step down next month from his roles in government as Biden's chief medical advisor, as well as director of the National Institute for Allergies and Infectious Diseases, which he has headed since 1984. —AFP

## Top court endorses elections; MPs...

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The lawmaker revealed no further details on the content of the draft law, which will affect close to 80,000 expat employees in government jobs. MPs have been pressing the government to accelerate the replacement of expat employees with Kuwaitis.

MP Essa Al-Kandari sent a series of questions to nine ministers asking about obstacles that prevent them from replacing expat employees in public jobs with Kuwaiti nationals. The ministers include those of information, finance, health, education, public works and electricity, municipality, commerce and industry, com-

## Employee kills 6 in US Walmart...

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In the hours afterwards, news footage showed a major police presence around the Walmart, which is located about 240 km southeast of the US capital Washington.

Gun attacks in grocery stores in America have become increasingly common in recent years. A teenage gunman killed 10 people, most of them black, at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York in May. Last year a shooting at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado also left 10 dead. And in a particularly gruesome attack in 2019, a young gunman killed 23 and wounded 26 as he stalked shoppers at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas.

An advocacy group called Guns Down America has reported that from Jan 1, 2020 to May 14 of this year there were 448 "gun incidents" and 137 deaths at 12 large national retailers. In Chesapeake, local resident Edna Dunham told CBS news after the shooting, "That could have been me." "It could've been any of us because we go there so much. It could've been any of us," Dunham said.

Walmart, the largest retailer in the United States,

## Saudi win sparks rare Arab...

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"This is a historic victory for Saudi Arabia and a great victory for all Arabs," 24-year-old Jordanian Ahmed Al-Qasim, his country's flag draped around his shoulders, told AFP at a Doha fan zone. The triumph was Saudi's biggest since its World Cup debut in 1994 and the first for a Middle Eastern country in this year's tournament, which is making its debut on Arab soil.

The outpouring of joy followed a series of bitter human rights disputes that drew angry responses from the Qatari organizers, including accusations of anti-Arab racism. Some Qatari fans raised the conservative kingdom's flag alongside their own, and even Qatar's Amir watched the game draped in a Saudi scarf - days after the Saudi Crown Prince donned Qatari colors.

"There was a political dispute between the two governments, but it has ended and at the end of the day, we are one people," said Anoud, a Qatari who asked to be identified only by her first name. "We have turned the page and the blockade is behind us,"

she told AFP outside a Doha shopping mall.

Tributes were paid around the region, with many Arab leaders voicing their congratulations on Twitter. Two Doha skyscrapers lit up their glass facades with the green colors of the Saudi flag, as did Dubai's Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building. Celebrations were seen in Gaza and there were even fireworks in Yemen, whose powerful neighbor Saudi Arabia has led a military coalition since 2015 to prop up the international-recognized government.

On social media networks, Saudi Arabia's victory topped regional trending lists and inspired a flurry of congratulatory posts as well as satirical memes mocking Argentina. Nevin Massad, a professor of political science at Cairo University, called Saudi's football win an "exceptionally emotional moment". "Political Arabism may no longer be possible, but there are different forms of Arabism among the people," including "an athletic Arabism", she told AFP.

Emirati political science professor Abdulkhaleq Abdulla called the Saudi team "Arab heroes", in a post on Twitter. Saudi Arabia's success was followed by creditable performances by Tunisia and Morocco, who fought out 0-0 draws with Denmark and Croatia respectively, both strong European teams. "We feel that all the Arabs are here behind us," said 23-year-old Saudi fan Khaled Abdullah, who was part of the celebrations in Doha. "Our joy is one." —AFP



DOHA: A Saudi supporter poses for a picture in Souq Waqif during the Qatar 2022 World Cup football tournament on Nov 22, 2022. — AFP