

## WAR IN SYRIA 30 civilians dead in anti- IS strikes

AFP, Beirut  
At least 30 civilians were killed yesterday in separate bombing raids by the US-led coalition and pro-Syrian government forces on ISIS-held territory in Syria, a monitor said.  
Fifteen of the victims died in coalition air strikes on a village near the Islamic State group's stronghold of Raqqa, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.  
"The victims included three children and four women," it added.  
"The US-led coalition is providing air support to Arab and Kurdish fighters battling to oust IS from Raqqa and the wider province."  
To the southeast, Syrian government forces backed by their Russian allies are fighting IS in the oil-rich province of Idlib.  
Suspected Russian air forces have killed another 15 civilians — mostly children — in an IS-held village in that province, the Observatory said.

# Massacre feared in Mosul

Report says 40,000 civilians killed in battle to take back city from IS

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

More than 40,000 civilians were killed in the devastating battle to retake Mosul from IS, according to intelligence reports revealed exclusively to The Independent — a death toll far higher than previous estimates.

Residents of the besieged city were killed as a result of "massive firepower used against them" by Iraqi ground forces attempting to force out militants, as well as by air strikes and Isis itself, according to Kurdish intelligence services.

Hoshyar Zebari, until recently a senior minister in Baghdad, told The Independent that many bodies "are still buried under the rubble".

"The level of human suffering is immense," he said.

Zebari, a native of Mosul and top Kurdish official who has served as the Iraqi Finance Minister and prior to that Foreign Minister, emphasised in an exclusive interview that the unrelenting artillery bombardment by units of the Federal Police, in practice a heavily armed military unit, had caused immense destruction and loss of life in west Mosul.

The figure given by Zebari for the number of civilians killed in the nine-month siege is far higher than those previously reported, but the intelligence service of the Kurdistan



Regional Government has a reputation for being extremely accurate and well-informed.

Reading from Kurdish intelligence reports, Zebari says that a high level of corruption among the Iraqi military forces occupying Mosul is undermining security measures to suppress IS in the aftermath of its defeat. He says that support individ-

uals are able to pass through military checkpoints by paying \$1,000 and can bring a vehicle by paying \$1,500.

Much of the blame for the calamitous level of destruction in west Mosul has been put on air strikes, but it is evident at ground level that a lot of the damage was caused by artillery shells and rockets.

In addition, IS snipers killed great numbers of civilians trying to escape whose departure would have robbed IS of its "human shields", though in the event their presence shielded very little. Zebari said that intelligence had even intercepted messages "from Isis fighters to their commanders saying they were tired of killing civilians".

For years human traffickers cashed in on the group's desperation, ferrying thousands of Rohingya across the Andaman Sea to countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

## 'We are human only in name'

Thai smuggling crackdown leaves Myanmar's Rohingya in limbo

AFP, Sittou

Five years have passed since Hla Hla Sein was forced into a displacement camp in western Myanmar for Rohingya Muslims, where disease and deprivation are rife and armed guards patrol a barbed-wire perimeter.

But after a crackdown on the international smuggling routes that once offered a dangerous — but viable — escape route, she now sees no way out.

"We have no idea how many years we will have to live like this," the 40-year-old widow told AFP inside the tiny bamboo hut she shares with her son, tugging nervously at her purple headscarf.

"Our lives are worse than animals... we are human only in name."

Deadly sectarian riots in 2012 drove more than 120,000 Rohingyas into the camps in Rakhine State, where they live in ramshackle homes and are deprived of adequate food, schools and doctors.

For years human traffickers cashed in on the group's desperation, ferrying thousands of Rohingyas across the Andaman Sea to countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

The journeys were defined by danger: from rickety boats on high seas to abuse and even death at the hands of the gangs, who held many victims for ransom in jungle camps on the Thai-Malaysia border.



# Air strike kills 20 Yemeni civilians

REUTERS, Dubai

At least 20 Yemeni civilians were killed and many others wounded when a Saudi-led coalition air strike hit a village in the south, officials from the armed Houthis movement and the government said yesterday.

The UN said the victims of Tuesday's bombing, which hit al-Ahla-Atera village in Taiz province where fighting between the 20 warring sides has intensified, were internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Yemen's internationally recognised government confirmed that around 20 people were killed, including women and children. It gave no further details on the attack.

Yemen's human rights minister, Mohammed Askar, called for a government investigation into what he described as an "unfortunate incident," while Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdul-Salam condemned it as a "monstrous crime."

Shabia Mantoo, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman in Yemen, said most of those killed were believed to be from the same family.

Yemen's human rights minister, Mohammed Askar, called for a government investigation into what he described as an "unfortunate incident," while Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdul-Salam condemned it as a "monstrous crime."

Tuesday's attack was the latest in a series of coalition bombings that have hit schools, hospitals, markets and private homes across northern Yemen.

# Trump, Putin had social dinner

White House reveals additional discussion of two leaders at G20

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin had an additional, previously undisclosed chat at this month's G20 summit in Hamburg, the White House acknowledged on Tuesday.

After a brief greeting at the start of the two-day summit and a two-hour bilateral meeting with their foreign ministers on July 7, Trump and Putin also chatted over dinner on the final night of the summit, a official said.

"There was a couple of social dinner at the G20," a White House official told AFP. "Toward the end, the president spoke to Putin at the dinner."

The disclosure has raised questions about what the pair talked about, who was present and why the meeting was never previously mentioned. The lack of US translator raised eyebrows among other leaders at the dinner who called it a "breach of national security protocol."

Trump last Tuesday took to Twitter to blast the suggestion that there was anything improper about his dinner chat with Putin.

"Fake News story of secret dinner with Putin is sick." All G20 leaders, and spouses, were invited by the Chancellor of Germany, Pres' knew," he declared.

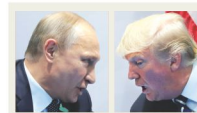
"The Fake News is becoming more and more dishonest! Even a dinner arranged for top 20 leaders in Germany is made to look sinister!"

Meanwhile, the Russian lawyer at the

his father's rival Hillary Clinton.

Trump Jr had been told by email that a "Russian government attorney" would provide damaging details. Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort and son-in-law Jared Kushner also attended.

Veselnitskaya has rejected claims that she was working on behalf of the Russian



MEETING DESCRIBED AS A BREACH OF NATIONAL SECURITY PROTOCOL  
RUSSIAN LAWYER READY TO MEET CONGRESS OVER TRUMP JR MEETING  
DIPLOMATS SPAT OVER RUSSIAN ACCESS TO DIPLOMATIC COMPOUNDS IN US

Heart of the scandal over a meeting with Trump's eldest son claimed yesterday is ready to testify to the US Congress. Lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya attended a meeting with Donald Trump Jr during the election campaign in June 2016 at which it appears he expected to get incriminating information from the Russian government on

government, while Trump Jr insists that no sensitive information was passed on.

The US State Department said Tuesday senior diplomats from Washington and Moscow held a "tough, forthright" conversation on Monday concerning bilateral tensions, including over Russian access to diplomatic compounds in the US.

# Saudi-led bloc drops list of Qatar demands

AGENCIES

Four Arab nations that cut ties with Qatar are no longer insisting it comply with a list of 13 specific demands they tabled last month.

Diplomats from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt told reporters at the UN on Tuesday they now wanted it to commit to six principles on combating extremism and terrorism and negotiate a plan with specific measures to implement them — a step that could pave the way for an early resolution of the crisis.

There was no immediate comment from Qatar, which denies aiding terrorists.

The four Arab countries broke diplomatic relations with Qatar in early June largely over their allegations that it supports terrorist and extremist groups — a charge Qatar rejects. They initially made 13 demands, which Qatar also dismissed.

Saudi Arabia's UN Ambassador Abdullah Al-Mouallimi told a briefing for a group of UN correspondents that the four nations are now committed to the six principles agreed to by their foreign ministers at a meeting in Cairo on July 5, and hope Qatar will support them as well.

The principles include commitments to combat extremism and terrorism, prevent financing and safe havens for such groups, and suspend all acts of provocation and speeches inciting hatred or violence, reported AP.

Iran threatens response to US sanctions

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that Tehran would "respond appropriately" to new US sanctions but that Iran

remains committed to its nuclear deal with world powers.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will always stick to its international commitments," Rouhani said in a televised cabinet meeting.

But if the US wants "to press forward with new sanctions under any pretext," he said, "the great nation of Iran will respond appropriately," he said.

"We will not forgive violations by the Americans and we will stand against them," he said.

His comments came a day after the US and Iran traded tit-for-tat sanctions over the Islamic republic's ballistic missile programme.

The State Department

# China 'aggressive' in border row

Top Indian diplomat tells lawmakers amid escalating crisis

AFP, New Delhi

A top Indian diplomat said China is being unusually aggressive in a month-old border dispute with India, which shows no sign of easing, media reports said yesterday.

Beijing has made virtually daily warnings to its neighbour over the deadlock on a remote Himalayan plateau, where Indian and Chinese troops have been locked in a tense face-off.

Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar told lawmakers in a closed briefing on the dispute that India wanted a diplomatic settlement, the report said.

"Jaishankar told us that China's aggression and rhetoric on the recent standoff is unusual," a member of the parliamentary panel at Tuesday's briefing told Indian media.

"We will continue to engage with them through diplomatic channels," the foreign ministry number two was

quoted as saying by Press Trust of India news agency.

The dispute concerns land near where the boundaries of China, India and Bhutan meet. China has alleged that Indian troops are on its territory. Bhutan and India say the area — sticking to the Doklam plateau in India and Dhaulagiri to China — is Bhutanese.

Bhutan has no diplomatic relations with China and is closely allied to India, which says its troops approached the Chinese army unit that entered the zone

on June 16 to build a road.

China has said it will hold talks with India only after Indian troops are withdrawn from the disputed territory.

China and India have a number of border disputes, although the section currently in question is generally regarded as stable.

The two fought a border war in 1962 in Arunachal Pradesh.

In 2014, hundreds of Indian and Chinese troops faced off on the de facto border known as the Line of Actual Control that runs along the northwest Indian region of Ladakh.

On Tuesday, an Indian junior home minister Kiren Rijiju told parliament that 73 new roads with "operational significance" were being constructed by India along the border, with 30 completed so far.

The latest dispute has triggered international concern, with the visiting Australian foreign minister urging the neighbours to resolve the row amicably.



An armoured vehicle is seen lit on fire during clashes with demonstrators at a rally against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas, Venezuela, on Tuesday. Maduro said that controversial plans to re-write Venezuela's constitution will move ahead "now more than ever" following US President Donald Trump's threat of economic sanctions.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# French military chief quits over Macron spat

AFP, Paris

French leader Emmanuel Macron faced the biggest crisis of his young presidency yesterday following the resignation of the head of the armed forces, whom he had rebuked for criticising defence spending cuts.

The row between Macron and General Pierre De Villiers blew up last week when the chief of staff told a parliamentary committee he would not allow the armed forces to be "screwed" by the government's plans to slash \$850 million euros (\$980 million) from this year's budget.

Macron, 39, slipped down the 60-year-old, five-star general, telling army top brass at their annual summer party "I am the boss" and that he deeply regretted that the budget dispute had been dragged into the "public sphere".

In a newspaper interview at the weekend, Macron added that if there was a difference of opinion, "it is the chief of the defence staff who will change his position."

De Villiers, who had been in the job for three years, said he felt he had no choice but to stand down.

He no longer felt able to ensure the reliability of the model of the armed forces that I think is necessary to guarantee the protection of France and the French people," he said.

Macron named 55-year-old General Francois Lecoq, currently the top military adviser to the prime minister, as his replacement.

At a weekly cabinet meeting the president hailed De Villiers for his "remarkable service" and promised to hike the defence budget again in 2018, government spokesman Christophe Castaner said.

## BRIBING POLITICIANS TO CHALLENGE RULING PARTY

# Maldives leader's nephew arrested

AFP, Colombo

The nephew of Maldives president Abdulla Yameen has been arrested for allegedly bribing politicians to challenge the ruling regime, the opposition said yesterday, warning of further reprisals in the troubled honeymoon islands.

Faris Maumoon, an MP and son of former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, was taken into custody after police searched his home in the capital Male on Tuesday.

The passport of another key opposition figure Qasim Ibrahim, a former ally of strongman Yameen, was also seized by authorities.

Opposition parties aligned against Yameen issued a joint statement condemning the arrests.

The opposition this month secured enough support from government defectors to begin impeachment proceedings against the speaker, in a bid to wrest control of parliament from Yameen before presidential elections next year.

The latest arrests come a week before parliament is due to vote on the impeachment proceedings.