

# Russia Boosts Air Campaign to Help Recapture Key Syrian City

MOSCOW - Russia said Monday it has intensified its air campaign in Syria to help President Bashar Assad's forces drive Islamic State militants from Deir el-Zour, a major stronghold for the group, killing an estimated 800 militants across the country this month alone. Col. Gen. Sergei Rudskoi said Russian jets are now making 60 to 70 flights a day to target militants heading from other areas to join the fight in the eastern city. He says Syrian troops are meanwhile advancing from three directions to encircle Deir el-Zour. Syrian government forces control around half the city and a nearby air base, both of which are besieged by the militants.



Rudskoi said militants fleeing U.S.-backed offensives in the Iraqi city of Mosul and the Syrian city of Raqqa have poured into Deir el-Zour in recent months.

He said Syrian troops have also encircled Akerbat, an IS-held town in central Syria, and that Russian warplanes have targeted militant convoys trying to flee the area for Deir el-Zour. Russia has waged an air campaign in Syria since September 2015 aimed at helping Assad's forces defeat IS as well as Syrian rebel groups. This month alone, Russian warplanes have flown 990 missions, destroying 40 armored vehicles, more than 100 trucks and killing about 800 militants, Rudskoi said. (AP)

## Europe Wary of Security Infrastructure despite Vehicle Attacks

LONDON - Europe has experienced around a dozen cases of drivers using a car or truck to plow into pedestrians like last week's attack in Barcelona, but cities have not rushed to mitigate the risks by changing their layout. Concerns about cost, a fear that evolving security threats will make redesigned streetscapes obsolete and a reluctance to disrupt everyday life are among reasons cited by security experts, executives and municipal officials. "We don't want

to be Hebron," said Els Ampe, Deputy Mayor of Brussels, referring to the city in the West Bank where Palestinians and Israeli settlers are often separated by concrete and steel barriers. Brussels has 45 hectares of pedestrian zones, including many narrow winding streets, she said, and installing barriers to vehicles on many of these streets would restrict access for people who live, maintain facilities and conduct business there. (Reuters)

## Merkel Warns Turkey of Harder German Stance

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel has warned that her government might adopt an even harder line in the longstanding feud between Berlin and Ankara. "We must always retain the right to take further measures," Merkel told German commercial television network RTL on Sunday night over the topic of sanctions against Turkey, noting that her government has "already reacted with a very hard line so far." The chancellor believed that Dogan Akhanli, a

German author, has been released again in Spain after local authorities arrested him during his holiday in response to an Interpol warrant issued by Turkey. "I am very happy that Spain has freed him again... We cannot abuse international organization like Interpol for such actions," she said.

Akhanli, 60, was born in Turkey, but emigrated to Germany in 1991 after spending years in a Turkish prison for political reasons. The author fre-



quently criticized Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "Turkey certainly does not like this. They want to silence me... From the age of 60 onwards I no longer want to remain silent," he was quoted as saying. Turkey has requested Spain for extradition of the author. (Xinhua)

## APEC Members Review Climate Change, Food Security Cooperation



HO CHI MINH CITY - The APEC Policy Partnership on Food Security (PPFS) and the Ocean and Fisheries Working Group

(OFWG) held meetings on Monday in Vietnam's southern Can Tho city, reviewing regional cooperation in food security and

climate change. The two groups of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) also prepared contents for a high-level policy dialogue on enhancing food security and sustainable agriculture in response to climate change slated for Wednesday in the city.

The PPFS on Monday adopted a multi-year plan of action on food security and climate change and a plan of action on rural-

urban development. The two plans' first phases focus on clarifying the best relevant policies, practices and technologies among APEC members. The OFWG meeting, which will conclude on Tuesday, reviewed the implementation of micro and small-sized fishery development policies and projects to ensure food safety, reduce poverty, cope with climate change and waste discharge to the sea, and protect aquatic resources in the Asia-Pacific. (Xinhua)

## UN Warns of Thousands Civilians to Flee Tal Afar as Anti-IS Offensive Launched

BAGHDAD - The United Nations on Sunday warned that thousands of civilians are expected to flee the town of Tal Afar and surrounding areas, as the Iraqi security forces began offensive to dislodge Islamic State (IS) militants from their last stronghold in Iraq's northern province of Nineveh. "Thousands of people are fleeing Tal Afar for safety. Families are trekking for 10 to 20 hours in extreme heat to reach mustering points. They are arriving exhausted and dehydrated," the Humanitarian

Coordinator for Iraq, Lise Grande, said in a statement. Grande described the situation inside Tal Afar as "very tough," because food and water are running out, and people lack the basic necessities to survive, according to the statement by the UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The statement came hours after the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the start of an operation to retake control of the northern town Tal Afar from IS militants. (Xinhua)

## Erdogan Says Top Turkish General Must Accept Demotion

ISTANBUL - President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday warned a top Turkish general who played a key role in defeating last year's failed coup and led a cross-border operation in Syria that he must accept a surprise demotion without rancour.

In a rare show of tension between the military and Erdogan, Turkish media reported that Lieutenant General Zekai Aksakalli had wanted to resign from the armed forces after he was moved from special forces chief to a less significant position. "There can be no such concept of disappointment in the military. Whatever task is assigned, a soldier goes and fulfils their duty there," Erdogan said after Aksakalli was assigned as commander of the army's 2nd Corps, based on the Gallipoli peninsula in northwestern Turkey.

Up to 10 generals including the former special forces chief were ready to resign, Hurriyet daily reported on Monday. No reason has been given for the demotion. Hurriyet speculated there may have been "discomfort" within the military over the general's public profile in running the Syria operation and the desire to replace him with a younger figure.

Aksakalli led the Turkish military's cross-border "Euphrates Shield" operation launched in August last year aimed at clearing the border zone in northern Syria of both Kurdish militia fighters and the Islamic State extremist group. "Right now, Zekai Aksakalli has completed his duty in the special forces," Erdogan said, adding that the proposal came during a meeting of the nation's top armed forces body on August 2. (AFP)

## Turkey, Iran Mull Joint Action against Kurdish Militants: Erdogan

ISTANBUL - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Monday Turkey and Iran have been considering a joint military action against Kurdish militant groups. "PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and its Iranian affiliate PJAK (the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan) have been constantly causing damages to both countries," Erdogan told reporters in Istanbul before departing to Jordan for an official visit. "Joint action against terrorist groups that have become a threat is always on the agenda," he added.



The president noted that the issue has been discussed with the Iranian army chief during talks in Ankara last week. "We have discussed the details on what kind of work we can carry out and its diplomatic dimension," Erdogan said.

The PKK, listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, resumed its armed campaign against the Turkish government in July 2015 to seek for autonomy in the southeastern part of Turkey. (Xinhua)

## German Nationalists Try Reviving Migration as Election Topic

BERLIN - Germany's anti-immigrant AfD party pushed Monday to make the massive influx of migrants into the country an election issue as it battles with flagging support, despite waning concern among Germans over the matter. More than 1 million migrants entered Germany in 2015-2016. Alternative for Germany leaders Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel told reporters in Berlin they think the wave of newcomers has led to increased crime, an overwhelmed educational system and an "Islamization of society." "The big number of migrants cannot be

integrated in the long run," Weidel said, calling for tougher asylum laws. She also advocated shutting down the Mediterranean Sea route from Libya to Europe that many migrants use and accused the Germany navy of participating in human trafficking by assisting migrant boats in distress. The AfD's support has dropped ahead of the Sept. 24 election to 7 percent in the most recent polls, half of what the party had at the height of the immigration crisis. Support for Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative bloc dropped during the influx and its aftermath, but has rebounded to about 39 percent. (AP)

## US, Canada, Mexico Pledge Quick Negotiations to Update NAFTA

WASHINGTON - The United States, Canada and Mexico on Sunday wrapped up the first round of renegotiations on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), pledging to continue a rapid pace of talks in the coming months to update the 23-year-old trilateral trade deal.

"Detailed conceptual presentations were made by the United States, Mexico and Canada across the scope of the agreement, and negotiating groups began work to advance text and agreed to provide additional text, comments or alternate proposals during the next two weeks," negotiators from the three countries said in a joint statement after concluding five-day talks here.

Negotiators will work to advance negotiating text through the end of August, and will gather in Mexico for a second round of talks from September 1-5, the statement said, vowing to keep a rapid pace of negotiations. NAFTA negotiations will move to Canada in late September and return to the United States in October, with additional rounds being planned for the remainder of the year, according to the statement.

While acknowledging "a great deal of effort and negotiation will be required in the coming months", the three nations are committed to "an accelerated and comprehensive negotiation process" that will upgrade the trade deal and "establish 21st century standards" for global trade. (Xinhua)

## Neighbor News

### US, Japan Military Cooperation Should not Harm third Party's Interests: China

BEIJING - Military cooperation between the United States and Japan must not harm any third party's interests or regional peace and stability, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Monday.

Media reported that Japan wants to introduce a land-based missile defense system, and in response the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph Dunford said the United States will help Japan in this regard, noting that it is important to integrate their ballistic missile defence capabilities.

In response, spokesperson Hua Chunying said the Chinese government holds that the missile defense issue is related to global strategic stabil-

ity and mutual trust between major countries, thus it should be handled with caution.

She said all countries should not only consider their own security interests, but also respect other countries', follow the rules that protect global strategic stability and security of all countries, and safeguard peace, stability, equality, mutual trust and win-win cooperation.

Due to historical factors, Hua said the world pays much attention to Japan's military and security areas.

"We hope both the United States and Japan will act with caution and make contributions to peace, stability and development in the region," Hua said. (Xinhua)

### Protection of Minorities, Govt's Priority: Abbasi

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi Monday said protection of minorities and providing them with opportunities to excel in every field as per their talent and capabilities, was priority of the government.

He said the government was committed to promoting religious harmony in the country.

He was talking to a delegation of Christian community, led by Parliamentary Secretary on Religious Affairs Khalil George that called on him at the PM Office, according to a press release. Minister for Statistics Kamran Michael was also present during the meeting.

The prime minister appreciated valuable contributions, rendered by the minority communities, especially the Christian community in all walks of life. He said the government would continue

making every possible effort for addressing the issues faced by the minority communities.

The delegation included among others bishop Irfan Jamil, bishop Ashraf Joseph, bishop Humphrey Sarfraz, pastor Abraham Daniel, pastor Imran Fazal, sister Sosan Sarda r and sister Martha Taj.

The delegation felicitated the prime minister on behalf of the entire Christian community of the country on assuming the office of the prime minister of Pakistan.

Thanking the prime minister for announcing state funeral for late Dr. Ruth Pfao, the delegation members said that the honour conferred upon her by the Government of Pakistan encouraged Christian community to further contribute towards social and humanitarian services across the country.

(Monitoring Desk)

### Iran will Work to Sustain Nuclear Deal: Zarif

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says his top priority is to ensure that a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six other countries will stand.

Speaking in a televised interview on Sunday night, Foreign Minister Zarif said the ministry under his watch would work first and foremost to keep the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in place.

"Priority number one of the diplomatic apparatus will be to sustain the JCPOA and to prevent America's deal-breaching," he said. "We must not allow America to execute or violate the deal at Iran's cost."

He said the JCPOA had been built on distrust and envisaged the nec-

essary rules to deal with non-performance by parties.

Earlier in the day, Zarif had received a favorable vote of confidence at the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) to work as foreign minister in President Hassan Rouhani's second cabinet. During a final debate at the Parliament, President Rouhani, who was in attendance to defend his cabinet picks, stressed the preservation of the JCPOA.

The JCPOA, a major foreign policy achievement of President Rouhani's first term, was finalized between the Islamic Republic on the one side and the United States, the UK, France, Russia, China, and Germany on the other in July 2015. (Presstv)

### Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan Sign Military Cooperation Plan

TASHKENT - Kazakh Defense Minister Saken Zhasuzakov visited Uzbekistan on August 18, reports the Kazakh defense ministry. In Tashkent, the sides discussed bilateral military and defense cooperation and signed a military cooperation plan.

The document was signed by Zhasuzakov and his Uzbek counterpart Kabul Berdiyev.

The cooperation plan aimed at joint drill and organizing military trainings. Within the framework of the visit, the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Kazakhstan was received by the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Zhasuzakov thanked the President for the warm welcome and conveyed best wishes from Nursultan Nazarbayev. (AKI)