

Yemen Clashes Kill More than 140 as Aid Delayed

SANAA - Fierce clashes raged between rebels and loyalists in southern Yemen, leaving more than 140 dead in 24 hours, as the Red Cross faced delays to urgently needed aid deliveries.

Relief workers have warned of a dire situation in the impoverished Arabian Peninsula state, where a Saudi-led coalition is waging an air war on the Iran-backed Houthi Shiite rebels.

The bloodiest fighting occurred between rebels and loyalists of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi in the main southern city of Aden, officials said.



Fifty-three people, more than a third of those slain in the past 24 hours, were killed as rebels tried to seize a port in the city, which sits on an extinct volcano jutting out into the sea. At least 19 Huthis and 15 pro-Hadi militiamen

were killed overnight in the town of Daleh, north of Aden, officials said, and seven other people died in the southern province of

Abyan. Pro-Hadi fighters have laid siege in Abyan to the base of a renegade army brigade loyal to ex-president Ali Abdullah

Saleh, who is accused of backing the Huthis.

Ten rebels were killed in coalition air strikes that hit Al-Anad airbase near Abyan and a military camp in Lahj, while many more died in Shabwa province. Hadi, considered by the UN to be Yemen's legitimate leader, took refuge in Aden in February after the Huthis, who hail from the mountainous north, seized power in Sanaa. Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia last month as rebels advanced on his southern stronghold, prompting the military campaign by the Saudi-led coalition, now in its 12th day. (AFP)

Nawaz Says 'No Hurry' to Decide on Joining Saudi Offensive in Yemen

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said Pakistan is "not in a hurry" to decide whether to join the Saudi-led coalition against rebels in Yemen as Parliament resumed discussion on the issue.

The premier addressed a joint session of the Parliament a day after Defence Minister Khawaja Asif revealed Saudi Arabia wanted Pakistani warplanes, warships and soldiers. Not a single lawmaker has spoken in favour of sending troops.

Saudi Arabia, the Gulf's main Sunni Muslim power, has asked Pakistan to join a Saudi-led military coalition that began conducting air strikes last month against largely Shia Houthi forces in Yemen.

Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif begins a two-day visit to Pakistan on Wednesday and discussions on Yemen are expected to dominate the meetings. The premier also said he welcomed Iranian input.

"Iran should also join the discussion and evaluate whether their policy is correct or not," PM Nawaz said. The premier has repeatedly said he will defend any threat to Saudi Arabia's "territorial integrity" without defining what that threat could be, or what action he would take. (Monitoring Desk)

Over 2,048 Somali Refugees Returned Home: UNHCR

NAIROBI - The UN refugee agency said on Wednesday it has so far repatriated 2,048 refugees from Kenya to Somalia under the current voluntary return pilot project which kicked off in December 2014.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in its biweekly update received in Nairobi that more refugees have expressed their interest to return home.

The UNHCR said majority of the refugees returned to southern Somalia's port city of Kismayo and with hopes of greater stability in Somalia, some IDPs and refugees from neighboring countries are spontaneously returning to their areas of origin.

"2,048 individuals (442 households) voluntarily returned to Somalia between the beginning of the return pilot project in December 2014 and March 31. The majority returned to Kismayo," UNHCR said in the update.

According to refugee agency, a total of 25 cases comprising of 87 individuals were submitted to Branch Office Nairobi for onward resettlement to the U.S, Denmark and New Zealand in mid March.

"21 new born babies and five spouses were added on to cases already in the U.S resettlement processing pipeline. 27 individuals departed Dadaab for onward resettlement to Sweden, U.S., Norway, France and Britain.

"The Swedish resettlement experts arrived in Dadaab on March 30 and conducted Cultural Orientation for refugees who will be resettled to Sweden," it said.

The move came after the German government last month provided 5.5 million U.S. dollars to support voluntary repatriation of refugees to Somalia.

The money was channeled to the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) to implement the project which will help to improve the livelihoods of returning refugees, IDPs and the local population in selected host communities. (Xinhua)

Obama Says Confident Iran Sanctions Could be Reimposed if Deal Broken

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama said in an interview released on Tuesday he is confident sanctions against Iran could be reimposed if Tehran violates an agreement to restrict its nuclear program. Obama told National Public Radio (NPR) that U.S. and European negotiators are trying to reach a deal with Iran in which sanctions could be reimposed without a U.N. Security Council vote, where Tehran ally Russia would have a veto. "We are absolutely convinced we can do it again," Obama said of the international sanctions, which have crippled Iran's economy.

He said a reimposition of sanctions would be triggered by a finding of the International Atomic Energy Agency that Tehran had broken the agreement.

After reaching a framework deal last week, negotiators face an end-of-June deadline to reach a final agreement meant to prevent Iran from being able to build a nuclear weapon. Obama said a nuclear deal could help strengthen moderate elements in Iran.

"If they are shown to have delivered for their people, presumably it strengthens their hand vis-a-vis some of the hardliners inside of Iran," he

said.

Obama also took a swipe at Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, a possible Republican presidential candidate in 2016, who has vowed to scrap any deal with Iran on his first day in office if elected.

Obama said if presidents were to withdraw from international agreements reached by their predecessors it would be a problem for U.S. allies and "embolden our enemies." "It would be a foolish approach to take, and, you know, perhaps Mr. Walker, after he's taken some time to bone up on foreign policy, will feel the same way," Obama said. (Reuters)

Blair Assails Cameron over EU Referendum

LONDON - British Prime Minister David Cameron's plan to hold a European Union membership referendum if he is re-elected next month would lead to an intense period of uncertainty for businesses, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair said on Tuesday.

Cameron, whose Conservatives are neck-and-neck with the opposition Labour Party in most polls ahead of the May 7 vote, has promised to renegotiate Britain's ties with Brussels, and then hold a referendum by the end of 2017. In a campaign speech on Tuesday, former Labour leader Blair, prime minister

from 1997-2007, said the "short-term" pain of Cameron's proposed re-negotiation has been underestimated. "Think of the chaos produced by the possibility, never mind the reality, of Britain actually quitting Europe," Blair, 61, said. "Jobs that are secure suddenly insecure; investment decisions postponed or cancelled; a pall of unpredictability hanging over the British economy."

If Britain voted to leave the EU, business would face the most intense uncertainty since World War Two, Blair said. "There would be significant business uncertainty in the run-up to a vote but

should the vote go the way of exit, then there would be the most intense period of business anxiety, reconsideration of options and instability since the war." In response to Blair's comments, Conservative finance minister George Osborne rejected the idea that the referendum would deter investors, citing continued inward investment since his party first made the pledge.

"He's doing a good service to us all today by ... advertising the fact that if you vote Conservative, you get a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union," Osborne told a news conference. (Reuters)

Cuba expected to be Cut from Terrorism List

WASHINGTON - The US State Department is expected to recommend that Cuba be removed from the government's list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, a U.S. official tells CNN on Tuesday, a notorious designation that has been a stumbling block in the establishment of embassies in both Havana and Washington. "Our expectation" is that Cuba will be removed from The LIST, the official said. But the official cautioned the Obama administration has yet to make any formal announcement. While that announcement from the State Department is not expected Tuesday, it could come as early as Wednesday.

On a conference call with reporters, Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes said the State Department is "nearing its completion" of its review of the state sponsor of terrorism designation process. He did not rule out an announcement this week.

Cuba has raised the designation as a major objection in its talks with U.S. officials regarding normalizing relations between the two Cold War adversaries. Once a recommendation is made by the State Department, SECRETARY OF STATE John Kerry would pass that along to President Barack Obama who has said he would act quickly.

If the President, as expected, accepts the State Department's recommendation, Congress would have 45 days to approve the decision. (CNN)

India Accepts Pakistan's Offer of Special Aircraft to Bring Back Citizens

ISLAMABAD/KARACHI - New Delhi gratefully accepted Islamabad's offer of providing a special aircraft to facilitate the return of 11 Indian citizens that had reached Karachi from Yemen on Tuesday, Indian Deputy High Commissioner J. P. Singh told DawnNews. The senior Indian diplomat in Islamabad said that Indian High Commission had arranged a commercial flight for their citizens. However, Pakistan's offer of a special aircraft was shared with the Indian government in New Delhi, which then took the final decision.

The Indian citizens arrived on Pakistan Naval Ship Aslat along with citizens from various other countries after they were rescued from war-torn Yemen. They expressed their gratitude to Pakistan for the government and navy's efforts for evacuation.

Earlier, Pakistani High Commissioner to India Abdul Basit said, "Prime

Minister Nawaz Sharif has offered a special aircraft to the Indian High Commission in Islamabad to send back the 11 Indian citizens."

"Distinguished officers of the Pakistan authorities including the Navy, distinguished excellencies from representing countries - on behalf of government of India, and High Commission of India - I am grateful for their help and assistance which they provided to our Indian nationals while evacuating their nationals from Yemen," said another Indian diplomat Prabhat K Jain. "I am really thankful [to them] for keeping the morale high during the journey. All the 11 Indians which have accompanied their Pakistani brothers are hale and hearty," he added.

Kerala-based citizen Ratan told DawnNews he went to Yemen for a project. "When we arrived there the situation was not that good but we were told we can still work," he said.

"But after a week, the situation began to deteriorate and we were sent to Al Mukalla."

"When we reached our terminal in Al Mukalla we found out that there is Pakistani Navy vessel rescuing people. We contacted the Indian embassy and they said we can go on that, we embarked the vessel and were treated very kindly and were given priority.

All the military people did very good work." When asked to give a message to Pakistanis, the Indian citizen said "don't bring politics into this, bring brotherhood". Indian citizen named Paul told DawnNews that he was also in Yemen for work purposes. "I have been in Yemen since a month and went there for work from Dubai," he said. "In that month problems arose in Yemen and we were told we will be evacuated... and only Pakistan Navy's ship was there. Our aim was to escape Yemen somehow." (Agencies)

Nieghbor News

Iran, Turkey Urge Joint Action against Extremism

KABUL - Iran's President Hassan Rouhani and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan have called for the expansion of joint efforts aimed at fighting terrorism and extremism in the Middle East, saying that the two countries share a common view on the issue.

"The two sides agree on the view that instability, insecurity and war should stop in the entire region," President Rouhani said in a joint press conference with the Turkish president in the Iranian capital, Tehran, on Tuesday. The Iranian president also stated that Tehran and Ankara should boost bilateral efforts to tackle terrorism in the region, saying, "Together, we

should fight terrorism and extremism in order to achieve brotherhood between Muslims and people in the region."

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Erdogan arrived in Tehran earlier in the day on an official one-day visit to hold talks with senior statesmen of the Islamic Republic. The Turkish president immediately started talks with Rouhani in Tehran's Sadabad Complex, before heading to a high-level meeting of the Iran-Turkey economic cooperation. Rouhani said he and Erdogan have held "detailed discussions" on the ongoing conflict in Yemen, adding that the two sides emphasized the need for an immediate ceasefire in the Arab country. (Press TV)

Egypt's Commander in Chief Calls on Gen. Raheel Sharif

ISLAMABAD - Defence Minister and Commander-in-Chief of Egypt's Armed Forces, General Sedki Sobhi Sayed, held a meeting with Pakistan Army chief General Raheel Sharif at the General Headquarters (GHQ) on Tuesday to discuss the crisis in Yemen, according to an ISPR statement. General Sobhi also visited Joint Staff Headquarters at Chaklala to call on Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Rashad Mahmood.

The meetings were held to discuss areas of mutual cooperation between the armed forces of both countries. During General Sobhi's meeting with General Raheel Sharif, "mat-

ters of mutual interest, regional security and military-to-military bilateral relations were discussed," a statement from ISPR said.

General Sobhi will also meet Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif to apprise him about Egypt's stance on the Yemen conflict. After Saudi Arabia's decision to launch air strikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen, Egypt hosted an Arab summit on March 29, where the formation of a unified military force to counter growing security threats from Yemen to Libya was announced - an idea floated by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. (Monitoring Desk)

China Adds Voice to Call for Yemen Ceasefire

BEIJING - China's foreign ministry added its support on Tuesday to calls for a ceasefire in Yemen, after Russia and the Red Cross appealed for a military pause to allow humanitarian aid deliveries and the evacuation of civilians.

Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a daily news briefing that China was deeply concerned about the situation in Yemen.

"We call on all relevant parties to quickly implement a ceasefire and avoid further civilian casualties," Hua said. "China also hopes that all relevant sides can earnestly implement relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions and Gulf Cooperation Council proposals and resolve the crisis through political dialogue so as

to quickly restore Yemen's stability and normal legal order."

China was paying close attention to the humanitarian situation in Yemen and urged all sides to respect international law and facilitate evacuation measures, Hua said.

The fighting has killed hundreds of people, cut off water and electricity supplies and led the U.N. children's agency UNICEF to warn that Yemen is heading toward a humanitarian disaster Saudi Arabia, the main Sunni Arab power in the Gulf, launched the air campaign on March 26 to try to contain the Shi'ite Houthis and restore President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who has fled Aden for refuge in Riyadh. (Reuters)

Turkmenistan in Talks with Azerbaijan, Turkey on Gas Export to Europe

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan is in talks with Azerbaijan and Turkey on the issue of implementation of the European vector of its gas export, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhammadow said after the meeting with President of Moldova Nicolae Timofti, who is in Ashgabat on an official visit. He said that Turkmenistan sells gas to Russia, Iran and China as well as works to diversify its gas export.

"Now we hold tripartite negotiations with Azerbaijan and Turkey," said Berdimuhammadow. "I hope that we will reach an agreement, and it will become another step towards the imple-

mentation of the European vector."

He also drew attention to the fact that Turkmenistan never removed, and will not remove the European vector of its export from the agenda.

Turkmenistan is a key player in the gas market in the Caspian region and Central Asia.

When talking about construction of a pipeline to Europe, the most optimal route would be laying a 300-kilometer gas pipeline across the Caspian Sea to the coasts of Azerbaijan, which has at its disposal an appropriate infrastructure for the re-export of Turkmenistan's gas to Turkey and further to Europe. (Trend News Agency)