

Oil facility attacks target global supplies, Saudi says

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude exporter, said yesterday that attacks on two of its tankers and a major pipeline targeted the security of global oil supplies. Drone attacks claimed by Iran-aligned Yemeni rebels shut down one of the kingdom's main oil pipelines on Tuesday, further ratcheting up Gulf tensions after the mysterious sabotage of four ships, two of them Saudi tankers, on Sunday.

"The cabinet affirms that these acts of terrorism and sabotage ... do not only target the kingdom but also the security of world oil supplies and the global economy," it said after a meeting chaired by King Salman in the Red Sea city of Jeddah on Tuesday evening. Tuesday's drone strikes hit two pumping stations on the kingdom's east-west pipeline, which can carry five million barrels of crude per day and provides a strategic alternative route for Saudi exports if the shipping lane from the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz is closed.

Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed responsibility for the strikes and said they were a response to "crimes" committed by Saudi Arabia and its allies during more than four years of war in support of the government. The Saudi tankers Al-Marzoqah and Amjad suffered "significant damage" in as yet unexplained sabotage attacks in the Sea of Oman off the United Arab Emirates on Sunday, Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said, but there were no casualties or any oil spill.

An Emirati official said three Western countries—the US, France and Norway—would be part of an investigation into the ship attacks along with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The ships—which also included the Norwegian tanker Andrea Victory and an Emirati vessel—were docked in the sea off the coast of the emirate of Fujairah, the official added. Neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE, both close allies of the United States, have yet given details on the exact nature of those attacks, which come amid heightened tensions between Washington and Riyadh's arch-rival Tehran.

OPEC giant Saudi Arabia currently pumps around 10 million barrels per day (bpd) of which around seven million bpd are exported. At present, most Saudi exports are loaded onto tankers at terminals on the kingdom's Gulf

coast and must pass through the Strait of Hormuz. The Saudi cabinet called for "confronting terrorist entities which carry out such sabotage acts, including the Iran-backed Houthi militias in Yemen".

Iranian tools

Iran has repeatedly threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz in case of a military confrontation with the United States. The US has already strengthened its military presence in the region, including deploying a number of strategic B-52 bombers in response to alleged Iranian threats.

Iran and the US have engaged in a war of words in recent weeks since Tehran began to roll back commitments set out in a landmark 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. US President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the deal last year and has unilaterally reimposed tough sanctions on Iran. The International Energy Agency said yesterday that Iranian crude oil output fell in April to 2.6 million barrels per day, the lowest level in over five years, and could tumble in May to levels not seen since the 1980s war with Iraq.

Shiite-majority Iran rivals Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia for influence in the Middle East, with the two taking opposing sides in multiple regional conflicts including in Yemen. A military coalition, led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, intervened in the Yemen war in March 2015 to bolster the efforts of the internationally recognized government against the Houthi rebels. The conflict has killed tens of thousands and left up to 14 million Yemenis at risk of starvation according to UN agencies.

The head of the rebels' Supreme Revolutionary Committee, Mohammed Al-Houthi, said on Twitter yesterday the "Yemeni people want the aggression to stop... and the embargo to be lifted". The Yemeni government condemned the Houthi-claimed attacks, saying the insurgents were tools of the Iranian regime. "The Houthis work for the interest of the Iranian camp," the government said in a statement carried by the state news agency Saba. "The targeting of the oil (pumping stations) in Saudi Arabia... is further proof that the Houthi militia does not believe in peace." — AFP

Hashem criticized insurance companies describing them as "sharks" - claiming the new law favors the companies at the expense of the insured. MP Abdullah Al-Kundari criticized the law saying it does not provide sufficient protection for those insured and encourages monopoly for some companies besides that it does not encourage competition.

MP Saadoun Hammad said that the law does not require foreign companies to comply with the capital requirements as the Kuwaiti insurance companies and called for imposing the law on foreign companies wishing to open in Kuwait. At the end of the debate, 34 lawmakers voted for the law against 13. The second reading will be debated following the introduction of several changes.

If the greatest of Allah's creations could not take decisions without turning to Allah then what about the rest of mankind? We definitely need to! This Ramadan is a month of supplication and the month of seeking forgiveness for all the wrong decisions which led to wrong actions and sometimes sins.

Dua for istikhara (decision making)

O Allah, I seek Your guidance [in making a choice] by virtue of Your knowledge, and I seek ability by virtue of Your power, and I ask You of Your great bounty. You have power, I have none. And You know, I know not. You are the Knower of hidden things.

O Allah, if in Your knowledge, this matter (then it should be mentioned by name) is good for me both in this world and in the Hereafter (or: in my religion, my livelihood, and my affairs), then ordain it for me, make it easy for me, and bless it for me. And if in Your knowledge it is bad for me and for my religion, my livelihood and my affairs (or: for me both in this world and the next), then turn me away from it, [and turn it away from me], and ordain for me the good wherever it may be and make me pleased with it." (In Bukhaari, Saheeh 1166).

Courtesy of the TIES Center: the TIES Center aims at empower Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and inter-faith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, you can contact TIES at Tel: 25231015/6; Hotline: 94079777; e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.

military because there is not going to be any war." Pompeo told Russian officials in the Black Sea resort of Sochi that the US "fundamentally do not seek a war with Iran." Playing down the statements by Washington's top diplomat, Kremlin spokesman Peskov told reporters: "There were no assurances from Pompeo," and "there is an obvious situation which unfortunately tends to escalate further."

Germany and the Netherlands said yesterday they were halting their training of soldiers in Iraq as tensions rise between neighboring Iran and the United States. "The German army has suspended the training," defense ministry spokesman Jens Flosdorff said, adding that there was "generally heightened alert, awareness" for soldiers currently operating in the region.

Flosdorff said training may resume in the next few days and that there was "no concrete threat" at the moment. Germany has about 160 soldiers deployed in Iraq, including 60 in Taji, just to the north of Baghdad, and 100 in Erbil, in Kurdish-controlled northern territory. Separately, the Netherlands' defense ministry said it was also suspending its training mission in Iraq due to "threats", the Dutch ANP news agency said.

More than 50 Dutch soldiers are training Kurdish troops in Erbil in the context of the international coalition against the Islamic State group, ANP said. The defense ministry website says the Netherlands also supplies two military advisers and four civilian experts to the NATO "capacity-building mission" in Baghdad. Lithuania, which has eight soldiers in Iraq, said it did not plan to halt its mission. — Agencies



AT SEA: In this file photo, the Spanish Navy frigate ESPS Mendez Nunez (center front), the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (left), the aircraft carrier USS John C Stennis (right), the French Marine Nationale frigate FS Languedoc and the guided-missile cruiser USS Leyte Gulf sail in formation in the Mediterranean Sea.— AFP

Facebook curbs 'livestreaming'

PARIS: Facebook announced yesterday it would tighten access to its livestreaming feature as New Zealand's premier Jacinda Ardern and French leader Emmanuel Macron prepared to launch the global "Christchurch Call" initiative to tackle the spread of extremism online. Facebook boss Mark Zuckerberg has been under intense pressure since March when a white supremacist gunman used Facebook Live to stream his rampage at two mosques in the New Zealand city of Christchurch, which left 51 people dead.

The California-based platform said it would ban Facebook Live users who shared extremist content and seek to reinforce its own internal controls to stop

the spread of offensive videos. "Following the horrific recent terrorist attacks in New Zealand, we've been reviewing what more we can do to limit our services from being used to cause harm or spread hate," Facebook vice-president of integrity Guy Rosen said in a statement.

Ardern and Macron will later issue the Christchurch Call to fight the spread of hateful and terror-related content along with leaders from Britain, Canada, Norway, Jordan and Senegal, who will also be in Paris. The largely symbolic initiative is intended to keep up the pressure on social media companies who face growing calls from politicians across the world to stop their platforms being abused. "It's an action plan, it's the start of something," Ardern told CNN in an interview yesterday. Many countries have already tightened legislation to introduce penalties for companies that fail to take down offensive content once it is flagged by authorities. — AFP

MPs approve insurance and...

Continued from Page 1

supervision of the Central Bank and opposed the proposal to establish an independent body for the insurance sector.

Ashour said the new law increases the capital of insurance companies to between KD 5 and 15 million which will impact existing companies. MP Safa Al-

Decisions: Time to reflect...

Continued from Page 1

We seek forgiveness for the bad decisions we took. In this fast-paced world sometimes we do not consider enough. What I am about to do - is it acceptable in front of Allah? Am I compromising my deen by doing something? Am I trying to justify the decision by saying that it's not all bad? When we seek to reflect in the quietness of our own thoughts often as we grow older and wiser...we seek Allah's mercy and guidance to help us take the right decisions.

We pray Istikhara now whereas in the past we didn't. We consult (Shura'aa) now when didn't used to. We beseech the Almighty to give us what He knows is best (Khair). Yes, we know we have not taken some decisions in the right way in our lives but we also know that Allah can open our hearts with His light and mercy. We are weak and helpless without Him.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) came to teach the Book of Allah - the Quran - and Wisdom. This is mentioned in several places in the Quran (Al-Baqarah 2:129, 151, and 231; Al Imran 3:164; An-Nisaa' 4:113; Al-Ahzab 33:34; Al-Jumu'ah 62:2). The Quran does not contain the rules only, but also the wisdom. It gives us practical rules and guidelines for making ethical decisions.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a master decision-maker. However, for all his decisions he turned to Allah...

US orders 'non-emergency'...

Continued from Page 1

National Security Advisor John Bolton warned that Washington would respond with "unrelenting force" to any attack by Tehran, including by its regional allies. On Sunday, mysterious attacks by unknown assailants against four ships in the region, including two from Saudi Arabia, sent war talk up another notch.

Neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE, both close allies of the United States, have given details on the exact nature of those attacks. The Pentagon said last week it was sending several massive, nuclear-capable B-52 bombers to the region in response to indications of an alleged plan by "Iranian and Iranian proxy forces" to attack US forces.

But a British general said Tuesday there had been "no increased threat from Iranian-backed forces in Iraq and Syria." The comments by Major General Chris Ghika, a British spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve, the coalition fighting the Islamic State group, drew a sharp retort from US Central Command. Both Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Pompeo have this week played down fears that their countries were headed for conflict.

Khamenei told Iranian officials the standoff "is not

Palestinians mark 'Nakba'...

Continued from Page 1

several places along the Gaza Strip fence. "The rioters are setting tyres on fire and hurling rocks. A number of explosive devices have been hurled within the Gaza Strip, as well, and a number of attempts have been made to approach the security fence. IDF troops are responding with riot dispersal means."

Yesterday's rallies were called to mark Nakba Day, what Palestinians term the catastrophe that befell them at Israel's creation in 1948, when hundreds of thousands fled or were expelled from lands in what is now Israel. "Our people rise today to announce their rejection to this crime and to assert their right in Palestine, all of Palestine," Islamic Jihad leader Khader Habib said at one demonstration, referring to Israel and the territories it captured in the 1967 Middle East war.

"Palestine is ours, the sea is ours, the sky is ours and the land is ours, and those strangers must be removed," he said. Another protester, Jamila Mahmoud, 50, said

Attacks expose weaknesses...

Continued from Page 1

The US Navy's Bahrain-based Fifth Fleet is tasked with protecting commercial ships in the area. The British and French navies maintain a presence, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE have high-tech naval capacities. But Gulf Arab states are struggling to build an effective system to defend against drones and low-tech sabotage attempts, Eurasia Group said in a note. "There are hundreds, if not a few thousand, small boats moving in that area every day. Many of these vessels are smugglers operating between Iran and the Gulf states," said Norman Roule, a retired senior US intelligence officer.

"This will make it difficult, but not impossible, to trace any small vessels which may have been involved in the operation." Port security in Dubai, the region's trading hub, was unchanged, a spokeswoman for the government media office said. But the UAE may still face pressure to increase patrols. "The UAE needs to send a signal to reassure the shipping industry that Fujairah is safe and this is not going to happen again," a Western diplomat in Abu Dhabi said.

More than three days on, little information has been provided on where the ships were when they were attacked, what sort of weapon was used, and who did it. Navigational data indicated at least some of the ships may have been within nine nautical miles of the shore, well within UAE territorial sea. Saudi Arabia's energy minister has said at least one of them was further out, in the UAE's exclusive economic zone where international law largely applies.

Reuters and other journalists taken on a tour off the Fujairah coast saw a hole at the waterline in the hull of a Norwegian ship, with the metal torn inwards. A Saudi tanker they viewed showed no sign of major damage. Maritime security sources told Reuters that images suggest the damage was likely caused by

her family had originally come from Asqan, now the Israeli city of Ashkelon, near Gaza. "If we don't return, maybe our children and grandchildren will do, one day we will get our rights back," Mahmoud said at the border protest site. Palestinians also held rallies in the occupied West Bank but no major clashes with Israeli forces were immediately reported.

This year's Nakba protests were preceded by a surge in deadly cross-border fighting between Gaza militants and Israel which ended in a ceasefire on May 6. Israeli troops have killed more than 200 Palestinians and wounded thousands in regular border protests since March 2018, according to human rights groups. UN investigators have said the Israeli military might be guilty of war crimes for using excessive force. Israel has said it is defending its border against attacks against its troops and infiltration attempts by gunmen.

Israel has rejected a Palestinian right of return as a threat to maintaining a Jewish majority in a country it describes as the nation-state of the Jewish people. Frustration is growing among Palestinians as hopes fade for a two-state solution to the conflict which would give them an independent country. President Donald Trump's announcement in December 2017 of US recognition of disputed Jerusalem as Israel's capital also fuelled Palestinian anger. — Reuters

limpet mines attached close to the waterline with less than 4 kg of explosives.

One source said the level of coordination and use of mines were likely to rule out militant groups such as Al-Qaeda. "It's not those guys seeking publicity, it's someone who wants to make a point without necessarily pointing in any given direction," said Jeremy Binnie, Middle East and Africa editor for Jane's Defense Weekly. "It's below the threshold (for war)."

Jean-Marc Rickli, head of global risk and resilience at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, said the attacks could be a message that Iran has means to disrupt traffic. Saudi state oil company Aramco said output and exports were not disrupted by the attack on the pumping stations, but it temporarily shut the East-West pipeline to evaluate its condition.

Both attacks targeted alternative routes for oil to bypass Hormuz. Fujairah port is a terminal of the crude pipeline from Abu Dhabi's Habsan oilfields. The Saudi East-West line takes crude from eastern fields to Yanbu port, north of Bab Al-Mandeb. The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards said last year that Tehran would block exports through the waterway if countries heeded US calls to stop buying Iranian oil.

US officials have said closing the Strait would be crossing a "red line" and pledged action to reopen it. The waterway separates Iran and Oman, linking the Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea. The Strait is 21 miles wide at its narrowest point, but the shipping lane is just two miles wide in either direction. Even during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, when the two sides sought to disrupt oil exports by attacking ships in what was known as the Tanker War, shipping did not stop although insurance rates spiked.

JBC Energy Research Centre said Fujairah would continue to be seen as a reliable bunkering hub, especially with a US strike group arriving in the region and navies from Britain, France and China available to assist. "No matter who is behind this," Rickli said, "it contributes to heightened tensions in the region and leads to a situation where an incident could trigger a larger response." — Reuters