

# Iran says misaligned radar led to Ukrainian jet downing

● First of the two missiles launched at the aircraft was fired by a defence unit operator

Tehran

Iran said that the misalignment of an air defence unit's radar system was the key "human error" that led to the accidental downing of a Ukrainian passenger plane in January. "A failure occurred due to a human error in following the procedure" for aligning the radar, causing a "107-degree error" in the system, the Iranian Civil Aviation Organisation (CAO) said in a report late Saturday.

This error "initiated a hazard chain" that saw further errors committed in the minutes before the plane was shot down, said the CAO document, presented as a "factual report" and not as the final report on the accident investigation.

Flight 752, a Ukraine International Airlines jetliner, was struck by two missiles and crashed shortly after taking off from Tehran's main airport on January 8, at a time of heightened US-Iranian tensions.

The Islamic republic admitted several days later that its forces accidentally shot down the Kiev-bound plane, killing all 176 people on board.

The CAO said that, despite the erroneous information available to the radar system operator on the aircraft's trajectory, he could have identified his target as an airliner, but instead there was a



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"wrong identification".

The report also noted that the first of the two missiles launched at the aircraft was fired by a defence unit operator who had acted "without receiving any response from the Coordination Center" on which he depended.

The second missile was fired 30 seconds later, "by observing the continuity of trajectory of the detected target," the report added.

Tehran's air defences had been on high alert at the time the jet was shot down in case the US retaliated against Iranian strikes hours earlier on American troops stationed in Iraq.

Those strikes were carried

out in response to the killing of Soleimani, in a US drone strike of a top Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani, near Baghdad airport.

On 8 January 2020, the Boeing 737-800 operating the route was shot down shortly after takeoff from Tehran Imam Khomeini International Airport. All 176 passengers and crew were killed; it was the first fatal air accident involving Ukraine International Airlines.

The shoot down occurred four hours after Iran launched retaliatory missile strikes on U.S. positions in Iraq for the killing of Major General Qasem Soleimani.



Experts have questioned Iran's decision to not close its airspace after launching missiles; General Amir Ali Hajizadeh said a request had been made for a no-fly zone before the incident but this request was rejected



## News in brief

**China releases professor who criticised President Xi**

◆ A Beijing law professor who has been an outspoken critic of China's President Xi Jinping and the ruling Communist Party was released yesterday after six days of detention, his friends said. Xu Zhangrun, a constitutional law professor at the prestigious Tsinghua University, returned home on Sunday morning but remained under surveillance and was not free to speak publicly about what happened, one of his friends, who declined to be identified, told Reuters.

**Kuwait asks parliament to approve debt law to help cover deficit**

◆ Kuwait's government formally submitted a public debt law to parliament on Sunday which would allow it to borrow 20 billion dinars (\$65 billion) over 30 years, including 8 billion dinars to help finance the current budget deficit, a legislator said. The government and parliament have long been at odds over the law which would allow Kuwait to tap international debt, but the issue has gained urgency in recent months as the oil-exporting nation has been hit by low crude prices and the COVID-19 pandemic.



◆ Hong Kong's opposition camp said on Sunday that over 600,000 citizens in the Chinese-ruled city cast ballots over the weekend in primaries it cast as

a symbolic protest vote against tough national security laws imposed by Beijing. The unofficial poll will decide the strongest pro-democracy candidates to contest elections in September to Hong Kong's Legislative Council.

◆ Around 200 people employed to pick crops at a farm near Malvern in England's West Midlands region have been told to self-isolate after 73 of them tested positive for COVID-19, Public Health England (PHE) and Herefordshire Council said yesterday. The number of new confirmed COVID-19 cases across Britain each day has been falling from a peak of more than 6,000 in April to 650 in the latest figures released

## British pilot to fly home after 4-mth virus battle in Vietnam



A British pilot who spent more than four months in hospital, including two months on life support in Vietnam after contracting COVID-19 is on his way home, astounding doctors who gave him just a ten percent chance of survival.

## Pope 'very pained' by decision to turn Hagia Sophia into mosque



The sixth-century edifice -- whose stunning architecture is a magnet for tourists worldwide -- has been a museum since 1935, open to believers of all faiths



Reuters | Vatican City

his weekly blessing in St. Peter's Square.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has said the first prayers would be held in Hagia Sophia on July 24, after declaring the ancient monument was once again a mosque following a court ruling revoking its status as a museum.

The World Council of Churches has called on Erdogan to reverse his decision and Patriarch Bartholomew, the Istanbul-based spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, called it disappointing.

Erdogan said the nearly 1,500-year-old Hagia

Sophia, which was once a Christian cathedral, would remain open to Muslims, Christians and foreigners.

He added that Turkey had exercised its sovereign right in converting it to a mosque and would interpret criticism of the move as an attack on its independence.

Greece has condemned the move and UNESCO said its World Heritage Committee would review Hagia Sophia's status and that Turkey's decision raised questions about the impact on its universal value as a site of importance transcending borders and generations.

