VOA NEWS

September 9, 2018

This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd in Washington.

Russia and Syria launched airstrikes Saturday on Syria's last rebel stronghold of Idlib, killing at least four civilians in what a war monitoring group said were the most intense attacks in a month.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said aircraft carried out about 60 raids in less than three hours on southern areas of the densely-populated stronghold.

The bombings including shelling from government areas came one day after Iran and Russia backed a military campaign in the rebel-held area despite pleas from Turkey for a cease-fire.

The two largest electoral blocs in Iraq called on Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to resign Saturday after parliament held an emergency session to discuss the unrest in Basra. At least 12 people have been killed there during several days of protests over poor public services, unemployment and corruption.

The secretary-general of the Sairoon Coalition said following the session Saturday that al-Abadi should resign and apologize to the Iraqi people.

The prime minister acknowledged the unrest that has gripped Basra but defended his record in parliament. He described the unrest as "political sabotage" and asserted the crisis over the public services was being exploited for political gain.

On Friday, protesters in the southern city stormed the Iranian consulate and torched government buildings in violence that rocked the oil exporting Shiite heartland.

Eleven people were killed Saturday in an aerial attack by Iranian forces on the headquarters of the Iranian opposition Kurdistan Democratic Party and a refugee camp.

The attack occurred after the KDP carried out attacks inside Iran from its bases in northern Iraq, which marked the end of a 20-year cease-fire between its fighters and Iran.

This is VOA news.

Three days of U.N.-mediated consultations aimed at restarting peace negotiations to end Yemen's civil war achieved no results because one of the main parties to the talks failed to show up.

Lisa Schlein reports from Geneva.

U.N. Special envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths is putting a brave face on the failure of the talks by saying that fruitful discussions have begun. This, even though those discussions only took place between him and the Yemeni government delegation.

He expressed disappointment that the rebel Houthi delegation, known officially as Ansarullah, did not show up, but notes it is not unusual for negotiations involving conflict to run into difficulties.

"So, I don't take this as a fundamental blockage in the process."

More than 16,000 civilians have been killed or wounded during more than three years of civil war between the Saudi Arabian-backed government of Yemen and the Iranian-supported Houthi rebels.

Lisa Schlein, for VOA news, Geneva.

An Egyptian court sentenced 75 people to death, including several prominent Muslim Brotherhood leaders. Forty-seven others were given life sentences over the bloody dispersal of two Muslim Brotherhood sit-in camps five years ago.

AP's ??? reports.

In a case involving 739 defendants facing charges ranging from murder to damaging property, the court also sentenced to life in prison the head of the Brotherhood, Mohammed Badie, and 46 others.

Mahmoud Abu Zaid, a photojournalist known as "Shawkan," received five years imprisonment, meaning he will walk free for time served.

The sit-in was staged by supporters of Mohammed Morsi, a Brotherhood stalwart who became Egypt's first freely elected President in 2012 but was ousted a year later by the military, then led by President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi.

I'm ???.

Former President Barack Obama on Saturday appeared at his first campaign event for the midterm elections in November.

Obama urged a crowd of Democratic [polati...] Party volunteers, that is, in Anaheim, California, to take off house "slippers" and put on their "marching shoes" to help flip the U.S. House of Representatives back to Democratic Party control.

"Where there is a vacuum in our democracy, when we are not participating, we are not paying attention, we are not stepping up, other voices fill the void. But the good news is, in two months we have a chance to restore some sanity in our politics."

Obama's appearance came one day after he assailed President Donald Trump and Republicans on Friday, urging Democrats to deliver a check on the administration's "abuses of power" and restore a sense of sanity to politics by voting in November's elections.

For more on these stories, visit our website. I'm David Byrd, VOA news.