













# US, allies warn Huthis as ship attacks rattle global commerce

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: Twelve nations led by the United States on Wednesday jointly warned Yemen's Huthi rebels of unspecified consequences unless they immediately halt sea attacks that are increasingly disrupting global commerce.

President Joe Biden's administration described the statement—joined notably by Britain, Germany and Japan—as a final warning as he weighs possible military strikes against the Huthis if attacks persist.

The Iranian-backed rebels, who control much of Yemen including the capital Sanaa and most of the Red Sea coast, have been firing on ships allegedly linked to Israel in avowed

solidarity with Palestinians in the battered, Hamas-run Gaza Strip.

"Let our message now be clear: we call for the immediate end of these illegal attacks and release of unlawfully detained vessels and crews," said the joint statement released by the White House.

"The Huthis will bear the responsibility of the consequences should they continue to threaten lives, the global economy and free flow of commerce in the region's critical waterways." A senior Biden administration official, while not specifying the consequences, called the message "very clear."

"I would not anticipate another warning. I

think this statement speaks for itself," the official told reporters.

Biden consulted with his national security team on the morning of New Year's Day while on holiday in the US Virgin Islands to "discuss options" over the Huthi attacks, the official said.

Britain—a close US ally on security issues—has issued its own warning of "direct action," with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak saying that the Huthis "must end their deadly and destabilizing attacks on vessels."

"The UK will always take action to defend freedom of navigation," Sunak wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.



Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) pose after a swap, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, at an unknown location in Ukraine.

## North Korea moves to redefine relations with South

**Monitoring Desk**  
SEOUL: North Korea is shaking up the way it handles relations with South Korea, enacting changes to policy and government organisations that would effectively treat the South as a separate, enemy state.

The moves, which break with decades of policy, could have North Korea's foreign ministry taking over relations with the South, and potentially help justify the use of nuclear weapons against Seoul in a future war, analysts said.

Since the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a stalemate, both nations

have had policies that treat each other differently than other countries.

That has included relying on special agencies and ministries for inter-Korean relations rather than their foreign ministries and embracing policies for future peaceful reunification, usually envisioning a single state with two systems.

But in remarks to a year-end party meeting last week, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said peaceful reunification is impossible, and said the government would make a "decisive policy change" in relations with the "enemy".

## ICJ slates hearings in Gaza genocide case for Jan 11-12

**Monitoring Desk**  
PARIS: The International Court of Justice (ICJ) will hold public hearings in proceedings launched by South Africa against Israel over the Gaza war on Jan 11 and 12, it said on Wednesday.

South Africa had asked the ICJ on Friday for an urgent order declaring that Israel was in breach of its obligations under the 1948 Genocide Convention in its crackdown against Hamas.

Israel had said it would appear before the court to contest the accusations.

The court usually takes one or two weeks to issue a decision on emergency measures after the hearings. The court's rulings are final but it has no authority to enforce them.

## Iran holds day of mourning for 84 killed in twin blasts

**Monitoring Desk**  
TEHRAN: Iran observed a day of mourning on Thursday for the at least 84 people killed when twin blasts ripped through a crowd commemorating the slain Revolutionary Guards general Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday blamed "evil and criminal enemies" of the Islamic republic, without naming them, and vowed a "harsh response".

Regional tensions have surged amid Gaza's bombardment sparked when Hamas launched its October 7 surprise attack on Israel, which Tehran welcomed while denying any involvement. President Ebrahim Raisi's political deputy, Mohammad Jamshidi, charged on social media platform X that "the responsibility for this crime lies with the US.

honour Soleimani, four years after a US drone strike in Baghdad killed the veteran senior commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday blamed "evil and criminal enemies" of the Islamic republic, without naming them, and vowed a "harsh response".

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Doctors hold placards calling for better pay, as they stand on a picket line outside London's St Thomas Hospital on the first day of strike action.

## Cameron stresses Balkan peace in Kosovo

**Monitoring Desk**  
PRISTINA: UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron on Thursday stressed the importance of maintaining peace and stability in the Western Balkans, committing £45 million (\$57 million) to shoring up security in the region.

During a visit to Kosovo, his first as the UK's top diplomat, he met political leaders and visited British troops.

Speaking after talks with his Kosovar counterpart, Donika Gervalla-Schwarz, Cameron stressed

"the importance of stability in the Western Balkans".

"That is something Britain is investing in, with £45 million this year. It's something that is very important for our national interest," he told a press conference in Pristina.

Tensions have persisted between Kosovo and neighbouring Serbia since the wars of the 1990s that led to the breakup of the former Yugoslavia.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008 but the latter has refused to recognise it.

## Russian hackers were inside Ukraine telecoms giant for months

**Monitoring Desk**  
LONDON: Russian hackers were inside Ukrainian telecoms giant Kyivstar's system from at least May last year in a cyberattack that should serve as a "big warning" to the West, Ukraine's cyber spy chief told Reuters.

The hack, one of the most dramatic since Russia's full-scale invasion nearly two years ago, knocked out services provided by Ukraine's biggest telecoms operator for some 24 million users for days from Dec. 12.

In an interview, Illia Vitiuk, head of the Security Service of Ukraine's (SBU) cybersecurity department, disclosed exclusive details about the hack, which he said caused "disastrous" destruction and aimed to land a psychological blow and gather intelligence.

"This attack is a big message, a big warning, not only to Ukraine, but for the whole Western world to understand that no one is actually untouchable."

## Indonesia watchdog says president's son broke rules

**Monitoring Desk**  
JAKARTA: Indonesia's vote watchdog ruled on Thursday the president's son—the leading candidate's running mate in coming elections—had broken rules during his campaign, a breach that one expert said could leave him facing a reprimand but not disqualification.

Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who is seeking to become vice-president in the vote scheduled for Feb. 14, denied any wrongdoing.

The watchdog, known by the abbreviation Bawaslu, said 36-year-old Gibran had violated a Jakarta gubernatorial regulation when he handed out free milk to people at a public "car-free day" in December.

A 2016 Jakarta gubernatorial order bars "events for the interests of political parties" during car-free days, when vehicles are banned from major thoroughfares as part of an environmental push.

The watchdog said it did not have the power to penalise him for breaking an order imposed by authorities in the capital, Jakarta Governor Heru Budi Hartono did not respond to a Reuters request for comment.

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## New Jersey imam shot dead outside mosque, no suspect or motive identified

**Monitoring Desk**  
NEW JERSEY: An imam who was shot on Wednesday outside a mosque in New Jersey has died, the US state's attorney general said, adding that the killing did not initially appear to be driven by "bias" or domestic terrorism. Hassan Sharif was shot multiple times outside Masjid Muhammad in Newark, just west of New York, before being taken to hospital where he later died, New Jersey Attorney General Matt Platkin said.

"We do not yet know the motivation for this crime (but) the evidence collected thus far does not indicate that this was an act motivated by bias, or an act of domestic terrorism," said Platkin. He added that "in light of global events, and with a rise in bias that many communities are experiencing across our state—particularly the Muslim,

## Italy's Meloni urged to discipline lawmaker over New Year's gun incident

**Monitoring Desk**  
ROME: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni faced calls on Tuesday to punish a lawmaker from her party after a bystander was injured by a shot fired from his gun at a New Year's celebration. Emanuele Pozzolo, who is a member of Meloni's Brothers of Italy party, said the small revolver from which the bullet came belonged to him but has denied discharging the weapon himself.

The shot slightly injured the son-in-law of a member of the security team who were with a junior justice minister attending the same event to bring in the new year in the northern Ital-

ian village of Rosazza. Local police are investigating the incident. Pozzolo had a licence for the gun but opposition politicians are asking why he decided to take it to a New Year's party.

"These incompetents are a danger to the safety of those who meet them, let alone the interests of the country," said Elly Schlein, leader of the opposition centre-left Democratic Party. The right-wing Brothers of Italy said in a statement that unspecified attack would be taken against Pozzolo if he was found to have done wrong but condemned efforts to use the incident to attack the party politically.

## Three injured in stabbing incident on Tokyo train, woman in custody

**Monitoring Desk**  
TOKYO: Three men were injured on Wednesday in a stabbing incident and taken to hospital after a woman wielded a knife on a train at Akihabara Station in Tokyo, Japanese police said.

The police received an emergency call at just before 11 pm local time (1400 GMT) saying the woman had inflicted injuries with a knife on the Yamanote loop line, one of the busiest transport routes in the city, a Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department spokesperson said.



A number of trucks are stuck on the E22 at Linderod, southern Sweden.

## Somalia rejects port deal between Ethiopia and Somaliland

**Monitoring Desk**  
MOGADISHU: Somalia rejected a pact its breakaway region of Somaliland signed with Ethiopia allowing it to use a major port with access to the Red Sea in return for recognition as an independent state, saying the agreement had no legal force.

Somaliland, which views Somaliland as part of its territory, also summoned its ambassador to Ethiopia for deliberations over the agreement signed by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

and Somaliland leader Muse Bihi Abdi on Monday. The agreement would allow landlocked Ethiopia, which relies on neighbouring Djibouti for most of its maritime trade, to lease 20 km around the port of Berbera, which lies on the Gulf of Aden with access to the Red Sea, for 50 years for its navy and commercial purposes. In exchange Somaliland's leader said Ethiopia would recognise Somaliland as an independent nation, becoming the first country to do so.

## Philippines receives climate finance commitment from Canada

**Monitoring Desk**  
MANILA: (This Dec. 6 story has been corrected to say that \$5.3 billion is Canada's total international commitment, not just for the Philippines, in the headline and paragraph 3)

The United Nations Development Programme have a commitment from Canada on climate finance, the president's office in Manila said on Wednesday. The collaboration and finance commitment will run until 2026 and Canada will support the Philippines in promoting biodiversity conservation.

## Temperatures plunge below -40 Celsius in Sweden

**Monitoring Desk**  
STOCKHOLM: Sweden on Wednesday recorded its coldest January night in 25 years, with a reading of minus 43.6 degrees Celsius in the far north as a cold snap hit the Nordics.

"To put that into perspective, that is the lowest January temperature in Sweden since 1999," Mattias Lind, meteorologist at Sweden's national weather agency SMHI, said.

In January 1999, a temperature of minus 49 degrees Celsius was recorded in Sweden, which tied the record set in 1951. Lind said that Wednesday's measurement was made at

the Kvikkjokk-Arrenjarka station in Sweden's far north.

"It is the lowest temperature that has been recorded in this specific spot since measurements began" in 1888, he said. Several other stations recorded temperatures of below minus 40C in Sweden's north.

While residents of the region are used to seeing freezing temperatures, the recent cold snap has forced local bus operators to suspend services, and train operator Vy said that it had cancelled all trains north of the city of Umea for several days.

## Record-breaking strike piles pressure on England's health service

**Monitoring Desk**  
LONDON: Junior doctors in England started a six-day walkout over pay on Wednesday, the longest strike in the 75-year history of the state-run National Health Service (NHS), which will hit patient care during a seasonal winter peak in demand.

As in other key sectors over the past year, junior doctors represented by the British Medical Association (BMA) have staged a series of walkouts to demand better pay in the face of soaring inflation.

Junior doctors in England on Wednesday defended a decision to start their longest consecutive strike in the seven-decade history of Britain's National Health Service (NHS). They said their wages have gone down by around a quarter in real terms under the current government, which has been in power since 2010.

"I'm here because we deserve better as doctors," Callum Parr, an accident and

emergency doctor from London, said from a picket line outside St Thomas' Hospital in the British capital. The 25-year-old medic said he was \$150,000 in debt after six years at university, and facing increasing costs including rapidly rising rental prices in the city. "Our job is hard, we knew it would be hard, we went to medical school which is also hard, and we want to help patients," he said. "But you also have to be able to pay your bills."

In a statement, the union urged the government to make a "credible" pay offer to end the strikes, which threaten to increase the pressure on the health service, where more than 7.7 million on waiting lists seek treatment. "Morale across the health service is at an all-time low... Many will be wondering if their chosen career is still worth pursuing the government has the chance to show those doctors they still have a future working in this country," the BMA said.



Myanmar protesters residing in Japan raise photos of Aung San Suu Kyi during a rally, outside the Embassy of Myanmar in Tokyo, Japan.

