

Erdogan: West is backing IS

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says he has uncovered evidence that US-led coalition forces have helped support terrorists in Syria – including IS.

American-led forces have been working alongside Syrian rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad but have attempted to avoid helping IS and other Islamist militant groups.

However, speaking on Tuesday in the Turkish capital, Ankara, he said he believed they had given support to a variety of militant groups, including IS Kurdish outfits YPG and PYD.

"They were accusing us of supporting Daesh [Islamic State]," he told a press conference, according to Reuters.

"Now they give support to terrorist groups including Daesh, YPG, PYD. It's very clear. We have confirmed evidence, with pictures, photos and videos."

"The coalition forces are unfortunately not keeping their promises," Erdogan said. "Whether they do or they don't, we will continue along this path in a determined way. There is no



People gather beside the wreckage of train carriages at Rura, some 30kms west of Kanpur yesterday, following a train crash in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. At least two people died and 28 were injured after a train derailed in north India, close to the site of a previous rail accident that killed 146.

PHOTO: AFP

COUNTRYWIDE CEASEFIRE IN SYRIA

Russia, Turkey float plan

Doubt looms over whether rebels will agree terms; air strikes kill 22

REUTERS, Ankara

Turkey and Russia have prepared an agreement for a ceasefire in Syria, Turkey's foreign minister said, adding Ankara would not budge on its opposition to President Bashar al-Assad staying in power.

The comments by Mevlut Cavusoglu yesterday appeared to signal a tentative advance in talks aimed at reaching a truce, but the insistence that Assad must go will do little to smooth negotiations with Russia, his biggest backer.

Russia, Iran and Turkey said last week they were ready to help broker a peace deal after holding talks in Moscow where they adopted a declaration setting out the principles any agreement should adhere to.

"There are two texts ready on a

solution in Syria. One is about a political resolution and the other is about a ceasefire. They can be implemented any time," Cavusoglu told reporters in Ankara.

A Syrian rebel official said meetings between Ankara and rebel forces were expected to continue this week, but could not confirm whether a final ceasefire agreement had been reached.

The official told Reuters a major sticking point in negotiations between rebel groups and Turkey was that Russia wanted to exclude the Damascus countryside from the ceasefire, but the rebels refused to do so.

A second rebel official told Reuters there was no agreement yet from the side of the rebel factions.

"The details of the ceasefire deal have yet to be officially presented to

the factions, and there is no agreement so far," the second official said.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said yesterday United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura had spoken by phone with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and supported the efforts to establish a ceasefire and new peace talks.

The Syrian opposition's main political body on Tuesday urged rebel groups to cooperate with "sincere regional efforts" to reach a ceasefire deal but that it had not been invited to any conference, referring to the Kazakhstan meeting.

Meanwhile, air strikes carried out by unidentified aircraft killed at least 22 civilians, including 10 children, in a village held by the Islamic State group in eastern Syria, a monitor said yesterday.

Air strike disables Mosul's last bridge

AFP, Baghdad

An air strike has disabled the last bridge linking eastern and western Mosul, a city Iraqi forces are fighting to retake from jihadists, residents and a provincial official said.

Iraqi forces have advanced into eastern Mosul -- which is divided by the Tigris River -- and have retaken some neighbourhoods on that side of the city, which has been held by the Islamic State group for more than two and a half years.

But the western part of Mosul, the last Iraqi city where IS holds significant territory, remains in the hands of the jihadists.

"Aerial bombing... cut the bridge, and it is not possible to cross it," Mosul resident Abu Ali told AFP.

Abu Ali said he had crossed the river yesterday in a boat, now the only way to do so, as other bridges were previously disabled.

Abu Ali and Briskani both said the strike was on Tuesday, while the US-led coalition carrying out air strikes against IS said it had "disabled a bridge" in the Mosul area a day earlier.

IS overran large areas north and west of Baghdad in 2014, but Iraqi forces backed by US-led air strikes have since regained much of the territory they lost.

NEWS IN brief

Facebook triggers false Bangkok bomb scare

AFP, Bangkok

Facebook sparked fear -- and anger -- among Thailand's social media users after its Safety Check feature triggered a false bomb alert in Bangkok. The check-in feature allows users to signal to friends that they are safe after an event in their area. But it appeared to misfire late Tuesday, creating an alert called "The Explosion in Bangkok" that said a blast in the capital had been confirmed by "multiple sources".

Kashmir newspaper returns after ban

PTI, Srinagar

Local English daily Kashmir Reader hit the stands yesterday after it was banned by the Jammu and Kashmir government for nearly three months on the charges that its publication was a threat to peace in the valley. The newspaper was banned on October 2.

Kirchner charged in corruption case

AFP, Buenos Aires

Former Argentine president Cristina Kirchner was charged in a corruption case Tuesday and slapped with a \$630-million asset freeze over public tenders awarded to a business man



friend during her administration. Kirchner, who was in office from 2007 to 2015, was

charged with illicit association and fraudulent administration for allegedly favoring construction magnate Lazaro Baez for public contracts in Patagonia, her southern political bastion.

11 dead migrants found on Libya shores

AFP, Tripoli

The bodies of 11 migrants who died trying to make the perilous journey to Europe have washed up on beaches around Libya's capital Tripoli, the Red Crescent said yesterday. The Libyan Red Crescent said on its Facebook page that the bodies were recovered at the Hay Al Andalus beach in the capital and in another area about 15 kilometres west of the city.

Local made alcohol kills 34 in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani police yesterday caught three men accused of preparing home-made liquor mixed with aftershave that killed 34 people including a fourth suspect after they consumed the toxic brew on Christmas Eve. More than a hundred people were also sickened in the incident, one of the country's deadliest cases of mass alcohol poisoning, which happened in a Christian neighbourhood in the town of Toba Tek Singh some 340 kilometres south of Islamabad.



Afghan security personnel inspect a damaged vehicle after a roadside bomb explosion at the Dasht-E-Barchi in Kabul, yesterday. An Afghan MP was among at least three people wounded when a roadside bomb struck his vehicle in Kabul, officials said, in the latest in a series of attacks on lawmakers.

PHOTO: REUTERS

"Thought it was going to be a smooth transition!"

Trump accuses Obama of hindering power transition

AFP, Palm Beach

US President-elect Donald Trump poured kerosene on a simmering dispute with Barack Obama yesterday, accusing him of derailing a smooth transition with "inflammatory" statements and "roadblocks."



Ever since the November 8 election, Trump and Obama have tried to bury political differences in favor of a united public front that would smooth the transfer of power on January 20.

But the Republican president-in-waiting unceremoniously cast any bonhomie aside in a morning Twitter tirade. In a declaration that is unprecedented in its personal condemnation of a soon-to-be predecessor, the 70-year-old tweeted: "Doing my best to disregard the many inflammatory President O statements and roadblocks."

"Thought it was going to be a smooth transition - NOT!"

Tensions between Trump and the current White House have been growing for weeks as Obama has become more outspoken about a vitriol-filled election.

Obama -- who is still the most popular politician in the country -- recently suggested that he may have won a third term were he not constitutionally barred. That seems to have irked the notoriously thin-skinned president-elect.

Trump followed up Wednesday's early tweet with another two taking aim at Obama's policy toward Israel.

"We cannot continue to let Israel be treated with such total disdain and disrespect. They used to have a great friend in the US, but...." he wrote.

"Not anymore. The beginning of the end was the horrible Iran deal, and now this (UN)! Stay strong Israel, January 20th is fast approaching!"

Marry, or go to jail

Myanmar men may face jail for not marrying pregnant women

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's government is drafting a law that could see men jailed for up to seven years for getting a woman pregnant but not marrying her, a senior official said yesterday.

The provision is part of tough new legislation designed to strengthen women's rights as the country opens up after half a century of military rule.

Director of the social welfare department Naw Tha Wah said the new law would criminalise domestic violence for the first time and make gang-rape a capital offence.

If passed in parliament, the law would also carry a penalty of up to five years in prison for any man who refuses to marry a woman after they have lived together, and up to seven if she is pregnant.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar is a socially conservative country, where gender stereotypes are deeply entrenched and sex remains a taboo topic.

The Burmese language has no word for female genitalia and any garments worn on a woman's lower half are considered unclean, meaning they must be washed separately from men's clothes.

There are currently no laws to prevent domestic violence against women or combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

Cuba outlaws 'cult of personality'

AFP, Havana

There will be no Fidel Castro streets or plazas in Cuba, in keeping with the late revolutionary leader's wishes, as spelled out in a law Cuban legislators passed on Tuesday.

President Raul Castro, 85, said that before dying at the age of 90 on November 25, his brother Fidel had requested that no monuments or statues be erected in his honor, and that no streets or buildings be named after him.

Lawmakers adopted the bill implementing his wish unanimously on Tuesday.

Fidel Castro always opposed the erection of statues in his likeness. No streets or buildings are named after him in the Communist-led Caribbean country.

Faulty wing flaps to blame

Says report; second black box found in Black Sea

AGENCIES

The main flight recorder from the Russian jet that crashed on Sunday has revealed that faulty flaps were to blame, Russian media said.

The flaps, panels on the wings that help lift an aircraft, were not moving together, a source close to the probe told the private Interfax news agency.

Private news outlet Life published what it said was the panicked exchange between the pilots in the moments ahead of the crash decoded from one of the black boxes, suggesting that a problem with the plane's wingflaps might have been to blame.

According to the transcript one pilot shouted "the flaps, shit. What the fuck!" as an alarm sounds. "Commander, we're falling" are the last words recorded, reports AFP.

Russian rescuers trawling the Black Sea yesterday found the second black box from the Syria-bound military plane that crashed with 92 people on board, authorities said.

The rescue workers told state media that the second black box contained the flight parameters, despite the contradictory reports over the content of the recorders.

The discovery of the second black box

comes as searchers scramble to recover bodies and remaining debris from the aircraft in a major operation involving divers, deepwater machines, helicopters and drones.

The defence ministry told Russian news agencies that so far 15 bodies and 239 body parts from those onboard the ill-fated aircraft have been found, with some of the remains trans-

RUSSIAN MILITARY JET CRASH

ported to Moscow for DNA identification.

Russia's FSB security service has said it is looking into four main suspected causes: pilot error, technical failure, faulty fuel and a foreign object in the engine. The FSB said that so far there were no indications to suggest terrorism was behind the crash, but did not rule it out entirely.

'Profitable' WashPost to expand newsroom

AFP, Washington

The Washington Post, purchased three years ago by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, will turn a profit in 2016 and expand its newsroom, defying the downward trend in the newspaper industry.

A memo to staff this month from Post publisher Fred Ryan, obtained by AFP, said the newspaper has been helped by its digital efforts and will be launching new "initiatives" in the coming year.

"Thanks to the incredible work of the entire team, the Washington Post will finish this year as a profitable and growing company," Ryan said in the memo.

"In addition to reinforcing our belief that there is a viable business model in quality journalism, this will provide additional funding for several new initiatives that build upon the successes of this year."

The newsroom was "larger this year than last year, and it will grow even more next year," he added.

The newspaper will create a new "rapid-response investigative team" to add to the investigations team, and hire more staff for video, breaking news and other areas.

The Post is likely to add at least 60 positions to boost its newsroom to around 750, as it aims to compete with the New York Times and its staff of 1,300, according to a Politico article by media analyst Ken Doctor.