

# Coalition rejects declaration of self-rule in south Yemen

RIYADH: The Saudi-led military coalition yesterday rejected Yemen separatists' declaration of self-rule over the country's south and demanded "an end to any escalatory actions". The separatists' move complicates a long and separate conflict, fought by the coalition and the internationally recognized government, against Houthi rebels who control much of the north. Yemen's separatists signed a power-sharing deal in Riyadh last November that quelled a battle - dubbed a "civil war within a civil war" - for the south that had in August seen them seize control of the second city of Aden.

"Following the surprising announcement of a state of emergency by the Southern Transitional Council, we re-emphasize the need to promptly implement the Riyadh Agreement," the coalition said according to tweets from the official Saudi Press Agency. "The Coalition demands an end to any escalatory actions and calls for return to the Agreement by the participating parties."

The STC, which is backed by key coalition partner the United Arab Emirates, on Sunday declared self-rule in southern Yemen, accusing the government of failing to perform its duties and of "conspiring" against the southern cause. The government has condemned the move and said the separatists - who have long agitated for independence in the south - would be responsible for the "catastrophic and dangerous" outcome.

The breakdown between the one-time allies comes as the coalition has extended a unilateral ceasefire aimed at fending off the coronavirus pandemic - an olive branch rejected by the Houthis. Compounding the country's troubles, at least 21 people were killed in flash flooding this month, with Aden's streets submerged and homes destroyed. The United Nations said Sunday that more than 100,000 people across Yemen have been affected by the torrential rains which had damaged roads, bridges and the electricity grid, and contaminated water supplies.

"Countless families have lost everything," Lise Grande, the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, said in statement. "This tragedy comes on top of the COVID-19 crisis, which comes on top of the pre-famine last year, which came on top of the worst cholera outbreak in modern history," she added. "The solution is clear. The parties to the conflict need to find the courage to stop fighting and start negotiating."

The Riyadh pact on power-sharing for the south had been hailed as averting the complete break-up of the country, but with a lack of implementation, observers have said it is effectively defunct. Cracks



ADEN: Fighters with Yemen's separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) stand guard at the entrance of the ministry of finance's premises in this southern city on Sunday after the council declared self-rule in the south. — AFP

emerged soon after it was signed, with complaints over food shortages in the south, a sharp depreciation of the currency and a lack of funds to pay public sector employees.

"We in (Saudi Arabia) and UAE strongly believe that the internationally backed Riyadh agreement has guaranteed an opportunity for the brotherly Yemeni people to live in peace," Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir said in a tweet. "We

reject any hostilities that will jeopardize the safety and stability of Yemen," he said.

While the government and the STC are technically allies in the long war against the Houthis, the secessionists believe the south should be an independent state - as it was before unification in 1990. On Sunday, Aden residents reported heavy deployments of STC forces in the city and a separatist source told AFP they had set up checkpoints "at all government facilities,

including the central bank and port of Aden".

Hussam Radman, a research fellow for the Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies, said the separatists were already in control of the military and security in Aden, where they have popular support. "But with this declaration, it will become responsible for the administrative side in the provisional capital that has witnessed an unprecedented decline lately" in the provision of services and economic performance, he said. — AFP

## Saudi eliminates death penalty for...

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while he or she is a minor can no longer face execution. Instead, the individual will receive a prison sentence of no longer than 10 years in a juvenile detention facility," HRC President Awwad Alawwad said in the statement.

It was not immediately clear when the decree, which was not immediately carried on state media, would take effect. "This is an important day for Saudi Arabia," Alawwad said. "The decree helps us in establishing a more modern penal code, and demonstrates the kingdom's commitment to following through on key reforms across all sectors of our country."

The announcement came just two days after the kingdom in effect scrapped the punishment of flogging, in a decision by the General Commission for the Supreme Court. The punishment will instead be replaced by prison time or fines. Capital punishment for crimes committed by people under the age of 18 runs contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Saudi Arabia has ratified. The

decree is expected to spare the lives of at least six men who are on death row. They were accused of taking part in anti-government protests during the Arab Spring uprisings while they were under the age of 18.

Saudi Arabia, whose human rights record came under intense international scrutiny after the murder of a prominent Saudi journalist in 2018, is one of the world's biggest executioners after Iran and China. Amnesty International said in its latest annual report. It said the kingdom had executed 184 people in 2019, including at least one person charged with a crime committed as a minor. In April 2019, the Sunni-ruled kingdom beheaded 37 men convicted of terrorism charges. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has launched a series of social and economic reforms aimed at modernizing the conservative kingdom, which has no codified system of law to go with sharia texts.

But "hudud" or harsher punishment under Islamic law such as floggings are still applicable for serious offences, a Saudi official said. Hudud, which means "boundaries" in Arabic, is meted out for such sins as rape, murder or theft. But "hudud" punishments are rarely meted out as many offences must be proved by a confession or be verified by several adult Muslim witnesses, the official added. — Agencies

## North Korea's Kim 'alive and well': Seoul

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is "alive and well", a top security adviser to the South's President Moon Jae-in said, downplaying rumors over Kim's health following his absence from a key anniversary. Conjecture over Kim has grown since his conspicuous no-show at April 15 celebrations for the birthday of his grandfather Kim Il Sung, the North's founder - the most important day in the country's political calendar.

"Our government position is firm," said Moon's special adviser on national security Moon Chung-in, in an interview with CNN on Sunday. "Kim Jong Un is alive and well." The adviser said that Kim had been staying in Wonsan - a resort town in the country's east - since April 13, adding: "No suspicious movements have so far been detected."

Kim has not made a public appearance since presiding over a Workers' Party politburo meeting on April 11, and the following day state media reported on him inspecting fighter jets at an air defence unit.

His absence unleashed a series of unconfirmed media reports over his condition, which officials in Seoul previously poured cold water on. "We have nothing to confirm and no special movement has been detected inside North Korea as of now," the South's presidential office said in a statement last week.

South Korea's unification minister Kim Yeon-chul reiterated Monday that remained the case, adding the "confident" conclusion was drawn from "a complex process of intelligence gathering and assessment". The comments came two years after Kim and Moon's first summit in the Demilitarized Zone that divides the peninsula. Seoul marked this anniversary with a ceremony at the South's northernmost train station, seeking to highlight its commitment to a cross-border railway project. But inter-Korean relations are largely frozen with talks between Washington and Pyongyang at a standstill, and there was no indication of any commemoration in the North.

Daily NK, an online media outlet run mostly by North Korean defectors, has reported Kim was undergoing treatment after a cardiovascular procedure earlier this month. Citing an unidentified source inside the country, it said Kim, who is in his mid-30s, had needed urgent treatment due to heavy smoking, obesity and fatigue. Soon afterwards, CNN reported that Washington was "monitoring intelligence" that Kim was in "grave danger" after undergoing surgery, quoting what it said was an anonymous US official. — AFP

## Some countries to repatriate their...

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embassies in Kuwait, and they initially said they needed more time to repatriate their workers. "But as a result of continuous pressure from our side, they announced they will repatriate them...We are hopeful that through coordination and agreement these workers will be repatriated to their countries," Jarallah said.

The interior ministry has announced a one-month amnesty starting April 1 for an estimated 160,000 expat workers living illegally in the country, but the response has been tepid. Although no official figures have been released and with only four days left of the amnesty, only under 50,000 expats have benefited from the offer, under which no fines will be taken and airfare will be paid by the government.

MP Mohammad Al-Dallal asked the foreign minister about plans to repatriate illegal Indians, Egyptians, Bangladeshis and Filipinos, the largest foreign communities in Kuwait. He demanded dates of the repatriation and expected numbers of those who could leave. The lawmaker also asked for measures taken by the ministry against foreign countries who refused to take their nationals, although the same countries have repatriated large numbers of their nationals from several other countries while excluding Kuwait. Dallal also demanded a list of aid Kuwait had presented to Egypt, India, the Philippines and Bangladesh since 1990. Local media reported yesterday that Sri Lanka has asked Kuwait to delay the repatriation of its nationals living illegally until May 30.

Rapporteur of the National Assembly's health and labor committee MP Saadoun Hammad said yesterday the panel is ready to complete legislation on the population structure and visa traders

within days after receiving the draft laws. He expected that such issues could be finalized at a meeting of the Assembly's office and officials of various parliamentary committees due to take place yesterday. The meeting is expected to decide which issues have the priority to be debated in the Assembly if a session is held.

The public prosecution meanwhile is reportedly investigating around 10 cases involving visa traders, and that dozens of people are detained and being interrogated. An interior ministry colonel and around nine of his partners are involved in the first case. A special judge yesterday extended their detention at the Central Jail pending trial.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem called on the government and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh to reveal the names of any MP who tries to intervene to help visa traders. He said he heard that some people tried to intervene to let visa traders off the hook, affirming that the government must hold visa traders responsible for the problem of marginal labor and refer them to the public prosecution. Visa traders have been involved in human trafficking and bringing people from various countries in exchange for money, granting them a visa or renewing their residency without giving them actual jobs.

Meanwhile, children in China's two most important cities went back to school yesterday after more than three months at home, as coronavirus restrictions eased and governments around the world began charting a path out of the pandemic lockdown. Europe's four worst-affected countries all reported marked drops in their daily death tolls, offering hope that the outbreak may have peaked in some places - at least for now.

But leaders and experts remain divided on how quickly to revive shuttered economies while maintaining a delicate balance between freedom and safety. Italy and New York laid out partial reopening plans, with France and Spain to follow suit this week, while tens of thousands of final-year students returned to school in Shanghai and Beijing

after months of closures.

"I'm glad, it's been too long since I've seen my classmates," 18-year-old Hang Huan said in Shanghai. "I've missed them a lot." Students in Beijing must have their temperatures checked at school gates and show "green" health codes on an app that calculates a person's infection risk, according to the education ministry. Virus numbers in China - where the disease first emerged late last year - have dwindled as the country begins to cautiously lift control measures, although fears remain of a potential resurgence and cases imported from abroad.

Primary schools in Norway also reopened yesterday, along with some businesses in Switzerland, such as hairdressers and florists, while New Zealand prepared to begin its phased exit from lockdown in the evening. "There is no widespread, undetected community transmission in New Zealand," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern declared. "We have won that battle."

In an Oslo suburb, Karine Rabbe brought her seven-year-old daughter Tilde to school in the rain after six weeks of online teaching. "She was ready at six o'clock this morning, three hours early. She was so excited to go back. No alarm clock, we don't need that," Rabbe said.

More than 205,000 coronavirus deaths have been confirmed across the globe - over a quarter in the United States. Italy has the second-highest death toll at 26,000, followed by Spain, France and Britain, all at well over 20,000. But on Sunday Britain's daily tally was the lowest since March 31, while Italy and Spain's were the lowest in a month. France's toll was a drop of more than a third on the previous day's figures.

Those encouraging numbers blew relief through a continent frustrated by restrictions designed to slow the spread of the disease. "We cannot continue beyond this lockdown - we risk damaging the country's socioeconomic fabric too much," said Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte as he unveiled a plan to emerge from Europe's longest shutdown, in place since early March. People will have to wear masks in public and rigorously observe social distancing

measures when the country's current restrictions are eased on May 4.

Britain's leader, Boris Johnson, returned to work yesterday after being hospitalized by COVID-19, one of nearly three million people known to have been infected worldwide. The pandemic has forced more than half of humanity into lockdowns, upending lives and tipping the global economy toward a recession of a severity not seen in decades. Millions of Muslims are marking a Ramadan like no other under restrictions for a month of dusk-to-dawn fasting that in happier times involves large family meals. Saudi Arabia partially lifted its curfew, but said it would maintain a round-the-clock lockdown in the holy city of Makkah.

In Spain, which has had some of the strictest measures in Europe, children ventured outside Sunday for the first time since mid-March, some wearing small masks and gloves. Not every country has enforced social distancing during the pandemic, however. Secretive Turkmenistan, one of the few places not to have reported a single COVID-19 case - despite bordering virus hotspot Iran - held festivities to honor its national horse, with spectators packed into a hippodrome.

While cases and deaths plateau, the world remains in wait-and-see mode as scientists race to develop treatments and, eventually, a vaccine for the virus. Several countries plan to introduce virus tracing apps to alert users if they are near someone who has tested positive - technology already downloaded by nearly two million Australians, despite privacy concerns.

In New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo said a first stage of a reopening would start on May 15 if hospitalizations decrease. But for some conservative-led US states, that timeframe is too long. Rejecting the advice of top disease experts, Georgia has allowed thousands of businesses to resume operations, and Oklahoma will let restaurants and cinemas reopen from May. "People are still going to get it. But Oklahomans are safe and we're ready for a measured reopening," Governor Kevin Stitt told Fox News.