

US, Cuba restore ties

Open embassies after 54 years

AFP, Washington

The Cuban flag was raised at the US State Department yesterday, in a historic gesture to mark renewed diplomatic ties between Havana and Washington as embassies were reestablished in their respective capitals.

Diplomatic relations officially resumed at the stroke of midnight and the Cuban banner was hoisted a few hours later, in a move toward burying decades of enmity between the Cold War foes seeking to normalize relations.

A foreign policy legacy for President Barack Obama, the historic turnaround between two bitter adversaries has come about at breakneck pace, in just a matter of months since the two sides agreed to bury the hatchet and work together as equals.

The shift came after Washington acknowledged that its policy of trying to affect change in tightly controlled communist Cuba through isolation and trade restrictions had failed, and that engaging Havana directly was a better way to nudge it towards democracy and prosperity.

At about 4:00 am (0800 GMT) the Cuban

banner took its place among a row of flags from around the world adorning the State Department's imposing marble entrance in the US capital as workers hoisted it up a newly installed flag pole, according to an AFP photographer.

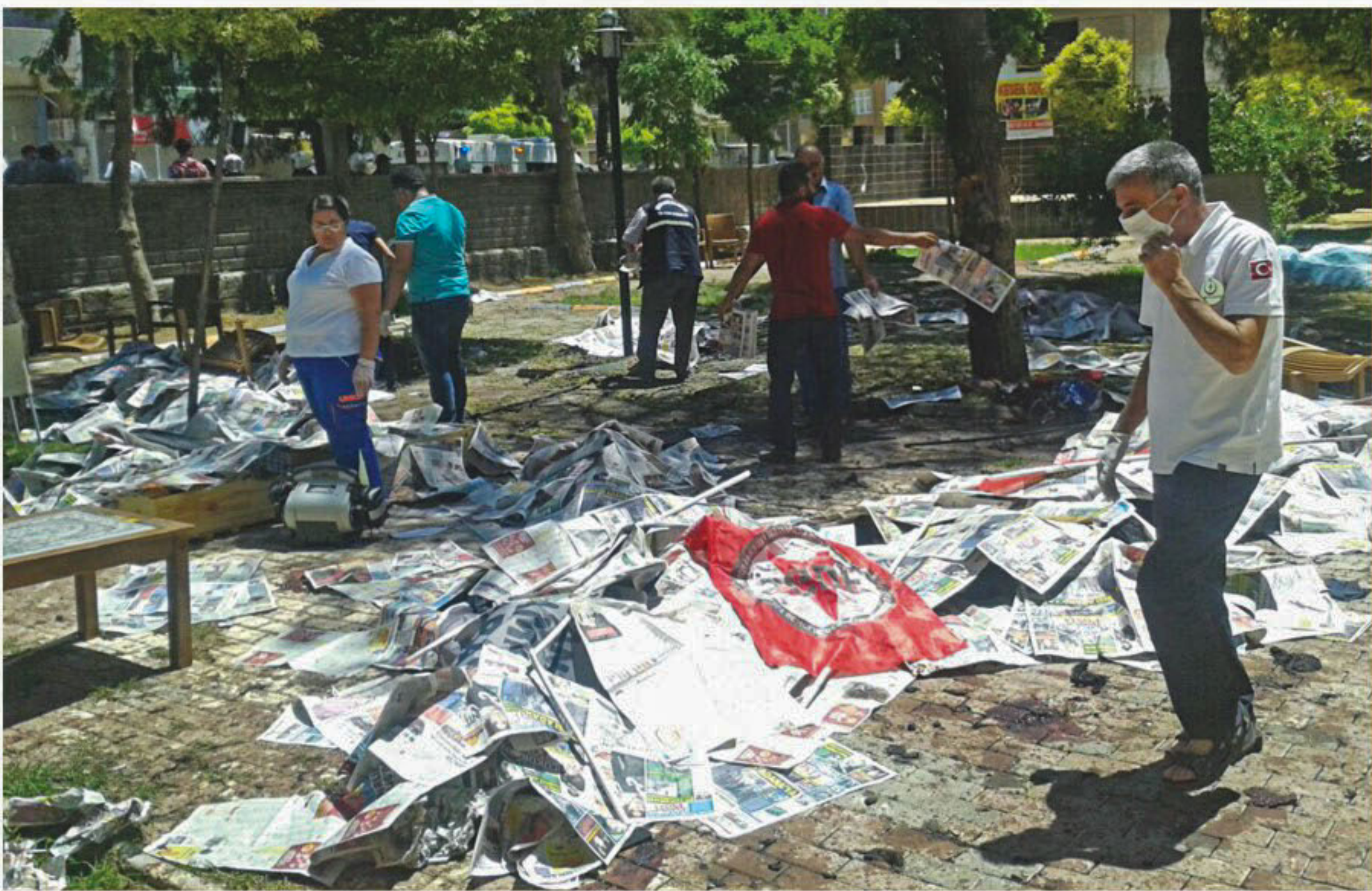
The banner took its place between the flags of Croatia to the left and Cyprus to the right.

And for the first time since 1961, the standard -- with a white star inside a red triangle against white and blue stripes -- will also fly over Havana's newly upgraded embassy in Washington, just a stone's throw from the White House.

In yet another historic gesture, US Secretary of State John Kerry will formally receive his Cuban counterpart Bruno Rodriguez for talks yesterday, before holding a joint press conference around 1:45 pm (1745 GMT).

Ahead of the meeting, Rodriguez will preside over a ceremony to mark the upgrading of the Cuban interests section to a full embassy.

The rapprochement was announced on December 17, as Obama and his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro agreed to end their countries' estrangement and put them on track towards a full normalization of ties.



This photo shows the scene after an explosion in the town of Suruc in Sanliurfa, yesterday, not far from the Syrian border. At least 30 people were killed and dozens injured, with the origin of the explosion not immediately determined, but many authorities and Turkish media claiming the attack to be carried out by a suicide bomber.

PHOTO: AFP

US friendly fire kills 10 Afghan soldiers

AFP, Pul-e Alam

A US airstrike killed up to 10 Afghan soldiers yesterday at an army checkpoint in a Taliban-infested province south of Kabul, one of the deadliest episodes of "friendly fire" from foreign forces in recent years.

The early morning raid in Baraki Barak district of Logar province comes as coalition forces increase air strikes on potential militant targets despite a drawdown of Nato forces after 13 years of war.

The bombing marked the second such incident in the area since last December when a Nato air strike killed five civilians and wounded six others.

"At 6:00 am today, two US helicopters attacked a checkpoint in Baraki Barak," district governor Mohammad Rahim Amin told AFP.

"The checkpoint caught fire... and 10 Afghan army soldiers were killed," he added, revising down his earlier toll of 14.

Civilian and military deaths in coalition airstrikes have been one of the most emotive and high-profile issues of the war, often provoking fury from the government.

An American military official said he was "aware of an incident involving US forces in Logar province this morning".

"This incident is under investigation," he added.

Logar's deputy police chief, Mohammad Wara, also said 10 Afghan soldiers were killed and four others were wounded but provincial army commander, Abdul Razid Safi, said the attack resulted in eight fatalities.

Amin said the targeted outpost was "not a suspicious area".

"The Afghan flag was waving at the checkpoint in Baraki Barak when the Americans launched their attack," he said.

But the Afghan defence ministry said "armed insurgents had opened fire on the

NEWSIN brief

Malaysia blocks UK-based whistle-blower website

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian authorities said they had blocked a UK-based website that had published corruption allegations against Prime Minister Najib Razak, but the portal vowed yesterday to press on with its exposes.

The Sarawak Report website has recently published reports alleging financial mismanagement involving Najib and debt-laden state investment vehicle 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB). The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission announced on Sunday it had blocked the site for carrying "unsubstantiated content".

Dozens injured in Nepal charter protests

AFP, Kathmandu

Clashes between police and hundreds of demonstrators left dozens injured in central and southern Nepal yesterday during protests about the draft of a long-awaited new constitution, an opposition leader said.

Lawmakers tabled the draft in parliament last month after bickering parties struck an historic deal to divide the country into eight provinces, paving the way for a new federal structure.

The parties were spurred by April's devastating earthquake to reach agreement on

Fear of violence after nationalist Australia rallies

AFP, Sydney

Australian officials urged vigilance yesterday following nationalistic and anti-Islam rallies, to ensure sentiment does not boil over into ugly race riots similar to those seen in 2005.

Hundreds of people attended Reclaim Australia rallies around the country over the weekend, with violent clashes erupting in Melbourne as police tried to separate anti-Islam and anti-racism demonstrators. Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales president Stepan Kerkyasharian said divisions in the community were fuelling insecurity.

Taiwan, China sign landmark water deal

AFP, Taipei

China and Taiwan inked a landmark deal yesterday that will see water pumped from the Chinese mainland to a Taiwanese-controlled archipelago.

The agreement will see water pumped from China's southeastern province of Fujian to the 100,000 residents of Taiwan's Kinmen County by 2017.

"The event is of historical significance when it comes to forging a path toward peaceful relations between the two sides," Kinmen county magistrate Chen Fu-hai said at the signing ceremony.

Banks reopen amid tax rise

Greece starts debt repayment

BBC ONLINE

Greek banks are reopening after being closed for three weeks because of the deadlock over the country's debt, as the government initiates repayment of its loans to the ECB and IMF.

Athens reached a cash-for-reforms deal aimed at avoiding a debt default and an exit from the eurozone.

But many restrictions remain and Greeks also face price rises with an increase in Value Added Tax (VAT).

Germany has said it may consider further debt concessions to Greece.

Greece has begun making a €4.2bn (\$4.6bn) payment due to the European Central Bank (ECB) yesterday, as well as €2.05bn due to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Queues at ATMs have been a feature of life in Greece for weeks, with people waiting in line each day to withdraw a maximum of €60 (£41) a day, a restriction imposed amid fears of a run on banks.

From yesterday, the daily limit becomes a weekly one, capped at €420 (£291), meaning Greeks will not have to queue every day.

An architect told the BBC that the banks re-opening will make only a small difference to his ability to operate:

"The key challenge is that we cannot pay our suppliers, which means that we will eventually run out of products to sell," Vassilis Masselos told the BBC World Service's Newsday programme.

While banks throwing open their doors marks the return of some

range of goods and services, including taxis and restaurants, with VAT rising from 13% to 23%.

The rise was among a package of reforms demanded by Greece's creditors to open talks on the proposed €86bn bailout.

Members of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's party rebelled against the austerity measures demanded by creditors when it was voted through parliament.

But the vote paved the way for Greece to receive a bridging loan, which enables the reopening of the banks and for Athens to repay debts to its creditors yesterday.

Both Greece and the IMF have been arguing for a restructuring of its €320bn debt, saying its current position is "unsustainable".

German Chancellor Angela Merkel ruled out "a classic haircut" - a markdown of Greece's debts.

But she told German television other forms of relief, such as extending maturities or slashing interest rates, could be considered once the details of the latest programme are worked out.

GREECE DEBT CRISIS

normality to the Greek economy, long-term problems remain.

Unemployment is stubbornly high, and as this chart shows, Greece's recession is comparable to one of history's most famous economic crashes.

But a block on transfers to foreign banks and a ban on cashing cheques remain in place.

Greeks will also pay more on a



Elderly people receive priority numbers while waiting outside a bank, prior its opening yesterday in Athens. Greek banks reopened after a shutdown lasting three weeks imposed by the government to avert a crash in the banking system over the country's debt crisis.

PHOTO: AFP

UN endorses Iran deal

Paves way to lift sanctions

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council yesterday unanimously adopted a resolution that endorses the historic deal on Iran's nuclear program and clears a path for international sanctions crippling its economy to be lifted.

Representatives of all 15 countries on the council voted by raising their hands.

"The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously," announced New Zealand's Foreign Minister Murray McCully, who presided over the Security Council for the Iran meeting.

The passing of the resolution marks formal UN endorsement for the hard-won, groundbreaking agreement reached between Iran and the so-called P5+1 group after 18 straight days of talks that capped almost two years of momentous negotiations.

On condition that Iran respects the agreement to the letter, seven UN resolutions passed since 2006 to sanction Iran will be gradually terminated, according to the text.

The agreement with Tehran was reached last Tuesday in Vienna by the UN council's five permanent members Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States plus Germany.

The text launches a progressive and conditional lifting of sanctions, in exchange for guarantees that the Islamic republic will not develop a nuclear bomb.

"When our nations truly unite to confront global crises, our influence grows exponentially," said US ambassador Samantha Power, calling for similar collaboration on other problems such as the suffering in Syria.

Beijing chides US over S China Sea flight

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday called on Washington not to pick sides in quarrels over the South China Sea, state media said, days after a US naval commander flew over the disputed waters.

US Pacific Fleet commander Admiral Scott Swift on Saturday made what the fleet called a "seven-hour maritime surveillance mission" over the South China Sea aboard a US P-8A Poseidon aircraft.

Swift also visited the Philippines, a close US ally and one of several countries locked in territorial disputes with China over competing claims to the Sea.

China's defence ministry responded by calling on the US to "take more actions to promote regional peace and stability, and not the opposite".

Suicide bombing kills 30 in Turkey

REUTERS, Suruc

A suspected Islamic State suicide bomber killed at least 30 people, mostly young students, in an attack on a Turkish town near the Syrian border yesterday.

Bodies lay beneath trees after the blast outside a cultural centre in the mostly Kurdish town of Suruc in southeastern Turkey, some 10km from the Syrian town of Kobani, where Kurdish fighters have been battling Islamic State.

The explosion tore through a group of mostly university-aged students from an activist group as they gathered to make a statement to the local press about a trip they were planning to help rebuild Kobani.

Turkey's NATO allies have been seeking tighter controls on a porous border with Syria that runs alongside Islamic State-held territories. But monitoring is difficult with 1.8 million Syrian refugees now on the Turkish side and smuggling rife.

The United States, which has an air base at Incirlik in southern Turkey, called the bombing a "heinous terror attack".

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu told a news conference in Ankara that 30 people had been killed. "It is... most probably a suicide bombing."

The Hurriyet newspaper said the attacker was an 18-year old woman, but there was no confirmation.

"Turkey has taken and will continue to take all necessary measures against the Islamic State," Davutoglu said, without giving details. "Measures on our border with Syria...will be increased."

One witness, giving his name as Mehmet, told Reuters by telephone he saw more than 20 bodies. "It was a huge explosion, we all shook."

TACKLING ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN BRITAIN

Cameron launches 5-year plan

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Young Muslims are drawn to fundamentalist Islam in the same way young Germans were attracted to fascism in the 20th century, David Cameron suggested yesterday, as he sets out a five-year strategy to combat ISIS-inspired radicalisation.

In a speech in Birmingham, Cameron said Islamic extremist ideology is based on the same intolerant ideas of "discrimination, sectarianism and segregation" that led to the rise of Hitler and that still exist in the far right.

He also rejected suggestions that Western foreign policy has contributed to the rise of ISIS and its popularity among Muslim populations in the West, arguing that such extremism existed long before the Iraq war.

The Prime Minister also announced details of a new drive to promote integra-

tion led by the Government's "tsar" for troubled families, Louise Casey. This will include addressing issues around integration, language and employment and learning from "past mistakes" where government funding was "simply handed" over to "self-appointed 'community leaders'" who "sometimes used it in a divisive way".

Downing Street said Cameron was determined to make tackling Islamic extremism in Britain a central priority over the next five years with a comprehensive strategy that involved not just the police and the criminal justice system but also "softer interventions" to tackle the root causes of radicalisation.

However he is likely to face criticism for the tough language in the speech from some in the Muslim community who have warned it could play into the hands of extremists.



'Living goddess' breaks decades of seclusion

AFP, Patan

When a massive earthquake struck Nepal in April, Nepal's longest-serving "living goddess" was forced to do the unthinkable -- walk the streets for the first time in her life, she told AFP in a rare interview.

Still following the cloistered lifestyle she entered at the age of two, Dhana Kumari Bajracharya also opened up about her unusually long 30-year reign, suggesting the pain of her unceremonious dethroning in the 1980s was still raw.

Before the 7.8 magnitude April 25 quake, Bajracharya had only ever appeared in public while being carried in an ornate wooden palanquin.



The Himalayan nation's living goddesses, known as Kumaris, live in seclusion and rarely speak in public, bound by customs that combine elements of Hinduism and Buddhism.

But as the tremor hit, shaking the ground, reducing buildings to rubble and killing thousands, Bajracharya left her quarters in the historic city of Patan, south of

Kathmandu, for the first time in three decades. And for the first time on foot. "I had never thought about leaving the house like that," she said, clearly still traumatised by the disaster that claimed more than 8,800 lives.

"Perhaps the gods are angry because people don't respect traditions as much

Loyalists battle rebel holdouts in Yemen's Aden

AFP, Aden

Yemeni loyalist forces said they advanced yesterday into the last district of the southern port city of Aden still held by Iran-backed rebels, seeking to flush out the remaining insurgents.

Fighters from the pro-government Popular Resistance "have regained control of most of al-Tawahi district," including the presidential residence, said spokesman Ali Ahmehi.

The southern fighters also pushed the Shiite Huthi rebels and allied forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh out of the region's military headquarters and the naval base, he told AFP.

"A wide combing operation is under way to flush out" rebel holdouts, he said, adding that remaining insurgents had taken positions on several rooftops.