

Fighting in Yemeni City Dies Down as Cease-Fire Takes Hold

SANAA, Yemen - Yemen's key port city of Hodeida was calm Tuesday morning, hours after a U.N.-mediated cease-fire went into effect between government-allied forces and the country's rebels, Yemeni officials said.

Fighting subsided as the cease-fire took effect, with only the sporadic sound of automatic weapons fire heard in the city, where the port handles about 70 percent of Yemen's imports. Yemen's four-year conflict pits the internationally recognized government, backed by a Saudi-led coalition, against Shiite rebels known as Houthis.

The government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi called for its forces to "cease-fire in both Hodeida city and the province" also named Ho-



deida, according to a statement from Hadi's Defense Ministry. The rebels also welcomed the cease-fire in the key port city. The agreement came during U.N.-sponsored talks in Sweden last week. A joint committee

led by U.N. officers will oversee the cease-fire and the redeployment of the warring parties' forces out of Hodeida, which is currently controlled by the Houthis. Local authorities and police will run the city and its three port facil-

ities under U.N. supervision, and the two sides are barred from bringing in reinforcements.

U.N. envoy Martin Griffith has said the committee is expected to start its work swiftly "to translate the momentum built up in Sweden into achievements on the ground." A cessation of hostilities in Hodeida would spare Yemen a significant spike in civilian casualties since the rebels have shown battlefield resilience as much larger government-allied forces backed by airpower tried for months to retake the city. The two sides fought to a stalemate after weeks of ruinous street-to-street fighting in densely populated districts on the city's outskirts. (Fox News)

India's Gandhi Ratchets Up Pressure on PM Modi to Waive Farm Loans

NEW DELHI - Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi pressed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday to write off farm loans to help growers reeling from lower food prices, ratcheting up demands for debt write-offs ahead of a general election that must be held by May. Gandhi's Congress party, which last week beat Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in three key state elections, on Monday waived farm loans, a poll promise, in the

central states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Congress is also likely to write off farmers' loans in the third of those states - the desert state of Rajasthan. "My message to farmers is that this country belongs to you and the Congress and other opposition parties will work together to ask Prime Minister Modi to write off your loans," Gandhi told reporters in parliament. "We'll not let him sleep until he waives your loans." (Reuters)

BEIJING - China will never pursue hegemony, President Xi Jinping said Tuesday as global concerns persist over the country's growing economic influence. During a speech to mark 40 years of market reforms, Xi repeated China's commitment to a multilateral trading system and further opening of its economy. However, he did not announce any new initiatives to counter a slowing economy and trade frictions with the United States. The Chinese leader said

China Will 'Never Seek Hegemony,' Xi Says in Reform Speech



China would not develop "at the expense of other countries' interests." (AP)

After Trump Urging, Japan Announces Plan to Bolster Defense with Purchase of 147 F-35s



TOKYO - Japan's government on Tuesday approved its first aircraft carrier and various increases in its military defense capabilities amid

pressure from the Trump administration to spend "massive amounts" on American military defense products to lower its trade surplus with the

U.S., The Wall Street Journal reported. The new guidelines, approved by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet, effectively counter Trump's criticism while ensuring Japan will bolster its defense capabilities against rising threats. Japan will spend \$10 billion on 147 F-35s over the next decade and refit an existing helicopter carrier into a ship that can deploy 42 U.S.-made F-35B stealth fighters capable of short takeoffs and vertical landings. Abe has long sought to

enhance Japan's military cooperation with allies. The measure emphasizes Japan's need to counter potential threats from North Korea and China as it enlarges its navy. Proponents say purchases of costly American weapons will reduce the U.S. trade deficit while enhancing military cooperation with allies. The guidelines said Japan will seek more cost-efficient purchase of advanced-capability U.S. equipment while pushing for more joint research and development. (Fox News)

Don't Blame Migrants for Everything, Pope Tells Politicians

VATICAN CITY - Pope Francis on Tuesday condemned nationalist leaders who blame migrants for their countries' problems and themselves fostered mistrust in society by pursuing dishonest gain and xenophobic and racist policies. The 82-year-old pope, who has made defense of migrants a plank of his papacy, made the comments in his message for the Catholic Church's World Day of Peace on Jan. 1. It is sent to heads of state and government and international organi-

zations. It comes at a time when immigration is one of the most contentious issues in countries such as the United States, Italy, Germany and Hungary. Francis has sparred with U.S. President Donald Trump and Italian right-wing league leader Matteo Salvini over the rights of migrants. "Political addresses that tend to blame every evil on migrants and to deprive the poor of hope are unacceptable," said the pope, who did not mention any countries or leaders. (Reuters)

Russia's Putin: Nothing to Stop Us Adding Other States to Nuclear Pact

MOSCOW - President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday that there was nothing to stop Russia and the United States agreeing that other countries could join the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty signed by Washington and Moscow during the Cold War. The United States has accused Russia of flouting the nuclear pact, allegations Moscow denies, and has threatened to pull out. Other countries are able to develop missiles banned under the treaty because they are not signatories. "What stops (us) starting talks on them joining the current agreement or starting to discuss parameters for a new accord?" Putin asked. (Reuters)

British Government Steps Up 'No-Deal' Brexit Preparations

LONDON - Prime Minister Theresa May and her ministers will on Tuesday step up preparations for a "no deal" Brexit, an outcome made more likely by a deadlock in parliament over the British leader's divorce deal with the European Union. With just over 100 days until Britain is due to leave the EU, May is yet to win the support of a deeply divided parliament for the deal she struck last month with Brussels to maintain close ties with the bloc.

She has said a delayed vote on her deal will take place in mid-January, prompting some lawmakers to accuse her of trying to force parliament into backing it by running close to the March 29 exit day. May, who last week survived a confidence vote within her Conservative Party, has warned lawmakers that the alternatives to her deal are leaving without an agreement or no Brexit. (Reuters)

UN Condemns North Korea Rights Violations and Nuke Spending

UNITED NATIONS - The U.N. General Assembly on Monday condemned North Korea's "systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights" and its diversion of resources into pursuing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles over the welfare of its people. It noted "with concern" that over 10 million North Koreans are estimated to be undernourished and that there is "an unacceptably high prevalence of chronic and acute malnutrition" in the reclusive northeast Asian nation.

Russia, Iran and Turkey Seek Deal on New Syria Constitutional Body

GENEVA - Russia, Iran and Turkey are close to agreement on composition of a Syrian constitutional committee that could pave the way for drafting a new charter followed by elections, diplomats said on Monday. The foreign ministers of the three nations, who support opposing sides in Syria's nearly eight-year war, met for talks on Tuesday in Geneva, where they are expected to seek the United Nations' blessing for their joint proposal, they added.



The resolution, sponsored by Japan and the European Union, was adopted by consensus, though countries including Russia, China, Cuba and Venezuela disassociated themselves from it. Many expressed opposition to assembly resolutions singling out specific

countries and said the Geneva-based Human Rights Council should deal with rights issues. North Korea's U.N. ambassador, Kim Song, said his country "categorically rejects" the resolution, calling it "a product of (a) political plot and hostile forces." (Fox News)

Nearly 2,000 Jailed for Life Since 2016 Coup: Turkey State Media

ANKARA - Nearly 2,000 people have been sentenced to life in prison since the July 2016 attempted overthrow of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkish state media reported Tuesday. State news agency Anadolu said some 1,934 suspects have been told by the courts that they will spend the rest of their life in jail. Of these, 978 people were jailed for life, Anadolu reported, while 956 were sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment, which has replaced the death penalty in Turkey and carries harsher conditions than normal life imprisonment convictions.

A total of 239 out of 289 cases opened after the failed coup have been closed. The remaining 50 include 18 in Ankara and nine in Istanbul, Anadolu added. Ankara accuses the US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen of ordering the 2016 coup attempt and refers to his movement as the "Fethullah Terrorist Organisation". Gulen strenuously denies Turkey's claims and followers insist his movement promotes peace and secular education, ridiculing the description of themselves as a terror group. More than 3,050 people in all have been convicted over links to Gulen, with 1,123 given different jail sentences ranging from over a year to 20 years in prison.

In one trial, Gulen's nephew Selman Gulen was sentenced to seven years and six months in jail for being a "member of an armed terrorist organization", the agency reported Tuesday. (AFP)

Neighbor News

Iran's President to Visit Turkey for Talks on Bilateral Cooperation

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani will travel to Turkey on Wednesday for an official visit, Tasnim news agency reported on Tuesday.

The Iranian president will visit Ankara at the official invitation of his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan to attend the fifth round of Iran-Turkey high council of strategic cooperation.

Heading a high-ranking

political and economic delegation, Rouhani will leave Tehran for Ankara for a two-day visit, Parviz Esmaeili, deputy head for communications and information at the Iranian presidential office, was quoted as saying.

During the trip, the two countries will sign major political, economic and cultural agreements, Esmaeili said. Turkey is one of Iran's major trading partners. (Xinhua)

Indian Spy Hamid Nehal Ansari Crosses over to India after Repatriation from Pakistan

ISLAMABAD - Indian citizen Hamid Nehal Ansari, who served a three-year sentence for espionage in Pakistan, crossed over to the Indian side of the Wagah-Attari border on Tuesday, a day after Islamabad announced his release.

The convicted spy was handed over to Indian officials at Wagah border after being taken to Lahore from Mardan jail. He crossed over to the Attari side at around 5pm PST, Hindustan Times reported.

Foreign Office Spokesperson Dr Muhammad Faisal had earlier today said that Ansari would be sent back to India today via the Wagah border. According to

jail officials in Mardan, Ansari was transported to Lahore from Mardan jail amid tight security. His lawyer Qazi Anwar also confirmed the release of his client.

"I talked to [the] superintendent of Mardan jail and he informed me that Ansari was released at 7:25am from the jail and shifted to Lahore in high security," Anwar told DawnNewsTV.

The spy's family had reached the Attari border to receive him. The FO spokesperson had announced Ansari's repatriation on Monday. The Indian national completed his three-year sentence for espionage and other crimes on Saturday. (Agencies)

UZEX Currency Trading Site's Trade Volume Reaches Almost \$9M

TASHKENT - At the Dec. 10-14 trade week at the Uzbek Commodity Exchange (UZEX), transactions worth 814.5 billion soums were carried out, which is 15.7 percent more than a week before, Trend reports on Dec. 18 referring to the press service of the exchange.

The exchange trading

rose from 599.6 billion soums by 14.4 percent to 686.3 billion soums. In the sales, oil products held the first place with a share of 16.8 percent. Construction materials ranked second with a share of 16.7 percent, followed by chemical products with 14.5 percent, as well as fodder with 13.6 percent. (Trend)

Over 22,000 Tons of Humanitarian Aid Delivered to Tajikistan in January-November This Year

DUSHANBE - Sixty countries of the world have provided 41 million U.S. dollars' worth of more than 22,000 tons of humanitarian aid to Tajikistan over the first eleven months of this year, according to the Agency for Statistics under the President of Tajikistan, Trend reports referring to news.tj.

Over the report period, among donors countries the greatest share in value reportedly came from China - nearly 34 percent. In all, fifty-eight countries provided 73.644 million U.S. dollars' worth of humanitarian aid to Tajikistan last year and the greatest share came from China - 32.2 percent. (Trend)

Germany - 3.8 percent; the United States - 3.6 percent; and others. Over the same eleven-month period last year, fifty-four countries provided some 70 million U.S. dollars' of humanitarian aid to Tajikistan. In January-November 2017, among the donor countries the greatest share in value reportedly came from China - nearly 34 percent. In all, fifty-eight countries provided 73.644 million U.S. dollars' worth of humanitarian aid to Tajikistan last year and the greatest share came from China - 32.2 percent. (Trend)

Saudi Arabia Studies Investment Projects in Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - A business delegation of Saudi Arabia, led by Bader bin Bahishan Al-Busais, visited Turkmenistan with a working visit to study investment opportunities, Trend reports with reference to Arab News.

A series of meetings of the Saudi delegation with the leadership of Vnesheconombank, the ministries of industry and trade, and the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan took place in Ashgabat. It was earlier reported that

Turkmenistan is of investment interest for oil companies of Saudi Arabia, such as Saudi Aramco. The company considered investing in oil and gas production, including countries with access to the Caspian Sea, such as Turkmenistan, which owns the largest mineral resources.

It is worth noting that Saudi Arabia supports the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, which started in December 2015. Deliveries are expected in 2020. (Trend)