

Israeli 'Provocations' Radicalizing Muslim World: Davutoglu

ISTANBUL - Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu accused his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday of terrorism and said Israeli "provocations" such as the bombardment of Gaza were contributing to radicalization in the Muslim world. In a Reuters interview, Davutoglu said peace in the Middle East and the eradication of extremist groups would be virtually impossible without the establishment of a Palestinian state. He also warned the international community against focusing solely on fighting Islamic State militants in its efforts to

end the conflict in Syria, saying the "brutality" of President Bashar al-Assad was the root cause of the problem. Turkey, an EU candidate nation and member of the NATO military alliance, is a key Western ally in the fight against Islamic jihadists. But its leaders have become increasingly concerned about what they see as rising Islamophobia in Europe and increasingly outspoken in their criticism of Israel. "Netanyahu himself killed, his army killed children in the playground. They killed our citizens and an American citizen in international waters. This is terror-

ism," Davutoglu said, referring to a 2010 Israeli assault on a Turkish boat attempting to break Israel's blockade of the Palestinian Gaza Strip. "Nobody can argue about Israeli aggression in Jerusalem in the al-Aqsa mosque," he added. "These provocations create frustration in the Muslim world and are becoming one of the reasons why these radical trends are emerging," he said. "If we want to establish peace and order in the Middle East, eliminating all the extremist forces, we have to solve the Palestinian question." Davutoglu on Thursday compared Netanyahu to the Islam-



ist militants who killed 17 people in Paris last week, saying both had committed crimes against humanity. Netanyahu

has called for an international condemnation of Davutoglu's remarks and those of President Tayyip Erdogan, after

he criticized the Israeli prime minister's attendance with other world leaders at a solidarity march in Paris. (Reuters)

Troops Take to Belgian Streets to Guard Against Attacks

BRUSSELS - Belgium is deploying hundreds of troops to guard potential targets of terrorism, including Jewish sites and diplomatic missions, following a series of raids and arrests, the defence minister said on Saturday.

Up to 300 military will be stationed at locations such as the U.S. and Israeli embassies in Brussels and NATO and EU institutions.

Troops will reinforce police at least until Thursday, when authorities will review the national threat level, set at 3 on a scale of 4 this week.

"It's very important to say that this wasn't a simple decision. But it was necessary, at a time when police are overly engaged, for the army to enter in a supporting role," Defense Minister Steven Vandeput told reporters.

On Thursday, two gunmen were killed in the Belgian town of Verriers during raids on an Islamist group that authorities said was planning to attack police. (Reuters)

Preparations for Moscow Meeting on Syria Going on Actively: Lavrov

TEHRAN - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stressed that the preparations for Moscow consultative meeting on the crisis in Syria are continuing actively.

Addressing a joint press conference with his Tanzanian counterpart Bernard Membe in Moscow on Friday, Lavrov said Russia has not received any refusals from any of the groups of the "Syrian opposition" for the present to participate in Moscow meeting, scheduled for January 26-29,



Al-Manar reported. "We feel there is great interest in this event on the part of the opposition figures who have been invited and of the so-called foreign players," Lavrov told the confer-

ence. He went on saying "It is clear that every opposition group tries to strengthen its position and be ready to discuss issues that will be on the agenda. Tactical maneuvering is under way."

Lavrov described the communication process as being not easy, noting that "It is the first attempt during the period of the Syrian crisis to bring together various opposition representatives... There have been no such attempts before."

On Wednesday, Lavrov said the "opposition" groups which might refuse to participate in Moscow meeting on Syria "will lose", noting that Russia counts on a good level of representation in the meeting. (FNA)

Security Forces Retake Villages in Western Iraq

BAGHDAD - Iraqi security forces on Saturday recaptured two villages after clashes with Islamic State (IS) militants in Iraq's western province of Anbar, while the IS militant group executed seven of its members, including a local leader, a government statement and a security source said.

The Iraqi army and allied Sunni tribesmen backed by aircraft launched an offensive on IS positions in west of the provincial capital city of Ramadi, some 110 km west of Baghdad, and managed to free the villages of Albu Haiyan, Alous and surrounding areas after fierce clashes, a Defense Ministry statement said. The battles are still under way, with heavy casualties among IS militants, the statement said without giving further details.

For months, Ramadi has been the scene of fierce clashes between the IS militants and the security forces, which has gained support from some local Sunni tribes who rejected the presence of the extremist IS group.

In Iraq's eastern province of Diyala, the IS militants executed one of its leaders and four of his aides after being accused of trying to topple their IS leadership in Sansil area near the town of Maqadiyah, some 100 km northeast of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, a provincial security source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity. The IS militants hung the bodies of the executed militants on trees in front of the people to terrorize whoever think of working against the extremist militants even if they were their own members, the source said.

Separately, the IS group executed two more of its members at the militant-seized village of Shiqlaq, just north of Maqadiyah, after the two members sent their families out of the village in a violation of the group's instructions, the source added.

The security situation in Iraq began to drastically deteriorate since June 10, when bloody clashes broke out between the Iraqi security forces and the IS group, an al-Qaida offshoot, who took control of the country's northern province of Nineveh and later seized swathes of territories after Iraqi security forces abandoned their posts in other predominantly Sunni provinces. (Xinhua)

New Sanctions Mean End of Nuclear Talks: Senior Iranian MP

TEHRAN - Senior parliamentary officials in Tehran warned on Saturday that Iran would stop negotiating with the world powers in case the US Congress approves any new sanction against the country.

"If the US or any member of the Group 5+1 (the US, Russia, China, France and Britain plus Germany) imposes a new sanction against Iran, it will be against the spirit of the negotiations and in that case the Islamic Republic of Iran will have reservations about continuing the talks," Rapporteur of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Seyed Hossein Naqavi Hosseini said. Naqavi Hosseini blamed the US for the prolonged nuclear talks between Iran and the world powers, and said, "Washington should pave the way for reaching a final agreement

by avoiding issues which are outside the framework of the nuclear talks."

He reiterated that Iran has specific redlines in the nuclear talks, and said, "The West should avoid making excessive demands from Iran." In late December, Iran condemned Washington for adding nine individuals and entities to its Iran sanctions blacklist, stressing that the embargoes mean a negative move amid the talks underway between Tehran and the six world powers, including the US. "We deplore the US administration's imposition of new embargoes on a number of other companies and people under the pretext of their partnership in purchasing the sanctioned goods and equipment, and we believe they violate the US undertakings under the Joint Plan of Action (Geneva agreement inked in

November 2013 between Tehran and the Group 5+1)," Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Marziyeh Afkham said in her weekly press conference in Tehran.

"Under such circumstances that the negotiations between Iran and the G5+1 to reach a comprehensive agreement are underway, this measure is a blatant violation of the good will principle and places a question mark on the goals pursued by the US administration through the negotiations," she added. Afkham, meantime, downplayed the effects of such acts on Iran's interactions with the world states to supply its industrial and trade needs.

Also asked by reporters on the US Congress new bill to impose more sanctions against Iran, she said the US administration will be responsible for the imple... (More on P4)... (22)

Syrian Army Makes Fresh Gains in Idlib, Homs

TEHRAN - The Syrian Army continued to make more gains in its fight against the armed groups in nearby areas of Idlib and Homs provinces, claiming the lives of scores of Takfiri militants.

The army soldiers stormed the hideouts of the rebels in the areas of Binnish, Arnaz and Kafr Takharim in Idlib, and killed a large number of them. In the meantime,



the militants suffered major losses in the areas of Um Sahrij, al-Misherfa and al-Saan, as the army made advances in Homs central province.

diplomatic solution and they started supplying the country's opposition groups with their arms and funds.

In 2014, specially after victory of President Bashar al-Assad in the country's presidential election, the army has gained upper hand in its anti-terrorism campaign, and has been partly successful in sealing borders with Turkey and Jordan. (FNA)

Japan PM Pledges \$2.5 Billion in Mideast Aid

CAIRO - Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pledged Saturday \$2.5 billion in humanitarian and development aid for the Middle East as he launched a regional tour that includes visits to Jordan and Israel.

In a speech in Cairo, Abe pledged \$200 million in non-military assistance for countries affected by the Islamic State (IS) group's bloody expansion in Iraq and Syria, which spurred an exodus of refugees to neighbouring countries.

"Japan will newly carry out assistance of 2.5 billion US dollars in non-military fields including humanitarian assistance and infrastructure development, intended for the

entire region," Abe said, according to an official transcript.

Speaking to Egyptian politicians and businessmen, he said Japan would "provide assistance for refugees and displaced persons from Iraq and Syria".

"I will pledge assistance of a total of about 200 million US dollars for those countries contending with ISIL (IS), to help build their human capacities, infrastructure, and so on," he added.

A Japanese foreign ministry official told AFP that much of those funds would go towards assisting neighbouring states hosting refugees.

The money is included in the... (More on P4)... (23)

Australia Asylum Seekers Continue Hunger Strike for 5th Day

PAPUA NEW GUINEA - Hundreds of asylum seekers at an Australian immigration detention center in Papua New Guinea's (PNG) Manus Island continue a hunger strike for the fifth consecutive day to express their strongest protest at their detention and dire conditions.

According to reports, more than 400 people are refusing food as they protest against an upcoming plan to move them to

temporary accommodations on the outskirts of Lorengau, the island's capital.

The protesters say it would be more honorable to die from a hunger strike than to be killed by locals if they are resettled in Papua New Guinea. Moreover, dozens of people have resorted to self-harm. Around 40 men have sewn their lips together; three others have swallowed razor blades and... (More on P4)... (24)

Neighbor News

Chinese FM's Africa Visit Strengthens Ties, Cooperation

NAIROBI - Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi wrapped up his week-long Africa tour on Friday, which has taken him to Kenya, Sudan, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo). The visit is to strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation between China and African countries in areas such as politics, economy and security, Wang told reporters in Kinshasa, capital of DR Congo, the last leg of his Africa trip. Africa hosts most of the developing countries, and China-Africa cooperation is an essential part of South-South cooperation, he said. "China is willing to transform the traditional friendship between China and Africa into impetus for common development, and to work with African countries to convert their potential in human and natural resources into economic strengths," he added.

Wang said that China cherishes the sincere friendship with Africa, and is willing to work with African countries to pursue common benefits, realize win-win results and achieve common development. During his first stop in Kenya, Wang

stressed that the sides will further promote cooperation in seven priority areas, including agricultural modernization, infrastructure development and renewable energy, so as to deepen bilateral relations and practical cooperation. In Cameroon, the foreign minister said China will continue to enhance political mutual trust with Cameroon and boost win-win cooperation on the basis of the development needs of Cameroon and the ability of China. China will further promote cooperation with Equatorial Guinea in energy and other fields and create more win-win achievements, Wang said when visiting the country. In DR Congo, Wang said China is willing to work with the country to support each other politically, achieve win-win outcomes economically and deepen security cooperation. Besides strengthening political ties and economic cooperation, another highlight of Wang's Africa visit is China's support for the efforts of the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) to promote reconciliation and realize peace and stability in South Sudan. (Xinhua)

Death Sentences for TTP Men Behind 2010 Ahmadi Attack

LAHORE - An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) on Saturday sentenced to death two Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants, Moavia and Abdullah, for the deadly attack on an Ahmadi place of worship in 2010. On May 28, 2010, militants attacked two Ahmadiyya places of worship in the city of Lahore with guns, grenades, and suicide bombs, killing 94 people and wounding

well over 100. The Punjabi Taliban, a local affiliate of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (the Pakistani Taliban or TTP), claimed responsibility. Two men were captured during the attack, but the government was heavily criticised by rights groups for failing to make progress on their trial, seeking repeated adjournments from the court as has the defense. (Monitoring Desk)

Ex-Oil Minister: Iran to Boost Gas Exports to Iraq to 50mln cbm

TEHRAN (FNA) - Former Iranian Oil Minister Rostam Qassemi announced the country's plans to boost natural gas exports to Iraq to 50mln cbm following a recent agreement between the two neighboring states.

"After technical negotiations with the Iraqis, we considered a gas contract with Baghdad for the daily exports of 25mln cbm which was inked by the two (oil) ministries, and then the construction of the pipeline from Mehran to Naftshahr and Baghdad was completed," Qassemi told FNA on Saturday.

The secretary of the headquarters of Iran-Iraq

economic relations also elaborated on another agreement endorsed by the two countries' officials to export gas through Khorramshahr city in Iran to Basra in Iraq, and said, "With the second agreement, we will export 50mln cbm of gas to Iraq."

Referring to the good economic relations between Tehran and Baghdad, Qassemi said, "At present, our economic exchanges are worth around \$13bln." 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. (FNA)

All political parties in Uzbekistan intend to nominate presidential candidates

All the political parties in Uzbekistan intend to nominate their candidates for the presidential election. Uzbekistan's Central Election Commission (CEC) scheduled the presidential election for March 29.

Under the current electoral legislation of Uzbekistan, only the political parties have the right to nominate a presidential candidate.

The candidate may be a member of the nominating party or a non-party candidate. Uzbekistan held the previous presidential election in De-

ember 2007.

The elections were participated by the candidate of the Movement of Entrepreneurs and Businessmen - Liberal-Democratic Party, Islam Karimov, who gained over 13 million votes (88.1 percent of the vote), the candidate of the People's Democratic Party, Asliddin Rustamov (3.17 percent), the candidate of the initiative group of voters, Akmal Saidov (2.85 percent) and the candidate of the Social Democratic Party 'Adolat', Dilor Tashmukhamedov (2.94 percent). (TREND)

IS Targeted in 29 Airstrikes in Syria, Iraq: Joint Task Force

WASHINGTON - The United States and its allies conducted 29 airstrikes on Islamic State (IS) targets in Syria and Iraq in a 24-hour period, the Combined Joint Task Force said in a statement on Saturday. Sixteen strikes around seven Iraqi cities

destroyed vehicles, buildings, equipment and fighting positions, as well as hitting units belonging to Islamic State, which is trying to establish a caliphate in the Middle East, the task force said. In Syria, 11 airstrikes were carried out near the

city of Kobani, destroying a tank and fighting positions, while others focused on targets near Abu Kamal and Dawr az Zawr. The strikes took place between Friday and Saturday mornings, the task force statement said. (Reuters)