

## SAUDI-BACKED FORCES TAKE ADEN PORT FROM HOUTHIS

**ADEN:** Saudi-backed Yemeni militiamen captured Aden's main port and a neighbouring district yesterday, a big prize in their battle to drive Houthi forces from the southern city, residents and fighters said. Coming a day after the fighters wrested the city's airport and another district from the Houthis, the advance has dealt the biggest setback yet to the Iran-allied Houthis in more than three months of war. Houthi forces withdrew from the port and Mualla district into Tawahi and were slowing the militiamen's advance in another area called Crater, using intense sniper fire from volcanic crags which overlook the seaside metropolis.

Medics said dozens of combatants and civilians had been killed in the last two days of fighting and the main hospital made an urgent appeal for blood donations. Saudi Arabia and other Arab states have been bombing the Houthis and their allies from the air since March 26 in the hope of reinstating Yemen's President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, an ally of Saudi Arabia who fled into exile in Riyadh.

The Houthis say their takeover of the capital Sanaa in September and armed push into Yemen's south and east in March and April are part of a revolution against a corrupt government and hardline Sunni Muslim militants.

Residents said scores of southern fighters were in the streets of Aden fighting on Wednesday as part of the offensive dubbed "Operation Golden Arrow". A Reuters witness saw about 40 armoured vehicles, which the militiamen said were provided by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and were vital for their battle to win back control of the airport. Residents said scores of fighters amassed at the entrance of Mualla in the morning and heavy exchanges of gunfire erupted with Houthi forces, who were pushed over the course of several hours into Tawahi district.

### Regional Struggle

A struggle for power in Yemen exploded into an international crisis in late March when the Houthis entered Aden - the country's main port and second city - and a Saudi-led coalition began its air campaign. Pitting mostly Sunni Muslim fighters in Yemen's south against the Shiite Houthis, the war is tinged with some of the sectarian and regional rivalries defining other wars in the region. The combat looks set to simmer despite a deal reached by world powers and Iran over its disputed nuclear program on Tuesday.

Riyadh, waging a regional struggle for influence with Iran, reacted warily to the deal,

saying it would make the Middle East more dangerous if it conceded too much to Tehran. Ali Al-Ahmedi, spokesman for anti-Houthi forces in the city, said earlier on Wednesday that they would build on their capture on Tuesday of Khormaksar - an area that acts as a bridge between the mainland and a peninsula where much of the city lies. "The southern resistance in coordination with reconstituted army units and coalition aircraft are moving into position to lift the siege on the area of Crater, Mualla and Tawahi and to storm and seize them back," Ahmedi said. "The clearing of these areas is a matter of hours," he said.

Pro-Houthi media said the air campaign continued unabated yesterday, killing 13 people in bombings throughout the country. Following Tuesday's advance, residents of cities across Yemen's south set off fireworks, honked horns and chanted slogans promising a swift victory over the Houthis. The country's proximity to Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, makes the instability a cause for international concern. Yemen has also been in the frontline of the United States' global war against Islamist militants but American personnel pulled out of the country as the internal conflict worsened.

The fighting in Aden has taken a dreadful



**ADEN:** Fighters against Houthis gather in front of the airport in this port city yesterday. —AP

humanitarian toll, with flood, medicine and other necessities in short supply. A UN-brokered ceasefire to allow delivery of aid collapsed within days. More than 3,000 people have been killed and more than one million displaced since the conflict broke out. — Reuters

## PALESTINIAN FAMILY MOURNS THIRD SON KILLED BY ISRAEL TEEN 'EXECUTED' BY ISRAELI COLONEL



**QALANDIA:** Members of the Palestinian Kasba family sit under portraits of Samer (left) and Yasser, who were respectively killed by Israeli security forces in 2002 and 2001, at their home in this refugee camp near the West Bank city of Ramallah on July 13, 2015. — AFP

**QALANDIA REFUGEE CAMP:** For more than a decade, the Kasba family has displayed a banner depicting brothers Samer and Yasser, shot dead by Israeli troops during the second Palestinian intifada aged 15 and 11. Ten days ago, Fatima and Sami Kasba added the picture of a new "martyr" - 17-year-old Mohammed, their third son to die by Israeli army gunfire. The incident that led to his death has sparked controversy in Israel and anger among Palestinians, with video footage made public challenging the army's initial version of events.

An officer shot Kasba dead on July 3 after he threw stones at an army vehicle close to the Qalandia checkpoint in the occupied West Bank, on the third Friday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The army, which has opened an investigation, said after the shooting that Kasba posed an "imminent danger" to soldiers. The Israeli NGO that released the video says an officer shot him after he ran away from troops and left him to die without medical treatment. There are conflicting accounts, but for the family the result is still the same - a third dead son.

"Every day there is a martyr, not just in our family, but for all Palestinian families," Sami Kasba said. "Someone is hurt, someone is killed, someone is arrested. This is what happens, that's the occupation," he told AFP, recalling the moment he found out his son had been shot. "The doctor called me and told me: 'Your son has been killed'."

### 'Why Did They Kill Him?'

Mohammed's brothers died when he was just a toddler. Yasser was killed by army gunfire in 2001, a year after the second intifada (uprising) broke out, during fierce clashes at Qalandia checkpoint. He was only 11. Samer, 15, died a year later from a bullet fired by a soldier in Ramallah near the Palestinian presidential compound. "When his brother (Yasser) died, he (Mohammed) was only three-and-a-half years old," said Fatima. "Even if Mohammed was really a terrorist like they say, then why didn't they arrest him or shoot him in the legs? Why did they kill him?" The army said in a statement that Kasba was "hurling rocks at close range and, in response to the imminent danger, the forces fired towards the suspect". But Israeli rights group B'Tselem challenged the military's version, drawing on CCTV footage, witness testimony and forensic evidence to conclude that he was shot in the back at close range after throwing a stone then running away from troops.

The CCTV footage apparently of the lead-up to the shooting shows a person running towards a military jeep and throwing a stone at its windshield. The vehicle stops, two men emerge and run out of frame in pursuit of the stone thrower. Colonel Israel Shomer shot Kasba twice in the back and once in the side of the face, B'Tselem said, calling the killing "unjustified and unlawful". It insisted that the military's version of events was flawed, notably the claim that he "posed a mortal threat to the soldiers at the time of the shooting".

### 'An Execution'

"Military open-fire regulations permit shooting at the legs of a suspect in order to facilitate his arrest. They do not permit killing him by firing three shots at his upper body," B'Tselem said. Colonel Shomer quickly received the support of senior Israeli army officials and the approval of cabinet ministers, who said he acted proportionally and in self-defence. But for Fatima Kasba, her son's killing was "an execution". After the B'Tselem report, the army refused to comment beyond stating that the incident was being examined by military police.

Army legal adviser Lieutenant Colonel Sarit Shemer conceded to AFP that in the occupied Palestinian territories "there are mistakes". "This is why the policy is that every Palestinian who dies, there is an interrogation (investigation) to check if there was a mistake," she said, but refused to comment on the specific case of Kasba. Such investigations rarely result in soldiers who have killed Palestinians being held accountable, B'Tselem says. Clashes between soldiers and Palestinian youths are a regular occurrence in the West Bank, with 14 Palestinians killed by the army so far in 2015 and more than 960 injured, according to the United Nations. There have also been several gun and knife attacks by Palestinians on Israelis since the start of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Local activists say 52 Palestinians have been killed at Qalandia since the first intifada began in 1987. — AFP

## ITS GLORY FADED, DECAYING ROME 'NEEDS MIRACLE'

**ROME:** Dirty and disorganised, Rome is once more in decline. City hall is paralysed by allegations of Mafia infiltration, basic services are in tatters, the main airport is partially closed, and wild cat strikes have frayed an already rosy public transport network. For generations, the Italian capital has rested on past glories rather than built on them. The years of neglect, corruption and bureaucratic bungling have taken a fierce toll, reflecting a wider malaise that afflicts Italy as a whole.

"Rome is on the verge of collapse," Giancarlo Cremonesi, the president of the Rome Chamber of Commerce, told Reuters. "It is unacceptable that a major city which calls itself developed can find itself in such a state of decay." One of the 10 biggest cities in Europe, with a population of 2.8 million, Rome boasts some of the most spectacular squares, fountains, museums and churches in the world. But like its ancient monuments, its problems are plain for all to see, starting at the main international gateway into the city, Fiumicino, Italy's largest airport, which is struggling to bounce back from a fire that broke out on May 7.

Although the blaze was confined to just part of one of its three terminals, more than two months later, 40 percent of all flights still have to be cancelled each day because of a dispute over the danger posed by contaminants unleashed by the flames. Magistrates sealed the site for weeks to gauge the air quality, while various public bodies argued over how airports should be classified when it came to measuring pollution. "In this case you see many things that are typically Italian. For example the role of the magistrates," Vito Riggio, the head of the Italian Civil Aviation Authority, told Reuters.

All the fire-damaged material should have been immediately removed to speed up the rebuilding, he said. "Instead the place was officially sealed. Nobody could enter and the source of the (contaminants) continued to pollute. It is not hard to grasp, but no one said anything, not even the government. I don't believe other countries are like that." The prosecutors' office dealing with the case said the sequestration order was lifted on June 24 and there was no legal impediment preventing a return to normal operations, although its investigation continues. No date has been set for a full reopening and the smell of burnt plas-

tics lingers in the departures halls.

### Mafia Mess

A much larger investigation has engulfed Rome city hall, housed in a Renaissance palace designed by Michelangelo and gazes out across the ruins of the ancient Roman forum. The "Mafia Capital" probe, which hit the headlines last December following a first wave of arrests, has rattled Italy, suggesting that organised crime was flourishing far beyond its traditional southern bastions. Buried under A14 billion (\$15.5 billion) of debt, Rome was saved from bankruptcy last year by emergency state funds. The mafia scandal has helped explain the financial mess, with wiretap transcripts suggesting mobsters had siphoned off millions of euros from a string of lucrative contracts, covering everything from recycling paper to sheltering immigrants.

Italy is struggling to shake off its worst post-World War Two slump, a three-year slide that has driven unemployment up to 1970s levels. While the real economy plunged, the illegal one, such as that unmasked in Rome, has spread and thrived. Much of the alleged corruption dates back to the time of the previous mayor, Gianni Alemanno, a former right-wing minister who is under investigation. He denies any wrongdoing. However, magistrates say the mobsters' tentacles have also delved into the current administration, run by Ignazio Marino, a liver transplant surgeon and an ally of centre-left Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi.

While Marino is not implicated, a number of his staff have come under scrutiny, leading to a stream of resignations. A city source says an official review has recommended that around 30 major public contracts be annulled and re-offered for tender. In a letter to Corriere della Sera newspaper, published on Monday, mayor Marino conceded that much of Rome's public administration was "substantially rotten". But, in the same way that Renzi was trying to change Italy with a battery of reforms, so he was looking to shake up sclerotic Rome, he said. "There is strenuous resistance to any type of change (here) ... but I will never give up," he wrote.

With grass running wild by the kerbsides and graffiti spreading like garish vines along buildings, Marino this month put together a 500-strong taskforce of employees and

volunteers to help clean up Rome's neglected green spaces. "Rome is falling apart at the seams," the city's main newspaper, Il Messaggero, lamented on its frontpage last week. On an inside page it reported a rat infestation in the centre. A 2013 European Commission survey placed Rome last out of 28 EU capitals in the rankings for the efficiency of city services. Despite its fine cuisine and sunny climate, Rome came second to last for quality-of-life satisfaction. Athens was bottom. Rome also came last when it came to satisfaction with public transport. This summer's chaos will not have improved sentiment.

### Rubbish and Pickpockets

Metro drivers have staged a series of go-slows to protest at a new norm requiring them to clock into work. The mayor says this is needed to boost productivity, arguing that while drivers in Milan work 1,200 hours a year, in Rome they put in 730 hours. The dispute has led to delays of up to 25 minutes between trains, leaving stranded passengers sweltering in the hottest July for more than a decade and fuelling anger on Internet protest sites like 'Rome Sucks' (Roma Fa Schifo).

Rome is the most popular tourist destination in the country, attracting some 10.61 million foreign visitors in 2014. This was down from more than 11 million the year before and locals say the poor state of infrastructure is hurting. "All my clients say Rome is beautiful, but all of them, without fail, complain about the services," said Marcello Lazazzera, who owns a small bed and breakfast, Domus Cornelia. "The metros never arrive on time, the stations are full of pickpockets, the streets are full of rubbish. Instead of getting better, the situation is getting worse."

It could get worse still in 2016, when 25 million pilgrims are expected to flow into the Eternal City in response to Pope Francis's call for an extraordinary Holy Year - one of the Roman Catholic Church's most important events. The mayor's office has yet to layout its strategy for coping with the influx, or earmark any funds to cover the cost. "The prayers of the pope will not be enough. Here we need a miracle from the lord above for Rome to emerge in good shape," said Chamber of Commerce chief, Cremonesi — Reuters

# EID MUBARAK

FROM THE  
CROWNE PLAZA FAMILY

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