

Over 100 Killed in Air Strikes, Clashes with IS Militants in Iraq

BAGHDAD - Up to 62 Islamic State (IS) militants and 48 security members were killed on Saturday in U.S.-led coalition air strikes, four suicide bomb attacks and clashes with Iraqi security forces, security sources said. In Iraq's western province of Anbar, three suicide bombers drove their booby-trapped vehicles into bases of Iraqi federal police and detonated them in Kilo 70 area in west of the provincial capital city of Ramadi, some 110 km west of Baghdad, leaving some 43 policemen killed and destroying five police vehicles, a provincial se-



curity source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity. Meanwhile, a suicide

bomber rammed his explosive-laden vehicle into a military base and blew

it up in Tal Msheidah area, just east of Ramadi, killing five security mem-

bers and wounding 11 others, along with destroying two military vehicles, the

source said. Separately, U.S.-led coalition aircraft carried out air strikes on IS positions in the desert area in north of Ramadi, leaving at least 53 IS militants killed, the source added without giving further details. Security forces and paramilitary Sunni tribal units captured downtown Ramadi from IS control on Dec. 28, raising the Iraqi flag on the government complex there, but small parts of the city has not yet been fully secured due to a large numbers of bombs planted by the IS and because the troops wanted to avoid casualties among civilians. (Xinhua)

US Prepared for Military Solution Against Islamic State in Syria: Biden

ISTANBUL - U.S. Vice President Joe Biden said on Saturday that the United States and Turkey were prepared for a military solution against Islamic State in Syria if a political settlement was not possible, amid uncertainty over scheduled peace talks. The latest round of Syria peace talks are planned to begin on Monday in Geneva but were at risk of being delayed partly because of a dispute over who will comprise the opposition delegation.

"We do know it would be better if we can reach a political solution but we are prepared ... if that's not possible, to have a military solution to this operation in taking out Daesh," Biden said at a news conference after a meeting with Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. Daesh is the pejorative Arabic acronym for Islamic State insurgents who hold parts of Syria. A U.S. official clarified that Biden was talking about a military solution ... (More on P4)...(24)

US Forces Setting up Airbase in Northeast Syria: Sources

BEIRUT - US special forces and experts are setting up an airbase in northeast Syria as part of the battle against the Islamic State group, Syrian military and security sources said Saturday.

They told AFP work was underway to expand an airfield in Rmeilan, in Hasakeh province, from where aircraft used to take off to spray pesticides on crops before Syria's war started five years ago. A Syrian military source said nearly 100 "American experts,"



alongside forces from the anti-IS Kurdish People's Protection Units had widened the landing strip and refurbished some in-

frastructure. "The airbase will be used for helicopters and cargo planes. Its strip is now 2,700 metres (yards) long and is ready to be used by planes that will transport equipment and ammunition," the source added. The Pentagon ... (More on P4)...(25)

Egypt Warns Against Unrest on Uprising Anniversary

CAIRO - Egypt's president, speaking ahead of next week's anniversary of the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime ruler Hosni Mubarak, vowed on Saturday to unleash a firm response to any unrest and to press ahead with the fight against Islamic militants. Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi spoke at a ceremony marking Police Day, which falls on Jan. 25, the day the uprising began five years ago. He posthumously decorated nearly

40 policemen killed in militant attacks, including eight generals and three colonels. Most of the widows who received the medals were accompanied by their children, including infants. El-Sissi, his eyes frequently welling up, carried the infants, hugged and kissed older children and posed with them for photos. He allowed several family members, including a boy no older than 12, to briefly address the large gathering. Addressing the na-

tion, el-Sissi said of those killed in terror attacks: "Don't let their blood go in vain and, by the way, we will not allow that ourselves, and I am saying that so everyone listens and takes note," he said. "The security and stability of nations are not to be toyed with," he said, adding that the security of Egypt was the responsibility of all Egyptians, not just the police and the army. El-Sissi delivered his 30-minute address standing in the middle of

the families of the policemen killed in terror attacks, with the sound of crying babies occasionally heard in the background. El-Sissi, who as military chief overthrew in 2013 Islamist President Mohammed Morsi, has presided over a sweeping crackdown on dissent, jailing thousands of Islamists and scores of secular, pro-democracy activists who fuelled the 2011 uprising. He was elected to office in 2014 with a landslide. (AP)

Poles Fearing Attack on Democracy by Government Join Protest

WARSAW - Thousands of Poles in cities and towns across the country marched Saturday in freezing temperatures to protest a slew of measures by the country's new right-wing government which they say are anti-democratic. The motto of the marches, the most recent of several that have taken place since Law and Justice took power in November, was "in defense of your freedom." Protesters are furious about government steps which they fear limit checks and balances on the party, which has a majority in parliament and also controls the presidency. Soon after taking power, Law and Justice took steps to curb the power of the Constitutional Tribunal, increased government control over state media, and widened the scope for police surveillance. Protesters in Warsaw shouted "democracy!" and many carried Polish and European Union flags. "We want to keep our ... (More on P4)...(26)

India Says can Join Hands with Africa to Create Oil Infrastructure

NEW DELHI - India has reportedly reiterated that Africa is its "natural partner" and said that both can join hands to create oil infrastructure. "India can partner in establishing the entire supply chain in the hydrocarbon sector, beginning from exploration, production, refining, distribution, infrastructure and strategic storage," Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj has said. "Africa, for us, is a natural partner with its rich resource endowments and rising production of hydrocarbons. This is an opportunity for both India and Africa to forge a commitment to energy security both security of demand and security of supply." Swaraj's statements at the India-Africa Hydrocarbon Conference in the Indian capital on Friday came a day after Indian Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had said that New Delhi is looking at ... (More on P4)...(27)

French President to Arrive in India Sunday

NEW DELHI - French President Francois Hollande will arrive in India Sunday to be the chief guest at this country's Republic Day parade Tuesday, sources said Saturday.

Sources said that the French President's first stop is the central government-controlled territory of Chandigarh in northern India.

"Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will meet President Hollande in Chandigarh Sunday. A meeting is scheduled between them at the city's best-known landmark, the Rock Garden," the sources said. This will be



the first visit by a French President to Chandigarh that was founded and designed by French architect Le Corbusier in the 1950s. After a day's visit to Chandigarh that includes an interactive session with Indian industrialists at a business

summit in the city, the French president will come to the Indian capital Monday. On Jan. 26, the French president will witness the Republic Day parade on the iconic Rajpath at the heart of the national capital as the chief guest. (Xinhua)

UN Urges Regular Aid Access to Yemen's Taz

SANAA - The UN humanitarian coordinator for Yemen called Saturday for regular humanitarian access to parts of the battleground city of Taz that are besieged by Iran-backed rebels. Jamie McGoldrick said he saw some food, cooking gas and other commodities being brought into the city where pro-government forces are holed up.

"I appeal to authorities and groups to work with the United Nations to establish a mechanism that will allow regular and sustained access of these goods and more into the city," he said in a statement.

He said access to three districts of the southwestern city had been difficult for months and the UN is seeking "mechanisms with parties on the ground to ensure sustained, unfettered and unconditional access."

Shiite Huthi rebels and allied fighters loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh have laid siege to Yemen's third city for months.

The insurgents overran the capital Sanaa unopposed in September 2014 and expanded their control across several regions.

Loyalists backed by a Saudi-led coalition have recaptured Aden and four other southern provinces since July, as well as most of Marib province, east of the capital.

McGoldrick said basic services are scarce in Taz, while hospitals are short of medical supplies. (AFP)

British PM Urges Maldives Political Change in Nasheed Talks

LONDON - British Prime Minister David Cameron urged the Maldives to open up its politics and release all remaining political prisoners after meeting former president Mohamed Nasheed on Saturday. Nasheed, who has been in prison in the Maldives

but was granted special leave for urgent surgery, visited Cameron's Downing Street office in London, accompanied by his wife Laila Ali Abdulla and his British lawyer Amal Clooney. Nasheed's conviction last March on terror-related charges has ... (More on P4)...(28)

UN Council Meets African Union for Burundi Crisis Talks

ADDIS ABABA - UN Security Council ambassadors and African Union leaders met Saturday for crisis talks on Burundi, after the government refused a proposed AU force to stem violence in the troubled country.

The meeting, in the AU headquarters in Ethiopia, comes a day after the UN envoys met with President Pierre Nkurunziza in Burundi, where they appealed for him to take urgent

action to stop the violence sparked by his re-election. UN council envoys have pushed for the government to hold talks with the opposition and agree to the presence of international troops -- such as a proposed 5,000-strong African Union force -- to restore stability. AU Peace and Security Council chief Smail Chergui said Saturday it was crucial the international ... (More on P4)...(29)

Neighbor News

Tajikistan Parliament backs President for Life

ALMATY - Tajikistan's parliament on Friday backed changing the constitution to allow the ex-Soviet country's long-serving president Emomali Rakhmon to run for office an infinite number of times.

The 63-year-old president has led the impoverished Central Asian country since 1992. On Friday, the lower house backed amendments saying "Rakhmon can stand for president an unlimited number of times," said lawmaker Makhmadali Vatanzoda.

"The lawmakers proposed including this new article in the country's constitution." The amendments now have to be approved by the constitutional court

and put to a national referendum.

Tajikistan last year awarded Rakhmon the title of "Leader of the Nation," reinforcing his burgeoning personality cult.

"According to the Tajik constitution, a person can stand for president twice for 7-year terms. However this does not apply to the Leader of the Nation," argued Vatanzoda, one of the authors of the amendments.

Rakhmon, a former collective farm boss, won a seven-year term in a one-sided election in 2013. He is eligible to serve another term after that following constitutional reforms. The next election will be in 2020. (Agencies)

Russian Army to Hold First Mountain Drills with Pakistan

MOSCOW - The Russian Army's Commander-in-Chief Oleg Salyukov on Friday announced that Russian ground forces will hold its first ever military exercises with Pakistan in the coming year, according to TASS news agency.

The Russian Army is scheduled to hold seven international drills in 2016, including the "the first ever Russian-Pakistani special drills in mountainous terrain."

"As part of interaction with our foreign colleagues in 2016, we have scheduled seven joint exercises with the involvement of the relevant units of foreign states," the Russian Army Commander-in-Chief said.

The Russian Army will also hold joint anti-terror command and staff exercises of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as well as a Russian-Vietnamese exercise, Salyukov added. (Agencies)

Iran Closer to Plan to use Oman Plant for LNG Exports

TEHRAN - Iran indicated on Saturday that it had moved closer to plans to take its natural gas to Oman and turn it into liquefied natural gas (LNG) for exports to international markets.

Alireza Kameli, the managing director of the National Iranian Gas Export Company (NIGEC), has been quoted by the media as saying that around 30 percent of the gas that Iran plans to export to Oman will be used for producing LNG.

Kameli said based on initial agreements, Iran will export a daily of 28 million cubic meters (mcm) of gas to Oman. Nevertheless, he em-

phasized that the figure is not final and may increase by the time the two countries finalize their gas export talks. Iran's Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh on Thursday visited Oman to follow up talks on several issues relating to cooperation between the two countries in the area of energy.

Top on the agenda of his visit was a project to pipe Iran's natural gas to Oman.

Based on an early agreement that Iran signed with Oman in 2013, the Persian Gulf sultanate will receive a daily of 28 mcm of gas from Iran per day through a sub-sea pipeline. (PressTV)

China to Tighten Checks on Subsidies for New-Energy Vehicles

BEIJING - China's finance minister said some new-energy vehicle producers have relied too much on government subsidies, noting subsidy-related fraud will be punished severely.

The subsidies were first given to nurture the initial market, but enterprises tend to rely too much on them and focus on policy when designing vehicles, making few technological breakthroughs, Finance Minister Lou Jiwei said on Saturday at a forum on electric vehicles. China plans to cut such subsidies by 20 percent between 2017 and 2018

from 2016 levels, and by 40 percent between 2019 and 2020, the Ministry of Finance announced in May last year.

The finance ministry plans to conduct a special check of the use of subsidies and has vowed to severely punish those involved in subsidy-related fraud. New-energy vehicles continue to gain popularity.

The number sold in 2015 more than tripled year on year to 331,100, partly due to government incentives to encourage their use. About 500,000 new-energy vehicles had been sold by the end of 2015. (Xinhua)