

International

South Yemeni separatists pin down government in the de facto capital

Fighting leaves 38 people dead

ADEN: Yemeni ministers were holed up in Aden's presidential palace yesterday after separatist forces seized effective control of the southern port city, dealing another blow to the country's embattled government. Pro-separatist forces backed by the UAE known as the "security belt" fanned out across the city—the country's de facto capital—after three days of fighting that left 38 people dead. The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have backed the beleaguered government of President Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi since intervening against Shiite Houthi rebels in Yemen's civil war in March 2015.

But the Arab allies, whose military coalition was launched to roll back rebel gains and restore Yemen's "legitimate" government to power in Sanaa, have not intervened to prop up Hadi against his separatist rivals. The coalition has instead urged the separatists to exercise restraint and called on the government to weigh up the demands of its rivals. While Yemen's president resides in the Saudi capital, the infighting in the anti-Houthi camp has left Prime Minister Ahmed bin Dagher and a number of senior government figures holed up in the Aden presidential palace. A high-ranking military source said the separatists had also taken over the bin Dagher's office chief overnight.



Another blow to embattled government

remains at Aden port unable to be released," the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said via Twitter.

"We are also particularly concerned for those newly displaced in Aden who have fled other areas in Yemen. More than 40,000 people fled to Aden and nearby governorates since December and we anticipate more displacement as people continue to flee from hostilities in the west coast." At least 38 people have been killed and 222 wounded in Aden since Sunday, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross. The separatists, who for months have pushed for the reinstatement of South Yemen as an independent country, now control most of the city. Since 2015, Aden had served as a refuge for tens of thousands of Yemenis fleeing conflict in their hometowns across the country, as the Saudi-backed government battled Houthi rebels allied with Iran. A coalition offensive along the Red Sea coast has

sent new waves of displaced to the government's de facto capital in recent weeks. Save the Children on Tuesday said it was also suspending work in Aden out of fear for the safety of its staff in what the agency called the "shattered" former refuge.

Demand for self-rule

Separatists, mainly based in Aden, have gained traction since April in their push for self-rule, demanding the reinstatement of South Yemen under a self-proclaimed Southern Transitional Council. Before the fighting broke out, the STC had called on Hadi to make changes to his government, accusing it of corruption and mismanagement.

The clashes have sparked fears of a repeat of South Yemen's 1986 civil war, a failed



ADEN: Fighters from the separatist Southern Transitional Council stand at the entrance of a military camp after they took control of the pro-government position in the Dar Saad district, in the north of Aden yesterday. —AFP

socialist coup which killed thousands in just six days and helped pave the way for the 1991 unification of South and North Yemen. The separatists, who enjoy popular support and are backed by some regular troops, have rapidly gained control over all but one district in Aden since Sunday. The Saudi-led coalition said it would take "all necessary steps to

restore security" in Aden but has not intervened on the government's behalf.

The UAE—a pillar of the coalition—has close ties to separatist leader Hani bin Breik while its "security belt" force backs the STC. A Yemeni government source said the coalition had, however, secured guarantees the separatists would not storm the presidential palace in Aden. More than

9,200 Yemenis have been killed since the coalition intervened in the war three years ago, triggering what the UN has called the world's largest humanitarian disaster. The coalition's original mission of rolling back Houthi gains has expanded to include fighting jihadist groups that have flourished during the war, and now keeping the peace between its allies on the ground. —AFP

Texas executes man who murdered his girlfriend and wife

CHICAGO: The US state of Texas executed an inmate Tuesday for the brutal killing of his girlfriend while he was on parole for the murder of his wife. William Rayford lost his final appeals just hours prior to his evening execution, including at the US Supreme Court. The appeals delayed the process for a few hours, but the lethal injection was ultimately carried out and Rayford pronounced dead at 8:48 pm (0248 GMT). The 64-year-old was convicted of killing his girlfriend Carol Lynn Thomas Hall in 1999, after an argument the two had in her home. At the time, Rayford was on parole, having served eight years of a 23-year sentence for the 1986 murder of his estranged wife Gail Ann Rayford.

His last statement included a request for forgiveness from the family of his second victim, according to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. "Please find it in your hearts to forgive me," Rayford said. "By no means am



William Rayford

I happy for what I've done. I have asked the Lord to forgive me." Both of Rayford's murders were brutal attacks that occurred in front of the women's children. Hall's body was found beaten, strangled and stabbed. Hall's then 11-year-old son was also beaten and stabbed when he tried to stop the attack. He survived and was a witness in Rayford's trial.

Rayford's attorneys had asked the US Supreme Court to halt the execution, alleging the convict, who was black, had insufficient representation and that his initial sentencing may have been marred by race-based prejudice. In another appeal, they claimed recent tests showed Rayford suffered decades-long brain damage caused by lead poisoning from bullets and bullet fragments lodged in his body, and from contaminated water. None of the appeals panned out, as judges rejected them all. The number of executions in the US declined to a near-historic low of 23 last year, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. —AFP

'Brainwashed' kids of Islamist fighters worry Germany

BERLIN: Germany's domestic intelligence chief wants the government to review laws restricting the surveillance of minors to guard against the children of Islamist fighters returning to the country as "sleeper agents" who could carry out attacks. Hans-Georg Maassen, head of the BfV agency, told Reuters that security officials were preparing for the return of Islamic State fighters to Germany along with potentially "brainwashed" children, although no big wave appeared imminent.

Nearly 1,000 people are believed to have left Germany to join up with the Islamist militants. As the group's presence in the Middle East crumbles, some are returning with family members. Only a small number of the 290 toddlers and children who left Germany or were born in Syria and Iraq had returned thus far, Maassen said. Many were likely to still be in the region, or perhaps moving to areas such as Afghanistan, where Islamic State remains strong.

He said Germany should review laws restricting surveillance of minors under the age of 14 to prepare for the increased risk of attacks by children as young as nine who grew up in Islamic State schools. "We see that children who grew up with Islamic State were brainwashed in the schools and the kindergartens of the IS," he said. "They were confronted early with the IS ideology ... learned to fight, and were in some cases forced to participate in the abuse of prisoners, or even the killing of prisoners." He said security officials believed such children could later carry out violent attacks in Germany. "We have to consider that these children could be living time bombs," he said. "There is a danger that these children come back brainwashed with a mission to carry out attacks." Maassen's comments were the first specific estimate of the number of children affected, following his initial warning in October that such children could pose a threat after being indoctrinated in battlefield areas. The radicalization of minors has been a big topic in Germany given that three of five Islamist attacks in Germany in 2016 were carried out by minors, and a 12-year-old boy was also detained after trying to bomb a Christmas market in Ludwigshafen.—Reuters

Germany raises anti-Semitism alarm

BERLIN: German leaders are increasingly alarmed about a resurgence of anti-Semitism 73 years after the Holocaust, stemming from an emboldened far right and an influx of refugees from countries hostile to Israel. Germany is marking the 1945 liberation of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz with solemn ceremonies, but also warnings of the need for stronger vigilance. On the anniversary on Saturday, Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned revisionist forces seeking to call into question the country's commitment to atoning for its Nazi past.

She said fighting anti-Semitism and racism must be a "daily task". "It is inconceivable and shameful that no Jewish institution can exist without police protection, whether it is a school, a kindergarten or a synagogue," she said. Merkel, who a decade ago became the first German chancellor to address the Israeli Knesset, has committed to creating a new position of commissioner on anti-Semitism under the new government she hopes to form by March. The move was prompted in part by demonstrations in Berlin in December against the US decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital which saw some protesters chant anti-Semitic slogans and torch Israeli flags.

Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert said at the time that although Berlin opposed the move by US President Donald Trump, it strongly condemned the aggressive rallies in German cities. "One has to be ashamed when hatred of Jews is put on display so openly on the streets of German cities," he said. The demonstrations heightened a sense of anxiety expressed by the Germany's Jewish community, now more than 200,000 strong, over the arrival since 2015 of more than one million predominantly Muslim asylum seekers. —AFP

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