

UN Security Council Declines to Back Russia's Yemen Appeal

UNITED NATIONS - The UN Security Council failed Friday to back a Russian appeal for an immediate ceasefire or humanitarian pauses in war-torn Yemen, where critical fuel shortages threatened relief efforts and doctors described desperate scenes.

Russia requested an urgent meeting of the 15-member council as the Saudi-led air war on Yemen's Huthi rebels entered a sixth week, crippling deliveries of fuel, food and medicine.

The latest strikes and clashes on the ground killed 47 people in the second city of Aden, where



the Red Cross scrambled to evacuate staff and patients from a hospital when it became a front

line. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has warned that fuel shortages could

bring all relief operations to a halt "within days," echoing alarm from the International Red Cross

and other embattled aid agencies. During a closed-door council meeting, Russia

proposed a draft statement calling for an immediate ceasefire or at least humanitarian pauses, and an urgent return to political negotiations.

But after the statement failed to win endorsement, Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said fellow envoys were showing "amazing indecision" in the face of the worsening humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Russia's diplomacy has been greeted with some suspicion given Moscow's close ties to Iran, which is supporting the Huthi rebels, who have seized the capital Sanaa and forced Yemen's president into exile. (AFP)

Neighbour News

Iran Slams Silence on Saudi Aggression against Yemen as Unacceptable

TEHRAN - senior Iranian diplomat has criticized as "unacceptable" the silence of certain countries vis-a-vis Saudi Arabia's incessant airstrikes on Yemen and the Riyadh regime's blockade of the war-hit Arab country. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, the deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, said on Saturday that Saudi Arabia's focus on its war against Yemen only benefits the Israeli regime and terrorist groups. He reaffirmed Iran's call for a diplomatic solution to the Yemeni crisis, saying, "Tehran supports Yemeni-Yemeni dialog [to be held] in a venue agreed upon by all Yemeni groups, and rejects any foreign interference in this country." Stressing that security in Yemen is intertwined with that of the Middle East region and Iran, Amir-Abdollahian warned that "we will not allow anybody play with our common security through adventurous measures." "Gone is the era of such adventurous measures," he said, calling on the regional governments to think about regional security and playing a constructive role in it. Saudi Arabia is continuing its brutal airstrikes against Yemen despite the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the impoverished Arab country. Riyadh launched its military aggression against Yemen on March 26 - without a United Nations mandate - in a bid to undermine the Houthi Ansarullah movement and to restore power to the country's fugitive former president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who is a staunch ally of Riyadh. (Monitoring Desk)

China and Togo Exempt Visa for Diplomatic, Service Passport Holders

LOME - Togo and China on Thursday reached visa exemption agreement, to take force on May 7, for service and diplomatic passport holders, according to an official release.

Citizens of either Contracting Party holding valid diplomatic or service passports, shall not be required to obtain a visa to enter into, exit from, transit through or stay in the territory of the other Contracting Party for the duration of their accreditation requirements of the other

Contracting Party within 30 days of their entry into the territory of the other Contracting Party, the agreement said.

China ambassador to Togo Liu Yuxi and the Togolese minister of foreign affairs and cooperation Robert Dussey inked the agreement at the ministry office. "Our world has become increasingly smaller and it is, today, a village. To go from one household to another, there is no need to knock at the door," Liu Yuxi said. (Xinhua)

Tajikistan-AKDN Cooperation Discussed in Dushanbe

DUSHANBE - Tajik Deputy Foreign Minister Nizomiddin Zohidmet with Mr. Akbar Ali Pesnani, Resident Representative of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) for Tajikistan. According to the Tajik MFA information department, the two exchanged views on state and prospects of further expansion of cooperation between Tajikistan and the Aga Khan Development Network.

They, in particular, discussed implementation of projects and programs of AKDN in Tajikistan, the source said. Founded and guided by His Highness the Aga Khan, the Aga Khan Development Network brings together a number of development agencies, institutions, and programs that work to empower communities and individuals to improve living conditions and opportunities, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, Central and South Asia, and the Middle East. The Network's nine development agencies focus on social, cultural and economic development for all citizens, regardless of gender, origin or religion. AKDN's underlying ethic is compassion for the vulnerable in society. AKDN agencies work in Tajikistan in a range of areas - from economic development to education, rural development to cultural revitalization, health care to financial services. Operating in the country since 1992, AKDN draws on a strong base of experience in working with mountain societies. (AP)

Pakistan Sends more Relief Assistance to Quake-Hit Nepal

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan sent more relief assistance to the earthquake-hit people in Nepal on Saturday, officials said. "At the instructions of the prime minister, two plane loads of relief items were dispatched to Kathmandu on Saturday," the foreign ministry said. Two C130 aircrafts of the Pakistan Air Force carried over 600 tons, 4 tons of medicines and dry food items while about a dozen Nepalese post-graduate medical students in Pakistan were also airlifted to serve their countrymen during the hardship of Nepalese nation. The prime minister has approved provision of 20000 tents, 20 tons of

rice and medicines to help quake-hit Nepal, as requested by the Nepalese authorities, a Foreign Ministry statement said.

The planes were seen off at the airport by the Ambassador of Nepal to Pakistan Bharat Raj Paudyal, officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Disaster Management Authority, Military Operations and Pakistan Air Force. The ambassador deeply appreciated the much needed support and assistance from Pakistan, the statement said. An extensive relief operation is likely to continue in the next few days, the foreign ministry said. (Xinhua)

N. Korea Arrests S. Korean NY Student for Illegal Entry

SEOUL - North Korea on Saturday said it had arrested a South Korean college student, holding a U.S. green card, for illegal entry into the country. Joo Won-moon, 21, from New York, was caught on April 22 crossing from the Chinese side of the Yalu River, according to North Korea's KCNA news agency. Joo admitted violating North Korean law, state media said. The arrest comes after North Korea said in late March that it had detained two South Koreans, accusing them of spying after they crossed

over from the Chinese border city of Dandong. Dandong is home to many ethnic Korean Chinese traders who deal with both North and South Korean businessmen. It is also home to South Korean and western Christian missionaries trying to operate in North Korea. A number of US missionaries have been arrested in the past, with some allowed to return home after interventions by high-profile US figures. But, despite pleas from Seoul to release, North Korea has... (More on P4)... (20)

UN Security Council Should Stay out of Burundi Dispute: Russia

UNITED NATIONS - Russia said on Friday the United Nations Security Council should not intervene in Burundi's constitutional dispute that has sparked the biggest political crisis in the East African state since an ethnically fuelled civil war ended in 2005.

Diplomats said Russia and China on Thursday blocked a French-drafted council statement on the situation in Burundi, where there has been

almost a week of street protests over President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to seek a third term.

Russian U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told reporters, "it's not the business of the Security Council and the U.N. Charter to get involved in constitutional matters of sovereign states." The Burundi constitution and the Arusha peace accord ending the civil war limit the president to two

terms, but Nkurunziza's supporters say he can run again because his first term, when he was picked by lawmakers, does not count.

The draft council statement, seen by Reuters, "stressed the need to hold a peaceful, credible, transparent and inclusive electoral process to sustain the gains of peace at a critical time, in accordance with the spirit of the Arusha Agreement, which led to over a decade of

peace in Burundi, and with the rule of law."

It also expressed concern about the unrest and escalation of violence since the announcement of Nkurunziza's candidacy for the June 26 presidential vote and condemned the use of lethal weapons in response to the protests. Statements by the 15-member U.N. Security Council have to be agreed to by consensus. (Reuters)

Ex-US President Carter Urges Palestinian Elections

Ramallah - Former US president Jimmy Carter on Saturday urged Palestinians to hold elections to end the de facto division of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and the Islamist-run Gaza Strip.

He was speaking at a joint news conference with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in the Palestinian political capital Ramallah in the West Bank.

"We hope that sometime we'll see elections all over the Palestinian area and east Jerusalem and Gaza and also in the West Bank," said Carter, a member of the independent Elders Group of global leaders. No election has been held in the occupied territories for nearly a decade.

Abbas's presidential mandate expired in 2009, but he remains in office since there has been no election. The Palestinian parliament has also not met since 2007. In 2006, a year after Abbas was elected, Hamas won the most recent Palestinian legislative elections. Differences between Abbas's Fatah party and the Islamist Hamas then led to the so-called "inqisam", or division.

Despite the rivals signing a reconciliation agreement a year ago, Hamas is reluctant to hand over power in Gaza to an independent Palestinian unity government they formed. Carter had also planned to go to Gaza, but the visit was cancelled at the last moment. He said it would be "very important" for "full implementation of the agreement reached between Hamas and Fatah". (AFP)

EU, NATO Try to Counter Russian Propaganda



BRUSSELS - Western powers are getting set to counter an expertly crafted Russian disinformation campaign over Ukraine which has left them wrong-footed too many times for comfort. The aim is to win the daily battle for the news headlines, to get the EU and NATO story out to show that Russia's message falls well short of the truth. "In Russia, the EU is described as though it is a conspiracy of homosexuals... the old myths of the Cold War are back," Robert Pszczel, spokesman in Moscow for NATO, told AFP. "Propaganda is so pervasive. About 90 percent of Russians get news from national television and the segment of Russians who are critical don't watch the news at all," Pszczel said. "It is a relentless narrative which portrays the outside world as basically a threat to Russia."

Russia's annexation last year of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula as Kiev pledged its future to the European Union has plunged relations with Moscow into deep freeze, with no sign of any improvement soon. It also jolted the 28-nation bloc and the US-led NATO military alliance out of their post-Cold War complacency, showing they needed to come to terms with a much more assertive Russia led by a no-holds barred President Vladimir Putin. A key part of that Russian effort is a sophisticated propaganda machine which, analysts and Western officials say, tries to cast doubts on Western "mainstream media" and even seeks to undermine the very idea of objective truth itself. In early April, several Russian television channels carried reports about a young girl they said... (More on P4)... (21)

Some 1,200 Migrants Rescued by Italy in Sea off Libyan Coast

ROME - Ships from the Italian Coast Guard and navy have rescued more than 1,200 migrants after smugglers' boats ran into trouble in the Mediterranean Sea near Libya.

Italian officials say the migrants were being taken Saturday to Italian ports after several different rescue operations, including helping some 200 people aboard motorized rubber dinghies a day earlier south of Sicily. The smugglers' boats

had set out in a spell of warm, calm weather.

Two weeks earlier, a fishing boat in which smugglers had crammed an estimated 800 people capsized in what is the largest known loss of life in a single boat accident involving migrants trying to reach Italian shores. There were only 28 survivors. The deaths prompted a humanitarian outcry and a European Union pledge to boost rescue efforts. (AP)

Japan PM Touts Economic Synergy with US in Visit

LOS ANGELES - The United States and Japan will work toward strengthened economic ties, including promoting more direct investment in each other's markets and approval of a Pacific trade agreement, officials said Friday. Speaking through an interpreter, Abe said during the Los Angeles stop in his U.S. visit that he envisioned a new era of cooperation between the two allies - an "alliance of hope" that included growing investments and closer

business and political ties. "We must reinforce an economic architecture that will shape and secure our future," U.S. Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker said at a Japan-U.S. economic forum downtown attended by visiting Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. "There are two essential cornerstones of that architecture: increasing two-way investment and deepening trade" through a trans-Pacific agreement, Pritzker said. At an earlier luncheon,

Abe said there is a "synergy across the Pacific Ocean" between the nations, and he alluded to strengthened defense ties with the U.S. amid Japan's perpetual feud with archrival China. Since winning election in December 2012, Abe has been a strong advocate of closer ties with the U.S. His remarks came near the close of a three-day swing through California after meeting earlier in the week with President Barack... (More on P4)... (18)

Kerry Visits Sri Lanka, Pledges Support for New Government

COLOMBO - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said on Saturday the United States wants to renew ties with Sri Lanka and urged its new government to work with the United Nations to ensure an investigation into war crimes met international standards. Kerry arrived in the South Asian island nation earlier on Saturday, the first time in a decade that a U.S. secretary of state has visited Sri Lanka. He announced the start of an annual bilateral dialogue and said the United States would

immediately send experts to advise the new government on economic growth, trade and investment. Kerry's visit comes after years of tensions between Washington and former President Mahinda Rajapaksa over allegations of human rights abuses and war crimes at the end of a long conflict with Tamil separatists, which ended in 2009. Rajapaksa's government had also clashed with the United Nations over its investigation into war atrocities. At Sirisena's request, the U.N. has agreed

to delay its report until September. In a speech to business leaders and activists, Kerry said it was important that the new government cooperate with the U.N. and mount an investigation seen as legitimate within Sri Lanka. He said a process of reconciliation was needed to heal the wounds of more than two decades of war. He also urged the government to release all remaining political prisoners and work with international organizations to investigate missing persons cases. (Reuters)

Death Toll from U.S.-Led Strike Rises to 52 Civilians in Syria

BEIRUT - The death toll from an air strike by U.S.-led forces on the northern Syrian province of Aleppo has risen to 52 including seven children, a group monitoring the conflict said on Saturday.

Rami Abdulrahman, who runs the British-based Observatory for Human Rights, said the death toll from Friday's strike was the highest civilian loss in a single attack by U.S. and Arab forces since they started



air raids against hard-line Islamist militant groups in Syria such as Islamic State. The Britain-based Observatory

said the raid had mistakenly struck civilians in a village on the eastern banks of the... (More on P4)... (19)