

IS eyes Libyan oil

Advances to interior, says French DM; Syria troops recapture key airbase near Damascus

AGENCIES
French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said yesterday that the Islamic State group was spreading from its stronghold on the Libyan coast to the interior of the country with the aim of getting access to oil wells.

IS THREAT IN LIBYA, SYRIA

"They are in Sirte, their territory extends 250 kilometres (155 miles) along the coast, but they are starting to penetrate the interior and to be tempted by access to oil wells and reserves," Le Drian told RTL radio.

World powers are trying to convince Libya's warring factions to lay down their weapons and fall behind a new national unity government, as IS-allied groups exploit the political chaos to take hold of parts of the country, reports AFP.

Meanwhile, Syrian troops recaptured a military airport and nearby town east of Damascus yesterday, more than three years after they were overrun by rebel groups, a military source said.

"The Syrian army has taken full control of the town of Marj al-Sultan and its airport in Eastern Ghouta," a rebel bastion east of the capital, the military source said.

Rebel groups seized the airport, about 15 kilometres (nine miles) east of Damascus,

in November 2012. The United Nations aid chief yesterday condemned attacks on civilians in and near the Syrian capital as "unacceptable," a day after more than 50 were killed.

"Such indiscriminate attacks are unacceptable," Stephen O'Brien said in a press conference concluding a three-day visit to Syria.

More than 50 civilians were killed on Sunday in air strikes and rocket fire on an opposition stronghold east of Damascus and in rebel fire on the capital.

"This is a tragic reminder of the urgency of finding a political solution and securing a nationwide ceasefire," O'Brien said.

Meanwhile, the head of Russia's military general staff says rebels of the Free Syrian Army are receiving weapons - comments that come just days after a Kremlin spokesman denied that Russia was doing that.

Gen Valery Gerasimov was quoted yesterday by Russian news agencies as saying Russia is supporting the FSA with airstrikes and "help with weapons, ammunition and materiel." The statement appeared to suggest Russia was supplying the weapons, but the military could not be reached for clarification.



Military personnel evacuate residents from a village at Legaspi in Albay province, south of Manila yesterday, as typhoon Melor approaches the city. More than 700,000 people fled the central Philippines amid threats of giant waves, floods and landslides. Inset, a resident walks past big waves spilling over a wall onto a coastal road in the city of Legaspi. PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Saudi Arabia Polls: 20 women elected

PTI, Riyadh
Saudi voters have elected 20 women for local government seats, according to results, a day after women voted and ran in elections for the first time in the country's history. The women who won hail from vastly different parts of the country, ranging from Saudi Arabia's largest city to a small village near Islam's holiest site.

Turkey-Russia summit cancelled: Kremlin

AFP, Moscow
Russia yesterday said a summit between President Vladimir Putin and Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan penciled in for December 15 had been cancelled, with ties between the two leaders in tatters over the downing of a Russian warplane. The meeting had been agreed at the G20 summit in Turkey on November 16.

Aussie teen pleads guilty to terror charge

AFP, Sydney
Melbourne teenager alleged to have bomb-making materials pleaded guilty yesterday to preparing for a terrorist act, reports said. The 17-year-old told the Children's Court he was "guilty" of one charge of engaging in an act in preparation for, or planning, a terrorist act, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation said.

Tehran's air pollution hits worst level

AFP, Tehran
Air pollution in Iran's capital hit its worst level -- for a day without a sandstorm -- in at least nine months yesterday, prompting warnings that all citizens should stay indoors. "Tehran's air is unhealthy for all," said the city's transport and traffic department on a municipality-owned website.

'No proof of terrorism' in Sinai crash

AFP, Cairo
Egypt said yesterday it still has no evidence that a "terrorist action" had downed a Russian plane at the end of October in the Sinai Peninsula, as stated by Moscow. The jihadist Islamic State group said it smuggled a bomb on board that blew up the Russian jet on October 31, killing all 224 people on board. On November 17, Moscow said an investigation had found that the plane which took off from the Sinai resort of Sharm el-Sheikh was brought down by a bomb on board.

PARIS STABBING Teacher attacked by man 'shouting IS'

AFP, Paris
A teacher in a Paris suburb was attacked yesterday by a man wielding a box cutter and scissors who cited the Islamic State jihadist group, sources in the police and prosecutor's office said. The assault comes after the Islamic State in November urged its followers to kill teachers in the French education system for teaching secularism and being "in open war against the Muslim family". The 45-year-old man was stabbed in the side and throat while preparing for his class at a school in Aubervilliers, northeast of Paris, but his life was not in danger, a police source said. The attacker was dressed in overalls

and a balaclava and arrived without a weapon but grabbed what appeared to be a box cutter that was lying in the classroom as well as a pair of scissors. According to local prosecutors the man shouted: "This is Daesh. This is a warning." Daesh is another name for IS. The brief exchange was reported by a witness working inside the school. The attacker fled after stabbing the teacher and the probe has been taken over by anti-terrorist investigators. The Islamic State's French-language magazine Dar-al-Islam called in its November edition for its followers to kill teachers in the French education system, describing them as "enemies

of Allah". "This education, in the case of France in particular, is a means of propaganda used to impose the corrupt way of thought established by the Judeo-masonry," it said. "Muslims must know the French education system is built against religion and Islam as the only religion of truth cannot cohabit with this fanatic secularism." While the motivations of the attacker were not yet clear, the assault comes as France remains on high alert a month after a wave of shootings and suicide bombings at Paris nightspots killed 130 people and left 350 injured.

Trust is the basis of Indo-Pak talks

Sushma Swaraj tells parliament
NDTV ONLINE

With India and Pakistan agreeing to resume dialogue, Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj told parliament yesterday, "Whenever we talk, it is based on trust."

Swaraj was replying to lawmakers in the Lok Sabha who wanted to know if India can trust Pakistan again. "When we have decided there will be no third party mediation, we will need to talk to each other," she said.

She said that "continued estrangement" between the two sides has been hampering peace and prosperity in the region, which is a shared vision of the two countries.

Pakistan has assured India it will expedite the Mumbai terror attacks case, she said in both Houses. The case is being heard in anti-terrorism court in Islamabad. A number of Lok Sabha members had also asked the minister to clarify on terrorism.

Her visit to Islamabad last week, she said, will be followed by 'Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue' with Pakistan. The process will explore cooperation in trade and connectivity, people-to-people exchanges and humanitarian issues. "The new Dialogue, we sincerely hope, marks a new beginning also for peace and development in the whole region," she said.

WINNERS, LOSERS IN PARIS CLIMATE PACT

The climate deal adopted in suburban Paris was the culmination of four years of negotiations on how to get nearly all countries to jointly reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that scientists say are warming the planet. Here's a look at winners in the Paris climate agreement and some who came up short:

SMALL ISLANDS
The tiniest countries were arguably the biggest winners in the deal. Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Maldives, Kiribati and other island nations pushed hard for two things. First, a global commitment to at least try to limit Earth's warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Second, a recognition that they need help to deal with damage caused by rising seas. They got both, though with some caveats.

UNITED STATES
The deal in some ways looks like a wish list from US negotiators. It has no new legally binding emissions or financial targets, which would have prevented President Barack Obama from accepting it without approval from the Republican-controlled Congress. It allows countries to set their own emissions targets, rather than having to negotiate them with other countries.

FRANCE
Almost everyone involved in the talks heaped praise on France for making the deal come together. With masterful diplomacy, the French built bridges and gave every country confidence that its voice was being heard.

CHINA
The world's biggest greenhouse gas polluter didn't have to cross any of its red lines. Though a strict firewall between developed and developing countries is gone, the deal still reflects different capabilities of rich and poor throughout the text, a key Chinese demand.

INDIA
Indian Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar blended praise with criticism in his post-deal speech, suggesting he had mixed feelings about the outcome. Knowing its emissions are expected to peak later than those of other major economies, India made sure the text includes some leeway for developing nations.

EUROPEAN UNION
The Europeans didn't come out of Paris looking like the leaders they want to be - and in many cases are - on climate change. The EU successfully introduced a mechanism in the deal designed to ramp up emissions targets over time, but caved on demands that the targets be legally binding.

SAUDI ARABIA
Oil-rich Saudi Arabia argued against the 1.5-degree temperature target and a long-term goal to phase out emissions. It lost both battles. However, the long-term goal doesn't specifically mention emissions from fossil fuels, a small win for the Saudis. SOURCE: AP



Kosovo police wearing gas masks stand guard after the Parliament opposition lawmakers released tear gas in the Kosovo's parliament in Pristina yesterday, in the latest eruption of a long-running protest against agreements made with Serbia. PHOTO: AFP

Western arms makers see sales fall, Russia rises

AFP, Stockholm
Arms manufacturers in North America and Western Europe dominated international arms sales in 2014, but their market share dropped while Russian and Asian companies saw their rise, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported yesterday. Total turnover for the 100 biggest arms and military services companies declined for the fourth year in a row, falling by 1.5 percent from 2013 to stand at \$401 billion (364 billion euros). The top company was US-based Lockheed Martin, which saw sales grow by 3.9 percent to \$37.5 billion for 2014. Companies based in Western Europe and the United States continue to dominate the top 100, with 80 percent of the total market share. But sales for Western European and US companies decreased by 3.2 percentage points between 2013 and 2014. In Western Europe "a large part of the

defence spending, which is missing, is from procurement. It's easier to cut procurement than to cut salaries -- so the quickest thing to do is just buy less," said Siemon Wezeman, a senior researcher at SIPRI's Arms and Military Expenditure Programme. Meanwhile, the 36 companies representing the rest of the world on SIPRI's list saw their sales soar by 25 percent, boosted by an almost 50-percent rise in Russian arms sales. "Russian companies are riding the wave of increasing national military spending and exports," said Wezeman. The combined annual revenue growth of the 11 Russian companies on SIPRI's list from 2013-14 was 48.4 percent, according to the report. The top Russian company on the list was Almaz-Antey, taking 11th place with a turnover of \$8.84 billion. Almaz-Antey manufactures the BUK missile, which was allegedly used to shoot down a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 on July 17, 2014 in Ukraine.



41 cops die in Argentina bus crash

AFP, Buenos Aires
At least 41 police officers died yesterday and several more were injured when their bus drove off a bridge in northern Argentina, plunging into a dry riverbed, officials said. Officials believe a tire blew out and caused the bus to veer off the bridge before dawn, falling some 15 meters (50 feet) with 60 border police aboard, said the emergency chief for the province of Salta, Francisco Marinero. Ten police officers were hospitalized, four of them in serious condition, he told a local radio station. The bus was part of a caravan of three carrying police. President Mauricio Macri sent his condolences to the officers' relatives. "The Argentine people must stand with these families," he said.

Germany will reduce migrant influx Merkel tells her party, draws cheers for centrist line

AFP, Karlsruhe
German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday pledged to reduce a massive refugee influx but insisted on keeping the door open to the world's neediest, drawing a rousing standing ovation from her party. After weeks of infighting over the expected arrival of around one million asylum seekers to Germany this year, Merkel appeared to unite her conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) behind a centrist line of generosity with clear limits. She drew loud applause as she repeated her rallying cry "We can do it" during an impassioned hour-long speech, capped by nine minutes in which the 1,000 delegates took to their feet to cheer their chancellor, who beamed and waved to the crowd. Merkel appealed to the venerable party's sense of history, saying that the same strength that allowed it "to rebuild from the rubble of the war to create the economic miracle, and to go from division to a reunified country" would get Germany through the refugee crisis. Even in the face of demands from the right wing of the party for an upper limit on newcomers, Merkel insisted Germany would never seal its border. "We want to tangibly reduce the number of refugees arriving," Merkel said.



FRENCH LOCAL POLLS Far-right fails to win a single region

AFP, Paris
France's far-right National Front (FN) might have failed to win a single region in elections but its high score ties the hands of the two main parties with presidential elections 16 months away, observers said yesterday. The anti-immigration party's hopes of winning control of its first ever region were dashed on Sunday as voters turned out in force and switched their support to the centre-right Republicans and the Socialists of President Francois Hollande. Despite being relegated to third place, the FN recorded its best-ever electoral score with 6.8 million votes. The party's leader Marine Le Pen blasted the blocking tactics of the main parties and told supporters: "Nothing can stop us now."