

'No Greater Threat to Planet than Climate Change': Obama

WASHINGTON - US President Barack Obama said Saturday that climate change poses the world's biggest single threat.

"Today, there's no greater threat to our planet than climate change," Obama said in his weekly address, which had an environmental theme to mark Earth Day on April 22.

"Climate change can no longer be denied, or ignored," he added, noting that 2014 was the hottest year on record.

The United States is the second largest greenhouse gas emitter after China, and Obama has

pledged to reduce US climate pollution by 26-28 percent from 2005 levels by 2025.

"This is an issue that's bigger and longer-lasting than my presidency," Obama said.

"This is the only planet we've got. And years from now, I want to be able to look our children and grandchildren in the eye and tell them that we did everything we could to protect it."

Obama said he would travel to the Florida Everglades, a region known for its tropical wetlands, on Wednesday to talk about the ways in which climate change affects



the economy. "Rising sea levels are putting a national treasure -- and an economic

engine for the South Florida tourism industry -- at risk," Obama said of the famous wet-

lands. Obama, who has made the fight against climate change one of his priorities, hopes to

help seal a global deal at an international climate conference in Paris in December. (AFP)

Iran Presents Yemen Peace Plan to UN

SANAA - Iran presented a four-point peace plan for Yemen to UN chief Ban Ki-moon, demanding international action to end the "senseless" Saudi-led air campaign against rebels backed by Tehran.

Saudi Arabia, for its part, responded swiftly to a UN aid appeal for its impoverished neighbour. The Iranian call came as intense bombing by the regional coalition hit Yemen again and Al-Qaeda seized more ground in the chaos. The Iranian proposal, submitted on Friday, calls for a ceasefire and immediate end to all foreign military attacks, the urgent delivery of humanitarian and medical aid, a resumption of political talks and the formation of a national unity government. "It is

imperative for the international community to get more effectively involved in ending the senseless aerial attacks and establishing a ceasefire," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote in a letter to Ban. He said "the only way to restore peace and stability is to allow all Yemeni parties to establish, without any foreign interference, their own inclusive national unity government."

Tehran is a key ally of the Shiite Houthi rebels who have seized swathes of Yemen but denies arming them. Columns of smoke rose over an arms depot east of the capital Sanaa on Friday as Saudi-led warplanes unleashed fresh strikes, witnesses said. (AFP)

Syrian Doctors Ask Russia to Help Unblock Medical Aid

UNITED NATIONS - Two Syrian doctors urged Russian diplomats at the United Nations on Friday to put pressure on President Bashar al-Assad to allow life-saving medical supplies into a besieged city near Damascus. The meeting came a day after the UN Security Council heard the two doctors give a detailed account of treating victims of chemical attacks last month in Idlib province. Doctor Zaher Sahloul told the diplomats that 10 people had died of kidney failure in the besieged city of Douma because they did

not have access to dialysis fluid and 23 others are at risk unless the medical aid is let in. "The dialysis fluid is blocked. We asked for their help to get it in," Sahloul told AFP after the one-hour meeting. Russia, an ally of the Assad regime, voted in favour of a resolution last year that demanded access for humanitarian aid and set up deliveries of cross-border aid convoys, without the consent of Damascus. Sahloul, who heads the Syrian American Medical Society, said the Russian diplomats said they would try to help unblock the aid. (AFP)

Gulf States Unhappy about U.N. Chief's Ceasefire Appeal

UNITED NATIONS - Several Gulf Arab states are unhappy about U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon's call for an immediate ceasefire by all sides in Yemen and are expected to raise the issue in a meeting with him early next week, U.N. diplomatic sources said on Friday. Ban on Thursday called for an immediate halt to the fighting, the first time he has made such an appeal since Saudi-led air strikes against

Iranian-backed Houthi rebels began three weeks ago. The main topic of the meeting will be the replacement for the outgoing U.N. envoy to Yemen Jamal Benomar, who announced his resignation on Wednesday. But, the sources said, they are also expected to raise their concerns about the appeal Ban made in a speech at the National Press Club. (Reuters)

Hezbollah Blames Saudi Arabia for Spread of Extremism

BEIRUT - The leader of Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group launched his harshest criticism yet of Saudi Arabia on Friday, blaming the kingdom for the spread of extremist ideology in the Muslim world and the killing of civilians in Yemen.

southern Beirut organized in support of Yemen's Shiite rebels that Saudi-led airstrikes targeting them have not led to victory.

Since March 26, the Saudi-led coalition has been pounding the rebels known as Houthis and allied fighters loyal to Yemen's ousted President Ali Abdullah Saleh. (AP)

Al-Qaida in Yemen Takes Massive Weapons Depot from Army

SANAA, Yemen - Al-Qaida's Yemen branch routed government forces from a large weapons depot in the country's east on Friday, seizing dozens of tanks, Katyusha rocket launchers and small arms, security officials said, as airstrikes by a Saudi-led coalition intensified in the capital, Sanaa, and also in Yemen's second-largest city. The seized depot is located in Mukalla, the capital of Hadramawt - Yemen's largest province where al-Qaida has been consolidating its control. Only the day before, the militants captured a major airport, an oil terminal and the area's main military base.

The gains highlight how al-Qaida has exploited the chaos in Yemen, where Shiite rebels are battling forces loyal to exiled President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. The Saudi-led air campaign in support of Hadi, now in its fourth week, has so far failed to halt the rebels' advance. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, as the Yemeni affiliate is known, is widely seen as the global network's most dangerous franchise and has been linked to several failed attacks on the U.S. The group claimed responsibility for the attack on a French satirical magazine in Paris earlier this year. However, the Saudi-led air campaign has not targeted areas with an al-Qaida presence, including Hadramawt, where the militant group has long been implanted despite U.S. drone strikes and Yemeni counterterrorism operations. The coalition says the airstrikes are aimed at the rebels, known as Houthis, not al-Qaida. On Friday evening, hundreds of al-Qaida supporters and fighters gathered at a theater in Mukalla to celebrate their victories in the Hadramawt region, singing war songs and chanting slogans. Pro-Hadi forces gained some ground elsewhere in Hadramawt on Friday, with fighters capturing the province's Masila oilfield, the country's largest, commander Ahmed Bannas said over the telephone. On the other side of the country, Saudi-led coalition airstrikes targeting the rebels intensified, with bombings in Sanaa and also Taiz, the country's second-largest city. (AP)

US Troops on Ukrainian Soil Could Reignite Fighting: Moscow

MOSCOW - Russia on Friday warned that the arrival of US paratroopers in Ukraine to train its forces fighting pro-Russian rebels could reignite the conflict, leading to mass bloodshed. The arrival of hundreds of US paratroopers in war-torn Ukraine causes "serious concern," the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement. It warned that the US training programme was a step towards Washington supplying weaponry to the Ukrainians fighting pro-Russian separatists in the country's Donbass region. "Washington's encouraging attitude to (Kiev's) revanchist plans carries a risk of reigniting mass bloodshed in our neighbouring country," Moscow said. "It's obvious that American

soldiers on Ukrainian soil will not bring it peace." President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said earlier Friday that the arriving US troops "can seriously destabilise the situation." Moscow blasted the US troops' mission to instruct the National Guard of Ukraine, a reservist force, for training those "who have stained themselves with the blood of women, children and old men in punitive operations in Donbass." "What will the overseas military specialists teach them - how to keep on killing those who speak Russian?" the ministry asked in a strongly-worded statement. It argued that the military training programme was the "first step towards supplying Ukraine with the modern American

weapons that Kiev's party of war so desires." US President Barack Obama is under pressure from lawmakers and military officials to send weapons to Ukraine to help it fight the insurgency but has so far held back. Some of his European allies including Germany have warned that sending arms would cause the bloodshed to escalate. Moscow argued that the arrival of US troops was a "clear breach" of the terms of a truce reached in the Belarussian capital of Minsk in February that called for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Ukraine. Kiev says Russia has sent thousands of soldiers across the border in eastern Ukraine to support the rebellion, charges Moscow denies. (AFP)

Chinese President Urges for Yemen Resolution

BEIJING - Efforts should be stepped up to seek a political solution to the crisis in Yemen, Chinese President Xi Jinping told Saudi Arabia's King Salman in a telephone call, China's Foreign Ministry said on Saturday. A Saudi-led coalition began an air campaign on March 25 after Yemen's Houthi rebels, who run most of the country, closed in on the southern port city of Aden and forced the Saudi-backed President Abd-Rabbu Mansour to flee to Riyadh. China, a low-key diplomatic player in the Middle East despite its reliance



on oil from the region, has previously expressed concern at the upsurge in violence in Yemen and called for a political solution. (Agencies)

Saudi Vows to Cover UN Aid Call for Yemen, Keeps Up Air Raids

SANAA - Saudi Arabia pledged Saturday to cover the entire \$274 million in humanitarian aid sought by the UN for conflict-torn Yemen, which has also been the target of Saudi-led air strikes against Shiite rebels. The United Nations says hundreds of people have died and thousands of families fled their homes in the war, which has also killed six Saudi security personnel in border skirmishes.

At least 27 more people died in the southwestern city of Taez during overnight clashes between loyalist forces and the Iran-backed Shiite Houthi rebels as well as Saudi-led coalition air raids, medical sources said. Saudi King Salman ordered the humanitarian pledge following a United Nations appeal on Friday for \$274 million (253 million euros) in emergency assistance for the millions affected

by Yemen's war. The kingdom "stands with its Yemeni brothers" and hopes for "the restoration of security and stability," the state Saudi Press Agency said, quoting an official statement. UN Humanitarian Coordinator Johannes Van Der Klaauw said in the appeal: "Ordinary families are struggling to access healthcare, water, food and fuel -- basic requirements for their survival." (AFP)

Libya Stability Key to Migrant Crisis: Renzi

WASHINGTON - Restoring stability in Libya is the only way to solve the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said Friday, as President Barack Obama warned re-establishing peace could not be achieved

by military force. Speaking at a joint White House press conference after authorities in Italy confirmed more than 11,000 migrants had been rescued in the past six days alone, Renzi said the problem would only be solved by peace in Libya.

The increasingly violent and chaotic situation in Libya has prompted a hike in the number of migrants trying to reach Europe, a tide that has not abated despite the tragic ending suffered by many attempting the crossing. (AFP)

Neighbour News

Iran Ready to Transfer Medical Know-How to Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Asia-Plus Iran's Ambassador to Tajikistan Hojjatollah Faghani has voiced his country's readiness to share experiences and transfer know-how in the field of medicine and treatment to Tajikistan, Iranian news agency IRAN reported. Faghani reportedly discussed ways of promoting mutual cooperation in the fields of medicine and treatment with Dr. Qurbonov, Chancellor of Tajik State Medical University named after Ibn Sina, on Thursday.

Referring to upcoming visit to Tajikistan by two Iranian medical delegations to the country, he said that this is an opportunity for promoting collaboration in educational and medical fields. Touring Ibn Sina Tajik University, Faghani also described Iran as among forerunners in modern and traditional medicines, IRNA reported. Qurbonov, for his part, dealt with history of the university and its scientific status during Soviet Union and recent eras. (Agencies)

New Bank to Enhance International Finance System: China

WASHINGTON - China's proposed infrastructure bank for Asia is intended to complement and not replace existing lenders dominated by the U.S. and Japan, a senior Chinese official said Friday. Vice Finance Minister Zhu Guangyao said after a meeting of the Group of 20 of leading world economies that China has proposed the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, or AIIB, to help fill an estimated \$8 trillion gap in infrastructure funding for the region over the next decade. Fifty-seven countries have signed up, including 16 of the world's 20 largest economies. Notable exceptions are the U.S. and Japan, which are the leading shareholders

of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank and have expressed concerns over the new bank's governance standards. But China's proposal has been diplomatic coup, as Britain, France and Germany have broken with Washington and joined Asian governments in seeking membership. The U.S. also faces growing criticism over the refusal by Congress to approve reforms to the International Monetary Fund that would increase the voting power of fast-emerging economies such as China, Brazil and India, and boost the Fund's resources to help countries facing financial troubles. (AP)

Iran's Military Strategy Purely Defensive: Rouhani

TEHRAN - Iran's military is purely for defence and should not be seen as a threat in the Middle East, President Hassan Rouhani said Saturday amid rising tension with Saudi Arabia. With a Saudi-led air campaign against Houthi rebels in Yemen putting Tehran at odds with its Sunni rival Riyadh, Russia this week moved to supply missiles to Iran. Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of arming the Houthis, Yemen's Zaidi Shiite minority which has long complained of marginalisation and has fought several conflicts with central authorities. The arms allegation is denied by Iran, which has presented a four-point peace plan for Yemen to UN chief Ban Ki-moon, demanding

international action to end the "senseless" Saudi-led air strikes. Rouhani, whose comments came after renewed intense bombing hit Yemen and Al-Qaeda seized more ground in the chaos, said the Islamic republic's military policies are wrongly perceived. "Our strategy has always been that of a deterrent... not a doctrine of war," he said in a speech at an annual Army Day ceremony in the capital where a new Iranian-made Bavar-373 missile was paraded. The presence of Iranian navy ships "in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Aden is intended to ensure the security of neighbouring countries and maritime traffic," he said. (AFP)

Pak-Sino Friendship has Big Support Among People: Survey

BEIJING: The ties between China and Pakistan, often described as "all-weather friendship", continues to resonate with the people of the two nations with a majority of them terming the relationship as "iron friends", according to a new survey conducted ahead of President Xi Jinping's visit. An online survey, jointly conducted by China's state-run Xinhua news agency, Pakistani online magazine Youlin and China's Tencent News, shows that netizens of both countries share a similar view on the bilateral ties.

According to the survey, 89 per cent of the Chinese netizens and 90 per cent of the Pakistanis surveyed chose "iron brothers" to describe the China-Pakistan relations. It said 73 per cent of Chinese and 63 per cent of Pakistani netizens believe the bilateral ties are a vivid embodiment of the saying, "A friend in need is a friend indeed," a Xinhua report said. In the survey, 92 per cent of Pakistani netizens said the iron brotherhood between China and Pakistan will never go rusty. (Monitoring Desk)