

1,375 People Killed in Iraq Violence in January: UN

BAGHDAD - A total of 1,375 Iraqis were killed and 2,240 others were injured in terrorist attacks and violence in January in Iraq, according to a statement issued on Sunday by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

The statement said that 790 civilians, including 59 policemen, and 585 Iraqi security forces personnel were killed, while 1,469 civilians including 69 policemen were wounded. An additional 771 security members were wounded in terrorist and violent acts during the month.

The statement said that the Iraqi capital of Baghdad was the worst affected province with 1,014 civilian casualties (256 killed, 758 injured). While the volatile Anbar province followed with 779 (195 killed and 584 injured). Then the prov-



inces of Diyala, Salahuddin, Nineveh and Kirkuk followed in the list.

"In general, UNAMI has been hindered in effectively verifying casualties in conflict areas. The figures reported have to be considered as the absolute minimum," the statement said, adding that there are unknown persons who have died from secondary effects of violence after having fled their homes due to expo-

sure to the elements, lack of water, food, medicine and health care.

The security situation in the country has drastically deteriorated since June, when bloody clashes broke out between Iraqi security forces and hundreds of militants from the Islamic State (IS). The militants took control of the country's northern city of Mosul and later seized swathes of territories after Iraqi

security forces abandoned their posts in Nineveh and other predominantly Sunni provinces. Earlier, a UN reports said that 2014 has witnessed some of the worst violence in years, leaving at least 12,282 civilians killed and 23,126 others injured, making it the deadliest year since the flare-up of sectarian violence in 2006-2007, according to a recent UN report. (Xinhua)

Iran Ready to Ink Convention with Regional States: Salehi

TEHRAN - Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali Akbar Salehi underlined the country's preparedness to sign a convention with the regional countries on safety of nuclear power plants. "The regional countries, specially the Persian Gulf littoral states, have stepped into the arena of peaceful nuclear activities and for instance, the UAE is building 4 nuclear power plants and other countries have also announced plans to build nuclear power plants," Salehi said in Tehran on Saturday evening. "We are ready to create a regional safety convention for the supervision of the regional countries' power plants operations in a way that such activities will be supervised and controlled permanently within the framework of a regional safety convention," he added. In earlier remarks in December, Salehi had underscored that Iran

welcomed acquisition of civilian nuclear technology by its Arab neighbors in the Persian Gulf, and announced the country's preparedness to share its experiences with them to this end. Salehi was asked by reporters to comment on the UAE and Saudi Arabia's efforts to build nuclear power plants, and said, "We will be happy if the Islamic and developing countries, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia, can gain access to this technology based on their rights enshrined in the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) and the (International Atomic Energy) Agency's statute and we don't have any concerns in this regard." Describing Iran as a pioneer in fighting to restore the developing countries' rights to use peaceful nuclear technology, he said, "If they want to enter the arena of civilian nuclear activities, we will welcome and will be happy." (FNA)

Nieghbor News

Iran, Egypt Hold Common Anti-Terror Stance: Iran Diplomat

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian diplomat says Iran and Egypt hold common stances with regard to opposing any act of terrorism in the Middle East region, particularly in Syria and Iraq. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossain Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in a Sunday meeting with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on the sidelines of the 24th Summit of the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, IRNA reported. The Iranian envoy urged Muslim countries to close ranks in countering Takfiri groups operating in the region. Amir-Abdollahian also censured the recent terrorist attack in Egypt's volatile Sinai Peninsula and underlined the need for cooperation among all Egyptian political groups and national conciliation.

At least two children were killed in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula on Friday, a day after at least 44 people were killed and dozens of others injured in a series of militant attacks across the volatile region. The latest fatalities come as a massive car bomb on Thursday detonated outside the headquarters of the 101st Brigade of the Egyptian army in the city of el-Arish, situated 344 kilometers (214 miles) northeast of the capital, Cairo, late on Thursday, leaving scores of people dead and wounded. Separately, an office of Egypt's most-widely-circulated daily, al-Ahram, was "completely destroyed" in an assault by gunmen on Thursday. Two Egyptian army officers were also injured when an army convoy was targeted with mortar shells in the border town of Rafah on the same day. (Press TV)

Japan Condemns 'Despicable' IS Hostage Beheading Claim

TOKYO - Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sunday condemned the announcement by Islamic State militants that they had beheaded second Japanese hostage as "heinous and despicable," ending a hostage standoff that has rocked the pacifist nation.

IS claimed in a video released online that it had killed 47-year-old journalist Kenji Goto -- the second purported beheading of a Japanese hostage in a week -- but made no mention of a Jordanian pilot it has also threatened to kill. "We will never forgive terrorists," Abe told a crush of reporters at his office on Sunday, appearing to fight back tears as he spoke. "We will cooperate with the international com-



munity to make them atone for their crimes." Jordan's King Abdullah II denounced Goto's murder as a "cowardly, criminal act" and said every effort was being made "to seek the release of the hero pilot Maaz Kassabeh", captured after his F-16 plane crashed in Syria in December.

IS has been demanding the release of an Iraqi jihadist on death row

in Jordan in exchange for Kassabeh's life, and Amman said it would hand her over if given proof he is still alive. The grisly video shows Goto, a respected war correspondent, wearing an orange outfit similar to those worn by Guantanamo Bay inmates, kneeling next to a standing man dressed head-to-toe in black with his face covered. The man, who speaks

with a British accent, appears to be the same IS militant who has featured in previous videos showing the execution of Western hostages.

He addresses Abe, saying the killing was the result of Tokyo's "reckless" decisions -- a possible reference to aid it has granted for refugees fleeing IS-controlled areas in Syria and Iraq -- and would mark the beginning of a "nightmare for Japan". The brief video, whose content has not been verified, ends with the image of a body and a decapitated head on top of it. "After an extensive review, we believe it's highly probable" the video is authentic, government spokesman Yoshihide Suga told reporters. (AFP)

British Mosques Hold Open Day after Paris Attacks

LONDON - Some 20 mosques in Britain were opening their doors to the public Sunday in an unprecedented gesture of reassurance following last month's Islamist attacks in Paris. Visitors will be served tea and cakes by members of the mosque community who will answer questions about Islam, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) umbrella group which is organizing the initiative said in a statement. Participating mosques include Finsbury Park in north London, where Abu Hamza -- jailed in the US last month for the deadly kidnapping of Western tourists in Yemen plus terrorism offences -- was once imam. The Finsbury Park Mosque has since undergone a change of leader-

ship and ethos and now stresses community relations and interfaith dialogue. But in the wake of the Paris attacks which killed 17 people, it has received a string of threatening letters and emails, its secretary-general, Mohammed Kozbar, told Sky News television recently. Prime Minister David Cameron's government sent a letter to Muslim leaders following the Paris attacks urging them to "explain and demonstrate how faith can be part of British identity" and suggesting there was "more work to do" in fighting extremism. This prompted an angry response from the MCB, which questioned whether the government was aligning itself with the far-right by suggesting ... (More on P4)... (25)

China to Speed Up Agri Modernization Through Reforms

BEIJING - China will step up reforms and innovation to speed up agricultural modernization in 2015, according to a key policy document released by the Party and government on Sunday. As the Chinese economy, under the "new normal," shifts from high-speed to medium-to-high-speed growth, it has become a key issue to continue consolidating the position of agriculture as the foundation of the economy and to further increase farmers' income, said the document. The "No. 1 Central Document" refers to the first major policy document of each year released by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council. This is the 12th consecutive year in which the document has focused on agriculture and rural issues. The document listed 5 aspects and 32 points for detailed government work on reforms related to the "three rural issues", agriculture, rural areas and farmers. According to the document, China will strive

to transform the development mode of agriculture, boost policies that benefit farmers, push forward the building of new socialist countryside, deepen rural reforms and strengthen rule of law in dealing with rural issues. This year's document put more emphasis on "strengthening reform and innovation," compared to the one of 2014, Zhu Lizhi, a research fellow with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences told Xinhua. China's agricultural modernization is expected to be accelerated with the help of the new policy document, Zhu added. Highlighting the role of agriculture, the document said a strong agricultural sector is the prerequisite of a strong China. Instead of mainly pursuing high output and relying on resources consumption, China should put equal emphasis on quantity, quality and benefits, and attach importance to competitiveness, technological innovation and sustainable growth, it added. (Xinhua)

Greece Starts Drive to Sell New Debt Deal to Doubting Europe

ATHENS - Greece's leftist government on Sunday began its drive to persuade a skeptical Europe to accept a new debt agreement while it starts to roll back on austerity measures imposed under its existing bailout agreement. After a turbulent first week in office, the new government has made clear it wants to end the existing arrangement with the European Union, the European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund "troika" when its aid deadline expires on Feb. 28. Instead, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras wants to agree a bridging deal with the troika while a new agreement is negotiated to reduce Greece's unmanageable public debt burden of more than 175 percent of its economic output is worked out. Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, who spoke to U.S. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew on Friday, is due to kick off a diplomatic offensive in Paris on Sunday, where he meets French counterpart Michel Sapin and Economy Minister Emmanuel Macron. He goes to London to see British Finance Minister George Osborne on Monday and travels to Rome on Tuesday. Before the meeting Sapin repeated that Greece could not expect its partners to accept a straight debt write off. But he left the door open to other options that could include

giving Athens more time for repayment. "No we will not annul, we can discuss, we can delay, we can reduce its weight, but not annul," he told Canal Plus television. He meets Varoufakis at 5 p.m. local time (1100 ET) before a joint statement to media at 6.30 p.m. Tsipras himself is due this week in Rome and Paris, the two major capitals where his hopes for a sympathetic hearing are highest given French and Italian calls for an easing in rigid euro zone budget austerity. He is also due to meet European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker but has yet to say if and when he might meet German Chancellor Angela Merkel or Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble who refuse to consider any writedown of Greek debt.

At home, where Greeks have seen poverty and hardship reach levels unmatched anywhere else in western Europe, the government has wasted little time in making clear it intends to respect its election promises to end years of harsh austerity. It has halted a series of privatizations it says amount to a disposal of strategic national assets at fire-sale prices and has announced plans to reinstate thousands of public sector workers laid off by the last government. (Reuters)

Death Toll Mounts in Ukraine Fighting After Peace Talks Fail

KIEV/DONETSK - Thirteen government soldiers and at least as many civilians have been killed in the past 24 hours in eastern Ukraine's separatist conflict after the collapse of peace talks, Kiev authorities said. Hopes of easing the situation evaporated on Saturday with Ukraine's representative and separatist envoys accusing the other of sabotaging

negotiations. "Fighting continues across all sections of the frontline," Kiev military spokesman Volodymyr Polyovoy said in a briefing. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which took part in the talks in Minsk, Belarus, along with envoys from Ukraine and Russia, said rebel delegates had not been ready to discuss key points of a



peace plan. "In fact, they were not even prepared to discuss implementation of a ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons," the OSCE said in a statement. It said rebels had instead pushed ... (More on P4)... (26)

US, Allies Conduct 34 Air Strikes against IS: U.S. Military



WASHINGTON - The United States and its allies have carried out 26 air strikes in Iraq and eight in Syria since Saturday in continued attacks on Islamic State targets, the U.S. military said on Sunday. The bulk of the strikes were near the Iraqi oil city of Kirkuk, while in Syria most of the strikes were near Kobani, where Kurdish forces have driven out Islamic State militants, said a statement by the U.S. Combined Joint Task Force which is leading the operation. (Reuters)

Officials Meet to Address Safety after Aviation Calamities

WASHINGTON - Government and aviation industry officials from dozens of countries are meeting in Montreal this week to try to find consensus on how to keep from losing airliners like the one that vanished without a trace in Asia and another shot down in Eastern Europe. It is only the second high-level safety conference in the 70-year history of the International Civil Aviation Organization, a U.N. agency, but last year was calamitous. A Malaysia Airlines flight disappeared in March and has not been found. In July, another Malaysia Airlines flight was downed while flying over an area of Ukraine where ethnic Russian rebels are trying to secede.



There is broad agreement that the agency should build a database where governments can send intelligence or warnings about risks to aircraft flying over conflict zones. Historically, though, nations other than the United States rarely have posted public warnings about such risks in other countries. Few have global intelligence networks, and it has been considered almost impolite for one country to issue a

warning about another. Instead, the practice has been for each country to issue warnings only about its own airspace. ICAO, the U.N. agency, sent an urgent warning to members on Jan. 14 that airlines flying over Libya risk being shot down. On Jan. 22, the European Aviation Safety Agency distributed a French warning that flights over Pakistan might be subject to "terrorist attacks." ... (More on P4)... (27)

Sharif Meets CM Punjab, Vows to Curb Terrorism

LAHORE - Prime Minister (PM) Nawaz Sharif met Chief Minister Punjab (CM) Shahbaz Sharif on Sunday in Lahore and discussed the ongoing political situation of the country. As per details, both leaders assembled to talk on the implementation of National Action Plan (NAP) and how to tackle the menace of terrorism. They further took the issue of new Governor of Punjab under discussion

whereas the premier also got briefed over the names of candidates who have applied for the seats in Senate. PM Nawaz appreciated the efforts of CM Punjab regarding the counter terrorism force establishment and stated that the nation, army and government are united in a war against terror. Moreover, CM Punjab assured that the new force will help to cripple the terrorism from the country. (Monitoring Desk)

China Provides Special Summer and Winter Uniform for Tajik Police

DUSHANBE On Friday January 30, Tajik Interior Minister Ramazon Rahimzoda received Chinese Ambassador to Tajikistan Fan Xianrong. According to the Tajik Interior Ministry's website, the two discussed issues related to expansion of bilateral cooperation between Tajikistan and China in combating terrorism, extremism and separatism. Tajik interior minister reportedly noted that such meetings created

conditions for expansion of friendly cooperation between the two countries. The meeting resulted in signing of an agreement between the Interior Ministry of Tajikistan and the Ministry of Public Security of China on providing special winter and summer uniform for Tajik police officers to a total amount of 940,000 yuans (equivalent to more than 150,000 U.S. dollars), the source said. (Asia-Plus)