

Red Cross: Yemen's Houthis, Saudi coalition begin prisoner swap



Houthi prisoners arrive to Sana'a airport, Yemen, on April 14, 2023.
● HANI MOHAMMED/AP

An exchange of more than 800 prisoners linked to Yemen's long-running war began on Friday, the International Committee for the Red Cross said. The United Nations-brokered deal, in the works

for months, comes amid concerted diplomatic efforts to negotiate an end to the conflict. The three-day operation will be the most significant prisoner exchange in Yemen since the Saudi-led

coalition and Houthis released more than 1,000 detainees in October 2020, AP reported. Thousands of people are still believed to be held as prisoners of war since the conflict erupted, with oth-

ers missing. But Fabrizio Carboni, the Red Cross' regional director, said the release "gives a sense of momentum" for efforts to end the war. "This will show that there is no way back to violence," Carboni told journalists. The Red Cross later said that a total of 318 detainees were released on Friday. In Sana'a, the Houthi-held capital of Yemen, dozens of former prisoners descended from a plane to a marching band and traditional Yemeni dancers, wearing ribbons with the colors of the Yemeni flag. Family members and a reception line of Houthi political leaders greeted the released with hugs and kisses. An injured man was seen supported by medical workers. Carboni acknowledged some former prisoners needed medical care before making their flight, but "nothing out of the ordinary." Meanwhile, prisoners released by Houthis took flights to Aden, the seat of

the country's former government allied with Saudi Arabia. Two rounds of simultaneous flights Friday between Aden and Sana'a transferred the prisoners. As part of the exchange, flights will transport prisoners from government-controlled cities inside Yemen and Saudi Arabia to Sana'a, said Majed Fadail, a deputy minister for human rights for Yemen's former government. Saudi Arabia launched the bloody war against Yemen in March 2015 in collaboration with a number of its allies and with arms and logistics support from the US and several Western states to reinstall Mansour Hadi, who resigned from the presidency in late 2014 and later fled to Riyadh amid a political conflict with the popular Houthi Ansarullah movement. The war objective was also to crush the Ansarullah movement, which has been running state affairs in the absence of an effective government in Yemen.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Myanmar airstrike death toll climbs to at least 170



● AP
AFP - The death toll from Tuesday morning's airstrike on a central Myanmar village rose to an estimated 171 victims on Friday, according to a team member involved in cremating bodies and media reports. Myanmar has been in crisis since the military toppled Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in a February 2021 coup, with an estimated 3,200 civilians killed as part of the junta's crackdown on dissent.

Finland starts building fence on parts of NATO's eastern flank



● AFP/GETTY IMAGES
BLOOMBERG - Finland kicked off a project to build a barrier to better protect its border with Russia, which now marks NATO's new eastern flank. The Nordic country started construction of an initial 3-kilometer stretch of fence near a border crossing in the southeast, which it plans to conclude in June, the Border Guard said on Friday.

China: 'No weapons to parties involved in Ukraine conflict'



Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang speaks during a joint press conference with German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, China, on April 14, 2023.
● SUO TAKEKUMA/POOL PHOTO VIA AP

China won't sell weapons to either side in the war in Ukraine, the country's foreign minister said Friday, responding to Western concerns that Beijing could provide military assistance to Russia. China has maintained that it is neutral in the conflict, while backing Russia politically, rhetorically and economically at a time when Western nations have imposed punishing sanctions and sought to isolate Moscow for its "military operation" in Ukraine, AP reported. Qin Gang is the highest-level Chinese official to make such an explicit statement about arms

sales to Russia. He added that China would also regulate the export of items with dual civilian and military use. "Regarding the export of military items, China adopts a prudent and responsible attitude," Qin said at a news conference alongside visiting German counterpart Annalena Baerbock. "China will not provide weapons to relevant parties of the conflict, and manage and control the exports of dual-use items in accordance with laws and regulations." The minister also reiterated China's willingness to help find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

French court approves key elements of Macron pension reform

The French constitutional court on Friday approved the key elements of President Emmanuel Macron's controversial pension reform, while rejecting certain parts of the legislation. The banner reform in the legislation to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 was validated by the Constitutional Council after almost three months of protests opposing the measure, AFP reported. The court struck out six measures not seen as fundamental to the essence of the reform and threw out a request filed by the left for a referendum on an alternative

pension law that would keep the retirement age at 62. Armed police were deployed outside France's Constitutional Council on Friday ahead of its key ruling, according to Reuters. President Emmanuel Macron says the French must work longer or else the pension budget will fall billions of euros into the red each year by the end of the decade. But the pension system is a cornerstone of France's cherished social protection model and trade unions say the money can be found elsewhere, including by taxing the rich more heavily.



People react amid tear gas during clashes at a demonstration as protesters gather on Place de la Bastille as part of the 12th day of nationwide strikes and protests against French government's pension reform, in Paris, France, on April 13, 2023.
● STEPHANIE LECOQ/REUTERS

Trump answers questions for seven hours in NY fraud lawsuit

Former US president Donald Trump answered questions for nearly seven hours Thursday during his second deposition in a legal battle with New York's attorney general over his company's business practices, reversing an earlier decision to invoke his Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination and remain silent. The Republican met all day with lawyers for Attorney General Letitia James, who sued Trump last year. Her lawsuit claims Trump and his family misled banks and

business associates by giving them false information about his net worth and the value of assets such as hotels and golf courses, AP reported. Shortly after Trump entered the Manhattan skyscraper that houses James' offices, his attorney, Alina Habba, said he was "not only willing but also eager to testify." After the deposition was finished, a lawyer for Trump's businesses, Christopher Kise, said the former president had spent nearly seven hours "describing in detail his extraordinary business

success." "The transactions at the center of this case were wildly profitable for the banks and for the Trump entities," Kise said. "When the facts of this success, and not politically engineered soundbites, are out in the open, everyone will scoff at the notion any fraud took place." The lawsuit is unrelated to the felony criminal charges filed against Trump by the Manhattan district attorney, which led last week to his historic arraignment, the first for a former president.

James declined to answer a question about the deposition at a news conference on an unrelated matter Wednesday. Trump previously met with James' lawyers Aug. 10, but refused to answer all but a few procedural questions, invoking his Fifth Amendment rights more than 400 times. At the time, James had not yet brought her lawsuit and it was unclear whether questions about the way Trump valued his company would become the basis of a criminal case. James' lawsuit focused on

allegations that Trump lied repeatedly about his own wealth and exaggerated the value of his assets on financial statements. In a social media post Thursday morning, Trump called the suit "ridiculous, just like all of the other Election Interference cases being brought against me." The lawsuit James brought is scheduled to go to trial in October. Video recordings of Trump's depositions could potentially be played at the trial, if the lawsuit is not settled.



● SETH WENIG/AP

Ambulance staff in England vote for pay deal: Union

REUTERS - Ambulance staff and others health workers represented by the Unison union in England have voted to accept a 5% wage increase proposed by the government to end strike action, the union said on Friday, saying it was the best pay deal available. Almost three quarters of health service workers in England voted to accept the offer, while Scottish workers have also accepted a deal there.