



Pompeo restricts gay flags at US embassies

Indian town on edge after murder of two-year-old girl

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SANAA: A Yemeni boy holds a rifle as Muslim worshippers pray at a square in the capital Sanaa. —AFP

Saudi intercepts attack Houthi drones

Iran-aligned militia steps up attacks on the kingdom

RIYADH: Saudi air defense forces have intercepted two drones launched by Houthi rebels from neighboring Yemen, state media reported, as the Iran-aligned militia steps up attacks on the kingdom. The drones targeted Khamis Mushait in the kingdom's south and caused no damage or casualties, the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen said in a brief statement released yesterday by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

The rebels said earlier via their news outlet Al-Masirah that they had targeted the King Khalid airbase near Khamis Mushait. The attacks come as SPA reported the coalition was intensifying air raids on Houthi positions in the northern Yemeni province of Hajjah. The rebels have stepped up drone and missile attacks on the kingdom amid tensions between Shiite power Iran and the United States, Saudi Arabia's main ally.

Last month, the Saudi air force shot down a bomb-laden drone deployed by Houthi rebels that targeted Jizan airport, close to the southern border with Yemen, the coalition said. The airport is used by thousands of civilians every day, but the coalition reported no casualties and warned the rebels of a strong response.

The Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen in March 2015 to push back an advance by the Houthi rebels, who still hold the capital Sanaa, and to restore to power President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi. Since then, the conflict has killed tens of thousands of people, many of them civilians, relief agencies say. It has triggered what the UN describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with 24.1 million more than two-thirds of the population in need of aid.

Embattled Yemen envoy
Meanwhile, the UN Security Council on Monday expressed full support for the UN envoy for Yemen after he came under sharp criticism from Yemen's president. The dispute threatened to derail fragile efforts to implement a ceasefire truce agreed in December in Sweden. In a statement, council members

"underlined their full support" for envoy Martin Griffiths and "called on the parties to engage constructively and continuously" with him.

The statement followed talks in Riyadh between UN political chief Rosemary DiCarlo with the Saudi foreign minister and with President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, the Saudi-backed leader of Yemen, to try to defuse the row. Saudi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Assaf and Abdel Aziz Hamad Aluwaisheg from the Gulf Cooperation Council "both expressed their support for the work of the United Nations in Yemen and for the efforts of the special envoy," said UN spokesperson Eri Kaneko.

DiCarlo, the UN undersecretary general for political affairs, also held "productive" talks with Hadi, a UN statement said, without providing details. The

UN Security Council is due to discuss Yemen on June 17. Hadi has accused Griffiths of siding with the Houthi rebels, telling UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a letter last month that he "can no longer accept these offenses" by the envoy. The president has taken issue with Griffiths over the rebel handover last month of ports to a "coast guard" that the government says is in fact rebel fighters in different uniforms. Successive UN envoys to Yemen have grappled with disagreements from both sides in their efforts to end the devastating war.

British diplomat Griffiths was appointed in February 2018, replacing Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed of Mauritania after the Houthis broke off ties with him. His predecessor, Jamal Benomar, quit in 2015 after a Saudi-led military coalition intervened in Yemen to push back the Iran-aligned Houthis, who continue to hold the capital, Sanaa. The conflict, which has killed tens of thousands of people, has had a devastating toll on civilians and triggered the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the United Nations. — Agencies



UN council backs embattled Yemen envoy

From hiding, former envoy accuses pope of 'blatantly lying'

WASHINGTON: A longtime Vatican dissident broke months of silence Monday to accuse Pope Francis of "blatantly lying" in denying knowledge of the sexual abuse allegations against a now-defrocked American cardinal. Retired Italian Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano told the Washington Post in a series of emails that Francis and his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI must come clean about what they knew of ex-Washington archbishop Theodore McCarrick's alleged decades of abuse.

Vigano said it is "immensely sad" that Francis was "blatantly lying to the whole world to cover up his wicked deeds" in allegedly protecting McCarrick. Vigano reiterated his earlier claims that he warned Francis in 2013 about McCarrick. "How could anybody, especially a pope, forget this?" he said, according to the Post.

Vigano, an iconoclastic Catholic conservative who has rocked the Vatican for years with accusations of corruption and abuse at the highest levels, disappeared last August after penning a sweeping 11-page attack on Francis and Benedict over McCarrick. In that letter, he said he warned church leaders in



VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis walks as he celebrates the Pentecost mass in Saint Peter's square at the Vatican. — AFP

2006 about allegations that McCarrick engaged in inappropriate sexual conduct and abuse with male seminarians over a period of decades. The allegations only became public in 2018.

He also wrote of deeply embedded "homosexual networks" that "are strangling the entire church." Vigano, who is backed by an ultra-conservative US church faction, called for the pope to resign over his alleged silence. Francis has rejected the criticism, denying he knew of the powerful McCarrick's transgressions. But the pope has become more vocal in

calling for the church to be honest and open about the priest sex scandals.

Vigano, 78, whose 2012 accusations of corruption in the Vatican sparked the "Vatileaks" scandal, would not divulge to the Post where he is staying since he retired from the church. He said his life "is quite normal," without providing any details. But he defended his August letter. "My silence would make me complicit with the abusers, and lead to yet more victims," he said. "The results of an honest investigation would be disastrous for the current papacy," he added. — AFP

Light exposure during sleep linked to weight gain in women: Study

WASHINGTON: Women who sleep with the television or a light on in the bedroom may be more likely to gain weight, according to a new study published Monday. The research, which was published in the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) Internal Medicine, relied on a survey of almost 44,000 US women, with a follow-up five years later.

The women were classified according to their level of exposure to artificial light at night (ALAN) which came from a variety of sources, from small nightlights or clock radios to light shining in from the street to televisions or room lights. One of the key findings was that women who slept with a television or a light on in the room were 17 percent more likely to have gained five kilograms (11 pounds) or more during the study period.

The correlation remained strong even after controlling for factors like sleep duration, diet, and physical activity. Although the authors cautioned they could not definitely draw a causal link, they said their findings added to a growing body of evidence that supports sleeping in a dark room. "Public health strategies to decrease obesity might consider interventions aimed at reducing ALAN while sleeping," wrote Dale Sandler and Yong-Moon Mark Park of the National Institute of Environmental

Health Sciences in North Carolina and coauthors. They suggested that the light may be suppressing production of melatonin, thereby disrupting circadian rhythm and eating patterns.

Other possibilities were that light acts as a "chronic stressor" disrupting the release of stress hormones such as glucocorticoids that play a part in regulating food intake, or that there may be another mechanism at work that affects metabolism directly. The authors acknowledged several limitations including that the data was self-reported and they did not know how intense various light sources were. High light exposure may also "reflect a constellation of measures of socioeconomic disadvantage and unhealthy lifestyle behaviors, all of which could contribute to weight gain and obesity."

Commenting on the paper, Malcolm von Schantz, a professor of Chronobiology at the University of Surrey in Britain said: "What is novel with this paper is that it is a longitudinal study comparing the weight of the same individuals at baseline and more than five years later." He added: "These new findings won't change the advice to maintain good sleep hygiene, and avoid light and electronic distractions in the bedroom, but they add further strength to the case for this advice." — AFP