

Rockets fired by Houthis kill 14 civilians

Heavy fighting breaks out in Yemen's Taiz city

CAIRO, Oct 22, (Agencies): At least 10 Houthi militia fighters were killed in heavy clashes in Yemen's third-largest city Taiz on Thursday, a day after they pounded it with rockets, forces loyal to the government said.

Taiz, considered Yemen's cultural capital, has suffered huge destruction since becoming a main battleground in the conflict between government supporters and the Iran-allied Houthis, who are backed by forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. It is currently divided between the two sides.

The Houthis and Saleh's forces are battling a Saudi-led coalition which is trying

to restore the government of Yemen's current president, Abd-Rabhu Mansour Hadi, which is now based in the southern port of Aden.

Forces loyal to Hadi killed at least 20 Houthis and Saleh loyalists in Taiz, their commanders said. Nobody from the Houthis was available to confirm the death toll.

Thousands have had to flee Taiz and those left behind are facing severe shortages of basic supplies. In September, the United Nations said it was concerned about the near collapse of the health care system in the city.

Also on Thursday, the Houthi-con-

trolled Saba news agency said at least 12 Hadi supporters were killed in an ambush by Houthi fighters in Marib, east of Sanaa. Reuters could not verify the deaths.

At least 5,400 people have been killed in the fighting in Yemen, the poorest country on the Arabian Peninsula, since March. The United Nations says the humanitarian situation is critical.

Air strikes by the Arab coalition have struck civilian targets on at least four different occasions in recent weeks, including a wedding party on Sept 28 that killed 131 people.

The Saudi-led coalition has gained

ground in southern Yemen, but Houthi forces remain in control of much of the country despite the almost daily air strikes.

Fourteen civilians were killed in one of Yemen's largest cities when shells fired by Houthi fighters and their allies, forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, fell on their neighbourhoods, medical sources said.

The sources said the shells also wounded some 70 people in the neighbourhoods of Tahrir and Daboua in the city of Taiz, in southwestern Yemen.

Meanwhile, Vice-President of Yemen and Prime Minister Khalid Bahah met

with the advisory commission of Riyadh Conference to discuss the situation in the areas restored to the legitimate government.

During the meeting, held at the headquarters of the Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) here Bahah said the country is undergoing a delicate stage "where there is no room for mistakes.

"All members of the government have to provide good example for the rest of the people in abiding by the provisions of the law and the constitution," the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) quoted him as saying.

He affirmed that the members of the government and the presidency work as one team despite the attempts of some hostile parties to drive wedges among them.

Bahah added that his government seeks to make Aden a model for areas that were restored to the state through the joint efforts of the government, the popular resistance and the Saudi-led coalition forces.

The meeting was held in the presence of Saudi Ambassador to Yemen Mohammed Al Jaber and the envoy of the Secretary-General of GCC to Yemen Saleh Al-Gueniar.

Operation rescues

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taken place but said he had no further information about it. In May, American special operations forces killed senior Islamic State leader Abu Sayyaf from Tunisia in a raid in Syria.

Hawija is a stronghold of Islamic State militants who have captured Kurdish peshmerga fighters in battles.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for US-led coalition forces in Iraq and Syria says they carried out a large-scale attack on Syria's Omar oil field as part of its mission to target the Islamic State group's ability to generate money.

Operations officer Maj Michael Filanowski told journalists in Baghdad on Thursday that the strikes late Wednesday struck IS-controlled oil refineries, command and control centers and transportation nodes in the Omar oil field area. US officials say it was one of the largest set of strikes since launching the air campaign last year.

Filanowski says the refinery generates between \$1.7 and \$5.1 million per month for the Islamic State group. He says the strikes did not target Omar's entire infrastructure, focusing instead on specific targets that would stunt their ability to sell oil.

Elsewhere, Iraqi forces said Wednesday they found 19 different mass graves containing the bodies of 365 fighters from the Islamic State group in the reconquered town of Baiji.

An army officer confirmed a large number of IS bodies had been discovered in mass graves, but could not say how many and mentioned that some had also been found in another neighbourhood.

In a statement, the security forces said that "the total number of graves discovered by the heroes of the Popular Mobilisation is 19".

It said the mass graves were found in the Asri neighbourhood of Baiji, 200 kms (120 miles) north of Baghdad, and contained a total of "365 bodies of DAESH terrorists".

DAESH is an Arab acronym for IS. It was not clear how long the bodies had been buried there nor how all of them were identified as fighters.

Fighting

Baiji and its nearby refinery — once the country's largest and now extensively destroyed — has been the scene of almost uninterrupted fighting in the past 16 months.

Iraqi forces led by the Popular Mobilisation, an umbrella group dominated by Tehran-backed Shiite militias, have fully retaken the area in recent days.

Some key flashpoints in the area changed hands many times since IS launched a sweeping offensive across Iraq in June 2014 but the broad operation launched about 10 days ago appears to have secured victory for the security forces.

In another news, a major increase in violence by the Islamic State group saw over 1,000 attacks and nearly 3,000 deaths worldwide in the past three months, analysis firm IHS Jane's said Thursday.

The figures show a 42-percent jump in daily attacks by the jihadist group, averaging 11.8 per day from July to September, up from 8.3 per day between April and June.

The figures suggest that air strikes by the US-led coalition have had only a limited impact on the group.

The London-based analysis firm recorded 1,086 IS attacks, causing a total of 2,978 civilian and government fatalities — a huge 65.3 percent increase in the average daily killings by the group compared to the previous three months, and an 81 percent jump on one year earlier.

IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre uses open sources to compile their database, and said IS likely carried out far more attacks that could not be verified.

"While the airstrikes and wider coalition efforts have put the group under significant pressure, it is seemingly still some way from being sufficiently weakened to allow the recapture of territory, let alone be defeated," Matthew Henman, head of the Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, told AFP.

Russia's increased involvement in Syria in recent weeks is likely to further strengthen IS, since there was a "clear indication" that Moscow is more interested in defending the Syrian regime than defeating IS.

"Already over the past week the Islamic State has made gains in areas of Aleppo governorate due to the targeting of rival opposition groups and this is likely to continue," said Henman.

"Civilian deaths in Russian airstrikes also give the Islamic State a powerful propaganda tool."

The figures reflect the inclusion of Nigeria's brutal Boko Haram militant group, which declared allegiance to IS in March.

Renamed Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyah, the group's attacks were the deadliest of any IS affiliate.

"This underlines the nature of the group's insurgency in Nigeria and several bordering countries, with its operations characterised by mass-casualty operations targeting the civilian population in the group's northeast operational heartland," Henman said.

The new figures also reflect changes in the type of combat over the summer in Iraq and Syria, which still account for the vast majority of IS activity.

Russia flew 53 sorties, hit 72 militant targets in Syria

Drone video shows staggering destruction near Damascus

MOSCOW, Oct 22, (Agencies): The Russian defence ministry said on Thursday its planes had flown 53 sorties and struck 72 militant targets in Syria in the last 24 hours, Russian news agencies reported.

The Russian air force hit a range of targets in the Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Aleppo, Damascus, and Deir al-Zor provinces, a ministry spokesman was quoted as saying by the RIA and TASS news agencies.

Meanwhile, video of a Damascus neighborhood filmed by a Russian drone has provided a rare glimpse into the staggering scale of destruction that years of fighting has inflicted around the Syrian capital, seat of President Bashar Assad's power.

The video shot over the district of Jobar by RTR war correspondent Yevgeny Poddubny on Oct 18 and obtained by The Associated Press on Thursday shows blocks of bombed-out residential buildings, most of them with gaping holes and others with their top floors collapsed.

Mushrooms of thick gray smoke billow out as targets are blasted, presumably by Syrian warplanes.

Thousands of Syrian army airstrikes and barrel bombs dropped from army helicopters throughout the country's civil war have reduced entire opposition-held neighborhoods in Syria to rubble. Most are in central and northern Syria, and some are in the eastern suburbs of Damascus where the rebels have been entrenched for several years.

The destruction in Jobar revealed by the drone video is the closest to the Syrian capital, where Assad retains a firm grip on power.

Air strikes in Syria are making it harder to deliver desperately needed aid to civilians suffering from the country's brutal war, the International Committee for the Red Cross said.

"Air bombardment makes it more difficult for us to reach some areas," said the head of the ICRC's Middle East and North Africa operations, Robert Martini.

"More use of weapons in any conflict will create additional difficulties in the humanitarian situation," he told AFP in

Iran supreme leader yet to publicly back the accord

Khamenei's 'Setad' stands to gain from N-deal

WASHINGTON/BEIRUT, Oct 22, (RTRS): The historic nuclear deal reached between Iran and major world powers has yet to be implemented, but one clear winner has emerged: Iran's highest authority, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Khamenei has yet to publicly back the accord, which lifts some sanctions on Iran in return for limits on its nuclear program. But he does stand to benefit, thanks to his close control of one of the most powerful and secretive organizations in Iran — "Setad Ejraiye Farmane Hazrate Emam," or Setad.

The deal, which is likely to go into effect after clearing a major Congressional hurdle last week, lifts US secondary sanctions on Setad and about 40 firms it owns or has a stake in, according to a Reuters tally based on annexes to the deal.

The delisting of Setad — which has little connection to Iran's nuclear program but is close to Iran's ruling elite — feeds into US Republicans' criticism that the deal will empower Iran's hardliners and help fund its regional ambitions.

Former US officials say Setad was just one of a slew of entities sanctioned because they were considered part of the Iranian government. One former official said Setad was also targeted because the United States saw it as close to Khamenei and believed that

an interview in Damascus late Wednesday.

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday accused the West of playing a "double game" with terrorist groups in Syria, where a US-led coalition is conducting a bombing campaign.

"It's always difficult to play a double game: declaring a fight against terrorists while simultaneously trying to use some of them to arrange the pieces on the Middle East chess board in one's own interests," Putin said at a meeting of political scientists known as the Valdai Club.

the sanctions might induce him to back serious nuclear negotiations.

With the nuclear deal reached, they say it is now appropriate to remove those measures. Many US sanctions related to Iran's support for militant groups and alleged human rights abuses will remain in place.

With stakes in nearly every sector of Iran's economy, Setad built its empire on the systematic seizure of thousands of properties belonging to religious minorities, business people, and Iranians living abroad, according to a 2013 Reuters investigation, which estimated the network's holdings at about \$95 billion.

Iranians who said their family properties were seized by Setad described in interviews in 2013 how men showed up and threatened to use violence if the owners didn't leave the premises at once.

Iran's mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment. In response to Reuters' findings in 2013, a Setad spokesman said at the time the information presented was "not correct," and did not elaborate.

Reuters found no evidence that Khamenei is personally enriched by Setad's assets. But through Setad, Khamenei has access to resources that allow him to bypass rivals and other branches of government.

The entities being delisted represent

a significant portion of Setad's holdings, though dozens of Setad-linked companies were never directly named by the US Treasury and may not have been affected at all by the sanctions.

The nuclear deal, reached in Vienna in July, would remove Setad from Treasury's Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list, enabling the conglomerate to open bank accounts abroad and procure financing for partnerships.

The secondary sanctions have barred foreign banks that wish to operate in the United States from dealing with Setad. American banks, companies, and individuals will still be barred from dealing with Setad, also called EIKO, under US primary sanctions.

Setad's removal from the sanctions list has raised concerns among some US lawmakers. A Republican-led bid to block the deal in Congress effectively ended in failure last week when President Barack Obama won enough support from Senate Democrats and independents.

"It allows the Ayatollah's shady conglomerate to jeopardize the global financial system," said Republican Senator Cory Gardner, who sits on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"These are bad actors who are now receiving the benefit of the bargain from the United States."

of President Bashar al-Assad, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeiri said ahead of a meeting with his US, Russian and Turkish counterparts.

"We believe that the Russian interference in Syria is very dangerous because it exacerbates the conflict," Jubeiri told reporters in Vienna, adding the Saudis had made this clear to the Russians.

Secretary of State John Kerry says the US, Iran, Russia and Europe agree Syria should be united and that Syrians should choose their own future leadership, but he says President Bashar Assad is the one obstacle to doing that.

replete with implausible conspiracy theories.

The hearing was expected to last the whole day, with breaks. Clinton was certain to face questions about her use of a private email account and server while serving as President Barack Obama's chief diplomat, another issue that has beset her campaign.

A new Associated Press-Gfk poll shows the public mixed on Clinton and Benghazi. Four in 10 say they neither approve nor disapprove of how she has answered questions about the attack, while 20 percent approve and 37 percent disapprove.

Americans also are divided on Clinton's email practices, which have raised security concerns. More than half of those polled view her use of a private server as a minor problem or no problem at all, compared with 1 in 3 who think it is a major problem. Nearly two-thirds of Republicans call it a major problem.

In the weeks after Benghazi, Clinton took responsibility for the incidents. In recent months, she has said her use of a private email server was a mistake.

FBI undercover

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high visibility of violent extremists who claim they are acting in the name of Islam today, "the Muslim community is completely under siege."

"Now the trust is really ruined," he added.

The problem is that in some operations, undercover agents set traps that, at times, appear to force the hand of suspects in their sights.

The topic is the focus of "(T)ERROR," a documentary that debuted at this year's Sundance independent film festival.

The film, which scored a Break Out First Feature award at the festival, provides an unprecedented behind-the-scenes view of a counterterrorism sting over a two-year period.

These cases are not without controversy.

In one, the so-called Fort Dix Five group of alleged extremist men were said to have plotted to stage an attack on the

Road users

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Meanwhile, the Directorate General For Civil Aviation (DGCA) said here on Thursday that air traffic at Kuwait International Airport is going normally, despite the prevailing dust in the country.

Deputy Director-General for aviation safety and air transport at Kuwait International Airport Emad Al-Jelewi told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the arriving and departing flights were not affected at all by the current bad weather.

He stated that the current visibility is 1,500 meters, noting that the minimum allowed visibility level for takeoff and landing is 500 meters in accordance with the requirements of the international navigation law.

Dow report

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The issue is concerning the way the company obtained loans from the Kuwait Investment Authority.

Al-Turajji affirmed that the committee postponed voting on the report related to the real estates and investments of Kuwait Investment Office in London until the relevant parliamentary committee completes its mission.

He expressed his hope that the National Assembly expedites voting on the two reports, "so that it sends a message to the state officials that people's money should not be tampered with."

In another development, MP Al-Turajji urged Minister of Oil and State Minister for National Assembly Affairs Ali Al-Omar to clarify the rumors concerning the termination of 70 Kuwaiti employees of the Gulf Oil Company.

Stressing the need for the minister to carry out his responsibilities, he insisted that laying off Kuwaiti employees in such a manner is not justified and does not serve the formal approach for employing Kuwaitis, reducing the unemployment rate and providing Kuwaitis with a decent living for themselves and their families.

Al-Turajji urged the minister to take

up this issue and end the suffering of employees whose services are expected to be terminated soon, especially since the minister "came from the womb of the people", reiterating that the minister must therefore intervene quickly to end this suffering and stop decisions that are aimed to lay off other employees.

He affirmed that the justifications for terminating the services of Kuwaiti employees in the Kuwaiti Gulf Oil Company are unacceptable, indicating that the suspension of oil production in the divided zones in Al-Wafra and Al-Khaffji does not mean Kuwaiti employees should become victims and held accountable for something that they are not responsible for.

Al-Turajji added that the minister should immediately clarify the truth behind this matter, and take necessary initiative to find alternatives to the laying off of Kuwaiti employees because tens of Kuwaiti families would be affected by such a decision.

In another development, MP Hamdan Al-Azmi sent parliamentary questions to the Minister of Health Ali Al-Obeidi regarding the Kuwait Health Office in Germany.

He said, according to reports, Ministry of Health has addressed Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Civil Service Commission to appoint Mubarak Al-Qabandi as the health attaché in Germany.

The questions sent by Al-Azmi in this regard to the minister were:

■ What is the truth behind the reports that Ministry of Health has completed procedures for appointing Mubarak Al-Qabandi as the Kuwait health attaché in Germany?

■ What position does he currently hold in Ministry of Health?

■ What are the conditions required for the recruitment of a health attaché? Did this individual meet these conditions?

Al-Azmi requested the minister to provide him with the correspondences in this regard among Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Civil Service Commission. He also asked for details of the qualifications, experiences and the positions held by Al-Qabandi.

US military base of the same name in New Jersey.

Five of the original group of six were found guilty of conspiracy to commit murder and four got sentenced to life in prison, including three Albanian brothers.

Before their 2007 arrest, they were placed under surveillance for a year and half after they had recorded vacation video footage of themselves shooting weapons in the countryside while shouting "Allahu Akbar."

Critics accuse the FBI of entrapment, saying FBI informants pushed the men to action.

Mahmoud Omar, an Egyptian-born informant in the case, maintains that the Dukas brothers are innocent.

"I still don't know why the Dukas are in jail," he told The Intercept in June.

The FBI acknowledges that using informants in investigations "may involve an element of deception, intrusion into the privacy of individuals, or cooperation with persons whose reliability and motivation may be open to question."

However, the bureau is quick to add, the courts have recognized that the use of informants is "lawful and often essential."

Newswatch

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with an automatic weapon in an argument, the interior ministry said in a statement. (AFP)

CAIRO: Egyptian security forces have arrested Hassan Malik, a leader of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, security officials said, part of a sustained crackdown on Islamists.

"He was arrested in Cairo on charges of funding a group that promotes violence," said one of the officials. (RTRS)

TEHRAN: Iran's president has announced that the government will begin fully implementing the landmark nuclear deal reached with world powers.

President Hassan Rouhani says in a letter published on his website Thursday that work will be done according to considerations and requirements set out by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. (AP)

UNITED NATIONS: The United States, Britain, France and Germany called on Wednesday for the United Nations Security Council's Iran sanctions committee to take action over a missile test by Tehran that they said violated a UN ban.

In a letter containing details on the launch, they said the ballistic missile was "inherently capable of delivering a nuclear weapon." (RTRS)

DUBAI: Iranian officials briefly blocked access to the smartphone messaging application Telegram, its founder and CEO says, making it the latest social media outlet to be targeted by authorities in the Islamic Republic.

Telegram is an application that allows users to send text messages, pictures and videos over the Internet. The service touts itself as being highly encrypted and allows users to set their messages to "self-destruct" after a certain period, making it a favorite of activists and others concerned about their privacy. (AP)

LONDON: The widow of a man who suffered with Parkinson's has triggered new research this week into the condition after she discovered she could "smell" the disease.

Joy Milne, 65, told researchers that she had noticed a change in the odour of her late husband, Les, years before he developed symptoms of Parkinson's. (AFP)

LONDON: The world's largest ever clinical trial into whether taking a daily dose of aspirin can stop five common cancers from recurring was launched in Britain on Thursday.

The Add-Aspirin phase III trial will recruit 11,000 patients who have recently had — or are having — treatment for bowel, breast, oesophagus, prostate or stomach cancer. (AFP)

SACRAMENTO, California: Prosecutors say they'll ask the US government for permission to offer a plea deal to a California man charged with trying to join Islamic extremists in Syria.

The Sacramento Bee reports that an attorney for 21-year-old Nicholas Teausant told a judge Tuesday that lawyers are "cautiously optimistic" about a deal. (AP)

MEXICO CITY: Patricia grew into an "extremely dangerous" Category Four hurricane Thursday as it swirled toward Mexico's Pacific coast, authorities said.

The storm, with the second highest strength in the five-level Saffir-Simpson scale, packed winds of 215 kms (130 miles) per hour some 385 kilometers southwest of the port of Lazaro Cardenas, according to the US National Hurricane Center. (AFP)