

International

UN urges Yemen warring parties to 'de-escalate violence'

'There is no sustainable military solution to the conflict'

DUBAI: The United Nations yesterday urged Yemen's warring sides to "de-escalate violence", a day after one of its agencies warned the conflict will have claimed 377,000 lives by year's end. The Yemeni government, supported by a Saudi-led military coalition, and the Iran-allied Houthi rebels have been embroiled in conflict since 2014, resulting in what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

"There is no sustainable military solution to the conflict in Yemen," said UN special envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg in a statement. "All warring parties need to de-escalate violence and prioritize the interests of civilians over scoring military wins," he said after a regional tour which included visits to Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt. A UN Development Program report said Tuesday that 377,000 people will have died by the end of 2021 through direct and indirect impacts of the Yemen war.

Nearly 60 percent of deaths will have been caused by consequences such as lack of safe water,

hunger and disease, it said, suggesting that fighting will have directly killed over 150,000 people. Projecting the impact of continued fighting into the future, the UNDP warned that 1.3 million people in total will have died by 2030. Grundberg also said that recent developments, including the ongoing battle for the strategic city of Marib, had resulted in ripple effects across Yemen, which has long been the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country.

In recent weeks, fighting has escalated on several fronts, mostly near Marib city, the internationally-recognized government's last major stronghold in Yemen's oil-rich north. Thousands of rebels and pro-government fighters have been killed in the battle for the city. The Houthis this month also seized a large area south of

Hodeida, a Red Sea port city where the warring sides agreed on a ceasefire in 2018, after loyalist forces withdrew. Yemen's grinding conflict has displaced millions, and more than 80 percent of the population of around 30 million require humanitarian assistance. —AFP



Yemen's grinding conflict has displaced millions



SANAA: Yemenis inspect a damaged factory following reported bombardment by the coalition forces in the Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa on November 23, 2021. —AFP

Iran executes man convicted as minor

TEHRAN: Iran executed a man yesterday who was arrested for murder at the age of 17, the judiciary said, despite appeals to spare his life by rights groups including Amnesty International. Arman Abdolali was executed at dawn in Rajai Shahr prison near Tehran, in line with the "qesas" eye-for-an-eye style justice demanded by the victim's family, said the judiciary's Mizan Online website.

Amnesty International had appealed on October 11 for Iran to halt the execution of the 25-year-old who was arrested in 2014 and later convicted of murdering his girlfriend, Ghazaleh Shakour. The London-based rights group said he had been sentenced to death twice but that the execution was stopped both times following international outcry.

It said Abdolali was first sentenced to death in December 2015 after "a grossly unfair trial" by a court that "relied on torture-tainted 'confessions'" following Shakour's disappearance the year before. It said Abdolali was sentenced to death again in 2020 in a retrial, where the court ruled the teenager was responsible in the absence of evidence to the contrary, Amnesty reported. "This young man was not a criminal," Hadi Sadeghi, a judicial official, was quoted as saying by Iranian media in October.

"Like the victim, he came from a respectable family. In prison, Arman continued his studies to obtain a master's degree in education," he said. "The two families knew each other and the victim and the accused intended to get married," Sadeghi added. The body of Shakour, who was 19 at the time of her disappearance, was never found. According to Mizan Online, the victim's mother had said she would forgive Abdolali if he revealed the location of her body.

UN human rights experts also appealed to Iran to halt the execution. "International human rights law unequivocally forbids imposition of the death sentence on anyone under 18 years of age," said the Geneva-based UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Iran executed at least 246 people last year, retaining its place as the most prolific user of capital punishment in the region and the second worldwide after China, according to Amnesty. Iran has often faced international criticism for executing people convicted of crimes committed when they were minors, in violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that has been ratified by the Islamic republic. In July, a senior Iranian official told AFP that the Islamic republic was doing its best to bring down to zero the number of executions of child offenders. —AFP

Breastfeeding British MP given baby ban

LONDON: A British MP called for reforms yesterday after a parliamentary official rebuked her for bringing her sleeping baby to a debate. Stella Creasy, an opposition lawmaker who has campaigned for MPs to be offered maternity leave, received a warning after speaking at a debate on Tuesday while holding her three-month-old son Pip.

The Labour MP for the London constituency of Walthamstow tweeted an email from an official at the House of Commons citing a rule that "you should not take your seat in the Chamber when accompanied by a child". Creasy and other MPs questioned the ruling, which appeared to stand at odds with previous directives on the practice.

Alex Davies-Jones, a Labour MP, tweeted that when elected in 2019 she was breastfeeding and the Speaker of the House of Commons Lindsay Hoyle assured her she would be able to feed her baby in



British MP Stella Creasy

the main chamber of Westminster Hall, a historic building used for some MPs' sessions. Former Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson was reportedly the first to do so in 2018.

"Mothers in the mother of all parliaments are not to be seen or heard it seems," Creasy complained. The MP has regularly brought her baby son, who is still being breastfed, to debates, as she previously

did with her daughter.

"He's very tiny" and "perhaps some of my colleagues are noisier than him", she told Sky News, calling for a more flexible approach from parliamentary authorities. "It's a part and parcel of modern life, isn't it, that sometimes you might need to have your children with you." Despite the formal rule against this, MPs have previously brought babies to debates without reprimand.

Former Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson was reportedly the first to do so in 2018. Creasy has campaigned unsuccessfully for MPs to get full rights to maternity leave. "When you're a mum you can't win," she told Sky News. Other MPs backed her.

"I've got quite a lot of sympathy with Stella," Justice Secretary Dominic Raab told Sky News. "We need to make sure we're in the 21st century," he said, while adding it was up to the parliamentary authorities to "work out what the right balance is".

The British government in February announced it would introduce six-month paid maternity leave for senior ministers, but MPs are not entitled to this. Creasy in 2019 became the first MP to hire a locum to work on her behalf in her constituency after her daughter's birth but was not allowed to do this again. —AFP

Mexican women fight for right to self-defense

CIUDAD NEZAHUALCOYOTL: Imprisoned for killing the man she says raped her, Roxana Ruiz is fighting to prove her innocence in a case taken up by activists campaigning for the right to self-defense. "My only crime was to defend myself against the man who raped me," Ruiz, 21, wrote from the prison where she has been held since May in a suburb next to Mexico City.

Rights groups will use Thursday's International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women to argue that legitimate self-defense is not a crime in a country facing a femicide crisis. In a letter published by activists, Ruiz said that her attacker was a man who insisted on accompanying her home after she went for a beer with a friend. Once there, he asked to stay the night, saying that he lived far away.

While she was asleep, the man sexually assaulted her, beat her and threatened to kill her, before she suffocated him while defending herself, she wrote. "I was afraid, terrified," she said. "I didn't want him to hurt anyone else," Ruiz added. Having reflected on

her experience while in prison, "I've started to think that the laws and society are unjust," she wrote. "Maybe I should have let my attacker have his way and perhaps leave me dead or injured," she added.

'Accomplice of femicide'

Mexico registered 736 femicide cases between January and September, following 975 cases in the whole of last year, according to official figures. Despite the clear risks, Ruiz faces an uphill battle to prove that she acted in legitimate self-defense because no forensic evidence was collected from the scene. Her lawyer, Abigail Escalante, accuses the authorities of failing to follow basic protocols such as a gynecological examination. "Why does a woman who suffered a crime have to prove that she's actually a victim?" Escalante asked.

The case has triggered protests by feminist groups, who denounce impunity for men who kill women. In a demonstration outside the jail where Ruiz is being held, protesters put up banners reading "self-defense is not a crime" and "the state is an accomplice of femicide." Her mother Ana Ruiz joined the protest to call for her daughter to be set free. "He wanted to kill her as well as rape her. He had threatened to kill her and she defended herself," she said.



CIUDAD NEZAHUALCOYOTL: Women activists take part in a protest in support of Roxana Ruiz Santiago, 21, accused of murder after she killed a man when defending herself from a rape, at the Bordo court in Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl, Mexico State, on August 23, 2021. —AFP

'Save our lives'

Yakiri Rubio, now 28, was locked up for 18 months on charges of murder after she fatally wounded the man who sexually assaulted her. Rubio was cleared after her lawyer, Ana Suarez, proved that it was self-defense. The authorities "dislike knowing that women can defend ourselves, so they don't want to do their job," she said. Now both work for an association helping women,

including through self-defense classes taught by a martial arts instructor. "It's to learn to save our lives," said Suarez's sister Maria Jose, one of the organizers. Rubio tells women to seek good advice in case they are arrested after defending themselves. Equally important is "that your family believes you, that society supports you, takes care of you and protects you, and that the media reports the truth," she added. —AFP

Canada govt vows faster indigenous reconciliation

OTTAWA: Canada's governor general opened parliament Tuesday in a speech partly delivered in her native Inuktitut, highlighting the "deep wounds" reopened by the recent discovery of mass graves at schools for indigenous children. Governor General Mary Simon, who was sworn in July to serve as the first indigenous representative of Queen Elizabeth II in Canada, said: "This is the moment to move faster on the path of reconciliation."

In the throne speech outlining Prime Minister Justice Trudeau's agenda, she said the discoveries in May of more than 1,300 unmarked graves at schools in British

Columbia and Saskatchewan "horrified" Canadians and underscored how a past policy of assimilation caused "deep wounds."

Those finds, she said, "show how much the actions of governments and institutions of old have been devastating for indigenous peoples, who continue to suffer from it today." Trudeau has made reconciliation with more than 600 tribes a priority for his government, which returned to power following a general election in September. Highlighting the plans of Trudeau's Liberals in her speech, Simon said the government plans to taper pandemic aid down to a Can\$7.4 billion (US\$5.8 billion) package targeting hardest-hit sectors through the spring.

The government will also prioritize affordable housing and subsidized day care, increased immigration, tougher gun laws, and deepening partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region. The statement follows a two-year row between Ottawa and Beijing over tit-for-tat arrests of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou, and two Canadians, former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman

Michael Spavor. All three were released and repatriated in September.

'Our planet is in danger'

In her speech Simon also promised the federal government's support for Canadians on the Pacific coast who are recovering from catastrophic flooding and mudslides caused by heavy rains that left at least four dead and one missing.

Ottawa has already deployed the army to help, and vital road and rail links between Vancouver and the rest of Canada have started to be reestablished this week. The latest flooding to hit British Columbia, following record-high temperatures over the summer that killed more than 500 people, as well as wildfires that destroyed a town, is a stark reminder of "extreme weather worsened by climate change," Simon said. "Our planet is in danger," she said. "From a warming Arctic to the increasing devastation of natural disasters, our land and our people need help." To pass their agenda, the Liberals must rely on at least one other party. —AFP

IAEA 'could not agree' in talks with Iran

VIENNA: The UN nuclear watchdog's head said yesterday that he "could not agree" in talks with Iranian officials to resolve disputes over the monitoring of the country's atomic program, a day after returning from Tehran. Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told the quarterly meeting of the board of governors that his talks in Tehran were "inconclusive", despite what he had earlier described as "intense" negotiations.

"We could not agree yesterday, in spite of my best efforts," Grossi told reporters yesterday, shortly after addressing the board meeting. Among

other officials in Tehran, he met Mohammad Esfandi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. He had been hoping to make progress on several points of contention between the agency and Tehran.

These include the constraints put on IAEA inspections activity earlier this year, outstanding questions over the presence of undeclared nuclear material at sites in Iran, and the treatment of IAEA staff in the country. The talks came ahead of the scheduled resumption on Monday of negotiations between Tehran and world powers aimed at reviving the 2015 deal that gave Iran sanctions relief in return for curbs on its nuclear program. —AFP