

Yemen Dialogue Begins in Saudi Arabia without Houthi Rebels

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia - Around 400 Yemeni politicians and tribal leaders launched talks in Saudi Arabia on Sunday on the future of their war-torn country, but the Shiite Houthi rebels who control the capital and much of northern Yemen are not participating. The meeting came as a five-day cease-fire that has been repeatedly violated was set to expire. The Saudi-led coalition and the rebels have blamed each other for the violations, as fighting on the ground has continued throughout the pause. The Houthis have re-



jected the main aim of the three-day talks - the restoration of Yemen's exiled president - and the location of the negotiations in Saudi Arabia. The absence of the Houthis means the

national dialogue is unlikely to end the violence. The U.N. envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, opened the meeting by calling on all parties to ensure that the shaky cease-fire leads to a lasting truce. "I call on all parties to refrain from any action that disturbs the peace of airports, main areas and the infrastructure of transport," said Ahmed, who delivered the speech on behalf of U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Since late March, Saudi Arabia has led airstrikes against the Houthis... (More on P4)...(17)

Neighbour News

Xi tells John Kerry: Pacific Ocean Big Enough for China and US

BEIJING - China's relationship with the US is "stable" despite tensions in the South China Sea, President Xi Jinping told top American diplomat John Kerry Sunday, adding that the Pacific Ocean is "vast enough" for both powers, state media said. Xi met with Kerry in Beijing as tensions between the world's two biggest economies mount over Chinese island-building in strategic but disputed waters. The United States is weighing sending warships and surveillance aircraft within 12 nautical miles - the normal territorial zone around natural land - of artificial islands that Beijing is building in the South China Sea. Such a deployment could lead to a standoff on the high seas in an area home to vital global shipping lanes.

Beijing regards almost the whole of the South China Sea as its own, and satellite images show China is rapidly building an airstrip on an artificial island in the Spratly archipelago, which is also claimed in whole or part by US ally the Philippines, and Vietnam, among others. But on Sunday Xi told Kerry that, "in my view", relations between the two countries "have remained stable on the whole", according to state-run news agency Xinhua. "The broad Pacific Ocean is vast enough to embrace both China and the United States," Xi said. He called for the two sides to handle disputes "in an appropriate way so that the general direction of the bilateral relationship will not be affected". (Xinhua.)

Egypt Hangs Six Convicted Islamist Militants

CAIRO - Egyptian authorities on Sunday hanged six men convicted of killing soldiers, police said, ignoring appeals to spare them amid allegations two of them had been in custody at the time of their alleged crimes. President Morsi sentenced to death: How will the Muslim Brotherhood respond? Christian Science Monitor A military court upheld the death sentences last March, following a trial in which the six were

convicted of carrying out the attacks in the months after the army's overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013. Prosecutors said they were members of the Sinai Peninsular-based Ansar Beit al-Maqdis jihadist group, which late last year pledged allegiance to the Islamic State organisation. The sentence was carried out by hanging in a Cairo jail, according to officials. Some of the... (More on P4)...(21)

Kerry in South Korea to Talk Security, Cyber Issues

SEOUL, South Korea - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is in South Korea where he will be discussing security issues amid fresh fears of North Korean belligerence and delivering a speech on cyber policy. Kerry arrived in Seoul on Sunday from Beijing and will see top South Korean officials on Monday, less than a week after South Korea's spy agency said North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered



his defense chief executed with an anti-aircraft gun for complaining about the young ruler, talking back to him and sleeping during a meeting Kim presided over. (More on P4)...(18)

That allegation, if true, adds to concerns about the erratic nature of Kim's rule, particularly after Pyongyang claimed last weekend it had successfully test-fired a newly developed ballistic missile from a submarine. Those actions come despite a recent U.S. diplomatic overture to North Korea to discuss resuming denuclearization talks that have been stalled for the... (More on P4)...(18)

Thousands Rally Against US Military Base on Japan's Okinawa

OKINAWA - Thousands of people rallied in Okinawa in southern Japan on Sunday in protest against a controversial US airbase on the island, as a two-decade-old bitter row over the relocation of the site drags on. Okinawa is home to more than half of the 47,000 US service personnel stationed in Japan as part of a defence alliance, a proportion many islanders say is too high. Futenma airbase has become emblematic

of that ill-will since Washington announced plans to move it in 1996, hoping to ease tensions with the host community after the gang-rape of a schoolgirl by servicemen. But locals have blocked the move to relocate the base, insisting the facility should go off-island instead, queering relations between Tokyo and Okinawa - a once independent kingdom that was annexed by Japan in the 19th century. "The govern-

Turkey Says It Shot Down Syrian Helicopter

ISTANBUL - Turkish forces shot down a Syrian helicopter after it crossed into Turkish airspace, the country's defense minister said Saturday. Syrian state-run television denied the report, saying that a small drone was shot down.

Turkish Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz told state-run Anadolu Agency that the helicopter was brought down Saturday after it crossed at Cilvegözü, near the southern Turkish city of Reyhanlı. The helicopter had been in Turkish airspace for five minutes and was shot down after it had made it seven miles into Turkey, officials said. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, speaking on Star TV according to Anadolu, said the helicopter was given a warning but was shot after it remained in Turkish airspace. He said the helicopter then crashed inside Syria. "I congratulate our armed forces which properly carried out their duty and showed the Syrian forces the necessary reaction. I embrace all of our pilots," Yilmaz said. He rebutted the Syrian claims, saying he has seen information that the aircraft was a helicopter. Turkish media reported that jets took off from a base in the southern city of Adana to intercept the aircraft. It was not immediately clear if anyone was injured in the incident. Davutoglu, in the midst of an election campaign, said Turkey would always respond if its borders are violated. "I hope that the message has been received and that no one will dare to violate our borders again," he said on television. (AP)

US Raid Kills 32 IS Members, Including 4 Leaders: Monitor

BEIRUT - A US special forces raid in eastern Syria killed 32 members of the Islamic State jihadist group, including four leaders, a monitoring group said Sunday. "The US operation killed 32 members of IS, among them four officials, including IS oil chief Abu Sayyaf, the deputy IS defence minister, and an IS communications official," said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. US officials have said

"about a dozen" people were killed in the operation on Friday night, which was conducted by Iraq-based US commandos in order to capture Abu Sayyaf. Abdel Rahman said three of the four leading officials killed in the raid were from North Africa, but that the IS communications official was Syrian. US President Barack Obama approved the special forces operation, a rare use of "boots on the ground" by the United States, which has fought the jihadists almost entirely from the air. The operation targeted an IS compound at al-Omar, one of Syria's largest oil fields, which is located in the eastern Deir Ezzor province. A US official speaking on condition of anonymity said the commandos engaged the jihadists "at very close quarters... there was hand-to-hand combat". US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter called the operation a "significant... (More on P4)...(20)

France Calls for Fairer Asylum Seeker Distribution within EU

NICE, France - The European Union needs a system of border controls and a way for asylum seekers to be more fairly distributed among EU member states, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said on Saturday. Nearly 1,000 migrants, many coming from Africa via Italy, were intercepted in southern France near the Italian border in the past three days, officials said at the weekend. In response, border police forces and controls on highways, trains and buses and various check points have been beefed up, Valls said as he visited Menton, a Riviera town only a few kilometers from the



Italian border. "We need to create a European system of border controls," Valls said, adding that France was making concrete proposals to Brussels on the matter. "Asylum seekers need to be distributed among EU states more fairly," he said, calling for a renewed crackdown on criminal networks profiting from the refugees' travels. Valls said France, Italy, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom had accepted 75 percent of asylum seekers in Europe and that France "had already done a lot," having welcomed already 5,000 from Syria and 4,500 from Iraq since 2012. (Reuters)

Burundi Takes 18 Suspects in Failed Coup to Court

BUJUMBURA - Burundi took 18 people suspected of involvement in a failed coup against President Pierre Nkurunziza to the high court on Saturday, relatives of some of the accused said. Earlier, about a hundred demonstrators took to the streets of Bujumbura to protest against Nkurunziza's decision to seek a third term, defying the president's call the previous day for an end to the weeks-long protests. The east African nation was plunged into deep crisis after Nkurunziza announced he was running for another five-year term, with clashes between police and protesters stirring memories of an ethnically

driven civil war that ended a decade ago. "A lot of us citizens do not want the constitution to be violated as he is not allowed to lead for the third term... We will demonstrate until he steps down," said Nduwimana Belamie, one of the protesters. Opponents say Nkurunziza's decision violates the constitution and the Arusha deal to end the war that pitted rebel groups of the majority Hutu population, including one led by Nkurunziza, against the army which was then commanded by minority Tutsis. The army is now mixed and has absorbed rival factions, but the coup attempt exposed divisions. (Reuters)

UN Envoy Urges Extension of Yemen Humanitarian Truce



SANAA - A UN envoy called for an extension of a humanitarian ceasefire in Yemen due to expire on Sunday as the Houthi Shiite rebels boycotted political talks in Riyadh. The appeal followed clashes on the ground between rebels and pro-government forces that killed dozens across south Yemen on Saturday despite the truce, which has largely held. "I call on all parties to renew their commitment to this truce for five more days at least," UN envoy to Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed said in the Saudi capital. "This humanitarian truce should turn into a permanent ceasefire," the Mauritanian diplomat added. Aid groups have also called for a lasting truce in the impoverished coun-

try, where a Saudi-led regional coalition has been waging an air war on the Iran-backed Huthis since late March. Yemeni political parties began talks Sunday in the Saudi capital aimed at finding a solution to the crisis. But the Houthis stayed away from the meeting of about 400 delegates including President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, who has taken refuge in Riyadh. The war has sent tensions soaring between Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia and its Shiite rival Iran, which has vehemently denied accusations it armed the Houthis. An Iranian aid ship bound for Yemen in defiance of US warnings has entered the Gulf of Aden and is expected to reach port on Thursday, media in Tehran reported. (AFP)

Iran Urges ECO to Expand Railway Network

TEHRAN - Iran on Sunday called for an expanded rail link between member states of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Abbas Akhondi, Iran's minister of housing and urban development, told a forum of ECO railroad chiefs, that more efforts are still needed to increase the share of rail links in transportation systems that connect the Organization's member states.

Akhondi added that private-sector companies can be encouraged to lead projects to the same effect. ECO comprises seven Asian and three Eurasian countries. Member states are Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The main purpose of the Organization - that was set up in 1985 - is to promote economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states. Akhondi described the inauguration of a new railway line between Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan as an important event for all the countries of the region. "This project will help the prosperity of trade and transit in the eastern side of the Caspian Sea," the Iranian minister said. "It will also facilitate transporting goods in the north-south corridor and will also help provide a better transit connection between Central Asia and Europe." (Agencies)

US Drone Attack in NWA Kills Six

PESHAWAR - Six suspected militants were killed and two others wounded in a US drone strike in the remote Shawal Valley in the North Waziristan tribal region late Saturday afternoon, sources said. These sources said that the drone fired two missiles into a compound in the valley close to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, killing six militants. Most of those

killed were foreigners, they added. The number of casualties was set to rise, the sources said, wishing not to be identified. Dattakhel and Shawal are by far the two major areas where the military is concentrating on air power to soften up the area infested by local and foreign militants, who fled Operation Zarb-i-Azb in North Waziristan. (Agencies)

Tajikistan and EBRD Agree to Work on Energy Reform

DUSHANBE - During the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors, the Government of Tajikistan and the EBRD signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) detailing the reform agenda which is the precondition to the financing of the landmark regional electricity transmission project, known as CASA 1000. According to the EBRD, the project, which involves a number of other international financial institutions and donors, including the World Bank and the European Investment Bank, will consist of many elements. The EBRD is considering financing the modernization of Tajik-

istan's domestic transmission infrastructure. The EBRD financing will be subject to reform of Tajikistan's state-owned energy company, Barqi Tojik. As part of its modernization agenda, the company will set out third-party access rules for the transmission line and an independent energy regulator will be established. EBRD Managing Director for Energy and Natural Resources, Riccardo Puliti, signed the MoU with Jamolidin Nouraliyev, First Deputy Chairman of the National Bank of Tajikistan, who represented the Government of Tajikistan. CASA 1000, which stands for "Central Asia-South Asia", is a planned... (More on P4)...(22)