

# Iraq Violence Kills At Least 1,100 in February: UN

BAGHDAD -The U.N. mission to Iraq said Sunday that violence claimed the lives of at least 1,100 Iraqis in February, including more than 600 civilians. The U.N. Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) said in a statement that 611 civilians were among 1,103 people killed last month, with the rest hailing from the security forces. It said at least 2,280 people were wounded, including 1,353 civilians. January's death toll was at least 1,375. The most violent city was the capital Baghdad, with 329 civilians killed and 875 wounded, it said. The U.N. numbers do not include the third of the country held by the Islamic State extremist group. U.N. envoy Nickolay Mladenov blamed the deaths on the extremist group, government forces and pro-government Shiite militias. "Daily terrorist attacks perpetrated by ISIL continue to deliberately target all Iraqis," Mladenov said in the statement, using an acronym for the Islamic State group. "There are also concerning reports of a number of revenge killings by armed groups in areas recently liberated from



ISIL," he added. He called on Iraq's fractured leaders to reconcile, saying "an exclusively military solution to the problem of ISIL is impossible." The statement came a day after series of attacks targeting public places and Shiite militia checkpoints in and around the capital killed at least 37 people. The deadliest, near the city of Samarra, saw two suicide car bombers attack checkpoints manned by Shiite militiamen, killing 16 Shiite fighters and wounding 31. Hours later, the IS group claimed responsibility for the Samarra attacks in a statement posted on an account used by the militants. The Islamic State extremist group and other Sunni insurgents seized control of much of western and ... (More on P4)...(17)

## Ukraine Military Says Rebels Using Truce to Regroup

KIEV - Ukraine's military said on Sunday a ceasefire had been fully observed in eastern separatist territories overnight, but warned that pro-Russian rebels were using the truce to regroup for new attacks on government positions.



A drop in violence and moves by both sides to withdraw heavy weapons from the front line had raised hopes a shaky two-week-old ceasefire could hold. "In order to mislead OSCE representatives, the rebels are moving military equipment from the front line ... and bringing it back at night," military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said. "There are signs the enemy is preparing for further offensives," he said, naming as major targets government-held Mariupol, a strategic port city, and Artemivsk,

north of the rebel stronghold of Donetsk. While there was no shelling in the night, rebels shelled government troop positions 34 times on Saturday, wounding eight Ukrainian soldiers, Lysenko said. On the other side, rebels said Ukrainian forces had fired mortar rounds and rockets in the Donetsk area 26 times in the past 24 hours, according to separatist DAN press service. Senior rebel commander Eduard Basurin said on Sunday separatists continued the process of withdrawing heavy weapons from the front line under the eye of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, DAN reported. The OSCE, which is monitoring the implementation of the peace deal, said on Saturday it had monitored the pull back of rebel equipment in parts of the Donetsk region and ... (More on P4)...(18)

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## U.S. Deserves 'Benefit of The Doubt' on Getting Iran Nuclear Deal: Kerry

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said on Sunday the United States deserves "the benefit of the doubt" to see if a nuclear deal can be reached with Iran that would prevent any need for military action to curb Tehran's atomic ambitions.



Kerry also said he hoped that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's planned speech to Congress on Tuesday, in which he will warn against a possible nuclear deal with Iran, does not turn into "some great political football." U.S. and international partners are in negotiation with Iran over curbing its nuclear program but Netanyahu has

cast doubt on a possible deal and says a nuclear-armed Iran would pose an existential threat to the Jewish state. The Israeli leader was invited to speak this week by Republican congressional leaders who did not first inform President Barack Obama's administration.

In an interview with the ABC program "This Week," Kerry said of the Iran negotiations, "It is better to do this by diplomacy than to have to do a strategy militarily which you would have to repeat over and over again and which everybody believes ... (More on P4)...(19)

## Egypt's Sisi Meets New Saudi King to Discuss Middle East Crises

RIYADH - Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el Sisi met Saudi Arabia's King Salman in Riyadh on Sunday for the pair's first in-depth talks on regional issues at a time of unprecedented turmoil in the Middle East. The meeting was aimed at strengthening bilateral ties, as well as discussing the crises in the Middle East and addressing security in the Red Sea in light of growing political chaos in Yemen, pan-Arab daily Asharq al-Awsat on Sunday quoted Sisi as saying. Salman broke official protocol to meet Sisi at the airport, a pointed mark of favor towards the Egyptian president at a time when some Arab media have asked whether the close ties that existed between the two states under the late King Abdullah would continue. The visit is the latest in an intense flurry of diplomacy in Riyadh, and follows talks between Salman and leaders of all Saudi Arabia's Gulf Arab neighbors, as well as Jordan. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will meet him on Monday. The talks have been billed as an opportunity for the new leader of the United States' top Arab ally and the birthplace of Islam to meet his peers for in-depth discussions after cursory initial meetings last month when they paid condolences over Abdullah's death. (Reuters)

## Israeli PM Heads for U.S. Congress Speech amid Criticism

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu left Sunday morning for Washington D.C. to speak in front of U.S. Congress on Iran's nuclear program. The upcoming speech on March 3 drew a lot of criticism and could be considered as one of the most contentious visits by an Israeli leader in the United States in recent history.

Netanyahu, who views a nuclear Iran as an existential threat to the state of Israel, said prior to his departure that he will act as an "emissary of the citizens of Israel and the Jewish people." The P5+1

group, namely the U.S., U.K., China, France, Russia and Germany, has been negotiating with Iran over its nuclear plan since mid-2013, and hope to reach a final agreement by the end of March. Whereas the U.S. and its allies are trying to get Iran to curb its nuclear program in exchange for lifting the international community's economic sanctions on Iran. Netanyahu's hardline stance demands that Iran give up its entire nuclear capabilities so it could not develop nuclear weapons. Iran, on its part, claims its nuclear program is ... (More on P4)...(20)

## Pro-Russians Remove Heavy Weapons from Frontline in East Ukraine

KEIV - forces in eastern Ukraine have announced that they have nearly completed the piecemeal pullback of heavy weapons from the frontline in the east of the country in compliance with a peace agreement signed last month.

The self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) said pro-Russians have pulled heavy weapons back from the area. Eighty percent of heavy weapons have been also relocated from nearby Lugansk.

Heavy weapons were withdrawn on Saturday in Donetsk, Torez, Dnistrovka, Pervomaisk, Bezymennoye, and Samoylovka, DPR

spokesman Eduard Basurin said, adding, "During the whole withdrawal operation, the DNR militia has pulled out 21 artillery groups." The pro-Russia forces in Lugansk also said they relocated most of their heavy arms, but will need a couple more days to complete the withdrawal. "As of mid-day February 28, the corps of the people's militia has withdrawn 80 percent of heavy weapons from the demarcation line. By March 2 or 3, the process of the withdrawal of heavy weapons is planned to be completed. Of course, if there are no incidents," the self-proclaimed Lugansk People's Republic (LPR) said in a statement. (Press TV)

## Egypt's Sisi Orders to Redraft Electoral Law Article

CAIRO - Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi ordered Sunday to redraft an electoral law article which was ruled unconstitutional within one month, state-run Nile TV reported. Sisi also demanded that "legal measures be considered to avoid delaying the elections," a statement from his office said. Earlier in the day, Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that an article in an election-relat-

ed law of drawing constituencies was unconstitutional, paving the way for a possible delay in a long-awaited March-April polls. Sisi vowed respect for the judiciary's rulings to cement the principals of law sovereignty. Meanwhile, the country's Supreme Electoral Commission, following the ruling, held an urgent meeting to discuss the impact of the court ruling on the elections map. (Xinhua)

## Neighbor News

### Iran Warns West against Dire Consequences of Arming Terrorist Groups

TEHRAN - Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani warned the western states that arming the terrorist groups to topple the Syrian government will produce dire repercussions for global peace and security. "Tehran has repeatedly warned of the grave consequences of arming the terrorist groups under the pretext of campaign against the legal government of Syria," Shamkhani said in a meeting with

Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni in Tehran on Sunday, warning that "adoption of wrong policies by certain western states and their regional allies will lead to terrorist threats to the international community". He underlined that instability and insecurity will further increase if the aforementioned states don't revise their wrong approach to terrorism. "The experience of Libya and the emergence of the ISIL in the country ... (More on P4)...(21)

### Dialogue between Pakistan and India to Help Reduce Tension on LoC: Sartaj

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will visit Saudi Arabia next week to meet the new king. A brief statement from the Prime Minister's Office said that Mr Sharif would travel to Saudi Arabia on "a special invitation" from King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. The reason for the sudden invitation was unclear. Also read: PM Nawaz meets Saudi crown prince Mr Sharif travelled twice to the kingdom in January, once to inquire about the health of former King

Abdullah and then to attend his funeral. He held extensive talks with then Crown Prince Salman on bilateral relations, Middle East situation and issues facing the Muslim world. The issue of financing terror groups in Pakistan by some Saudi entities was also raised. Know more: Gen Raheel meets with Saudi political, military leadership Saudi Arabia is recently facing intense criticism in Pakistan because of alleged terrorism funding from there. (Monitoring Desk)

### Sanctions Serious Hurdle to N. Deal: Iranian FM

ISLAMABAD - Adviser to the Pakistani prime minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz on Sunday said dialogue with India will help reduce tension on the Line of Control (LoC), Radio Pakistan reported. He said talks with India will be held on all issues, including the longstand-

ing Kashmir dispute. India cancelled foreign secretary level talks last year, they restored the talks themselves this year, he said. Aziz added that Pakistan has never joined India in an arms race. The advisor said national security is an important part of Pakistan's foreign ... (More on P4)...(22)

### Parliamentary Polls Kick Off in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - People started going to the polling stations in Tajikistan in the country's parliamentary elections amid speculations that the ruling party of President Emomali Rahmon will win the polls. The voting began on Sunday, the head of the Central Commission for

Elections and Referenda (CCER), Abdumannon Dodozoda, said, adding that a high voter turnout is expected. Polls will remain open until 8 pm local time (1500 GMT) on Sunday, and results are expected to be announced on Monday. According to the ... (More on P4)...(23)

### Chinese Diplomat Clarifies Policy on N. Myanmar Conflict

BEIJING - A senior Chinese diplomat on Sunday clarified China's policy toward its neighbor Myanmar since conflict in northern Myanmar has triggered rumors. In a written interview with Xinhua, Kong Xu-

anyou, director-general of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, denied any Chinese local authorities' involvement in the conflict. China has always adhered ... (More on P4)...(24)

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