

International

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Syria army in 'vast offensive' backed by Russian forces



Clinton subject to hacks from China, Korea



N Korea gears up for celebration



TAEZ: Female fighters from the Popular Resistance Committees, supporting forces loyal to Yemen's Saudi-backed President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, demonstrate their skills during a graduation ceremony of the affiliate special forces of the Popular Resistance yesterday in the country's third city Taez. — AFP

AIRSTRIKE KILLS 28 AT WEDDING IN YEMEN SAUDI DENIES ROLE AS US PEACE MOVES MAKE HEADWAY

SANAA: A suspected Saudi-led air strike killed at least 28 people at a wedding in a rebel-held town in Yemen, witnesses and rebels said yesterday, even as UN peace efforts made headway. The Saudi-led coalition, under mounting criticism over the civilian death toll of its bombing campaign against Iran-backed rebels, denied any involvement in the latest attack.

It was the second alleged coalition air strike on a Yemeni wedding party in just over a week. The new raid hit a house where dozens of people were celebrating on Wednesday evening in the town of Sanban in Dhamar province, 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of the capital Sanaa, residents said.

"Coalition warplanes launched the attack. The house was completely destroyed," said resident Taha Al-Zuba. "Warplanes were heard in the area ahead of the attack."

The rebels' Almasirah television said on Twitter that the wedding was hit by "aggression warplanes", referring to the coalition. Medical sources said 28 people were killed, raising an earlier toll of 13 dead.

Another 10 people were wounded, the sources said. Coalition spokesman Brigadier General Ahmed Al-Assiri said the allies did not launch any air strikes in the vicinity. "We did not conduct any operation in Dhamar... No strikes there, definitely," he said.

A suspected coalition strike killed at least 131 civilians at a wedding last month near the Red Sea city of Mokha, which the UN said may have been the deadliest single attack since March. The coalition denied involvement. The latest strike came as the United Nations announced that Houthi rebels, who control the capital and much of central and northern Yemen, had accepted a UN Security Council resolution calling for an end to the seven-month conflict.

The Houthis' refusal to agree to abide by Resolution 2216 passed in April-demanding their withdrawal from territory they seized since overrunning the capital in September 2013 — had stymied previous peace efforts. President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, who fled to neighboring Saudi Arabia in March but whose forces have since recaptured southern provinces with the support of coalition ground troops, had refused to join UN-brokered peace talks until the rebels signed up.

But UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric announced late on Wednesday that both the rebels and their allies confirmed they were willing to enter talks based on the UN resolution.

"This is an important step," he said. The Shiite Houthi rebels, whose heartland is in the mountains of the far north, have been backed by renegade troops still loyal to Hadi's ousted predecessor Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Saleh's political party also announced that it had accepted the UN peace plan following secret talks with UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed. But a member of Hadi's delegation, Abdulwahab al-Homayqani, said the rebels "did not announce their commitment to implement UN Resolution 2216" demanding their withdrawal. Rights groups have repeatedly criticized the coalition's strikes in Yemen, saying they have hit areas that don't contain military targets. In late August, an air strike hit a bottled water factory in the northern province of Hajja, killing 17 civilians and 14 rebels.

Warplanes in July struck staff residences at a power plant in the Red Sea port of Mokha, killing 65 civilians, while an April raid on a dairy plant in Hodeida further north left 35 civilians dead. The rebels too have come under heavy criticism for "indiscriminate" shelling of civilian-populated areas. A Western-backed resolution calling for a UN investigation into abuses committed during the Yemen conflict was withdrawn due to protests from Saudi Arabia, Human Rights Watch said last week.

A fresh challenge for the coalition emerged this week after the Islamic State group claimed an attack on Yemen's government and coalition bases in main southern city Aden. Fifteen loyalist and coalition troops were killed and several ministers suffered minor wounds. — AFP