

Head of UN Monitors Arrives in Yemen's Rebel-Held Sanaa

SANAA - The head of the UN team tasked with monitoring a fragile ceasefire in Yemen's port city of Hodeida arrived in the rebel-held capital Sanaa on Sunday, an AFP photographer said. Retired Dutch general Patrick Cammaert is heading a joint committee including members of the government and the Huthi rebels, in charge of monitoring a truce in the Red Sea city and its surroundings. Cammaert was greeted by the head of the Huthi delegation, Ali al-Mushki, and a number of other members of the UN team at Sanaa international airport. He is making a stop in Sanaa before heading to Hodeida, a lifeline port city that serves as the entry point for the majority of imports to war-torn Yemen, a UN official said.



On Saturday, Cammaert arrived in Aden where he held talks with Yemen government officials. During those talks he urged Yemeni leaders and the Saudi-led coalition backing the loyal-

ists to uphold the ceasefire that came into effect last week, said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric. He also "sought their commitment and cooperation to secure the unhindered flow of humanitarian aid", said Dujarric, add-

ing that Cammaert will "convey similar messages" to the Huthis in Sanaa.

On Friday, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a resolution authorising the deployment of observers to Hodeida, which is held by the rebels and has been subjected to an offensive by pro-government forces.

Both the government and the rebels backed the resolution on Friday.

Rebel negotiator Mohammed Abdelsalam said it marked "an important step towards stopping the aggression and lifting the blockade".

He was referring to the Saudi-led military coalition that intervened in 2015 and imposed a blockade on Yemeni waters and airports. (AFP)

Neighbor News

Trade with Pakistan: Maldives Wants to Import More

KARACHI - Maldivian Parliament Member Abdul Bari Abdulla has said that being an importing country, the Maldives can offer immense opportunities to businessmen and industrialists of Pakistan and they must frequently visit the nation to explore opportunities of enhancing bilateral trade in different sectors of the economy. He was speaking to business community during his visit to the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI). "We are not producers but largely importers whereas Pakistan, being a producing country, can provide many goods and

services to the Maldives," he pointed out. "Therefore, the Pakistani business community should focus on improving linkages with the Maldivians by holding maximum number of B2B meetings, which would certainly prove favourable for both the countries." Abdulla, who was leading a Maldivian delegation at the KCCI, stated that the Maldives had mostly been importing rice, fruits and vegetables from Pakistan but many other products particularly textile, cotton and agricultural commodities could also be exported. (Monitoring Desk)

India and Pakistan Engage in Tit-For-Tat Diplomacy

ISLAMABAD - India and Pakistan are yet again faced with diplomatic harassment that marred ties between the two countries earlier this year. While Pakistan has denied gas to the newly constructed Indian residential complex in Islamabad, the Indian government earlier this month denied permission to Pakistan high commissioner Sohail Mahmood to visit Kolkata. Both sides were quiet on why Mahmood was prevented from visiting but, as official sources said, Pakistan had been late in seeking approval for the visit. Both Indian and Pakistan high commissioners are required to seek approval from local authorities for any visit outside the capital. This development came around the time Indian officials were raising with Pakistan the issue of delay in supply of gas to India's newly constructed residential complex in Is-

lamabad. Sources said that the issue had been repeatedly raised for over a month both here with the Pakistan high commission and with MoFA in Islamabad. "Several note verbale have been issued but to no avail," said an official source. The complex was at the centre of the dispute between India and Pakistan over harassment of diplomats in both capitals. A group of men was said to have raided the complex under construction then and disconnected water and electricity supply triggering diplomatic hostility which lasted for over a month. The complex is now home to several Indian diplomats and other staff. According to sources here, the supply of gas has not started, despite pipelines having been laid, because the same is yet to be approved by Pakistan government authorities including MoFA. (Monitoring Desk)

Netanyahu Seeks to Calm Israeli Concerns over Trump's Syria Pullout

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought on Sunday to calm domestic concerns over US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria, saying his country will still act against Iran there. Trump last week said the Islamic State group had been defeated and he was withdrawing the United States' 2,000 troops from Syria. Israel has seen the US presence in neighbouring Syria as a bulwark against its main enemy

Iran and a counterweight to Russia. Both Russia and Iran support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime in the country's civil war. "The decision to remove the 2,000 US soldiers from Syria won't change our consistent policy," Netanyahu said at the start of a cabinet meeting. "We will continue to act against Iran's attempt to establish a military presence in Syria, and if the need arises, we will even expand our activities there." (AFP)

RABAT, Morocco - Moroccans gathered Saturday in front of the Norwegian and Danish embassies in Rabat in a candlelight vigil to honor two Scandinavian university students killed in a terrorist attack in the Atlas Mountains. Hundreds of people brought flowers and shed tears Saturday in a show of opposition to violence and religious extremism. They were honoring 28-year-old Norwegian Maren Ueland and 24-year-old

Moroccans Hold Anti-Terror Vigil for Slain Nordic Hikers

Louisa Vesterager Jespersen, whose bodies were found Monday. Authorities say the hikers were killed by four men affiliated with the Islamic State group. The killings shocked Moroccans as much as those in Denmark and Norway. "I am deeply touched by the reactions of the Moroccan people after the tragic event," the Norwegian ambassador to Morocco, Merethe Nergaard, said in a statement Saturday. The mourners included



ordinary Moroccans joined by politicians, artists and activists. Some held banners saying "Sorry" and condemned the brutal killing, which is unusual in Morocco and revived fears of terrorism. "Words cannot describe this barbaric crime," said Khalil Bensalmi, in his fifties, who came to the vigil with his two daughters. (Fox News)

Former Liberal Democrat Leader Paddy Ashdown Has Died at 77



LONDON - Britain's Liberal Democrat party has announced the death of former leader Paddy Ashdown after a short illness. He was 77.

The popular, articulate Ashdown was for decades a prominent figure in Britain and continental Europe. He was known for his intellect, outspoken

nature and wit. Ashdown received a knighthood and was made a member of the House of Lords, but was the sort of person almost everyone called Paddy. He was a former Royal Marine commando who helped build the Liberal Democrats into a force to be dealt with in Parliament, raising the party's profile considerably by helping it amass a total of 46 seats in 1997, its best result in more than seven decades. He ran the party with military-style discipline, yet was always

warm on a one-to-one basis. He made time for just about everyone who sought him out. Current party leader Vince Cable said Saturday that it was a "hugely sad day" and that everyone across the political spectrum "had immense affection and respect for Paddy." "He was famous for his politics, but his talents extended well beyond that arena," said Cable. "He was an accomplished author, and had spent many years serving the country before he got near the House of Commons." (Fox News)

Japan Emperor Draws Huge Birthday Crowd before Abdication Next Year

TOKYO - More than 82,000 well-wishers paid their respects to Emperor Akihito who turned 85 on Sunday, his last birthday celebration at Tokyo's Imperial Palace before stepping down next year. The birthday of the emperor, whose position is ceremonial with no political power, is traditionally marked by a national holiday and an address at the palace, which opens to the public on the day. The crowd of 82,850, according to the Imperial Household Agency, was the largest birthday attendance during Akihito's three-decade reign, known as the "Heisei" era, which means "achieving peace" in Japanese. Akihito - flanked by his wife, eldest son Naruhito and other members of the imperial family on a balcony - addressed well-wishers waving small Japanese flags and holding up smartphones. Earthquakes, severe storms and heatwaves killed hundreds of people, destroyed homes and disrupted supply chains, clouding the outlook for Japan's export-reliant economy. (Reuters)

Turkey Masses Troops Near Kurdish-Held Syrian Town

BEIRUT - A Syrian war monitor and Turkish media say Turkey is massing troops near a town in northern Syria held by a U.S.-backed and Kurdish-led force. Turkey said it would delay a promised offensive in Syria following U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has vowed to dislodge the Kurdish fighters, who Turkey views as an extension of the insurgency within its borders. The U.S. had partnered with the Syrian Kurdish militia to drive out the Islamic State group. (AP)

Macron Calls for Order after 'Yellow Vest' Attack on Police

PARIS - French President Emmanuel Macron called for "order" on Sunday after a sixth weekend of "yellow vest" anti-government protests marked by dwindling participation and a violent attack on police in Paris. Speaking during a visit to the central African state of Chad where he was visiting French troops serving in a counter-terrorism force Macron said: "There must be order now, calm and harmony. Our country needs it." "It needs harmony, unity, sincere commitment to strong collective causes and we must heal the divisions," said the 41-year-old centrist, who has struggled to tamp down the anger of the working poor in smalltown and rural France over falling spending power and policies seen as tilted towards the rich. (AFP)

After Delays, Egypt's New Mega-Museum Set to Open in 2020

CAIRO - On the Giza Plateau outside Cairo, thousands of Egyptians are laboring in the shadow of the pyramids to erect a monument worthy of the pharaohs. The Grand Egyptian Museum has been under construction for well over a decade and is intended to showcase Egypt's ancient treasures while drawing tourists to help fund its future development. But the project has been subject to repeated delays, with a "soft opening" planned for next year scrapped in favor of a more triumphant



inauguration in 2020. Costs have meanwhile soared from an initial \$650 million to well over \$1 billion, with most of the financing coming from Japan. It's the latest mega-project to be championed by President Abdel-

Fattah el-Sissi, who is wagering that massive investments in infrastructure will revive an economy weakened by decades of stagnation and battered by the unrest that followed the 2011 uprising. (Fox News)

Cuban Assembly Approves Draft of New Constitution

HAVANA - Cuba's National Assembly on Saturday approved an update of the country's constitution, the final step before a national referendum expected to approve the new charter in February. The new constitution contains more continuity than change, although it recognizes the de-facto modernization of Cuban society over the last decade. The constitution maintains Cuba as a centrally planned economy ruled by a single Communist Party, but recognizes private property for the first time and paves the way for a separate

referendum on legalizing gay marriage. It also creates the role of prime minister alongside the current president, as well as provincial governors. Legalizing private property is a formal recognition of significant change in Cuban society since former President Raul Castro permitted home and auto sales, creating a booming real-estate market, and allowed more than half a million Cubans have permits to work as entrepreneurs. Hundreds of thousands more work full or part-time in the private sector without licenses. (Fox News)

Ghosh's Detention Puts Japan Justice System Under Microscope

TOKYO - Since his arrest on suspicion of falsifying financial reports, Nissan's former Chairman Carlos Ghosn has been sitting in a humble cell for more than a month, interrogated day in and day out, without a lawyer present. His case is drawing attention to the criminal justice system in Japan, where there is no presumption of innocence and the accused can be held for months before trial. The system, sometimes called "hostage justice," has come under fire from human rights advocates. When a court denied Tokyo prosecutors' request to detain Ghosn another 10 days on Dec. 20, it was so unusual that the Japanese media reported he might be released. But such speculation was dashed when prosecutors re-arrested him a day later on suspicion of breach of trust, tagging on a new set of allegations centered on Ghosn's shifting personal investment losses of some 1.8 billion yen (\$16 million) to Nissan Motor Co. On Sunday, a court approved prosecutors' request to detain him through Jan. 1. But his plight is routine in Japan. People have signed confessions, even to killings they never committed, just to get out of the ordeal. A trial could be months away and could drag on even longer. And his chances aren't good: The conviction rate in Japan is 99 percent. Those close to Ghosn and his family say he is asserting his innocence. But it is unclear when release may come for Ghosn, who led a two-decade turnaround at Nissan from near-bankruptcy. (AP)

Emergency Landing in Iran, Best Chance for Knowing Country, People

TEHRAN - Ashely Duncan, an American fashion psychologist, who was on board of the flight that made an emergency landing in Shiraz on December 14, says the incident provided her with an opportunity to have a better understanding about the Iranian people. The Boeing plane en route to Oslo, Norway, from Dubai, had to make an emergency landing in Shiraz international airport due to technical problems. Due to the time required for sending a relief aircraft by Norwegian officials to Shiraz, passengers were accommodated in a hotel in the southern Iranian city. Speaking in an exclusive interview with the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Duncan said, "As an American, I did have a pleasant experience. I did not allow the politics and the diplomatic relationship to taint my view of Iran's people." "The Iranian people allowed me to have a pleasant experience contrary to what has been promulgated in the media," she added. "So, I just want to thank them for their hospitality," she reiterated. She went on to raise examples of the Iranians' hospitality and kindness, saying she was able to ask an Iranian for his personal hotspot so that she could use WiFi to talk to her family and let them know that she was safe in Iran. (IRNA)

Iran Leader Urges Police to Win People's Trust

TEHRAN - Speaking in a Sunday meeting with commanders of Iran's police in Tehran, Ayatollah Khamenei said the behaviour of police forces is under the public scrutiny, and people tend to generalize their impression of the police's performance to other parts of the Islamic Establishment. "You should act in a way that the people find the police a powerful, fair and vigilant force," he said. Police forces have made significant progress in improving their behaviour towards people, but they need to improve further, he said, calling for "non-stop progress" so they reach a level that deserves the Islamic system. "The performance of the police forces must be wise and thoughtful, in a way that it helps the police win people's trust," he said. (Agencies)