



A ferry sinks in the Pacific

'Brainwashed' children of Islamist fighters worry Germany



HATAY, Turkey: A Turkish military truck carries a tank as it is dispatched to the border in Hatay, near the Turkey-Syria border yesterday as part of the Turkish cross-border operation 'Olive Branch' against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia in Syria. —AFP

Turkey ramps up Syria incursion

France warns against a full-blown 'invasion'

AFRIN: Clashes raged between Turkish-backed forces and Kurdish militia in Syria's Afrin region yesterday, as wounded civilians fled intense Turkish air strikes. Turkey and allied Syrian rebels have pressed on with Operation Olive Branch in the Kurdish-controlled Afrin enclave despite mounting international concern and reports of rising civilian casualties.

Yesterday, French President Emmanuel Macron warned he would have a "real problem" with Turkey's intervention if it turned into a full-blown "invasion." An AFP correspondent in Afrin heard warplanes flying overhead, and Kurdish officials said rocket fire on the town wounded 12 civilians. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said heavy bombardment and Turkish air strikes were accompanying ground fighting around Jandairis and Rajo, two areas to the west of Afrin near the Turkish border.

The Britain-based war monitor reported that Turkish-backed forces had seized control of the border village of Shinkal to the northwest. "Turkish forces dispatched new military reinforcements overnight, including fighters and equipment, to Shinkal in an attempt to consolidate their control over several points and support attacking forces," said Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman.

Turkey and its Syria rebel allies launched Operation Olive Branch against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), on January 20. The group has been a key ally of Washington in its fight against the Islamic State jihadists but Ankara regards it as an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has waged a deadly insurgency in southeastern Turkey since 1984. Ankara has denied hitting civilians in its military operations, but hospitals in Afrin say they are receiving civilian casualties on a daily basis.

'The whole world knows'

At region's main hospital late on Tuesday, a heartbroken family was seen carrying out the body of their father, killed in shelling several days earlier. A sobbing woman touched her head to the casket. Nearby, an elderly

man was yelling to anyone who would listen. He had survived heavy Turkish bombardment of his neighborhood, but 12 of his family members—including two infant grandchildren—had not. "The whole world knows what's happening here. Everyone know that civilians are dying," he screamed.

Clashes rage in Syria's Afrin region

casualties. Defense Minister Nurettin Canikli said on Tuesday that the Turkish army and its rebel allies "have not harmed any civilian" during the operation.

Turkish teen killed

Yesterday, the Turkish army said it destroyed 22 YPG targets overnight. Since launching the assault, Turkey and rebel allies have captured 11 villages and the strategic Barsaya hill, according to the Observatory. Barsaya overlooks both the rebel-held Syrian town of Azaz, and Kilis across the border in Turkey. Advancing fighters were facing "fierce resistance from YPG fighters holed up in the mountains, in spite of Turkey's massive firepower," said Abdel Rahman. The Observatory said that 85 YPG fighters and 81 pro-Ankara rebels had been killed in the fighting so far. Turkey says seven of its soldiers have been killed. Yesterday, rockets launched from Syria killed a 17-year-old girl and wounded another resident of a Turkish border town, officials said. The US and France have repeatedly expressed concern over the cross-border offensive, which Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan last week threatened to expand. Erdogan has vowed to "clean up" the YPG-held city of Manbij east of Afrin, where the US has troops as part of its operations against IS. In response, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said on Tuesday that if the operation turned into an "occupation" of parts of Syria, it would be "totally reprehensible." —AFP



Bahrain condemns 2 Shiites to death

DUBAI: Bahrain's criminal court yesterday sentenced two Shiites to death and 19 others to life imprisonment in a ruling against a cell convicted of terror attacks. The court sentenced a total of 58 people on terrorism charges and stripping citizenship from 47, state news agency BNA reported. The ruling is the latest in a series of scores of harsh penalties in the Western-allied Gulf kingdom for defendants accused of Iranian-backed militancy but who activists say are mostly peaceful opposition members.

The defendants were convicted of forming a "terror" cell that carried out a number of attacks, killing at least two policemen and wounding several others, and of smuggling weapons by boat. It also convicted them of attacking a prison and helping some prisoners to flee, of travelling to Iraq and Iran for military training and engaging in a gunbattle with police. All the convicts are from the Shiite majority in the small Sunni-ruled Gulf kingdom. Large quantities of weapons including grenades and light machine-guns were seized from the group, according to the ruling. Thirty-six members, including the two condemned to death, are already in jail while the rest were sentenced in absentia, including 12 defendants living in Iran and Iraq and one in Germany, a judicial source said.

The London-based Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) immediately condemned the ruling. "Today's ruling is the latest episode in Bahrain's travesty of justice, and likely one of the most cruel," said the director of BIRD, Sayed Ahmed Al-Wadaei. BIRD said two women were among those convicted while the fate of two other female defendants in the case was not immediately known. Twenty-one Bahrainis are now on death row in "political cases", 14 of them convicted in 2017, it said. Authorities have cracked down hard on dissent since mass street protests in 2011 that demanded an elected prime minister and constitutional monarchy in Bahrain.

Shiite cleric in hospital

In another development, Bahrain's Shiite spiritual leader Sheikh Isa Qassim was returned to hospital yesterday to undergo a new round of surgery, a rights activist said. "Sheikh Isa Qassim was admitted today to the Bahrain International Hospital to receive surgery for a hernia," Sheikh Maytham Al-Salman from Bahrain Center for Human Rights said.

He said authorities had delayed for two weeks before allowing the cleric to visit the hospital. Qassim, in his late 70s, is suffering from high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Rights activists say he underwent a previous round of surgery in early December. The cleric was a leader of Arab Spring-inspired 2011 protests in the Sunni-ruled kingdom, and has been under de facto house arrest since a 2016 court order revoking his citizenship. He was sentenced to a suspended one-year jail term on the charge of "serving foreign interests". Located between regional arch-rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain is home to a Shiite majority that has long complained of political marginalization. —Agencies

Iraqis maimed in battle struggle to survive as amputees

BAGHDAD: Karrar Hassan, 25, is just one of tens of thousands of Iraqi fighters wounded battling the Islamic State group. Now disabled, he struggles to survive on a \$400 pension. In 2014, he was unemployed and joined the Hashed Al-Shaabi, a paramilitary coalition dominated by Iran-backed groups that fought alongside Iraqi government forces against the jihadists. Months later, during fierce fighting for the city of Fallujah west of Baghdad, his left calf was ripped open by a blast and Karrar lost the leg. The Hashed sent him for treatment to both Iran and Lebanon, and he returned with a prosthesis from the knee down.

This gave him enough mobility to allow a return to the front. In 2015, Karrar was fighting in Baiji city, north of the capital, when he was hit again. This time two bullets shattered his right knee, putting him out of action once and for all. Iraq declared victory over IS in December 2017, after a grueling three-year onslaught that also wounded tens of thousands of fighters. The Hashed says it lost 8,000 men in the war on IS, and 26,000 were wounded. Iraq's government, which mobilized tens of thousands of members of the security forces for the campaign, has not given its own toll.

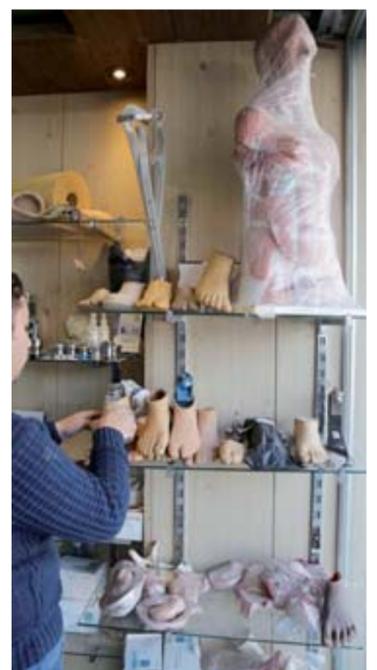
Karrar, a father of three small children, has been left incapacitated. Unemployed and now unable to drive, he spends his days at home trying to figure out how to provide for his family on a monthly pension of 500,000 Iraqi dinars (\$400). This amount represents a bit less than a medium salary in Iraq, but for

Karrar it is not enough to buy medicine for his injuries as well as food for his wife and three children. He says the ointment he needs to rub on his skin to avoid chafing from the prosthesis "costs \$800" and lasts for 10 months. Karrar would like to work, "but with my legs I can't even drive a taxi" or carry anything heavy.

Abu Mehdi Al-Mohandis, second-in-command in the Hashed, says hospitals run by the paramilitary unit provide free medical care for 60,000 fighters and 300,000 civilians. Dhia Hussein runs Al-Razi hospital for the Hashed in Baghdad, where he says 1,450 amputees have received treatment over the past six months alone. Iraq has a long history of bloody conflict, from the 1980-1988 war with its neighbor Iran to the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein and to the later struggle against IS. Each conflict has resulted in a heavy toll of casualties, many of whom are amputees. Tahsin Ibrahim has been making prosthetic limbs in Baghdad for more than 30 years.

He says the number of amputees has risen since the 2003 conflict, and the number of workshops specializing in prostheses and shops selling medical equipment has increased tenfold over the past 15 years. Most of Ibrahim's clients are war wounded, and he says many are forced to borrow money to pay for their artificial limbs. The most rudimentary prosthesis costs around \$1,000 in Iraq—more than twice the average monthly wage. Ahmed, 32, was deployed with the federal police to second city Mosul, one of the jihadists' main hubs before they were driven out by a fierce offensive that lasted for months. An IS mortar blast tore through his right leg, and Ahmed says his pension of 575,000 Iraqi dinars is simply inadequate.

Every month, half of this goes towards "paying for medical treatment", including doctor's visits and medicine, leaving him with just half to buy food for the family. That "is not enough". A doctor's visit also means



BAGHDAD: An Iraqi man arranges prosthetic limbs at a workshop in the capital Baghdad. —AFP

a taxi fare, he said. "The bus is not adapted for handicapped people so I have to take a taxi," said the father of four. One doctor who spoke to AFP, Ghassan al-Alussi, believes that the pensions allocated to war veterans are "insufficient". "Public and health institutions must do more for amputee fighters because they have defended the country," Alussi said. —AFP