

Few Russian Strikes in Syria are Against IS: U.S.

BRUSSELS - Only a third of Russia's air strikes in Syria are targeting Islamic State and its imprecise attacks are forcing the population to flee, fueling Europe's refugee crisis, a senior U.S. official said on Saturday. Of the 5,000 air strikes carried out by Russia since it began its air offensive in Syria on Sept. 30, about 70 percent hit rebels opposed to President Bashar al-Assad, rather than supporting the efforts of the U.S.-led coalition, the official told reporters in Brussels. Rescue workers and



rights groups say Russia's bombing in Syria has killed scores of civil-

ians at busy market places and in residential areas. The Kremlin launched its air strikes saying it wanted to help Assad,

its main Middle East ally, defeat Islamic State and other militant groups.

"We are not convinced of what the Russian intentions are," the official said on condition of anonymity. "For a while, very few strikes were going against ISIL and after a lot of public condemnation they turned a number of strikes against ISIL," the official said, referring to Islamic State, the militant group that controls territory in Syria and Iraq. The U.S. official said Russia used fewer precision-guided munitions than the United States and its allies. "The Russian ... (More on P4)...(20)

Damascus Says Ready for Talks, wants List of 'Terrorist Groups'

BEIRUT - Syria's government told a U.N. envoy on Saturday it was ready to participate in Geneva peace talks later this month but said officials wanted to know who would take part from the opposition. Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem, who met U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura in Damascus, also demanded a list of groups that would be classified as terrorist, state media reported. The Geneva talks scheduled for Jan. 25 are part



of an international bid to end the five-year conflict that has killed an estimated 250,000 people. The plan for a hoped-for ceasefire envisages defin-

ing "terrorist groups" in Syria, one of many tough issues facing diplomats. The Syrian government views all the groups fighting to topple Presi-

dent Bashar al-Assad as terrorists, including rebels represented in a recently formed opposition council tasked with overseeing the negotiations. Syrian rebels and opposition politicians have expressed doubts over whether the peace talks will begin as planned. Earlier this week, they told de Mistura that before negotiations the Syrian government must stop bombing civilian areas, release detainees and lift blockades imposed ... (More on P4)...(21)

IS Claims Attack on Police in Egypt

CAIRO - Islamic State (IS) militant group said on Saturday in an online message that it was behind an armed attack targeting police officers in Egypt's Giza. One traffic police officer and a soldier were killed on Saturday morning in the attack targeted their vehicle in Giza on the outskirts of capital Cairo, State-run MENA news agency reported. A number of gunmen opened fire at their car and fled away, and IS's claim cannot be at the moment independently verified. The attack came one shortly after two consecutive attacks against hotels in the North African nation. Late on Friday, some knife-wielding assailants attacked a hotel in Egypt's Red Sea city of Hurghada. Three tourists, a Swedish and two Austrian nationals, suffered minor injuries in the strike. The health ministry said the wounded tourists suffered knife wounds and were in stable condition. On ... (More on P4)...(22)

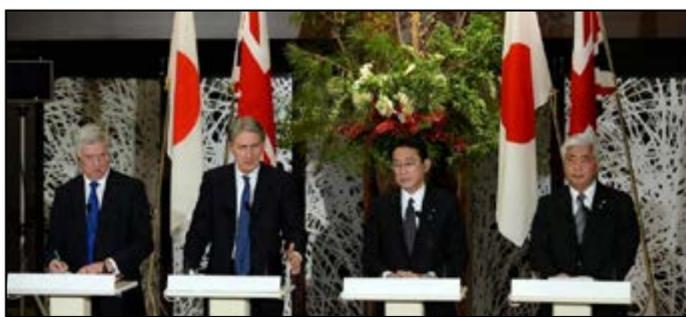
U.N. Yemen Envoy Suggests Geneva Location for Peace Talks

CAIRO - The United Nations' special envoy for Yemen has suggested Geneva as a location for holding peace talks due to restart this month on ending conflict in the war-torn country, Saba news agency reported late on Friday. Ismail OuldCheikh Ahmed made the suggestion in the Saudi Arabian capital Riyadh while meeting various members of the government of Yemen President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and political groupings leaning toward him, the

pro-Hadi Saba agency reported. A coalition led by Saudi Arabia and its Sunni Muslim allies has been fighting the Shi'ite Houthi movement, which controls the capital, since March of last year. The warring sides held their latest round of peace talks in December but failed to find a political solution that would end the conflict, which has killed nearly 6,000 people. Negotiations are set to resume on Jan. 14. Former President Ali Ab ... (More on P4)...(23)

Japanese, British Defense Chiefs Agree to Bolster Cooperation

TOKYO - Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani and British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon agreed on Saturday to strengthen bilateral cooperation. In particular, both ministers agreed to further their cooperation in tackling global terrorism and maintaining stability in this region, particularly in light of the recent nuclear test conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Nakatani and Fallon met on Satur-



day in Tokyo with their meeting following two-plus-two meetings held a day earlier between both countries' foreign and

defense ministers. Both defense ministers said on Saturday that they would bolster their cooperative efforts following DPRK's possible testing of a nuclear device Wednesday, which the DPRK has claimed was a hydrogen ... (More on P4)...(24)

Indian PM Satisfied with Security Forces' Response to Airbase Attack

NEW DELHI - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday expressed satisfaction with the performance of security forces in response to the militant attack upon an airbase in Punjab one week ago. "Noted with satisfaction the decision-making & its execution, the considerations that went into our tactical response," Modi tweeted after touring the airbase at Pathankot near the Pakistan border. "Also noted coordination among various field units. Lauded bravery & determination of our men & women on the ground. They are our pride," he said. Modi was briefed by the security forces on the details of the attack on Jan. 2 by six militants on the airbase. He also went around the scene of the attack that had left seven Indian security force men dead. India has asked Pakistan to take action against the handlers believed to be behind the attack and provided information about them, after accusing the militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed of staging the assault. (Xinhua)

Iran Complains to U.N. About Saudi 'Provocations'

DUBAI - Iran's foreign minister has complained to the United Nations about Saudi Arabia's "provocations" toward Tehran, as a diplomatic crisis between the region's two major powers entered its second week. In a letter to the U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon published by Iranian news agencies on Saturday, Mohammad Javad Zarif said "some people" in Riyadh seemed bent on dragging the whole region into crisis. The two powers, both major oil exporters, have been locked in a diplomatic battle since Saudi Arabia executed Shi'ite cleric Nimr al-Nimr on Jan. 2. Iranian protesters then stormed the ... (More on P4)...(27)

Baghdad Conducts 60 Pct of Sorties Against IS: Abadi

BAGHDAD - Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on Saturday said that more than 60 percent of sorties in the battles against the Islamic State (IS) militant group were carried out by the Iraqi air force conducted. In his speech at the ceremony of 94th anniversary of the Police Day, Abadi said "during the last year, Iraqi air force fought Daesh (IS group in Arabic) and our pilots risked their lives, and I can say that maybe 60 percent of the sorties have been conducted by the Iraqi air force, but still about 40 percent of the sorties we need the coalition (led by Wash-



ington) aircraft to cooperate with us." Abadi's comments came after the Iraqi security forces made a significant success late in December when the troops recaptured the city of Ramadi,

the capital of Iraq's largest province of Anbar from the hands of IS militants. Abadi also said that Iraq still needs foreign assistance for armament, ... (More on P4)...(25)

EU Pushes Libya Peace as IS Claims Deadly Blasts

TUNIS - The EU urged Libyan politicians to back a unity government, as the Islamic State group claimed suicide bombings that killed dozens and sparked fears of a jihadist expansion on Europe's doorstep. The deal aims to bring together rival administrations that split the country in August 2014 -- when an Islamist-backed militia alliance overran Tripoli, forcing the internationally-recognized government to take refuge in the east -- and tame chaos that has plagued Libya since 2011. The EU's push is the latest in long-standing diplomatic efforts to bring together the country's warring factions, with European Union foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini also pledging to give Libya 100 million euros (\$108 million) to battle IS. The funds would be available from the first ... (More on P4)...(26)

18 Kurdish Militants Killed in Southeast: Turkish Army

DIYARBAKIR - Turkish security forces have killed 18 Kurdish militants in southeast Turkey, the military said on Saturday, in the latest clashes to blight a region still reeling from the collapse of a two-year ceasefire last summer. Security sources said five people, four of them soldiers, had also been wounded in separate gun and bomb attacks in Diyarbakir, biggest city in the

mainly Kurdish southeast. The armed forces said in a statement that 16 PKK fighters had been killed on Friday in the town of Cizre, near the Syrian border, and another two rebels had been killed in the historical Sur district of Diyarbakir. In Sur, one soldier was shot while another three soldiers and a public sector worker were also wounded in a bomb ... (More on P4)...(28)

Candidates Rally Support on Last Weekend Ahead of Taiwan Leader Election

TAIPEI - Candidates running for Taiwan leadership and legislative election staged large scale campaigns Saturday across the island, the last weekend ahead of the Jan. 16 election date, dubbed "Super Saturday" by locals. Eric Chu, candidate of the Kuomintang (KMT) and his running mate Wang Ju-hsuan, led a big parade in Taipei Saturday afternoon together with a number of KMT heavyweight politicians including Ma Ying-jeou, the island's current leader, and two former KMT chairmen, ... (More on P4)...(29)

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Khamenei Urges High Turnout in Upcoming Parl't Vote

TEHRAN - Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called Saturday on the Iranian people to massively vote in the country's upcoming parliamentary elections, slated for Feb. 26. People from all walks of life are better to take part in the upcoming Majlis (parliament) and Assembly of Experts' elections to safeguard the country's integrity, Khamenei was quoted by official IRNA news agency as saying. People's vigilance and presence will guarantee the Islamic revolution and will bring tranquility and victory for the Iranian nation, he said, adding that at the same time it will thwart the plots of the enemies.

Presently, the Islamic revolution is facing challenges created by the United States, Israel and their terrorist "puppets" in the region to destroy its principles, Khamenei said. The 290-seat Majlis is elected by direct votes of people for four-year terms. Simultaneously, the election of the Assembly of Experts, which is a deliberative body of 88 Mujtahids or Islamic scholars, will be held. The Assembly of Experts is charged with electing and removing the supreme leader of Iran and supervising his activities. Members of the assembly are also elected by direct public vote for an eight-year term. (Xinhua)

Concrete Evidence Needed From India: Pakistan

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan needs concrete evidence from India for acting against the elements it suspects of being involved in the terrorist strike at Pathankot airbase instead of 'leads' suggesting the attack was planned and directed from Pakistan. "We are expecting evidence beyond leads and information to proceed as per our law," a senior official told Dawn in a background discussion after Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif chaired a meeting of his security aides on the Pathankot

incident and Pakistan's response. The official's comments provided an insight into Pakistan's planned response to India, which had shared what was described as 'leads' and 'actionable intelligence', with Pakistani authorities. Officials had previously said that the shared information included intercepts of telephone calls made by militants to their alleged handlers and the locations of the numbers which they (militants) had called in Pakistan. (Agencies)

China, India Express Hope to Further Cultural Exchanges

NEW DELHI - China and India Saturday expressed their hope to further cultural exchanges through publication cooperation. At the inaugural ceremony of the 24th World Book Fair of New Delhi, Chinese and Indian officials said the two countries are experiencing "a wind of change" in their interactions in cultural fields and publication in particular. Over 250 Chinese delegates were participating in the book fair, considered one of the biggest book fairs in Asia, as China is the guest of honor state. "We are facing an important opportunity to strengthen the traditional friendship between our two countries with a booming cooperation

of publication businesses in a new stage of such development since the beginning of the new century," said Sun Shoushan, vice minister from the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of China.. Chinese ambassador to India Le Yucheng said that with the coming of "China fever" in India and "India fever" in China, the publication has become an important means to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries. He cited a story of a mother in Mumbai hiring a Chinese language teacher to tutor her 19-month-old daughter Mandarin as an example of such a momentum. (Xinhua)

Turkmenistan to Form National Oil and Gas Company

ASHGABAT - President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov signed a decree, according to which it is planned to form a closed joint stock company "TürkmenMillinebitgazkompaniýasy" ("Turkmen National Oil and Gas Company" - NAPECCO). According to the document, this decision serves the purpose of successful implementation of the task of finding, mining and processing of hydrocarbon resources of Turkmenistan, as well as the implementation of processing of their products on the domestic and foreign markets, in

accordance with the Development Program of the oil and gas industry of Turkmenistan for the period until 2030. The shareholders of the new company are: State Agency for Management and Use of Hydrocarbon Resources under the President of Turkmenistan - the share in the authorized capital in the amount of 90 percent, "Turkmengas" State Concern - in the amount of two percent, "Turkmennebit" (Turkmenoil) State Concern - in the amount of two percent, the Turkmenbashi complex of oil refineries - with a share of authorized capital in the ... (More on P4)...(30)