

## 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 coalition and pro-regime warplanes on jihadist-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 Raqa, 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 Raqa and the wider province.

To the southeast, Syrian government forces backed by their Russian allies are fighting IS in the oil-rich province of Deir Ezzor.

Suspected Russian air strikes on Wednesday killed another 15 civilians, mostly children – in an IS-held village in that province, the Observatory said.

## 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 Houthi movement and the government said yesterday.

The UN said the victims of Tuesday's bombing, which hit al-Ater village in Taiz province where fighting between Yemen's two warring sides has intensified, were internally displaced people (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 Manato, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson in Yemen, said most of those killed were believed to be from the same family.

Coalition forces backed by the coalition have been fighting to seize a major military base in the south for several months. The Saudi-led coalition was formed in 2015 to fight the Iran-backed Houthis after they overran the capital Sanaa.

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



## 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 remained 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 pretexts, the great nation of Iran will respond appropriately," he said.

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

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 slapped sanctions on 18 individuals and entities in Iran hours after the White House admitted Tehran was tracking to the 2015 agreement.

Iran hit back with its own sanctions, "warning" American people and entities that it would act against the Iranian people and other Muslim peoples of the region."

Rouhani yesterday accused Washington of "duplicitous."

"On one hand they send official reports to Congress verifying that Iran has been completely loyal to the 'nuclear deal,'" Rouhani said.

"In the other hand they send

# Massacre feared in Mosul

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

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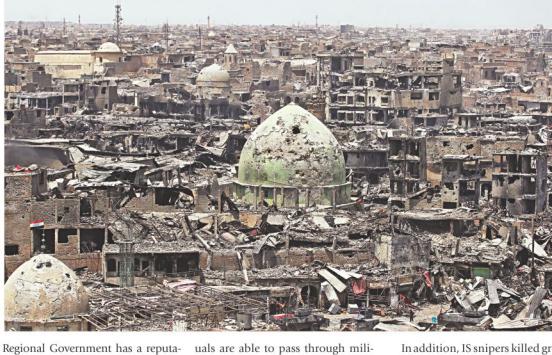
More than 40,000 civilians were killed in the devastating battle to retake Mosul from IS, according to intelligence reports revealed exclusively to The Independent – a death toll far higher than previous estimates.

Residents of the besieged city were killed as result of "firefights" against them" by Iraqi ground forces attempting to force out militants, as well as by air strikes and IS 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 Kurdish



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 suspect individuals

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 IS fighters to their commanders saying they were tired of killing civilians".

## 'We are human only in name'

Thai smuggling crackdown leaves Myanmar's Rohingya in limbo

AFP, Sittwe

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, now wearing a 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 Rohingya across the Andaman Sea to countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

The journeys were defined by danger: from rickety boats on high sea 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.



That route was shuttered by Thailand's junta in 2015 and few boats have left the camps since, according to residents, aid workers and migration experts.

The move may have spared Hla Hla Sein death at sea or abuse at the hands of smugglers, but it also cut off a way out of a painful limbo.

While a Bangkok court yesterday ruled on the fate of more than 100 people arrested for running the trafficking network, she will spend another day distributing food rations in the camp.

Hla Hla Sein and her son had tried to escape to Malaysia before the crackdown, but their boat was so overcrowded it started to sink a few hours into the journey, forcing them to turn back.

It was only after they returned to shore that she found out the smugglers had planned to sell them as slaves at their destination.

"I was ready to die at sea as we have nothing in this country," she said. "Our children cannot get education, even I cannot work. I thought dying would be better."

For those left behind in Myanmar's camps, escape is no longer an option.

"We are suffering," said Hla Hla Sein. "We are not supposed to stay like this forever."

## 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 Abdallah 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.

heart of the scandal over a meeting with Trump's eldest son claimed yesterday she is ready to testify to the US Congress.

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