

Merkel's Turkey Visit Aims to Soothe Tensions on EU Migrant Deal

ANKARA/BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel will use a visit to Turkey this weekend to try to soothe tensions over a deal meant to stem the flow of migrants to Europe, as questions about its effectiveness and long-term viability mount.

The pact, which came into force almost three weeks ago, aims to help end the chaotic arrival of migrants and refugees on the Greek islands, many fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East and Africa. More than a million reached Europe last year. The deal initially slowed the numbers of new



arrivals to Greece sharply, but boats have been coming again with around 150 people a day after a hiatus,

indicating the "hermetic sealing" of the route appears to be over, the International Organization for

Migration (IOM) said on Friday. Merkel will pay a one-day visit with European Council President Don-

ald Tusk to Gaziantep near the Syrian border on Saturday, where the two leaders are expected to go to a

refugee camp for Syrians and meet Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. There is much at stake for both sides. Merkel lobbied skeptical European partners to back the deal, under which Turkey agreed to take back migrants who cross the Aegean Sea illegally, and is under political pressure at home to show progress. Davutoglu sold the deal to the Turkish public partly on the basis that Turks would win quicker visa-free travel to Europe in return, a pledge that now could go unfulfilled, at least by the June deadline he had wanted. (Reuters)

Obama Urges Britons to Stay in EU

LONDON - Visiting U.S. President Barack Obama on Friday voiced his support for Britain to remain in the European Union (EU), in a message certain to be attacked by Brexit campaigners. Obama said he was speaking "with the candor of a friend" in a message published in the Daily Telegraph, one of the leading broadsheet newspapers in the country. He began a three-day visit to Britain late on Thursday. However, it is most likely to cut no ice with critics who will insist he is a head

of state and should not intervene in the domestic affairs of Britain, particularly the June referendum on EU membership. However, Brexit supporter London Mayor Boris Johnson also had a message for the U.S. president. "Britain and America can be better friends than ever, Mr. Obama, if we leave the EU," Johnson wrote in the Sun newspaper. Johnson also wrote that the United States would never surrender so much power to Brussels. Though Obama said the ... (More on P4)... (24)

Concerns Grow over Turkey-EU Deal to Curb Irregular Migration

ANKARA - Concerns over the implementation of a recent deal between Turkey and the European Union (EU) to cut back on irregular migration have not completely dissipated. "The European Union is still taking it slow in providing three billion euros that will go to Syrians in Turkey," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in an interview with a Turkish TV on Thursday night. The Turkish foreign minister acknowledged there

were problems in carrying out the deal which he said fuels pessimism among Turks and Syrians. Cavusoglu repeated his earlier threat of suspending the readmission and other deals Turkey have inked with the EU to prevent irregular migration. The readmission is part of a deal that was agreed on March 18 by the EU and Turkey to regulate migration and refugee flows. According to the deal, for every migrant Turkey receives, the EU promised to



repatriate one to its member states although the cap was set at 72,000. The European Commission said 325 irregular migrants had

been sent back to Turkey while 103 Syrian refugees have been repatriated in EU member states. ... (More on P4)... (25)

Chief of Syrian Gov't Delegation to Continue Talks Next Week

GENEVA - Head of the Syrian government delegation Bashar al-Jaafari said Friday that his team plans to convene for the fifth time with UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura next week, despite the withdrawal from UN-mediated talks of Syria's main opposition delegation. "We agreed with de Mistura that we will devote the next session which will be next Monday at 11 a.m. to discuss our modifications submitted on de Mistura's paper," he said following his fourth session with

the mediator since the latest round of talks kicked off a week ago. Focusing mainly on humanitarian issues, the Syrian diplomat outlined the efforts made by the Syrian government over the last four months to help those in need of assistance in the war-torn country. "With the coordination of the United Nations and the Syrian Red Crescent, the Syrian government achieved exactly 42 deliveries to hotspots," he explained. "1,170,000 beneficiaries have received ... (More on P4)... (26)

Vershbow Urges Allies to Enhance Cooperation in Black Sea Region

SOFIA - NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow here on Friday said the allies in the Black Sea region, together with the United States, should enhance cooperation against common threats.

"The significance of the Black Sea region, as a NATO frontier, as a crossroads between Europe, Asia and the Middle East, as the site of several so-called 'frozen conflicts,' and as a source and transit route for energy, means that what happens here is



a key concern for NATO," Vershbow said in a keynote speech at an international conference on Black Sea security. The seriousness of the se-

curity situation required NATO to look at new ways of maintaining peace and stability in the region, Vershbow said. Key to this was the commit-

ment of NATO members to stop the cuts in defense budgets and gradually increase defense spending to 2 percent of gross domestic ... (More on P4)... (27)

We don't Recognize US Court Ruling: Zarif

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign minister says the country refuses to recognize a recent ruling by the US Supreme Court, which authorizes the transfer of around USD two billion of frozen Iranian assets to the families of the victims of a 1983 bombing in Beirut. Mohammad Javad Zarif made the remarks on Thursday in New York, where he has been staying since Monday to attend a UN debate on Sustainable Development Goals and the signing ceremony of the Paris climate change agreement as well as to meet foreign officials. "As we [already] said, we do not recognize the court's ruling and the US government knows this well," he said, adding, "The US knows this well too that whatever action it takes with respect to Iran's assets will make it accountable in the future and it should return these assets to Iran." On Wednesday, the tribunal ordered the sum be paid to the families of the victims of the explosion, which targeted a US Marine Corps barracks in the Lebanese capital, and other attacks blamed on Iran. (PressTV)

Russian Sappers Defuse Large IS Arms Depot in Palmyra

MOSCOW - Russian sappers involved in mine clearing in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra have discovered and defused more than 12,000 explosive devices from a large arms depot left by the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group, the Russian Defense Ministry said Friday. The depot contained large-caliber mortar mines, artillery shells, and anti-tank and anti-personnel mines which terrorist used not only in the Homs province but also throughout Syria, said Igor Konashenkov, a spokesman for the ministry. Russia declared Thursday that the country's engineers have success-



fully cleared all mines and bombs in the ancient city. Palmyra, which fell into the hands of IS militants in May last year, was recaptured by the Syrian army

in March. Moscow then sent a group of sappers to help clear the city and its vicinity from mines and other explosive devices. (Xinhua)

US Urges World to Win "War" on Climate Change

UNITED NATIONS - The Latest on the U.N. signing ceremony for the climate change agreement. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry says the signing of the climate agreement by a record number of countries is a moment for world leaders to recommit to actually win the "war" against carbon emissions that are making the planet hotter every year. "The urgency of this challenge is only becoming more pronounced," he said, "and this is why our gathering today is, in fact,

historic." Kerry said the power of last December's climate agreement "is the message that it sends to the marketplace." It is going "to unleash the new energy of the future and set the global economy on a new path to development that preserves the environment, he said. Kerry reiterated that the United States will formally join the agreement this year, and urged all other countries to join as well. (AP)

Changes in Kiev Endangers Settlement of Ukraine Crisis: Russian Official

MOSCOW - Recent political changes in Kiev has put the settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine in additional dangers, a Russian official involved in the ceasefire-monitoring mission said Friday. "The political situation in Kiev has changed over the last few weeks... This also brings risks," Alexander Lukashevich, Russia's envoy to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency. In mid-February, the for-

mer parliamentary majority collapsed over an alleged unfair no-confidence vote in parliament against former Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk and his cabinet. Last week, the Ukrainian parliament approved the new government and formed the new parliamentary coalition, ending the months-long political deadlock that disrupted the country's reforms and threatened international aid for Kiev. Conflicts escalated this ... (More on P4)... (30)

Russia Mulls Giving Push to Israeli-Palestinian Settlement

MOSCOW - Russia is reportedly considering assuming a more active role in promoting a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as a fresh wave of violence between the pair of old foes has shaken the region since late 2015. Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Moscow respectively this week, with both holding talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Earlier this year, France launched an ambitious ... (More on P4)... (28)

Nepalese Army Chief to Visit United States

KATHMANDU - Nepalese Chief of the Army Staff (CoAS) Rajendra Chhetri will be visiting the United States from April 24 to May 5 at the invitation of U.S. Army, the army headquarters said here on Friday. During the visit, CoAS Chhetri is scheduled to hold meetings with high-ranking officials of the U.S. Army and United Nations, the army headquarters said. Leading a five-member delegation, the Nepalese army chief will be visiting the United States for the first time after assuming office in August last year. The army ... (More on P4)... (29)

Neighbor News

Xi Stresses Role of Higher Education in Fostering Talent

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping has asked the country's higher education institutes to ensure that graduates demonstrate both moral and technical excellence in a letter congratulating Tsinghua University on its 105th anniversary. Extending greetings to all faculty, students and alumni in a letter Friday, Xi praised the university's teaching that combines Chinese and Western cultures, the ancient and modern, sciences and humanities.

"Managing higher education well affects a country's development and a nation's future," Xi said.

Xi urged Tsinghua to continue its good work in building students' morals and character, serving the country and producing more talents needed by the nation and the people. Xi expressed the hope that the university will strive to make itself one of the first-class universities in the world and make greater contributions to the development of the nation, the welfare of the people and the progress of human civilization.

Originally founded in 1911 as "Tsinghua Xuetang," it is one of the country's key academic centers. (Xinhua)

I will Resign and go Home if Proven Guilty, Vows Sharif

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, in his address to Pakistani nation on Friday, said he will resign and go home if proven guilty by the Panama Papers probe.

"I challenge all those who allege tax fraud to come forward and present evidence. If charges are proved against me, I will resign immediately," vowed Pakistani Prime Minister.

The prime minister stated that a decision has been taken by him to write a letter to the Chief Justice of Pakistan, for the formation of a

commission to probe the allegations levelled against his family and him.

We will accept the recommendations presented forth by the commission, added Nawaz.

"Once again certain elements are attempting to destabilize Pakistan in the wake of Panama Papers."

"Soon after the issue surfaced, I took the nation into confidence and ordered the formation of a judicial commission under the supervision of a retired supreme court judge," said the premier. (Agencies)

Iran, P5+1 Meet for 1st Time After JCPOA Implementation

TEHRAN - Representatives of Iran and the P5+1 group of countries hold their first joint commission meeting to discuss framework for the implementation of the historic nuclear agreement they struck last year.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Abbas Araqchi and Helga Schmid, who represents the P5+1 countries, held talks, which lasted over four hours, in the Austrian capital of Vienna on Friday for the first time after Tehran and the six global powers started implementing the nuclear

agreement, dubbed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), on January 16.

During the meeting, Araqchi and Schmid discussed the process of the JCPOA implementation and obstacles in this regard as well as the lifting of sanctions against Iran. Araqchi, who heads Iranian Foreign Ministry's committee following up on the implementation of JCPOA, told IRNA that the country's delegation is also scheduled to hold separate meetings with some members of the P5+1 countries on the sidelines of the session. (PressTV)

Tajikistan's GDP Estimated At 9.332 Billion Somoni in Q1 2016

DUSHANBE - Based on current data, Tajikistan's gross domestic product (GDP) for the first three months of this year was 9.332 billion somoni, an increase of 6.5 percent over the same period last year in comparable prices, according to the Agency for Statistics under the President of Tajikistan. In January-March this year, GDP structure by sources of income included: sale and repair of automobiles and home appliances and consumer goods, hotels and restaurants - 22 percent; industry and energy - 17.4 percent; transportation, com-

munications and warehousing - 10.8 percent; taxes - 14.2 percent; construction - 8.1 percent; etc.

The government expects the GDP to rise 7.0 percent in a year to December 31, 2016. Meanwhile, international financial institutions have forecasted annual gross domestic product growth for Tajikistan to slow this year. We will recall that the GDP rose 6.0 percent in a year to December 31, 2015, reaching 48.4016 billion somoni, according to the Agency for Statistics under the President of Tajikistan. (Asia-Plus)