



**Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (R) talks with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud (C) and Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi in Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, yesterday.** PHOTO: AFP

# Hadi urges decisive war

UN staff were evacuated from Yemen's capital yesterday after a third night of Saudi-led air strikes, as President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi urged his Arab allies to bomb Iranian-backed rebels into submission.

The impoverished and deeply tribal Arabian Peninsula state, on the front line of the US battle against al-Qaeda, is the scene of the latest emerging proxy struggle between Middle East powers.

A Sunni Arab coalition, led by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies, is battling to avoid having a pro-Iran regime on its doorstep, as Shia Huthi rebels tighten the noose around Hadi's southern stronghold Aden.

"I call for this operation to continue until this gang surrenders and withdraws from all locations it has occupied in every province," Hadi told an Arab League summit in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

"I say to Iran's puppet and whoever is with him, you are the one who destroyed Yemen with your political immaturity," Hadi said.

Hadi later flew to Saudi Arabia with King Salman and does not plan to return to Yemen until "the situation settles," said Foreign Minister Riyad Yassin.

Heavy coalition strikes shook the rebel-held capital for a third consecutive night until dawn yesterday, residents said. The latest strikes apparently targeted mainly arms depots and other military facilities outside Sanaa, witnesses said.

More than 200 staff from the UN,

foreign embassies and other organisations were later evacuated by air, aid workers said.

Saudi Arabia says more than 10 countries have joined the coalition defending Hadi.

At least 61 people have been killed and around 200 wounded in three days of fighting between Shia rebels and anti-Huthi militia in Aden, the city's health department director Al-Khader Lassouar said.

The two-day Arab summit, which

**YEMEN CRISIS**

- UN, Saudi evacuate foreign staff
- Saudi vows to continue campaign
- UN chief calls for peaceful solution
- Experts say campaign may last 6 months

opened yesterday, is expected to back the offensive against the rebels and approve the creation of a joint military force to tackle extremists.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi told fellow leaders the region faced "unprecedented" threats. And Saudi King Salman vowed that the air strikes would continue until they bring "security" to the Yemeni people.

But UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged Arab leaders to "lay down clear guidelines to peacefully resolve the crisis in Yemen".

Saudi warships evacuated dozens of foreign diplomats from Aden hours

before the kingdom launched the air strikes on the advancing rebels, state television said yesterday.

Saudi Arabia has vowed to do "whatever it takes" to prevent Hadi's overthrow.

But experts say the Saudis will be reluctant to send in ground troops for fear of getting bogged down in a protracted conflict.

Gulf diplomats said the air strikes could last up to six months and accused Iran of providing "logistical and military support" to the rebels.

"According to estimates, there are 5,000 Iranians, (members of the pro-Tehran Lebanese movement) Hezbollah and Iraqi militia on the ground in Yemen," said one Gulf official, who did not want to be named.

It was not possible to independently verify the claim.

The Gulf officials said Riyadh and its allies had decided to intervene after satellite imagery in late January showed the movement of Scud missiles north towards the Saudi border, with the capacity to strike a large part of the kingdom's territory.

US President Barack Obama spoke to King Salman and said Washington shared a "collective goal" with its regional ally to see stability in Yemen.

Washington has pledged logistical and intelligence support for the Saudi-led campaign.

The US military also rescued two Saudi pilots forced to eject from their fighter jet over the sea off Yemen after a technical problem.

## Lankan leader's brother dies after axe attack

AFP, Colombo

The youngest brother of Sri Lankan president Maithripala Sirisena died in hospital yesterday after being attacked by an axe wielding acquaintance two days earlier, police said.

Priyantha Sirisena, 42, suffered severe head injuries in his hometown of Polonnaruwa, 215 kilometres (134 miles) north-east of the capital Colombo, police said.

The local businessman's death came as the President was in China on a state visit.

The President's office said he had completed his visit and was due to return on Sunday as previously arranged and would be back in the country in time for Monday's funeral.

"A personal dispute between the president's brother and a person known to him ended in tragedy," an official at the president's office told AFP. "We have no reason to suspect anything other than that."

Sirisena ended a three-day official visit to China on Friday and stayed on to address the Boao Forum on Saturday, officials said.

Police said they arrested a man in connection with the attack and an investigation was underway. No further details were given.

The government in a statement said Priyantha, a father of three, was "attacked during an altercation with a friend" on Thursday evening.

Official sources said Priyantha Sirisena was the youngest in a family of 12 children.

He was flown to the capital for emergency treatment, but his head injuries were so severe that, despite a four-hour surgery, he did not recover, doctors said.

Sirisena came to power following bitterly fought January presidential elections.

Unlike most former Sri Lankan leaders, President Sirisena has not extended personal security for his siblings and extended family and is known to have drastically scaled down his own protection unit.

## World goes dark in Earth Hour

AFP, Sydney

Hong Kong's iconic skyline dimmed and the sails on Sydney's Opera House went dark yesterday, as lights on landmarks across Asia were switched off for the global climate change awareness campaign Earth Hour.

Millions are expected to take part around the world in the annual event organised by conservation group WWF, with hundreds of well-known sights including the Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Seattle Space Needle set to plunge into darkness.

"It's almost like the thing vanished," said Tony Jennings from Earth Hour after standing under the Sydney Harbour Bridge as the lights went off at 8:30pm (0930 GMT).

Hong Kong's signature high-rise skyline along the Victoria Harbour was a shadow of itself, with usually lit-up skyscrapers standing dark -- among them were the city's tallest building, the 118-story International Commerce Centre.

In Taiwan the lights went off on the

Taipei 101 tower, the world's tallest building before it was overtaken by Dubai's Burj Khalifa, while in Kuala Lumpur the usually dazzling Petronas Twin Towers were dark.

In Australia, the initiative this year is focusing on farming, with fears that rising temperatures could ultimately damage the country's ability to produce food.

Earth Hour takes place from 8:30pm local time, and encourages citizens, communities, businesses and organisations to switch the lights off for an hour to highlight the plight of the planet.

This year it comes ahead of a crucial UN meeting in Paris in December which is bringing together the global community in an effort to limit global warming.

The initiative began in Sydney in 2007 but quickly went global.

"Over 170 countries and territories have already confirmed their participation; more than 1,200 landmarks and close to 40 UNESCO world heritage sites," Earth Hour head Sudhanshu Saronwala told AFP ahead of the event.



**This combination of pictures shows the National Stadium, known as the Bird's Nest, with the lights on (top) and with the lights off (bottom) during the annual Earth Hour event, yesterday.**

## Czech women kidnapped in Pakistan freed

AFP, Prague

Two young Czech women kidnapped in Pakistan in 2013 have been freed and have returned home, Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka said yesterday.

"I can confirm that Hana Humpalova and Antonie Chrastecka have already returned to the Czech Republic," Sobotka told the CT24 news channel.

He added that the two 26-year-old women were freed with the help of the Turkish Muslim humanitarian organisation IHH.

Humpalova and Chrastecka, both psychology students, were kidnapped on March 13, 2013, in the south-western Baluchistan province while being escorted by a tribal policeman after crossing into Pakistan from Iran on holiday.



**Russia's Soyuz TMA-16M spacecraft carrying the International Space Station (ISS) crew of US astronaut Scott Kelly and Russian cosmonauts Gennady Padalka and Mikhail Kornienko blasts off from the launch pad at Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome early yesterday. Nasa and its Russian equivalent Roscosmos today announced plans to build a new space station for when the International Space Station (ISS) is retired in 2024.**

## AL-Qaeda, allies seize Syria's Idlib

AFP, Beirut

Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate and its allies yesterday seized the city of Idlib, only the second provincial capital to be lost by the regime in more than four years of war.

The capture came as UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed anger and shame at the world's failure to stop the conflict. More than 215,000 people have been killed in the four years long conflict.

The country has been ravaged by warring factions, including jihadist groups. The coalition that seized Idlib city is made up of Al-Nusra Front, the official Syrian affiliate of al-Qaeda, and several Islamist factions.

Earlier, a Syrian security source acknowledged that "terrorist groups had infiltrated the outskirts of the city," but state media did not report Idlib's fall.

The first provincial capital to fall was Raqa, in the north, which was seized by rebels in March 2013.

The rebels were subsequently ousted by the Islamic State group, which has made Raqa the de facto Syrian capital of its self-proclaimed Islamic "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq.

Around 2,000 Al-Nusra and allied fighters took part in the battle, according to the Observatory, while the regime launched some 150 air strikes in a bid to hold off the attack. At least 130 people were killed in the fighting, according to the Observatory, which said some of the city's residents had fled.



## 415,000 pay last respects to Singapore's founding father

AFP, Singapore

More than 415,000 people, equivalent to over 12 percent of Singapore's citizens, have visited parliament to pay their respects to former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, officials said yesterday.

Surging crowds late Friday forced the government to suspend the queue to enter parliament for safety reasons, but it was reopened before dawn yesterday once the backlog was cleared.

Lee's body has been lying in state in parliament's main lobby since Wednesday after he died on Monday at the age of 91. He is to be cremated in a private ceremony today after a state funeral.

"My mummy told me stories of how Lee was a good leader for Singapore. He has helped a lot of people by giving them a clean and nice country to live in," said eight-year-old student Annabel Lee, who was lining up with her mother.

Lee served as prime minister for 31 years from 1959, when Singapore was given self-rule by Britain, followed by another 20 years as cabinet adviser.

Former US president Bill Clinton, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Brunei's King Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and Malaysian King Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah are among the foreign dignitaries attending the funeral.

## Medha Patkar quits AAP

Condemns party infightings after key members ousted

NDTV ONLINE

Activist Medha Patkar yesterday quit the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) condemning the ugly infighting that saw two founder members Yogendra Yadav and Prashant Bhushan being voted out of a key panel for challenging chief Arvind Kejriwal.

"We didn't expect this from AAP. Senior leaders were insulted today and we condemn it," Patkar said, coming out in Yadav and Bhushan's support.

"Kejriwal does have some qualities. He should not have left an agitation and gone into politics. For us, there is no meaning in staying on in the party," added the 60-year-old activist known for the Narmada Bachao Andolan to protect displaced villagers.

Yadav and Bhushan were dropped from the party's national executive at a controversial meeting held on the outskirts of Delhi. They alleged that their supporters were beaten up and thrown out by bouncers and the voting was "murder of democracy."

Patkar said she and many others who had

joined the party expecting a different kind of politics felt let down.

"What has happened in the last few months is what is seen in other parties," she said.

"Prashant Bhushan and Yogendra Yadav have contributed so much to the party. I have not known of any instance where they have been involved in anti-party activities. Bhushan's Public Interest Litigations have helped in the fight against corruption. Yadav is not just a spokesperson; he contributed to the ideology."

But Patkar added that she did not want to target Kejriwal and his team.

The infighting has hit India's newest party just after it took power in Delhi following a record poll victory.

On Friday, a secretly-taped phone conversation was leaked, in which Mr Kejriwal was heard abusing Bhushan and Yadav and saying, "Any other party would have thrown them out."

Patkar said the sting needs to be verified and added: "I hope the sting is untrue and Kejriwal has not used such language."



## Pakistan arrests 32,000 in anti-terror drive

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan's law enforcement agencies have arrested over 32,000 people on different charges in more than 28,000 anti-militant operations in the aftermath of the Peshawar school massacre, the government said yesterday.

The arrests were made after the launch of the National Action Plan (NAP) in December which aims to rid the country of terrorism following Taliban's massacre at an army school in Peshawar in which 150 people, including 136 students were killed.

32,347 people were arrested on different charges in 28,826 anti-militant operations conducted across the country, the government said.

## Hillary Clinton 'wipes out all email from private server'

AFP, Washington

Hillary Clinton wiped "clean" her private server that hosted her emails while secretary of state, permanently deleting all correspondence, and did not turn over more of the messages, lawmakers said Friday.

A simmering scandal over Clinton's admitted use of a private email account for the duration of her four years as President Barack Obama's top diplomat has threatened to mar a spring rollout of her all-but-certain White House campaign.

"We learned today, from her attorney, Secretary Clinton unilaterally decided to wipe her server clean and permanently delete all emails from her personal server," House Benghazi Committee chairman Trey Gowdy said in a statement after Clinton's lawyer wrote to explain why no new emails would be forthcoming from the likely 2016 presidential candidate.

Gowdy had issued a subpoena for all Clinton emails related to Libya, particularly the September 11, 2012 attacks in Benghazi

that killed four Americans, and formally requested she turn over her server to a neutral third party.

It is unclear exactly when Clinton decided to permanently delete all emails from her server, but Gowdy said it appears to have occurred after October 28, when the State Department first asked her to hand over the records.

In a letter to Gowdy, Clinton lawyer David Kendall wrote that she has already complied with the order to hand over all work-related emails to the State Department.

Now, with that review process complete, "there are no hdr22@clintonemail.com emails from Secretary Clinton's tenure as secretary of state on the server for any review, even if such review were appropriate or legally authorized," he said.

Reiterating what Clinton herself had conveyed at a press conference earlier this month, Kendall said Clinton and her legal team determined which emails were personal and unrelated to work -- nearly 32,000 emails -- and deleted them.

