

# Worldwide Executions Decrease but Death Sentences Rise in 2014

NEW YORK - Egypt and Nigeria accounted for well over 1,000 of the death sentences announced last year, more than a third of the world's total, Amnesty International says in its latest annual report on the death penalty. The London-based human rights group expressed alarm at the 28 per cent jump in death sentences: 2,466 people in 55 countries were condemned to death in 2014.

At least 607 people were executed in 22 countries last year.

Neither of those numbers is complete, as North Korea's closed-off stance means that no estimate there was

available. Amnesty International also doesn't report numbers for China, where such information is considered a state secret.

The Dui Hua Foundation, a US-based prison research group, has estimated 2,400 executions happened in China for 2014, which is more than the rest of the world put together.

Amnesty International also said it was unable to confirm whether judicial executions took place last year in Syria, where civil war has raged for four years.

The countries with the most recorded executions last year were Iran with at least 289, Saudi Arabia with at least 90, Iraq with



at least 61 and the United States with at least 35, the rights group said.

In Iran, hundreds more executions were "not officially acknowledged" and the total could be as high as

743, the organisation said. Out of the 90 people executed in Saudi Arabia, two were women, an Ethiopian national and a Nepali national.

The 88 men comprised 53

locals, seven, Syrians, one Iranian, 21 Pakistanis, one Philippine national, two Yemenis, one Indian, one Turkish and one Iraqi.

Once again, the United States was the only coun-

try in the Americas to execute people in 2014, the report said. Texas and Missouri each carried out 10 executions.

Other US states that put ...*(More on P4)...*(22)

## Nieghbor News

### Opposition Huddle Demands APC over Yemen Crisis

KARACHI - A joint resolution read at the end of a Pakistani opposition parties' meeting held on Wednesday to discuss the situation in Yemen called for a peaceful solution to the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, and demanded that the government hold an All Parties Conference (APC) before taking a stance on the issue.

The meeting, chaired by former president Asif Ali Zardari, was held at Bilawal House and attended by representatives from the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), Awami National Party (ANP), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-F (JUI-F).

PPP Vice President Sherry Rehman, while reading out the joint declaration, said the government should summon an APC and a joint Parliament session to formulate the nation's stance on the critical matter. Also speaking on the occasion, PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari said dialogue on the issue was the need of the hour. He urged all stakeholders to sit together to resolve their differences. MQM leader Farooq Sattar said "the government is flying solo on the issue". The whole nation is concerned about the alarming situation and all concerns need to be addressed, he added. *(Monitoring Desk)*

### Iran Calls for UN Action against Aggression on Yemen

TEHRAN - Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Iran's deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, said Wednesday that if the Saudi-led military aggression against Yemen continues, it will have dangerous repercussions for all Middle Eastern states.

The Iranian diplomat made the remarks in a meeting with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on the sidelines of the Third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in Kuwait City.

Amir-Abdollahian expressed surprise at such "unilateral" decisions to launch aerial attacks against Yemen, emphasizing the UN's role in preventing the eruption of an all-out war between the

two Arab states. "One should not allow that the continued attacks fan the flames of war and endanger the collective security of the region," Amir-Abdollahian said, adding that the current military aggression against Yemen would bring about a new wave of terrorism and extremism in the Middle East and the world.

He also condemned the disruption of food and medical supplies to the impoverished people in Yemen as a result of the current aerial and naval siege on the Arabian Peninsula country. On March 26, the Al Saud regime unleashed deadly air raids against Yemen. The attacks have claimed the lives of over 100 civilians so far. ...*(More on P4)...*(23)

### Xi highlights "Four Comprehensives" in Reform Drive

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday called for the country's deepening reform to be carried out based on the "Four Comprehensives", his new political mantras.

Speaking at the 11th meeting of the central reform leading group, Xi called on authorities to "show courage and guts" in reform.

The meeting deliberated and approved a plan to support rural teachers over the next five years and guidelines on reforming urban public hospitals.

Leaders attending the meeting noted that remote and poor areas in the middle and west of China presented the biggest challenges in modernizing education. They stressed the im-

portance of every child receiving equal education so as to stop poverty spreading to the next generation.

Means of increasing the number of good teachers in poor areas include improving teachers' political and moral awareness, increasing their income, and persuading urban teachers to work in rural schools, they agreed.

The leaders also urged a deepening of reform in public hospitals. Public hospitals should be operated for the public good, instead of seeking profits, and the service should be accessible, equal and beneficial for the people, they said. They believe better healthcare administration is needed, particularly in the area of medical insurance and medical workers' salaries. *(Xinhua)*

### Turkey Suggests Turkmenistan New Areas of Cooperation

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan - Turkey presented Turkmenistan new proposals on cooperation in various fields, the message of the government of Turkmenistan said April 1.

The proposals were presented at the meeting of Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhammadov with the chairman of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey Mustafa Hirsarcikloglu, which took place in Ashgabat. The message did not indicate which specific cooperation proposals Turkish side presented to Turkmenistan.

The message said that Turkey takes part in implementation of the large-scale joint projects in Turk-

menistan, which play "a huge role in a stable and sustainable socio-economic development not only of the two countries, but also the entire region."

Earlier it was reported that by the end of 2014, Turkey ranked second in total trade turnover of Turkmenistan. Bilateral trade turnover volume exceeded \$6 billion, which is a 26.6 percent increase compared to the same period in 2013. Turkmenistan employs about 600 Turkish companies entrusted with such major projects as the construction of an international seaport in Turkmenbashi and the international airport in the capital of Turkmenistan, highways, transport interchanges and overpasses. *(Agencies)*

### India Evacuates Citizens from Yemen amid Saudi Aggression

NEW DELHI - Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman, Syed Akbaruddin, said on Wednesday that a group of 348 Indian citizens has been evacuated following the aerial assaults that began on March 26.

The top Indian official further said the group was taken by an Indian navy ship at Yemen's port of

Senior officials in New Delhi said the ship "sailed into a barrage of bombs" to evacuate the Indian group. The group includes more than 100 women and 28 children.

The remarks come amid reports suggesting the docking of five Indian ships in Aden to get some diplomats and workers out of the port city.

Figures show there are nearly 4,000 Indian laborers, businessmen and nurses working in Yemen.

Many of the Indian workers are stranded in Aden and the capital Sana'a. There have been no reports of any Indian casualties so far.

On March 29, India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said the country received permission to begin its daily airlifts from Yemen.

"Today we got permission to fly from Sana'a for three hours a day. We will use the slot for evacuating our citizens every day," she told the Press Trust of India.

The minister also posted in her Twitter account that New Delhi was "doing everything" to evacuate Indians from the Arab country "at the earliest by all routes - land, sea and air."

In the latest air raid on Wednesday, 29 people were killed and two dozen more injured. The airstrike targeted a food factory in the western province of Hudaydah. *(Agencies)*

### Lebanon PM Stresses Respect for Yemen's Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity

BEIROUT - Lebanese Prime Minister Tammam Salam has voiced his country's support for Yemen's "sovereignty and territorial integrity," stressing the need for a political solution to the developments in the southern Arabian Peninsula state.

Salam made the comments on Saturday during an Arab League summit in Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, the Lebanese newspaper Daily Star reported on Saturday.

He added that a solution in Yemen must not rely on any foreign interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries. The Lebanese premier, however, stopped short of criticizing the Al Saud regime's invasion of Yemen.

"Out of its keenness on supporting constitutional legitimacy in Yemen and [supporting] Arab consensus and the unity and stability of all Arab states, [Lebanon] announces its support for any Arab stance that preserves Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity in addition to the cohesion of its social fabric," Salam said in his address to the Saturday's session.

On March 27, the secretary general of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement, Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, denounced the Saudi attacks on Yemen, which began a day earlier, saying that the real reason for the airstrikes is that Saudi Arabia has lost its domination on the impoverished country.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud said during Saturday's summit that the ongoing military invasion of Yemen would continue until its goals are achieved. *(Monitoring Desk)*

## U.S., Chinese Engagement in CA "Complementary"

WASHINGTON - The United States supports China's efforts to develop infrastructure in Central Asia (CA) and sees them as "complementary" to Washington's engagement in the region, a senior U.S. diplomat said on Tuesday.

"We don't see China's involvement in Central Asia in zero-sum terms," Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. "Its development of infrastructure in Central Asia can be fully complementary to our own efforts." "In particular, we see an important role for China in supporting



the transition in Afghanistan and advancing its own integration into the broader Asian region," Blinken said at an event in Brookings Institute, a Washington-based think tank. The United States supports China's efforts to "connect the region", and is looking at

ways to "more effectively coordinate" with China in this regard, he added. The senior U.S. diplomat also hoped that China's efforts to develop infrastructure in central Asia would "advance trade in all directions and adhere to international norms." *(Xinhua)*

## Nuclear Deal Must Guarantee Removal of Bans: Iran

*A senior Iranian negotiator says any deal with the P5+1 group of world powers on Tehran's nuclear program should certainly guarantee removal of all sanctions.*

TEHRAN - "It is not possible to have a deal without lifting sanctions, all sanctions must be removed," Abbas Araqchi said on Wednesday.

The Iranian official pointed to the difficulty of the task to see all sanctions removed all at once, stressing, however, that the lifting of major economic and oil embargoes constitutes the cornerstone in any agreement.

"...The type and the entity by which the sanctions have been imposed are very variable, they must be distinguished, but we insist that in the first step of the agreement all economic, financial, oil and banking sanctions must be lifted,"

Araqchi said. The Iranian negotiator also stated that the removal of sanctions should be based on a "clear and precise perspective, otherwise there would definitely be no deal."

Araqchi added that minor but key problems still remain in front of the two sides, which are mostly related to the issues of sanctions as well as research and development on Iran's advanced centrifuge machines.

"Until we have solutions to all problems we cannot have a comprehensive agreement," AFP quoted Araqchi as saying. Hamid Baedinejad, another

member of Iran's delegation to Lausanne talks, told Press TV on Tuesday that Tehran and the P5+1 group of countries have reached an agreement on the removal of anti-Tehran sanctions, but minor issues still remain. "Sanctions have many aspects, there are unilateral sanctions, US sanctions, EU sanctions, UNSC sanctions... I should say that many of these aspects have been resolved, but still there are some limited areas that also need to be resolved, and we are now concentrating on those remaining technical aspects with regard to the sanctions," Baedinejad told Press TV. ...*(More on P4)...*(24)

### World Needs 'Better Deal' with Iran: Israel

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday made a last-ditch appeal for world powers to call off an emerging nuclear agreement with Iran, saying the world must insist on a "better deal" that links concessions to a change in Tehran's behavior.

His remarks came as U.S. House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, arrived as part of a regional visit. U.S. Republicans share Netanyahu's concerns and have pushed for tougher sanctions on Iran, which the White House says would scuttle the talks. Last month, Boehner helped engineer a speech to Congress by Netanyahu, against the White House's wishes, in which the Israeli leader harshly criticized the possible nuclear deal.

As negotiators continued talks in Switzerland a day after abandoning a March 31 deadline to reach the outline of a deal, Netanyahu said world powers were looking to ease sanctions on Iran while it continued to wreak havoc in the Middle East and threaten Israel with annihilation. He said a weak deal will reward Iran's intransigence and endanger not only Israel but other nations in the region. In an English-language statement to interna ...*(More on P4)...*(25)

### IS Attacks Palestinian Refugee Camp in Damascus

DAMASCUS - The Islamic State (IS) militant group on Wednesday captured the southern part of a main Palestinian refugee camp in south of the capital Damascus, sources told Xinhua.

IS militants advanced into the Yarmouk Camp from the nearby district of Hajar al-Asawad, located south of the camp, said Khaled Abdul-Majid, a Palestinian politician and head of the Palestinian Struggle Front.

The IS militants captured the streets of Oruba and Taqadum and part of the Safad street south of the camp, he added.

They also stormed the Palestine Hospital there, capturing all of the medical staffs and volunteers, another Palestinian activists told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

He said the southern part of the camp is important as it's a densely populated area, adding that the IS also reached the 30 Street inside the camp. The IS militants also erected snipers atop buildings in the southern part of the camp and currently clashing with rival rebel groups, which are in control of the camp since 2012. The Yarmouk camp is a large district in southern Damascus. Among its one million residents, 170,000 are Palestinian. Most of them fled to Syria in 1948 following the establishment of the Israeli state. *(Xinhua)*

## Russia Muslim Leaders Issue Religious Decree Against ISIL

MOSCOW - A major Russian Muslim group has issued a fatwa (religious decree) against the Takfiri ISIL terrorist group, condemning the militants as "enemies of Islam" and calling for all of its members to be punished as criminals. The Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Russia published the religious decree on its website on Tuesday, saying all actions by the ISIL have shown and proved to contradict Islam.

"The followers of ISIS (ISIL) are mistakenly interpreting Islam as the religion of brutality and cruelty, of violence, torture and killings of all discontent," the decree read.

The Muslim leaders added that, in reality, the basic principles of Islam forbid the killing of civilians, prisoners and envoys, which also include journalists and workers of humanitarian missions.

The decree called for the punishment of all ISIL



terrorists, saying that "from the point of view of the Muslim canon the members of such criminal groups deserve either capital punishment or full lifelong isolation from the society." The Muslim leaders emphasized, however, that before being punished, every suspect must first be convicted by a court that would fully eliminate any potential doubts about his or her complicity in violence, robberies and killings. This file photo shows leaders of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Russia meeting with President Vladimir Putin. The decree high-

lighted that ISIL's aim to create a so-called caliphate could be considered as mutiny as such a move can only be created by the approval of all Muslim communities. "A single-sided declaration of caliphate would cause numerous competing caliphates to appear and this would cause strife and disagreement between Muslims," the decree read. The Takfiri extremists currently control parts of Syria and Iraq. They have carried out heinous crimes in the two countries, including mass executions and the beheading of people. *(Agencies)*