

DRONE ATTACK ON BIGGEST YEMEN AIRBASE

Huthi rebels kill 6

AFP, Al-anad Air Base

A rebel drone hit Yemen's largest air base yesterday, killing six loyalist soldiers during a military parade in an attack which threatens to hamper UN-led peace efforts.

At talks in Sweden last month, the UN brokered several agreements between Huthi rebels and the Saudi-backed government seen as the best chance of ending nearly four years of devastating conflict.

The Shia Huthi rebels said they carried out the strike on Al-Anad air base, in government-held Lahij province some 60 kilometres (40 miles) north of Yemen's second city Aden.

At least 12 people were wounded, including top commanders, according to medics at Ibn Khaldoun hospital in the provincial capital Huta.

Footage of the attack showed a drone exploding over a podium around which dozens of military personnel were standing. Soldiers scrambled to carry wounded comrades to military vehicles, while a man holding a camera bled on the ground.

An AFP correspondent at the scene said journalists were among the wounded.

Originally built by the then Soviet Union during the Cold War, Al-Anad served as the headquarters for US troops overseeing a long-running drone war against Al-Qaeda until March 2014, when it was overrun by the Huthis.

Government forces recaptured it in August 2015 as they recovered territory from the rebels with support from a Saudi-led military coalition.

Yemen's deputy chief of staff Saleh al-Zandani, intelligence Brigadier General Saleh Tamah and senior army commander Fadel Hasan were among the wounded, along with Lahij governor Ahmad Abdullah al-Turki, doctors at Ibn Khaldoun hospital told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Chief of staff General Abdullah al-Nakhi was also at the base at the time of the attack, a pro-government official said. He was not named among the casualties.

The attack came one day after UN envoy Martin Griffiths warned "substantial progress" was needed on the ground before full-blown negotiations could be launched on ending the civil war.



A man pushes a baby stroller in a snow covered park in Prague, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

AGENCIES

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the United States will withdraw its troops from Syria while continuing the battle against IS, as Turkey warned of an offensive inside Syria if withdrawal is delayed.

Speaking at a joint news conference with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in Cairo yesterday, Pompeo said that Washington remained a steadfast partner in the Middle East.

"President Trump's decision to withdraw our troops has been made. We will do that," the top diplomat said.

Pompeo is in Egypt as part of a Middle East tour aimed at reassuring Arab partners after President Donald Trump announced his plans to with-



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (L) shakes hands with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry in Cairo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

draw US forces from Syria.

He also met Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Ittihadeya Palace to discuss security and economic cooperation.

Pompeo arrived in Egypt after stops in Jordan and Iraq where he sought to reassure leaders that withdrawing from Syria does not mean the US is abandoning the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as IS) armed group or easing pressure on Iran.

From Egypt, Pompeo will travel to the Gulf Arab states - Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait - to press the case.

Earlier, the foreign minister of Turkey said it will launch an offensive against Syrian Kurdish forces if the United States delays the withdrawal of its troops from the war-torn country.

"If the (pullout) is put off with ridiculous excuses like Turks are massacring Kurds, which do not reflect the

reality, we will implement this decision," Mevlut Cavusoglu told NTV television.

Cavusoglu said Ankara would fight the YPG whether or not the US withdraws from Syria.

In another development, a jihadist group dominated by Syria's former al-Qaeda affiliate yesterday sealed its grip on northern Idlib, the last major rebel bastion, in a deal ending days of fighting with rival factions.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) signed a ceasefire with what was left of a rival alliance that sees it confirm its supremacy and unites the region under a jihadist-led administration.

The jihadists' deal, a copy of which was circulated on local media outlets, brings an immediate end to the fighting between HTS and the rival National Liberation Front, which was directly backed by Turkey.

The clashes between HTS and its NLF rivals in Idlib had killed 137 people on both sides since the start of the year, most of them fighters, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group.

Analyst Sam Heller said the latest development put HTS squarely in control of the Idlib region.

Get behind new election to break Brexit deadlock

Says Corbyn as future of May's deal looks bleak

REUTERS, Wakefield

British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn yesterday called on lawmakers to help his opposition party "break the deadlock" over Brexit and support his call for a motion of no confidence in the government to trigger an election.

Pledging to vote against Prime Minister Theresa May's deal next week, Corbyn said only

opening the way for a disorderly exit or for Brexit never to happen at all.

"If the government cannot pass its most important legislation then there must be a general election at the earliest opportunity," Corbyn told journalists and workers.

"Clearly, Labour does not have enough MPs in parliament to win a confidence vote on its own. So members across the House (of

Commons) should vote with us to break the deadlock," he said, adding Labour would call a vote of no confidence when it had the greatest chance of success.

He said only an election would give the winning party "a renewed mandate to negotiate a better deal" that

could pass through parliament, adding an election and renegotiation would most probably mean an extension to Article 50, which began Britain's divorce proceedings in March 2017.

Any extension would require the agreement of the other 27 EU member states.

Opposition leader to call no confidence vote

UK parliament to vote on PM's deal on January 15

Pompeo says US to pull forces, continue fight against IS

Turkey says will launch Syria offensive if US delays pullout

Ceasefire deal sees jihadists take over Idlib

DRC opposition chief wins vote

Rival cries foul; violence kills 4

AFP, Kinshasa

Opposition leader Felix Tshisekedi was yesterday declared the victor of DR Congo's controversial presidential election in a surprise result swiftly denounced by his rival as a "coup".

In a pre-dawn announcement, the election commission named Tshisekedi, son of the country's late veteran opposition leader, as provisional winner of the bitterly-contested December 30 vote.

The 55-year-old immediately pledged to work closely with current incumbent Joseph Kabila.

But the result was immediately denounced by his opposition rival Martin Fayulu, the runner up, who slammed the announcement as "an electoral coup".

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the declared outcome was "not consistent" with the results, saying that Fayulu appeared to have won.

The United Nations and African Union have warned against any resort to violence.

Meanwhile, in a worrying sign, two police and two civilians were killed in the western DR Congo city of Kikwit yesterday when police intervened to end protests over the outcome of presidential elections, security forces said.



Supporters of the newly elected president of the Democratic republic of Congo, Felix Tshisekedi, celebrate in the streets of Kinshasa, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



China offers Elon Musk permanent residency

AFP, Beijing

Tesla boss Elon Musk has been offered a "green card", China said yesterday, a privilege enjoyed by only an elite group of foreigners.

Musk was in China for the ground-breaking of Tesla's first overseas factory, which will allow it to sell vehicles directly in the world's largest market for electric vehicles.

The high-profile entrepreneur met with Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday in Beijing, where they discussed Tesla's China ambitions, said the State Council -- the country's cabinet.

"I hope to build Tesla's Shanghai factory into a global example," Musk told Li, according to a readout. "I really love China, I'm willing to visit here more often."

Li replied: "If this is what you truly have in mind, we can give you a 'Chinese green card'."

The number of foreigners with Chinese permanent residency crossed 10,000 in 2016, according to state-run China Daily.

Members of this club, according to the paper, include Dutch scientist Bernard Feringa, who won the 2016 Nobel Prize in chemistry, former NBA all-star Stephon Marbury, and Nobel-winning economist Robert Mundell. Getting a Chinese "green card" has been described as "one of the most difficult tasks in the world".

In contrast, more than one million people in the United States became permanent residents in 2017 alone.

'A total waste of time'

Trump storms out of border wall negotiations

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump said "bye-bye" and stormed out of negotiations Wednesday on funding a US-Mexico border wall when Democratic opponents refused to agree to the project.

"A total waste of time," Trump tweeted about his White House meeting with top Democratic congressional leaders. "I said bye-bye, nothing else works!"

Chuck Schumer, the top Democrat in the Senate, told journalists Trump "sort of slammed the table," then "got up and walked out."

"Again, we saw a temper tantrum because he couldn't get his way," Schumer said.

Although the two sides agreed that the meeting ended abruptly, they argued over who was to blame.

According to supporters of Trump at the meeting, the president asked Democratic leaders whether they would agree to fund his wall project in exchange for him ending a painful shutdown of swaths of government, which he has instigated in retaliation for the standoff.

The Democratic speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, "raised her hand and said no, not at all," said Kevin McCarthy, the senior Republican in the House, who was also present.

Vice President Mike Pence, who was in the meeting, said Democrats were not even wanted to negotiate.



Trump wants \$5.7 billion to fund a wall he says is needed to keep out dangerous illegal immigrants, drug dealers and people smugglers from Mexico.

Democrats say the wall would have little impact on real border problems and that Trump's tough approach has instead created a humanitarian crisis among

vulnerable, unthreatening migrants.

Trump's main lever to exert pressure on Congress has been to refuse signing spending bills that cover large areas of government. As a result, some 800,000 federal employees and many more contractors have now been without pay for almost three weeks.

Democrats insist they will not lift their opposition to the wall project, and believe Americans will tire of the shutdown chaos and blame Trump.

But Trump indicated Wednesday on a visit to Republican allies in Congress that he will continue to play hardball.

"Whatever it takes," he told journalists, when asked how long the shutdown could continue.

Earlier at the White House, Trump told journalists that if he cannot get his way, he could declare a national emergency -- a measure that allows him to bypass Congress and take the wall funds he needs from the military.

On Thursday, he will fly to the southern border that he described in a prime-time television speech Tuesday as an open door to murderers and other criminals.

Radio waves from deep space baffle scientists

AFP, Paris

Astronomers in Canada have detected a mysterious volley of radio waves from far outside our galaxy, according to two studies published Wednesday in Nature.

What corner of the universe these powerful waves come from and the forces that produced them remain unknown.

The so-called repeating fast radio bursts were identified during the trial run last summer of a built-for-purpose telescope running at only a fraction of its capacity.

Known by its acronym CHIME, the world's most powerful radio telescope -- spread across an area as big as a football pitch -- is poised to detect many more of the enigmatic pulses now that it is fully operational.

Fast radio bursts (FRBs) flash only for a micro-instant, but can emit as much energy as the Sun does in 10,000 years. Exactly what causes these high-energy surges of long waves at the far end of the electromagnetic spectrum remains the subject of intense debate.

More than 60 bursts have been catalogued since 2007, but only one other -- observed in 2012 at the Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico -- was a repeater.

Cosmic convulsions created by the turbulent gas clouds that give rise to stars, or stellar explosions such as supernovae, are both possible incubators.

But consecutive radio bursts are a special case.

It is not yet clear whether the breeding grounds of repeating bursts are different from those that produce only a single radio pulse.

Significantly, the 2012 and 2018 "repeaters" have strikingly similar properties.

ODDLY Enough

Older people more likely to share fake news: study

Facebook users aged 65 plus and conservatives are more likely to share fake news on the platform than younger or more liberal counterparts, according to a new study. Researchers from Princeton University and New York University analyzed the Facebook posts of nearly 1,200 people who agreed to share their data in the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election. The study, published in Science Advances, found less than only 8.5 percent of respondents shared suspected links. However, those that did tended to be older and self-identified as being on the conservative end of the political spectrum. In fact, users over 65 -- regardless of political affiliations -- shared "nearly seven times as many articles from fake news domains" as 18 to 29-year-olds.



Indonesia airline brings live music to the skies

Indonesian national flag carrier Garuda is bringing music to the skies with a series of live acoustic concerts on domestic flights, the airline said. Passengers will be serenaded at 35,000 feet in a scheme aimed at wooing millennials "who want a different flight experience", an airline spokesman told AFP. The carrier held its first in-flight concert on Wednesday, when two musicians performed for a captive audience aboard a flight between Jakarta and Bali. SOURCE: AFP