

Nearly 4,000 ISIL Terrorists Killed in Kobani: Report

TEHRAN - At least 3,710 ISIL terrorists were killed in the Syrian border town of Kobani after more than four months of fighting, a new report said.

Top Syrian Kurdish military commanders announced in a new report on Saturday that the ISIL terrorists suffered major losses during the four-month-long fighting, adding that the Kurdish offensives on the Takfiri group left more than 3,710 terrorists dead and 102 of their vehicles destroyed.

The report added that also 16 tanks belonging to the group were targeted during the clashes.

Kurdish fighters expelled ISIL terrorists from Kobani after more than four months of fighting.

YPG fighters have "ex-



pelled all Islamic State (of Iraq and the Levant) fighters from Kobani and have full control of the town", Rami Abdel Rahman, director of the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said on last week.

The Kurds are chasing

some terrorists on the Eastern outskirts of Kobani, "but there is no more fighting inside now", Rahman said.

Then the Kurdish fighters announced that they would continue to fight to expel the ISIL terrorists from neighboring areas of

the city.

In a statement of the People Protection Units, Kurds said that "Kobani war was crucial for ISIL mercenaries" and that "ISIL defeat in Kobani signifies the beginning of the end of ISIL mercenaries". (FNA)

UN Chief Condemns Terrorist Attacks in Egypt's Sinai

ADDIS ABABA - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Saturday strongly condemned Thursday's terrorist attacks in Sinai, Egypt. Ban told a press briefing on the sidelines of

terrorist attacks, saying such attacks "cannot be justified under any circumstances."

The chairperson said the attacks underline the need for enhanced Afri-



the African Union summit here that he strongly condemned the attacks in Sinai, which killed dozens of people and injured scores of others.

He expressed his deep condolences to families of victims and solidarity with the people of Egypt.

Late Friday, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, chairperson of the AU Commission, also condemned the

can action in combatting the scourge of terrorism, within the framework of the relevant AU and international instruments.

On Thursday evening, militants fired a barrage of rockets and set off car bombs in security premises in Arish, the capital city of North Sinai province, killing at least 33 people and injuring dozens of others. (Xinhua)

Nieghbor News

Minister Asks Iranian Firms to Pick Up Bigger Role in Iraq's Reconstruction

TEHRAN - Iraqi Communications Minister Kazem Hassan al-Rashid appreciated Tehran for its continued assistance and aids to Baghdad, and called for partnership of Iranian companies in reconstruction projects in his country.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran's aids are never forgotten by the Iraqi people," Rashid said, while visiting an exhibition in Iran's Northeastern province of Khorassan Razavi on Saturday.

The minister underlined the necessity for mutual cooperation with Iran to rebuild his country's ruined infrastructures, and said, "The abundant capacities of Iranian companies and commu-

nications sector, and Iraq's need to the restoration and reconstruction of infrastructures have created a proper opportunity for joint ventures."

Iran and Iraq have enjoyed growing ties ever since the overthrow of the former Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, during the 2003 US invasion of the Muslim country.

Late last month, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani in a meeting with Iraqi Transportation Minister Baqir Jabr al-Zubeidi underlined that further development of economic cooperation set a priority for the two Muslim neighboring states. (FNA)

Sharif Announces Reduction in POL Prices

LAHORE - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Saturday announced that per litre price of petroleum has been further slashed by Rs7.99, with the new at Rs70.29 per litre now.

With the new reduction in petrol prices, petroleum will now be cheaper than Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), the price of which stands at Rs76.35 for region I (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and the Potohar zone including Rawalpindi and Islamabad) and Rs71.50 per kg for region II (Sindh and Punjab excluding the Potohar zone).

The current price of petrol is 78.28 per litre.

Read: Fuel, power shortage looms as oil stocks

plummetAddressing a press conference here, he said petrol prices are being reduced by Rs7.99 per litre, HBOC Rs11.82 per litre, kerosene oil Rs10.48, light diesel oil Rs9.56 and high diesel oil by Rs5.62 per litre.

The per litre price of High Octane Blending Component (HBOC) has come down from Rs92 to Rs80.18. The price of High Speed Diesel (HSD), which is widely used in heavy vehicles and the agriculture sector, has been slashed by Rs5.62 per litre bringing its price down to Rs80.61 per litre. The price of light diesel oil was cut down from Rs67.5 per litre to Rs57.94 per litre. (Monitoring Desk)

Sino-US Defense Policy Talks Set for Next Week

WASHINGTON - Defense officials from China and the United States will meet in Washington DC next week for policy talks, the Pentagon said late on Thursday.

The talks follow speculation that Washington will temporarily halt military exchanges with China for fear of exposing critical elements of its strategy.

Pentagon spokesman Jeff Pool said the US delegation to next week's talks will include representatives from the Joint Staff, US Pacific Command, the State Department and the National Security Council, while the Chinese delegation will include representatives of the Ministry of National Defense and other military bodies. Pool said the Defense Policy Coordination Talks seek to foster sustained and substantive dialogue, deepen practical cooperation in

areas of mutual interest, and focus on enhancing risk reduction. Su Hao, a professor of Asia-Pacific studies at China Foreign Affairs University, said, "China should put forward its concerns to the US during the meeting." Su added that the US has carried out several military activities, including exercises, that obviously targeted China. Announcement of the talks follows a US media report that the Pentagon would not agree to a major new military exchange until the two countries agreed on rules for airborne encounters. Yang said "positive momentum has been maintained in mutual military exchanges in the new year" a reference to this month's joint military exercises in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, and Haikou, Hainan province. (Agencies)

Italy Elects Senior Judge Sergio Mattarella as President

ROME - Italian lawmakers elected Sergio Mattarella, a constitutional court judge and veteran center-left politician, as president on Saturday, handing a welcome political victory to Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. Mattarella, speaking at his office in the Constitutional Court after the vote, said: "My first thoughts are of the difficulties and hopes of our citizens."

The election shows the



40-year-old Renzi in firm control of both his famously fractious party and his allies in the ruling majority as

he seeks to pass reforms aimed at underpinning an economic recovery in Italy, where ... (More on P4)... (24)

Egypt Court Lists Hamas Military Wing As Terrorist Group

CAIRO - An Egyptian court on Saturday banned al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Palestinian group Hamas and listed it as a terrorist organization.

"The court decided to ban the al-Qassam Brigades and to list it as a terrorist group," said a judiciary official of the Cairo Urgent Matters Court.

The ruling came two days after a series of bloody attacks occurred in Egypt's restive Sinai Peninsula

that killed at least 33 soldiers and policemen.

According to the official, the al-Qassam Brigades was accused of carrying out terrorist attacks and killing over 30 people in late October, 2014. The group was also blamed for supporting the black-listed Muslim Brotherhood.

Since the ouster of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, Egyptian authorities has been working to fight against

Islamist militant groups based in the Sinai Peninsula, some were claimed to collude with the Hamas movement.

Islamist militants have killed hundreds of security personnel in Sinai, especially the northern district, which shares a border with Hamas-ruling Gaza Strip.

Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, has been banned all the activities in Egypt last March. (Xinhua)

Ukraine, Rebels Hold Fresh Peace Talks

MINSK/KIEV - A new round of peace talks got under way involving Ukraine and separatists on Saturday, even as fighting between Kiev government forces and the Russian-backed rebels raged in Ukraine's east, claiming civilian and military lives.

The main members of the so-called contact group - Ukrainian former president Leonid Kuchma, a Russian diplomat and an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe official - met at a state residence in the Belarussian capital Minsk, where they were joined by two separatist officials.

The sides have held only one inconclusive meeting since agreeing a ceasefire last September as part of a 12-point blueprint for peace. Much-violated from the start, that truce collapsed completely with a new rebel advance last week.

Both sides have accused each other of deadly artillery and mortar strikes on civilian targets in the past two weeks, includ-



ing on a cultural center in the main regional city of Donetsk on Friday which killed at least five people waiting for humanitarian hand-outs.

The September Minsk peace plan also called for tighter control of the joint Russia-Ukraine border, through which Kiev says Moscow is funneling fighters and equipment, and the freeing of prisoners held by the sides. Much has changed on the ground, however, since September. The separatists have set up self-proclaimed 'people's republics' while their forces, which Kiev says are supported by 9,000 Russian regular troops, have seized more than 500 square km (193 square miles) of territory beyond that agreed

in the Minsk talks and threaten to seize control of the east's two main regions entirely. Heavy shelling continued on Saturday in Ukraine's eastern regions as the separatists sought to tighten a circle around government forces clinging on to control of the strategic rail and road junction of Debaltseve.

Regional police chief Vyacheslav Abroskin, in a Facebook post, said 12 civilians had been killed on Saturday by separatist artillery shelling of the town, which lies to the north-east of Donetsk. Defense Minister Stepan Poltorak said 15 Ukrainian soldiers had been killed and 30 wounded in clashes across the east. (Reuters)

Syrian Troops Kill 50 Rebels in Idlib



DAMASCUS - At least 50 rebels were killed and 150 wounded Saturday in fresh clashes with the government troops in the northwestern province of Idlib, the pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV reported. Suqur al-Sham rebel group lost as many as 50 of its fighters during clashes in the countryside of Idlib, al-Mayadeen said, adding that a rebel commander was among those killed.

The state news agency SANA also reported the intense battles in different parts of Idlib, saying that units of the Syrian army intensified their shelling on Saturday on the rebels' positions after the rebel groups attempted to infiltrate military positions in Idlib.

Tens of the "terrorists" were killed in the Syrian troops' shelling, said SANA, adding that the battles have flared since dawn Saturday.

The al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front and likeminded groups have recently

intensified their attacks in Idlib in an attempt to consolidate their positions in that part of Syria, close to the Turkish borders.

The Nusra, furthermore, has also been engaged in battles against the rebels' Hazm Movement, a group comprising less radical rebels, in Idlib.

Following the attacks by Nusra on the Hazm Movement, the later threatened that it would abandon its positions for the Syrian army if the Nusra attacks persisted. The ongoing battles nationwide come as representatives of the Syrian government and political opposition concluded their meetings in Moscow last Thursday.

They failed to achieve a breakthrough in the talks that supposedly aimed at paving the way for a broader conference to hammer out details of a possible political settlement to the country's long-running conflict. (Xinhua)

Officials from Ukraine, Russia, OSCE and Rebels in Minsk for Ukraine Peace Talks

MINSK - Representatives from Ukraine, Russia, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and pro-Russian separatists gathered in Minsk, Belarus, on Saturday in a fresh attempt to reopen peace talks on the Ukraine crisis. A Reuters reporter saw former Ukrainian President Leo-

nid Kuchma, and representatives from Russia and the OSCE, drive away towards Minsk after their arrival at the airport. Two representatives of pro-Russian separatists who are fighting Kiev government forces in the east of Ukraine arrived earlier on Saturday. (Reuters)



Germany's Merkel Says She Doesn't See another Greek Debt Cut

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel has underlined the refusal of Greece's European creditors to consider forgiving part of the debt-ridden country's rescue loans, though she stressed in an interview published Saturday that Berlin's aim is to keep Greece in the eurozone. Greece's new government insists it will honor pre-election promises to seek a cut on the country's rescue debt and scrap painful budget measures that were demanded in exchange for the loans. Merkel said in an interview with the daily Berliner Morgenpost that Europe will continue showing solidarity with Greece and other nations hit by Europe's debt crisis "if these countries undertake their

own reform and saving efforts," and fended off a question about the new Greek government's moves to reverse reforms and rehire suspended workers. "We - Germany and the other European partners - will now wait and see what concept the new Greek government comes to us with," she was quoted as saying. She was clear, however, about prospects of a debt cut. Athens already was forgiven billions of euros by private creditors, Merkel said. "I don't see a further debt haircut." As for demands that have surfaced in Greece for Germany to pay more compensation for Nazi crimes during World War II, Merkel said that "this question doesn't arise." (AP)

UN Chief Backs Regional African Force to Fight Boko Haram

Addis Ababa - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Saturday welcomed an African Union proposal to set up a regional five-nation force of 7,500 troops to fight Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamist militants.

Support for the initiative, announced at an African Union summit being held in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa, came hours after the Chadian military said three soldiers and 123 militants were killed in two days of fighting with a Chadian army contingent in northern Cameroon.

"I welcome the decision of the AU and regional countries to establish an MJTF (Multinational Joint Task Force) against Boko Haram," he told reporters on the sidelines

of the summit. "They have committed unspeakable brutality. Those terrorists should be addressed with a regional and international cooperation. Not a single country, even the regional countries, can handle this alone," he said. "The United Nations is ready to fully cooperate with the African Union." Ban nevertheless said that "military means may not be the only solution." "There should be very careful analysis of the root causes why this kind of terrorism, and extremism, violent extremism, are spreading," he told reporters. At least 13,000 people have been killed and more than a million forced from their homes by Boko Haram violence since 2009. (AFP)

Tajikistan to Increase Aluminum Production

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan plans to produce around 190 thousand tons of aluminum this year, compared to 121 thousand tons in 2014, Avesta news agency reported citing Tajikistan's Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Sharif Rakhimzoda.

Last year the average price of aluminum was \$1,870 per ton.

According to the minister, early in 2014 the ministry forecasted aluminum production at 150 thousand tons, but last year's decline in the output was caused by lowering aluminum prices in the international market. "Tajikistan Aluminum Company (TALCO) is

currently cooperating with the Norwegian company Hydro, and this cooperation will help increase TALCO's production and sales of aluminum," he said.

TALCO is the largest state-owned enterprise in Tajikistan with the designed capacity of 500,000 tons of aluminum per year. The company accounts for 45 percent of Tajikistan's GDP and 90 percent of the foreign exchange earnings. It is one of the largest taxpayers and plays a pivotal role in the national economy.

In 2014, Tajikistan exported 125 thousand tons of aluminum for a total of \$234 million. (Agencies)