

# Yemen clashes kill dozens as aid delayed

## Pakistan holding back intervention

AFP, Aden

Fierce clashes raged yesterday between rebels and loyalist fighters in southern Yemen, leaving nearly 100 dead in 24 hours, as the Red Cross faced delays to urgently needed aid deliveries.

Relief workers have warned of a dire situation in the impoverished Arabian Peninsula state, where a Saudi-led coalition is waging an air war on Iran-backed Huthi Shiite rebels.

At least 53 people have been killed in 24 hours of fighting between rebels and fighters loyal to President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi in the main southern city Aden, medical and army sources said yesterday.

Meanwhile, an AFP photographer at Sanaa airport reported that three Indian aircraft and one Russian plane landed in the capital yesterday to evacuate their citizens.

Russia presented a draft resolution to the UN Security Council on Saturday calling for a humanitarian pause in the Saudi-led air war.

Riyadh has assembled a coalition of five Gulf monarchies, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan to wage air raids on the Huthis.

Pakistan said yesterday that it had been asked by Saudi Arabia to contribute aircraft, ships and ground troops to Operation Decisive Storm.

Despite close ties with Riyadh, Pakistan has so far held back from joining the offensive, saying it does not want to get involved in any conflict that would inflame sectarian tensions.

Shiite Iran has strongly criticised the intervention in Yemen by the coalition of largely Sunni Muslim nations, accusing Saudi Arabia of sowing instability with its air campaign.

Tehran has angrily rejected accusations of arming the Huthis.



A Palestinian man guards a post in Yarmuk Palestinian refugee camp in the Syrian capital, Damascus, yesterday. Around 2,000 people have been evacuated from the Yarmuk Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus after the Islamic State group seized large parts of it, a Palestinian official told AFP.

PHOTO: AFP

# Kenyan airstrikes target Shebab

AFP, Nairobi

Kenyan fighter jets pounded Al-Qaeda-linked Shebab insurgent camps in southern Somalia yesterday, the army said, days after the Islamists killed 148 people in their worst ever massacre in Kenya.

The airstrikes, which the army said destroyed two Islamist bases, came on the second day of national mourning in Kenya, and as security forces tried to hunt down those behind the university killings.

The massacre, Kenya's deadliest attack since the 1998 bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi claimed the lives of 142 students, three police officers and three soldiers.

"We bombed two Shebab camps in the Gedo region," Kenyan army spokesman David Obonyo told AFP, without giving details about any possible casualties in the lawless region bordering Kenya.

"The two targets were hit and taken out, the two camps are destroyed," he added.



# 'Tough conversation' with Arab allies

## Obama promises talks over security in NYT interview

AP, Paris

French special forces yesterday freed a Dutchman held hostage since being kidnapped in 2011 by extremists in Mali, the military said. There was no immediate word on the fate of two men abducted at the same time.

The military said the rescue of Sjaak Rijke took place at 5am yesterday in far northern Mali, and that several militants were captured.

Yesterday's statement did not identify who was holding Rijke, but the Dutchman appeared in a video posted in November by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

# 'Tough conversation' with Arab allies

## Obama promises talks over security in NYT interview

REUTERS, Washington

President Barack Obama said he would have a "tough conversation" with America's Gulf Arab allies in which he would promise strong US support against external enemies but tell them they must address internal political challenges.

In an interview with New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman published on Sunday, he said he would tell Gulf states they also needed to be more active in addressing regional crises.

"I think when you look at what happens in Syria, for example, there's been a great desire for the United States to get in there and do something," he said in the interview, conducted on Saturday.

"But the question is: Why is it that we can't have Arabs fighting the terrible human rights abuses that have been perpetrated, or fighting against what Assad has done?" he added, referring to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Obama said last week he would meet the leaders of the six Gulf Cooperation Council states this spring at his Camp David retreat outside Washington, partly to discuss their concerns about the emerging nuclear agreement with Iran.

The GCC includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab

Emirates, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia, which sees Iran as its main regional rival, has repeatedly hinted that it would seek its own atomic weapons if Tehran ever did the same.

Gulf states are part of the US-led coalition campaigning against Islamic State militants who have taken over large parts of Syria and Iraq.

Obama said he wanted to discuss with the Gulf allies how to build more effective defense capabilities and assure them of US support against outside attack.

"...that perhaps will ease some of their concerns and allow them to have a more fruitful conversation with the Iranians," he said.

But the president said their biggest danger came not from a possible attack from Iran but from dissatisfaction inside their own countries, including from alienated, unemployed youth and a sense that there was no political outlet for grievances.

So as well as giving military support, the United States must ask: "How can we strengthen the body politic in these countries, so that Sunni youth feel that they've got something other than (the Islamic State) to choose from," Obama said.

"That's a tough conversation to have, but it's one that we have to have," he said.



# Palestinians reject Israel tax transfer

AP, Jerusalem

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said yesterday he rejected Israel's offer of a partial transfer of tax revenues it collects for the Palestinians, following a three-month freeze.

Abbas said Israel wants to keep a large part of the frozen tax funds to settle debts incurred by his Palestinian Authority, including for unpaid utility bills.

"They (the Israelis) said they are going to send us our tax money," Abbas said yesterday. "But when they sent it, they deducted one third... We said 'no' and sent the money back, saying either we resort to arbitration or court."

Israeli officials were not immediately available for comment. Under existing agreements, Israel collects taxes and customs on behalf of the Palestinians and then transfers the sums to the Palestinian Authority, Abbas' self-rule government.

The tax transfers account for 70 per cent of the Palestinian Authority's revenue. Israel froze the tax transfers in January, after the Palestinians applied to join the International Criminal Court, a step that could pave the way for possible war crimes charges against Israel and Abbas' Palestinian rival, the Islamic militant group Hamas.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced after his re-election last month that the transfers would resume.

Palestinian officials said Israel owes the Palestinian Authority USD 450 million in frozen funds, but that Israel demanded to keep hundreds of millions of shekels for debt repayment.



# NEWS IN brief

## Syrian Islamists exchange 25 prisoners for commander

REUTERS, Beirut

Islamist militants and fighters loyal to the Syrian government have made a rare prisoner swap, with insurgents releasing 25 women and children in exchange for one of their commanders, a monitoring group said yesterday. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 10 children and 15 women were kidnapped by insurgents more than a year ago from Shia towns in northern Aleppo province. The deal was between the militant Islamist Jaish al-Mujahideen and pro-government militia, it said, and mediated by Kurdish fighters known as Popular Protection Units. Observatory head Rami Abdulrahman said the commander was the military leader of Jaish al-Mujahideen, who was captured in August.

## Malaysia detains 17 suspected of terrorism

AP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's police chief says 17 suspected militants have been detained for allegedly plotting to carry out terrorist acts in the country's largest city, Kuala Lumpur. Inspector General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar says the 17 people were detained Sunday. Khalid tweeted yesterday that two of them had just returned from Syria. No further details were immediately available.

## Australians' death row appeal fails

BBC ONLINE

Two Australian drug smugglers sentenced to death cannot challenge the president's decision to refuse them clemency, an Indonesian court has ruled. Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran were the leaders of the "Bali Nine" group of heroin smugglers arrested in 2005. They are scheduled to be executed by firing squad in Indonesia soon.

## Turkey power cut: head grid operator resigns

AFP, Istanbul

The head of Turkey's national grid operator has resigned after a crippling nationwide power cut. Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said yesterday, blaming the company for having taken "too many risks". "We have found out that five power distribution lines as well as the lines between the east and the west were disabled within microseconds," Yildiz told a news conference in Ankara a week after Turkey's worst power outage in 15 years. He added that human error in addition to a technical fault had caused the blackout and that Kemal Yildir had resigned "after holding himself responsible".

# KASHMIR'S REFUGEES

## In Dire Straits

In this photograph taken on March 2, 2015, Hindu refugee from West Pakistan, Mangu Ram (82) sits on a charpoy inside his concrete shanty in Surej Chak, on the outskirts of Jammu. Ram arrived in Surej Chak, a barren area on the banks of Tawi, as a teenage boy from Pakistani Punjab along with thousands of Hindu families fleeing religious violence in 1947. Surej Chak has evolved into one of the many slum settlements spread in Hindu dominated areas of Jammu for the migrant families, known as West Pakistan Refugees who live in abject poverty and mostly marry among themselves because of their low economic status.

PHOTO: AFP



# Syria talks kick off in Moscow

## Little progress expected

AFP,

Talks on ending the war in Syria began yesterday in Moscow but the absence of key opposition groups meant there was little hope of progress in resolving the conflict.

Syria's ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar al-Jaafari, is heading the government delegation for the meetings with members of the domestic "tolerated" opposition, the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change.

But the main Western-backed exiled Syrian opposition National Coalition stayed away, and another leading domestic opposition activist remains under a travel ban from Damascus.

The discussions, which run until April 9, are expected to focus on humanitarian issues and plans for future talks, while also serving as a way for Russia, a main backer of the Syrian regime, to build its profile as a potential mediator in the conflict.

A source in the Syrian government delegation told AFP that the opposition would spend yesterday and today meeting with Russian mediators before the two sides sit down together tomorrow.

"The main idea this time is to agree on a precise agenda for further negotiations," the source told AFP.

# Lanka, Pakistan sign nuclear agreement

AFP, Islamabad

Sri Lanka and Pakistan signed six agreements including one on atomic energy yesterday, the two countries' leaders said, as the strategically important island looks to build its first nuclear plant.

Details of the agreement were not immediately available but it comes after Sri Lanka signed a pact with India in February to build its atomic energy infrastructure, including training of personnel.

Sri Lanka's new president Maithripala Sirisena arrival in Pakistan Sunday for a three-day state visit has been watched by observers for clues over any further changes in Colombo's foreign policy.

# Passenger's 'Thank You' note to pilot goes viral

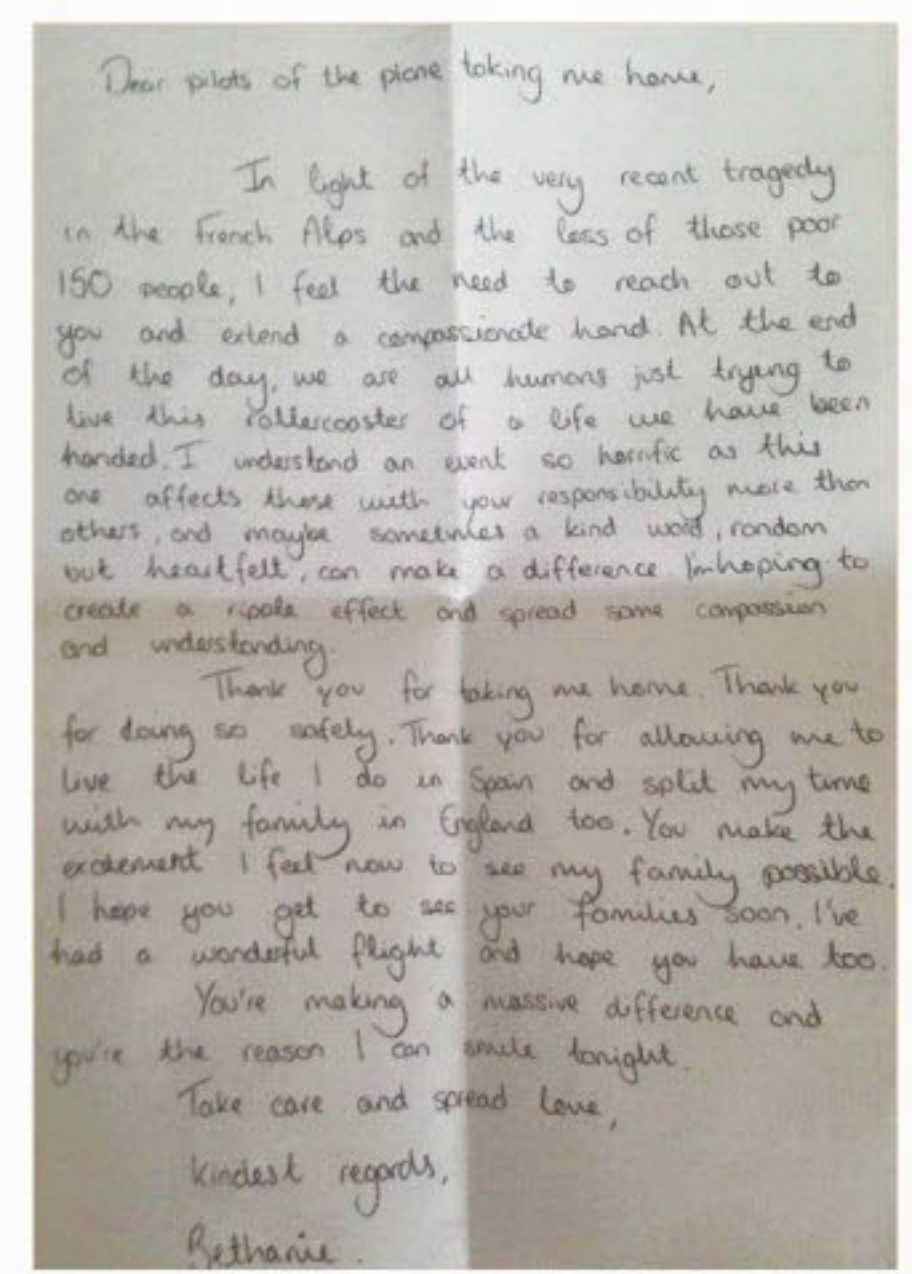
TNN, New Delhi

An airlines passenger's heartwarming letter to the pilot of the flight she was traveling home is actually breaking the internet.

The letter written some days back by an appreciative flyer, Bethanie, comes in wake of Germanwings plane crash in French Alps where investigators have indicated that the co-pilot of the ill-fated plane made a deliberate descent.

The letter was posted on twitter by Jai Dillon. In the letter, Bethanie thanks the pilot for making sure that she meets her waiting family members.

Her letter is now one of the most shared things on twitter.



THE FIVE MOST POWERFUL MILITARIES IN THE WORLD	COUNTRY	TANKS	AIRCRAFTS	NAVY
1	US	8,848	13,892	473
2	RUSSIA	15,398	3,429	352
3	CHINA	9,150	2,860	673
4	INDIA	6,464	1,905	202
5	UK	407	936	66

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States tops the latest Global Firepower rankings on basis of weapons production, army, navy and air force strength in terms of numbers.

Russia came in second in the race, followed by China, India and the UK to take up the remaining spots in the top five places.

France came in sixth followed by South Korea, Germany, Japan and Turkey to take up the next five spots according to a report published by Global Firepower on their website: <http://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp> on April 1, 2015.

The ranking does not take nuclear weapons into account. It ranks countries on the basis of weaponry and strength of their army, navy and air force. The ranking considers over 50 different factors, including a country's economic resources and its geographical location as well.

Bangladesh ranked 53 among 126 countries included in the ranking.