

109 US Troops Diagnosed With Brain Injuries From Iran Attack

Agencies

Washington: The United States military on Monday disclosed a more than 50 percent jump in cases of traumatic brain injury stemming from Iran's missile attack on a base in Iraq last month, with the number of service members diagnosed climbing to over 100.

No US troops were killed or faced immediate bodily injury when Iran fired missiles at the Ain al-Assad base in Iraq in retaliation for the US killing of top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike at the Baghdad airport on January 3.

The missile attacks capped a spiral of violence that had started in late December. Both sides have refrained from further military escalation, but the mounting number of US casualties could increase scrutiny on the Trump administration's approach to Iran.

Reuters News Agency was first to report earlier on Monday that there were over 100 cases of TBI, up from the 64 previously reported last month.

The Pentagon, in a statement, confirmed that so far 109 US service members had been diagnosed with mild traumatic brain injury. It added that 76 of them had returned to duty.

The US military in the past had said to expect an increase in numbers in the weeks after the attack because symptoms can take time to manifest and troops can sometimes take longer to report them.

Army General Mark Milley,

chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said last month that the service members suffering from traumatic brain injuries had been diagnosed with mild cases. He added that the diagnosis could change as time passed.

Symptoms of concussive injuries include headaches, dizziness, sensitivity to light and nausea.

Pentagon officials have repeatedly said there has been no effort to minimise or delay information on concussive injuries. But the disclosures following Tehran's attack have renewed questions over the US military's policy regarding how it internally reports suspected brain injuries and whether they are treated publicly with the same urgency as loss of limb or life.

US Republican Senator Joni Ernst said more answers were needed. "I've called on the Pentagon to ensure the safety & care of our deployed forces who may be exposed to blast injuries in Iraq," Ernst said on Twitter.

US President Donald Trump appeared to play down the brain injuries last month, saying he "heard that they had headaches and a couple of other things" following the attack, prompting criticism from politicians and a US veterans group.

Various health and medical groups for years have been trying to raise awareness about the seriousness of brain injuries, including concussions.

Since 2000, about 408,000 service members have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injury, according to Pentagon data.

Deadly Bomb Blast Hits Military Academy In Afghan Capital



Agencies

Kabul: A huge bomb blast has hit Afghanistan's capital of Kabul, in what appears to be the first deadly major assault in the city in months.

The blast took place at the entrance to the Marshal Fahim Military Academy, a government-run defense university, early on Tuesday.

The Afghan Interior Ministry said the attack had claimed the lives of five people, including both civilians and military personnel.

"This morning at around 7 am, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives... killing five people including two civilians and three military personnel. Twelve were wounded, including five civilians," said the ministry's spokesman Nasrat Rahimi.

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"It was a big explosion that rocked our house. We also heard gunfire afterwards. Ambulances rushed to the area quickly," resident Samiullah, who goes by one name, told AFP.

The Kabul police chief confirmed the location, according to a local broadcaster.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, which comes after nearly three months of relative calm in the Afghan capital.

Recent weeks have brought frequent but small-scale attacks on police and US security forces in Afghanistan, even as the United States and Taliban militants pursue talks to finalize a peace pact. They have been negotiating on and off for a year.



Chinese President Xi Jinping had his temperature taken with a thermometer after paying a visit to coronavirus patients

Situation in Wuhan 'Very Grave': China President

Agencies

Wuhan: The situation in Wuhan, the epicenter of the novel coronavirus, is still very grave, Chinese President Xi Jinping warned during a rare visit to frontline medical staff and patients affected by the deadly coronavirus that has killed more than 1,000 people.

The Chinese president, who has called the virus a "demon", made the rare public appearance amid the outbreak to meet frontline medical staff at Beijing Ditan hospital, where infected patients are being treated.

Xi called the situation at Wuhan, the virus epicenter, "still very grave", and urged "more decisive measures" to contain the spread of the epidemic, said state broadcaster CCTV.

He has largely kept out of the public eye since the virus outbreak spiraled across the country from Hubei province to infect more than 40,000 people.

He appointed Premier Li Keqiang to lead a group tackling the outbreak, and it was Li who visited ground zero in Wuhan last month.

On Monday Xi put on a blue mask and white surgical gown to

meet doctors at the hospital, observe the treatment of patients and speak via video link to doctors in Wuhan, state media said.

He then visited a residential community in central Beijing to "investigate and guide" efforts to contain the epidemic, said CCTV.

Video footage showed Xi having his temperature taken with an infrared thermometer, then speaking with community workers and waving at smiling residents leaning out of their apartment windows.

Death toll tops 1,000

China confirmed a rise in the number of new coronavirus cases on Monday morning, quashing hopes after several days of declining infection rates that strict control measures could be paying off. By Monday evening, the death toll topped 1,000, more than were killed during the SARS virus outbreak in 2003.

The number of confirmed infections in mainland China rose 15% Sunday to at least 40,171.

More than 300 cases have been confirmed outside China, including 12 in the US, and global health officials have warned that could be just "the tip of the iceberg" as they learn more about how easily the

disease spreads.

Dozens of new cases were confirmed Monday on a quarantined cruise ship in Yokohama, Japan, meanwhile, including more Americans. The number of passengers already removed or soon to be removed from the Diamond Princess for treatment in Japanese hospitals stood at 135 Monday. That includes at least 23 American passengers, 11 of whom were among the 65 new cases confirmed Monday. Most of the 3,711 passengers and crew remained under isolation orders on the ship.

The outbreak has prompted unprecedented action by the Chinese government, including locking down entire cities in Hubei as well as cutting transport links nationwide, closing tourist attractions and telling hundreds of millions of people to stay indoors.

The sweeping measures turned cities into ghost towns -- but there were some signs of normality returning on Monday.

Roads in Beijing and the financial hub of Shanghai had significantly more traffic, while the southern city of Guangzhou said it would start to resume normal public transport.

What Happens If You Catch The New Coronavirus?

The death toll from the new coronavirus in China surged past 1,000 on Tuesday, as Beijing stepped up efforts to treat tens of thousands of sick people and the World Health Organization (WHO) urged the world to "fight this virus before it gets out of control".

Since the new type of virus was first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December, it has infected more than 43,000 people and spread to two dozen countries.

The rapid advance of the virus - known as the 2019-nCoV - has triggered fear across the globe, despite all but two of the deaths and 99 percent of the infections reported as occurring in mainland China. As the fear spread, scientists and re-

searchers around the world have ramped up efforts to understand the new virus and how it affects the human body.

Here is what we know about the 2019-nCoV and what it does if you are infected.

'Varying levels of severity'

The 2019-nCoV belongs to a family of viruses that can cause respiratory illnesses in humans such as the common cold and the more severe diseases such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

Thought to have jumped to a human from an as-yet-unidentified animal source, the new virus spreads primarily through respiratory droplets, such as those generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes. On average, it takes about five to six days for someone to show symptoms after becoming infected.

The virus multiplies in the respiratory tract and can cause a range of symptoms, according to Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, who heads the WHO's Health Emergencies Programme.

"You have mild cases, which look like the common cold, which have some respiratory symptoms, sore throat, runny nose, fever, all the way through pneumonia. And there can be varying levels of severity of pneumonia all the way through multi-organ failure and death," she told reporters in Geneva last week.

At least 14 Rohingya refugees die after boat sinks off Bangladesh

Agencies

Dhaka: At least 14 people drowned and dozens more were unaccounted for after a boat carrying Rohingya refugees sank off southern Bangladesh early Tuesday, officials said.

Some 130 people were packed on the fishing trawler that was trying to get across the Bay of Bengal to Malaysia, coast guard spokesman Hamidul Islam told AFP. Seventy of them had so far been rescued.

Many of the 700,000-plus Rohingya who fled a military crackdown in Myanmar in 2017 have tried to leave overcrowded refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district on boats headed for Malaysia.

Islam said the boat was one of

the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. We haven't found any sign of the second boat yet. We will continue our operation," Islam said.

"So far we have recovered 14 bodies and 70 people alive," coast guard commander Naim ul Haq told AFP, adding that navy and coast guard boats were searching near St Martin's island. "They were lured by traffickers," border guard commander Faisal Hasan Khan said.

Malaysia is the favoured destination of the Rohingya as it is a Muslim majority nation and has a sizeable Rohingya diaspora.

With few opportunities for jobs and education in the camps, thousands have attempted to reach other countries in Southeast Asia.

Since last year, Bangladesh's



two vessels that was making the hazardous journey.

"We have found one capsized boat. All of them were mainly from

law enforcement agencies have picked up over 500 Rohingya from coastal villages and boats as they waited to board boats.

Equifax Data Breach US Says Chinese Military Stole Personal Data Of Over 145 Million Americans

Agencies

Washington: Four members of the Chinese military have been charged with breaking into the computer networks of the Equifax credit reporting agency and stealing the personal information of tens of millions of Americans, the Justice Department said Monday, blaming Beijing for one of the largest hacks in history to target consumer data.

The hackers in the 2017 breach stole the personal information of roughly 145 million Americans, collecting names, addresses, Social Security and driver licence numbers and other data stored in the company's databases. The intrusion damaged the company's reputation and underscored China's increasingly aggressive and sophisticated intelligence-gathering methods.

"The scale of the theft was staggering," Attorney General William Barr said Monday in announcing the indictment. "This theft not only caused significant financial damage to Equifax, but invaded the privacy of many millions of Americans, and imposed substantial costs and burdens on them as they have had to take measures to protect against identity theft."

The case is the latest U.S. accusation against Chinese hackers suspected of breaching networks of American corporations, including

steel manufacturers, a hotel chain and a health insurer. It comes as the Trump administration has warned against what it sees as the growing political and economic influence of China, and efforts by Beijing to collect data for financial and intelligence purposes and to steal research and innovation.

The indictment arrives at a delicate time in relations between Washington and Beijing. Even as President Donald Trump points to a preliminary trade pact with China as evidence of his ability to work with the Communist government,

other members of his administration have been warning against cybersecurity and surveillance risks posed by China, especially as the tech giant Huawei seeks to become part of new, high-speed 5G wireless networks across the globe.

Experts and U.S. officials say the Equifax theft is consistent with the Chinese government's interest in accumulating as much information about Americans as possible.

The data can be used by China to target U.S. government officials and ordinary citizens, including possible spies, and to find weaknesses and vulnerabilities that can be exploited -- such as for purposes of blackmail. The FBI has not seen that happen yet in this case, said Deputy Director David Bowditch, though he said it "doesn't mean it will or will not happen in the future."

NEW SM AKERS

Top Iranian official: We're looking for a pretext to raze Tel Aviv to the ground

Former leader of Revolutionary Guards also says Tehran has 'precise information' on all US military and civilian activity in the region, from ships to individual soldiers

Tehran - A former leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guards has warned that Iran is just looking for an excuse to attack Israel and "raze Tel Aviv to the ground," blaming Israel for allegedly helping the US kill top commander Qassem Soleimani.

Speaking to Lebanon's Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV station on Saturday, Mohsen Rezaei was asked if Iran would carry out its previous threats to attack Israel in the event of a war with the US.

"You should have no doubt about this. We would raze Tel Aviv to the ground for sure. We have been looking for such a pretext," Rezaei said in remarks translated by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) and released Monday.

Rezaei, the secretary of Iran's



powerful Expediency Council, is considered a top politician and an adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"If they (the US) do something, we can use it as a pretext to attack Israel, because Israel played a role in the martyrdom of General Solei-

mani," he said, blaming Israel for tipping off the Americans to Soleimani's location.

"We were waiting for the Americans to give us a pretext to strike Tel Aviv, just like we attacked Ayn Al-Assad," he said referring to the US military base

in Iraq, which Iran hit with several missiles in response to Soleimani's killing.

This is not the first time Rezaei has threatened to destroy Israeli cities.

"Iran's revenge against America for the assassination of Soleimani will be severe... Haifa and Israeli military centers will be included in the retaliation," he said in January.

Following the Iranian attack on the US base and repeated Iranian threats, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Iran against attacking Israel.

"We're standing steadfast against those who seek our lives. We're standing with determination and with force. Whoever tries to attack us will receive a crushing blow in return," he declared at a conference in Jerusalem.

UN Chief to visit Kartarpur Sahib during Pakistan tour

UN Chief Antonio Guterres will visit the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, the final resting place of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev, in Kartarpur during his visit to Pakistan next week.

The UN Secretary-General will arrive in Islamabad on Sunday and will hold bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Imran Khan and Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on that day and speak at an event on sustainable development and climate change.

Guterres will "travel to Kartarpur to visit a holy site, Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib," Deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq told reporters here on Monday.

The UN Chief is expected to visit one of the most prominent Sikh pilgrimage sites next Tuesday. Guru Nanak Dev spent the last 18 years of his life at Kartarpur Sahib, which has now become the world's largest Sikh



Gurdwara.

On February 17, Guterres will also speak at the International Conference on 40 Years of Hosting Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, which is being organized by the Pakistan government and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), along with High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

He will participate in a high-level panel discussion and other

events at the conference.

Guterres will also meet Pakistani President Arif Alvi.

The Secretary-General will be in Lahore on February 18, where he will meet students and attend an event on Pakistan's polio vaccination campaign. He will visit Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib before returning to New York on February 19.

In November last year, the UN Chief welcomed the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor between India and Pakistan, saying it paved the way for interfaith harmony and understanding.

"We welcome #PakistanCorridor today connecting two key Sikh pilgrimage sites, paving way for interfaith harmony and understanding by facilitating visa-free cross border visits by pilgrims to holy shrines," spokesperson for the Secretary-General had tweeted.