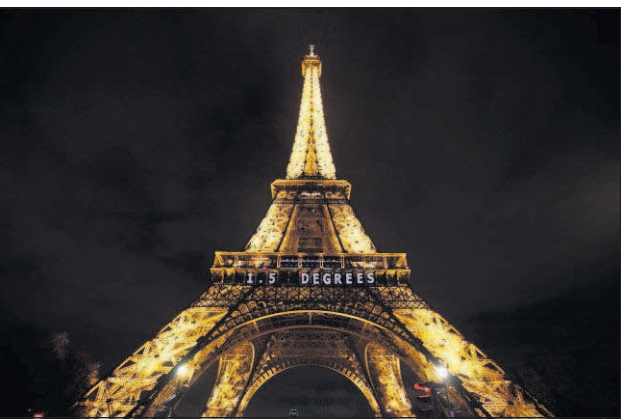




AP Photo/Francois Mori
The slogan “1.5 DEGREES” is projected on the Eiffel Tower as part of the COP21, United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France on Friday.

Climate negotiators say global deal is close in Paris

Associated Press

LE BOURGET, France — Talks on a global pact to fight global warming appeared to make progress late Friday, with some negotiators telling The Associated Press a deal was close.

Negotiators emerged from meetings with French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, the host of the talks, amid an air of optimism that had been lacking just hours earlier.

Fabius was expected to present a new, potentially final draft of the elusive accord Saturday morning at 9 a.m..

“We are pretty much there,” Egyptian Environment Minister Khaled Fahmy, the chairman of a bloc of African countries, told the AP late Friday. “There have been tremendous developments in the last hours. We are very close.”

A negotiator from a developed country was equally positive. “I think we got it,” said the negotiator, who was not authorized to speak publicly as the talks were not over yet.

Negotiators from more than 190 countries in Paris are aiming to create something that’s never been done before: an agreement for all countries to reduce man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases and help the poorest adapt to rising seas, fiercer weather and other impacts of global warming.

This accord is the first time all countries are expected to pitch in — the previous emissions treaty, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, only included rich countries.

The talks, originally

scheduled to end Friday, dragged into an extra day as the French hosts said they needed more time to overcome disputes.

A French official expressed confidence that the draft to be presented Saturday would be the final one. The official was not authorized to speak publicly because the negotiations were ongoing.

Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga of the Pacific island nation of Tuvalu was also upbeat.

“The signals that have come to me give me encouragement that we are going to have a very ... comprehensive and strong agreement in Paris,” Sopoaga told the AP.

Liu Zhenmin, deputy chief of the Chinese delegation, was more cautious. Asked by the AP whether the draft would be the final one, he said only if “it’s more or less acceptable.”

Earlier Friday, Liu stood firm on his nation’s demand that rich countries should assume most responsibility for the costs and argued against an agreement that sets too-tough goals for weaning the world off using oil, gas and coal — the biggest source of carbon emissions.

The U.S. and European countries want to move away from so-called “differentiation” among economies and want big emerging countries like China and India to pitch in more in a final climate deal.

China is among the more than 180 countries that have submitted emissions targets for the new pact but is resisting Western proposals for robust transparency rules that would require each country to show whether it’s on track to meet its target.

241 near collisions between pilots, drones

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — There has yet to be a confirmed U.S. collision between a drone and a manned aircraft, but there’s a growing number of close calls as drones fly where they least belong — near airports.

A report released Friday counted at least 241 reports of close encounters between drones and manned aircraft that meet the Federal Aviation Administration’s definition of a near-collision, including 28 incidents in which pilots had to veer out of the way.

The analysis by Bard College’s Center for the Study of the Drone found that 90 of the close drone encounters involved commercial jets.

The FAA defines a near-collision as two aircraft flying within 500 feet of each other. In 51 of the incidents studied, the drone-to-aircraft clearance was 50 feet or less, the report said.

Most of the sightings occurred within 5 miles of an airport and at altitudes higher than 400 feet. Those are spaces in which the FAA prohibits drones from flying, raising questions about the effectiveness of the rules.

The cities with the most incidents were New York/Newark, New Jersey, 86; Los Angeles, 39; Miami, 24; Chicago, 20; Boston, 20; San Jose, California, 19; Washington, 19; Atlanta, 17; Seattle, 17; San Diego, 14; Orlando, Florida, 13; Houston, 12; Portland, Oregon, 12; Dallas/Fort Worth, 11; and Denver, 10.

The report is based on an analysis of government records detailing 921 incidents involving drones and manned aircraft between Dec. 17, 2013, and Sept. 12, 2015. Researchers cautioned that it’s hard for pilots to judge their distance from another object when flying at high speeds.

The majority of the incidents, 64 percent, were sightings of drones in the vicinity of other aircraft with no immediate threat of collision.

The FAA has previously released data



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, File
In this 2014 file photo, a drone is demonstrated in Brigham City, Utah.

on reports of drone sightings, but the Bard report is the first comprehensive analysis of the sightings by researchers outside the aviation community. Its findings are likely to fuel more debate over how much of a threat drones are to manned aircraft as the government struggles with how to reap the benefits of unmanned aircraft without undermining safety.

Reports of drones flying where they aren’t supposed to have increased dramatically. In May 2014, 10 incidents were reported to the FAA; in May of this year, there were 100 incidents.

“It’s hard to say if or when there might be a drone crash, but certainly we’ve seen an increase in the number of reports and an increase in the number of close counters,” said Dan Gettinger, co-director of the drone center.

Government and industry officials have expressed concern that if a drone — much like a bird — is sucked into an aircraft engine, smashes a cockpit windshield or damages a critical aircraft surface area, it could cause an air crash.

“With sufficient speed, bird strikes have been known to penetrate the cockpit,” the report said. “It’s entirely possible, then, that a drone could also break through into a cockpit, potentially causing serious harm to the pilots or other occupants.”

Helicopter blades are considered especially vulnerable. Thirty-eight of the near collisions identified by researchers involved helicopters.

Aircraft engine manufacturers currently test the ability of engines to withstand bird strikes by firing dead birds at the engines at high velocities. The FAA hasn’t yet said when it will require engine makers to conduct tests with drones, but officials have unofficially acknowledged they are working on the issue, the report said.

The report cited research by engineers at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia, that used data on bird strikes to create computer simulations of drones striking planes in order to identify the riskiest impact locations. They concluded that hobby drones weighing between 2 and 6 pounds “can potentially cause critical damage.”

The FAA is in the process of finalizing rules for the use of commercial drones weighing less than 55 pounds. The agency is also expected to shortly issue rules requiring the registration of small drones, including those used by hobbyists, in an effort to help create a “culture of responsibility” among drone operators. The agency is trying to get the registration rules in place before Christmas.

Armed ‘patriots’ turn protests toward Muslim Americans

DALLAS (AP) — They are known as “Three Percenters,” followers of a movement that has rallied against gun control efforts nationwide, patrolled the U.S. border with Mexico and recently begun confronting Muslim Americans.

Followers describe themselves as armed “patriots.” But some of their leaders have been blamed for threats and vandalism against lawmakers, police and Muslims. One prominent member from Phoenix prompted an FBI alert in November after posting an explosive-filled Facebook video saying he was headed to upstate New York with guns to challenge a Muslim group. A Three Percenter in suburban Dallas led a mosque protest by armed, masked men that same month.

Texas has been the scene



Avi Selk/The Dallas Morning News via AP
Armed demonstrators hold a protest outside the Islamic Center of Irving in the Dallas suburb of Irving, Texas.

of several other incidents this year that have raised anti-Muslim unease. Two Muslim gunmen in May were shot outside a Prophet Muhammad cartoon contest in Garland. Police in Irving arrested a 14-year-old Muslim whose teachers thought his homemade clock was a bomb in September.

All this comes at a time when Texas has led a number of states trying to block the resettlement of Syrian refu-

gees and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump called for a “complete shutdown” of Muslims entering the U.S.

“We will interfere with every move they (Muslims) make towards taking over our country,” Dallas protest organizer David Wright said in response to questions the Associated Press sent to his personal Facebook page. “We are ready to fight back if they come at us violently.”

BRIEFLY

Putin: Russia provides air cover to Syrian opposition group

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia has provided air cover to a leading Western-backed opposition group in Syria, President Vladimir Putin said Friday, calling for closer coordination with the U.S.-allied coalition — comments that may reflect Moscow’s desire to narrow its differences with the West over the Syrian crisis.

At the same time, Putin vowed to further modernize Russia’s military and said its forces in Syria will “immediately destroy” any target threatening them, a strong warning to Turkey following its downing of a Russian warplane at the Syrian border.

Speaking at a meeting with top Defense Ministry officials, Putin said while supporting the Syrian government forces, Russia has backed some units of the Free Syrian Army, a Western-backed opposition group fighting Bashar Assad’s army.

“Several (FSA) units totaling more than 5,000 people, along with regular troops, are conducting offensive operations against terrorists in the provinces of Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Raqqa,” Putin said. “We have provided air support for them as well as the Syrian army, helping them with weapons, ammunition and supplies.”

While Putin sounded

unequivocal, his spokesman Dmitry Peskov said a few hours later that the president meant to say that Russia is sending weapons and supplies to Syrian government forces and not the FSA, but provides air cover to both. Peskov’s statement could be an attempt to assuage Assad, who calls the FSA and other moderate opposition groups “terrorists.”

Putin and his officials said before that Russia had cooperated with the FSA, but the group’s representatives have denied that.

Fired officer’s convictions a rare triumph for rape victims

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — The rape convictions that could put a fired Oklahoma City police officer behind bars for life are vindication for some of the women he targeted, and also a reminder of how difficult it is to achieve justice in such cases.

Most victims never report sexual assaults, and those who accused ex-officer Daniel Holtzclaw were even more vulnerable as poor black women, many with checkered histories of crime and addiction.

A grandmother’s bravery in telling her story made all the difference this time. After Holtzclaw pulled her over, forced her to expose herself and perform oral sex, she filed a complaint that

triggered a search for other victims.

In this case at least, it changed a narrative all too common in sex crimes: The jury found him guilty of rape.

“I didn’t do anything wrong,” the grandmother said Friday, showing her face on camera and revealing her name as Jannie Ligon. “So all I can say is, I was innocent and he just picked the wrong lady to stop that night.”

Holtzclaw was found guilty of sex crimes against eight women, and acquitted of charges involving five others he encountered on night patrol. Jurors recommended 263 years, including 30-year sentences for each of four first-degree rape convictions.

Holtzclaw trembled and sobbed as his verdict was read Thursday night, on his 29th birthday.

Though prosecutors assembled a damning case with GPS pinpoints, records of computer background checks and other evidence, some worried the all-white jury might doubt the testimony of his victims, all of whom are black.

“It shows that there is a hope for our country, there is hope for society and there is hope for all our sisters, mothers, wives, daughters, who are victims of rape, no matter what race they are, what ethnicity they are, what social-economic class and status they’re in,” said Benjamin Crump, a lawyer who plans to sue on behalf of some of the women.

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