

U.S. intel says Saudi attacks were staged from Iran

Tehran launched 20 drones and at least a dozen missiles, says report; Riyadh claims Iranian weapons were used in attack

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
REUTERS
WASHINGTON/ JEDDAH

American officials have shared intelligence with Riyadh indicating that Iran was the staging ground for the devastating drone attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil installations, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on Monday.

The weekend strikes on Abqaiq – the world's largest processing plant – and the Khurais oilfield knocked out 5.7 million barrels per day (bpd), or 6% of global production, sending prices soaring.

While Washington has blamed Tehran, the Monday assessment on the origin of the attacks has not been shared publicly, the *Journal* said.

‘Not definitive’
The U.S. assessment determined that “Iran launched more than 20 drones and at



Tough stance: Iran leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a meeting in Tehran on Tuesday. AFP

least a dozen missiles,” according to unnamed sources.

“But Saudi officials said the U.S. didn't provide enough to conclude that the attack was launched from Iran, indicating the U.S. information wasn't definitive,” the WSJ added.

“U.S. officials said they

planned to share more information with the Saudis in the coming days.”

President Donald Trump has said that the United States is ready to help Saudi Arabia, but will wait for a “definitive” determination on who was responsible.

“I'm not looking to get in-

to new conflict, but sometimes you have to,” he said. “That was a very large attack, and it could be met by an attack many, many times larger.”

“Certainly, it would look to most like it was Iran.”

Iran-supported Houthi rebels – who are fighting a

di-led coalition in Yemen – claimed the strikes. Riyadh has said Iranian weapons were used, but stopped short of blaming Tehran directly.

Oil supply restored

Saudi Arabia Energy Minister said on Tuesday that oil supply is fully back online and the kingdom will achieve 11 million bpd capacity by the end of September and 12 million bpd by the end of November.

Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman also told a press conference that oil production in October would be 9.89 million bpd and that the world's top oil exporter would keep full oil supplies to customers this month.

He said Saudi Arabia would keep its role as the secure supplier of global oil markets, adding that the kingdom needed to take strict measures to prevent further attacks.

No talks with U.S.: Khamenei

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TEHRAN

Iran's supreme leader on Tuesday ruled out negotiations with the U.S. “at any level”, after Washington blamed Tehran for attacks on Saudi oil installations.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the U.S. adopted a policy of “maximum pressure” on Iran because it believes it cannot bring the Islamic republic to its knees through other means.

“The policy of ‘maximum pressure’ against the Iranian nation is worthless and all Islamic Republic of Iran officials unanimously believe there will be no negotiations with the U.S. at any level,” he said in a televised address.

Corruption shadow over Sri Lanka's tallest tower

President alleges fund misappropriation

REUTERS
COLOMBO

The grand opening of Sri Lanka's tallest tower was mired in controversy on Monday when President Maithripala Sirisena said one of the Chinese firms contracted to work on the project had disappeared with \$11 million of state funds.

Mr. Sirisena made the allegation at the launch ceremony of the China-financed Lotus Tower, a 356.3 metre construction in the shape of a lotus bud featuring a revolving restaurant, conference hall and observation area.

The tower overlooks Beira Lake in central Colombo.

Mr. Sirisena said that in 2012, under his predecessor former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the state-run Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (TRC) had deposited 2 billion rupees (\$11.09 million) with Aerospace Long-March International Trade Co. Ltd (ALIT), a Chinese firm chosen as one of the main contractors.

“In 2016, we found ALIT had disappeared. We investigated into this and the Sri Lankan Ambassador in Beijing went to the address of ALIT personally on my instruction to find there was no such company,” Mr. Sirisena said in a speech.

“This is the money we could have spent for development of this country, for education, and medicines of patients.”

Mr. Sirisena's audience at the opening ceremony included Chinese envoy to Colombo Cheng Xueyuan. It was not possible to approach Mr. Cheng at the ceremony for comment and officials at China's Embassy in the Sri Lankan capital did



The Lotus Tower overlooking Beira Lake in Colombo. AFP

not respond to text and WhatsApp messages. It was not immediately possible to contact ALIT via phone or email.

Mr. Sirisena had suspended most of the Chinese-backed infrastructure projects started under Mr. Rajapaksa when he came to power in 2015 over allegations of corruption, overpricing and flouting government procedures. But more than a year later, the Sirisena government allowed Chinese projects to resume after a few changes in some of them.

China's Exim Bank in 2012 agreed to lend 80% of the total investment of \$104.3 million in the Lotus Tower, with the rest to be met by TRC.

Mr. Sirisena said the government had started repayment of the loans made, but more funds were needed to complete the project.

ELSEWHERE



20 dead as truck falls off cliff in Philippines

MANILA
Twenty villagers were killed and 14 others were injured when the truck they were riding in lost control and fell off a cliff on Tuesday in a remote mountain village in the southern Philippines, the police and the Red Cross said. The truck was negotiating a downhill road in Tboli when its brakes apparently failed and it plummeted down a ravine, pinning 15 people to death. Five other victims later died in hospitals. AP

Taliban warns of more violence ahead of election

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

The Taliban, which killed at least 48 people and wounded dozens more in two blasts on Tuesday, has warned of more violence ahead of the September 28 election.

The first attack saw a motorcyclist detonate a suicide bomb at a checkpoint leading to a rally where President Ashraf Ghani was addressing supporters in central Parwan province, just north of the capital, killing 26 and wounding 42.

Just over an hour later another blast also claimed by the Taliban rocked central Kabul near the U.S. Embassy. Authorities initially did not give casualty figures, but la-



In position: Afghan security forces at the site of a suicide attack near the U.S. Embassy in Kabul on Tuesday. AP

ter said 22 people had been killed and a further 38 wounded.

The explosions came after U.S. President Donald Trump abruptly ended talks with the Taliban earlier this month over a deal that would have allowed the U.S.

to begin withdrawing troops from its longest war.

In a statement sent to media claiming responsibility for both blasts, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the attack near Mr. Ghani's rally was deliberately aimed at disrupting the elec-

tion. “We already warned people not to attend election rallies, if they suffer any losses that is their own responsibility,” the statement said.

Women, children killed
Women and children were among the casualties, Parwan hospital director Abdul Qasim Sangin said.

The President, who was speaking to his supporters at the time of the blast, was unhurt but later condemned the attack, saying the incident proved the Taliban had no real interest in reconciliation.

“As the Taliban continue their crimes, they once again prove that they are not interested in peace and stability

in Afghanistan,” said Mr. Ghani in a statement.

The UN's mission in Afghanistan also slammed the Taliban, accusing them of showing “despicable disregard for civilian life & fundamental human right to participate in democratic process”.

The election will see Mr. Ghani face off against his own Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah, and more than a dozen other candidates, including former warlords, espies, and one-time members of the country's former communist regime. Mr. Ghani is seeking a clear mandate they can use to negotiate with the insurgents on a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

Israel votes on Prime Minister Netanyahu's political survival

Second election in five months is expected to be ‘very tight’

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JERUSALEM

Israelis voted on Tuesday in their second election in five months that will decide whether to keep Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the country's longest-serving Prime Minister, in office despite corruption allegations against him.

The stakes could not be much higher for the 69-year-old right-wing leader who, as in the April polls, faces a strong challenge from ex-military chief Benny Gantz and his centrist Blue and White alliance.

Mr. Netanyahu voted in Jerusalem and said he expected a close election, urging Is-



Benjamin Netanyahu

He spent the day warning if his supporters did not turn out to vote, including in appearances at Jerusalem's main market and its central bus station, where he wielded a megaphone to exhort the crowds. He repeatedly warned, as he has in previous elections, that leaving and Arab voters were showing up in large numbers to vote him out.

Mr. Gantz voted in his hometown of Rosh Haayin and called on the country to reject corruption and “extremism”. “We want new hope. We are voting today for change,” Mr. Gantz said after voting with wife Revital.

Race heats up within UNP for presidential candidacy

Premadasa wants secret ballot to pick candidate



Sajith Premadasa

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO
In the wake of a heightening contest for presidential candidacy within the ruling United National Party (UNP), deputy leader and Minister Sajith Premadasa on Tuesday said the party must hold a “secret ballot” to choose the most-preferred contender.

Addressing a media conference, the son of late President Ranasinghe Premadasa said he had written to UNP leader and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe expressing his interest to run for presidency, in the polls scheduled before the end of the year.

“If there are contra-opi-

ka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), while the leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) is fielding its leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake.

Three contenders

The UNP has three contenders for the office of the country's executive president – PM Wickremesinghe, Mr. Premadasa and Speaker Karu Jayasuriya. Though many in the party, especially its grassroots activists, are said to be backing Mr. Premadasa, his critics argue that he may not be the “unifying force” that is needed to consolidate both the Sinhala-majority and minority vote.

Meanwhile, referring to his possible candidacy for the first time, Mr. Jayasuriya on Tuesday said the Buddhist clergy and civil society had urged him to consider contesting in the presiden-

tial race. “Any prospect of my accepting a nomination to contest as a presidential candidate would be conditioned upon the support of all forces united behind the critical objective of abolishing the executive presidency, which has been the objective of civil society since 1995,” he said in a statement, reviving a promise made by different presidential hopefuls since 1994, and kept by none.

‘People's will’

Mr. Premadasa, apparently ambivalent on the issue, earlier told media persons that there was “no scientific survey” so far establishing that the people of the country wanted executive presidency abolished, and that he would act “according to the people's will”.

Amid persisting uncer-

tainty in the UNP, TNA Leader R. Sampanthan and his team of parliamentarians on Tuesday met Mr. Wickremesinghe. The TNA's position is being closely watched, given that the minority Tamil vote is likely to play a crucial role.

“Our leader conveyed to the PM that the presidential candidate was a matter for the UNP to decide, and that the TNA will neither interfere, nor influence that decision,” TNA spokesman M.A. Sumanthiran told *The Hindu*.

Further, the TNA said their expectations were clearly laid out – a political solution to the national question with no further delay, and the abolition of executive presidency. Mr. Sampanthan also told the PM that while the TNA would talk to all candidates, a final decision will be taken later.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12733

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32

ACROSS

- 9 Targeted at the centre, anti-corruption crusader's cry (7)
- 10 Fatter and true reflection covering the radii at equal intervals (7)
- 11 In other words, I'll face adverse weather (7)
- 12 Flipped over and over (7)

- (set by Arden)
- 13 Committed a crime as the child slept (9)
 - 15 Moldable depth in the vane... (5)
 - 16 ...team otherwise will break for tea (7)
 - 19 One third of the country will gather by the countryside (7)
 - 20 Excellent deal, point taken (5)
 - 21 Reversal on last test for Ashes holder (5,4)
 - 25 Silent place inside a small bagpipe (7)
 - 26 A flower for sweetheart (7)
 - 28 Hate to prance before court, essentially (7)
 - 29 I am only making this regular payment (7)
- ### DOWN
- 1 Talent said to endure (6)
 - 2 Regularly ransack and finish up (6)
 - 3 Point out regular pairs of old South Americans (4)
 - 4 Republicans allow everyone to run (6)
 - 5 Movement of water mostly below the fish (8)
 - 6 Live under shade, even priest belongs to a special unit (5,5)
 - 7 Fortune in hurricane season? (8)
 - 8 Doctor urged no drink outside, it's donkeywork (8)
 - 14 A bishop's answer is pardon (10)
 - 16 Intend to have mesh made of wool... (8)
 - 17 ...yet Carol provides service (8)
 - 18 A raised hat, makes sure they are neophytes (8)
 - 22 Test done internally, not on trauma (6)
 - 23 Harmony is one issue (6)
 - 24 One under terrible agony in the city (6)
 - 27 Trio will evenly make it muddy (4)

SUDOKU

			8	4			2	5
	9		5					6
7				3		9		
				2	4	3		
9								2
	2	7	4					
	6		3					9
3				2		6		
5	9			8	4			

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12732

S	I	G	H	T	S	C	A	S	S	E	T	T	E
L	O	U	N	G	A	R	G	U	M	E	N	T	
I	C	H	B	Y	A	P	E						
T	A	H	I	T	I	A	N	G	R	E	E	C	
U	E	R	S	E	E	E	M						
D	I	S	C	O	N	S	O	L	A	T	E		
E	T	P	O	A	H	E	D	S					
P	M	B	E	L	O	T	H	E	B	E	L	L	
L	O	O	F	A	H	D	O	M	I	N	I	O	
A	S	L	B	N	R	S	G						
C	R	A	C	K	P	O	T	S	C	O	T	E	
J	I	E	N	L	I	E	A						
D	O	C	T	R	I	N	E	B	E	T	R	A	

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

9	2	3	8	4	1	7	5	6
1	4	8	5	6	7	3	9	2
7	5	6	9	2	3	1	8	4
5	7	2	1	3	4	9	6	8
8	6	4	7	9	5	3	1	2
3	1	9	6	5	8	2	4	7
4	8	7	3	1	5	6	2	9
2	3	1	4	9	6	8	7	5
6	9	5	7	8	2	4	1	3