



Catalan mayors defy Spanish courts ahead of independence vote

IRAN RECRUITS PAKISTANI, AFGHAN SHIITES TO FIGHT IN SYRIA

Page 7

Page 8



BALUKHALI: Rohingya Muslims, who recently crossed over from Myanmar into Bangladesh, attack a suspected child trafficker near Balukhali refugee camp, Bangladesh. Thousands of Rohingya are continuing to stream across the border, with UN officials and others demanding that Myanmar halt what they describe as a campaign of ethnic cleansing that has driven nearly 400,000 Rohingya to flee in the past three weeks. — AP

MYANMAR ACCUSED OF VIOLATING BANGLADESH AIRSPACE

BANGLADESH FUMES, SUMMONS MYANMAR ENVOY



GUMDHUM: Rohingya Muslim refugee carry supplies through the Jalpatoli refugee camp in the 'no mans land' between Myanmar and Bangladesh in Gumdhum district yesterday. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina headed for the UN General Assembly yesterday to plead for global help coping with the Rohingya crisis, as the refugee deluge escaping a crackdown in Myanmar topped 400,000. — AFP

COX'S BAZAR: Bangladeshi authorities summoned Myanmar's envoy to protest what they said were violations of their airspace amid an exodus of Rohingya Muslims fleeing violence in western Myanmar. Myanmar's presidential spokesman yesterday said there's no evidence of any trespassing and that Dhaka should have reached out to discuss its concerns instead of issuing public statements.

The Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Friday that Myanmar drones and helicopters flew into Bangladeshi airspace on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. It said a protest note was handed to Myanmar's envoy Friday evening. Bangladesh warned that the "provocative acts" could lead to consequences. In Yangon, presidential spokesman Zaw Htay said that while Myanmar's military denied crossing into Bangladesh's airspace, the matter was being investigated. "We don't know exactly if they released that statement for political reasons," he said of Bangladesh's protest.

He added that Myanmar was "transporting rations for displaced people for emergency assistance" to areas close to the border and that

Bangladesh "needs to understand that as well." An exodus of up to 400,000 Rohingya Muslims began Aug. 25 when Myanmar's military launched "clearance operations" in Rakhine state following deadly Aug 25 attacks by a Rohingya insurgent group on police posts. Those fleeing have described as indiscriminate attacks by security forces and Buddhist mobs.

The Myanmar government says hundreds have died, mostly Rohingya "terrorists," and that 176 out of 471 Rohingya villages have been abandoned. Myanmar has insisted that Rohingya insurgents and fleeing villagers themselves are destroying their villages. It has offered no proof to back these charges. The UN has described the violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar as ethnic cleansing - a term that describes an organized effort to rid an area of an ethnic group by displacement, deportation or killing. Ethnic Rohingya have faced persecution and discrimination in majority-Buddhist Myanmar for decades and are denied citizenship, even though many families have lived there for generations. The government says there is no such ethnicity as Rohingya and says they are Bengalis who illegally migrated to

Myanmar from Bangladesh. Rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights watch have said that they have evidence that Myanmar troops were systematically targeting and setting Rohingya villages on fire over the last three weeks.

UN agencies fear continued violence in Myanmar may eventually drive up to 1 million Rohingya into Bangladesh. As hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have crossed into Bangladesh, relief camps are overflowing and food, medicine and drinking water has been in short supply. Mohammed Shahriar Alam, Bangladesh's junior foreign minister, said yesterday that India, Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, Iran and Malaysia have already sent relief and the goods are waiting in an airport in nearby Chittagong. He said more aid was also expected to come via ships soon.

"The United Nations and many other private organizations are working there to support hundreds of thousands who are in dire need of assistance," said Khaled Mahmud, a top official in Cox's Bazar. He acknowledged that aid distribution remained haphazard three weeks into the crisis. "Our work must be very organized and systematic," he said. "We are working on that." — AP

WARPLANES POUND US-BACKED MILITIA

BEIRUT: US-backed militias said they came under attack yesterday from Russian jets and Syrian government forces in Deir Al-Zor province, a flashpoint in an increasingly complex battlefield. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias fighting with the US-led military coalition, said the strikes wounded six of its fighters. Washington and Moscow are backing separate offensives in the Syrian conflict - with both sides advancing against Islamic State militants in the eastern region that borders Iraq.

"Our forces east of the Euphrates were hit with an attack from the Russian aircraft and Syrian regime forces, targeting our units in the industrial zone," the SDF said in a statement. The SDF accused Damascus of trying to obstruct its battle against Islamic State. Such attacks "waste energies that should be used against terrorism ... and open the door to side conflicts," it said. There was no immediate comment from the Syrian government or Moscow. The assaults by the Russian-backed Syrian army and the US-backed SDF have at times raised fears of clashes that could stoke tensions

between the competing world powers.

The offensives have converged on Islamic State from opposite sides of the Euphrates river, which bisects oil-rich Deir Al-Zor, Islamic State's last major foothold in Syria. Syrian troops with Iran-backed militias have closed in from the west since last week, while the SDF advances from the east. Russian and US battles against Islamic State in Syria have mostly stayed out of each other's way, with the Euphrates often acting as a dividing line.

Talks have been under way to extend a formal demarcation line, officials have said. In June, the SDF accused the Syrian army of bombing its positions in Raqqqa province and the United States shot down a Syrian government warplane.

Across the river

Ahmed Abu Khawla, the commander of the SDF's Deir al-Zor military council, said Russian or Syrian fighter jets flew in from government-held territory before dawn. The warplanes struck as the SDF waged "heated and bloody battles" in the industrial zone on the eastern

bank, seizing factories from Islamic State militants, he said. "We have requested explanations from the Russian government," he told Reuters. "We have asked for explanations from the coalition ... and necessary action to stop these jets."

The strikes came a day after Khawla said his fighters would not let Syrian government forces cross the Euphrates. On Friday, he warned the army and its allies against firing at SDF positions across the river - which he said they had done in recent days. The Russian foreign ministry said units of the Syrian army had already crossed. A senior aide to President Bashar Al-Assad said the government would fight any force, including the US-backed militias, to recapture the entire country. "I'm not saying this will happen tomorrow ... but this is the strategic intent," Bouthaina Shaaban said in a TV interview.

The US-led coalition said last week that the SDF did not plan to enter Deir Al-Zor city, where Syrian troops recently broke an Islamic State siege that had lasted three years.

A pro-Damascus military alliance launched



UQAYRIBAT, Syria: Photo shows a general view of destruction, in the town of Uqayribat in Syria's eastern Hama countryside. — AFP

attacks yesterday from the southern corner of Deir Al-Zor province to drive Islamic State from the Iraqi border. Islamic State is also coming under attack by US-backed Iraqi government forces just over the border from Syria's Deir Al-

Zor inside Iraq. Islamic State's declaration in 2014 of a "caliphate" spanning both countries effectively collapsed in July, when an Iraqi offensive captured Mosul, the militants' capital in Iraq. — Reuters