

NATO Calls for 'Comprehensive Response' to Migrant Crisis

LISBON - The plight of migrants in the Mediterranean requires a "comprehensive response", NATO's head Jens Stoltenberg said on Monday, adding that the alliance would help by trying to stabilise countries in the region. NATO's role in stabilising countries like Afghanistan was part of the broader approach to the refugee problem in the Mediterranean, Stoltenberg said. "This is not only about northern Africa. We know the people trying to cross the sea come from as far as Asia, Afghanistan or the Middle East." Last week, European Union leaders



agreed to triple funding for the bloc's maritime search-and-rescue op-

eration as part of a plan to deal with the spike in migrants undertaking the

perilous Mediterranean journey to Europe. The EU is also considering

possible military action against people smugglers. Stoltenberg welcomed the

EU's decision to increase its presence at sea, adding that human trafficking was the "main problem". More than 1,750 migrants have died in shipwrecks this year -- 30 times more than the same period in 2014. Many of these people are smuggled in on boats from Libya, which has long been a transit country for African migrants. The flow has intensified since the toppling of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011, as militias turn to the lucrative business of human trafficking. People fleeing violence in the Middle East, especially in Syria, are also using Libya as a transit country. (AFP)

Neighbour News

Iran Slams Nuclear Powers, Israel at UN Atomic Treaty Meeting

UNITED NATIONS - Iran on Monday demanded that countries possessing nuclear weapons scrap any plans to modernize or extend the life of their atomic arsenals, while branding Israel a threat to the region due to its presumed nuclear stockpile. Speaking on behalf of the 120-nation Non-Aligned Movement, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told signatories to the 1970 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that there should be no limits on the transfer of nuclear technology and know-how to NPT signatories. "We call upon the nu-

clear-weapon states to immediately cease their plans to further invest in modernizing and extending the life span of their nuclear weapons and related facilities," Zarif said at the start of a month-long review conference taking stock of the NPT, the world's benchmark disarmament treaty. He said cuts in deployment were not the same as cuts in stockpiles, adding that Iran and the other 117 non-aligned nations that are parties to the NPT are concerned about security policies of nuclear-weapon and NATO states that allow the use, or threat of use, of atomic weapons. (Reuters)

Uzbekistan Cuts Car Production Due to Crisis in Russia

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan plans to reduce its car production in the next two years in line with the state program of production modernization and diversification for 2015-2019, the information agency Amitel (www.amic.ru) reports citing Uzbek media. According to the program's targets, in 2015 Uzbekistan is to produce 219 thousand cars. The reason behind the production cut is the ongoing crisis in the Russian car market, the main export market for Uzbek-made cars. In 2014, sales of cars produced by GM Uzbekistan fell by 38 percent in Russia -- down to 37,695 cars compared

to 60,829 cars in 2013. In the first quarter of 2015, sales in Russia decreased by 58 percent -- down to 5,411 cars compared to 12,858 cars in the first quarter of last year. Due to decreasing exports of GM Uzbekistan cars to Russia, prices for used Uzbek-made cars have lowered by 25-30 percent inside Uzbekistan. GM Uzbekistan is a joint venture of General Motors and Uzbekistan's joint stock company Uzavtoprom, established in 2008 on the basis of UzDaewoo-Auto. GM holds 25 percent plus one share of the joint venture with the possibility of increasing the share up to 40 percent. (TCA)

Stability Returning to Pakistan Due to Army Operations: Gen. Raheel

RAWALPINDI - Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif on Tuesday said that stability is returning to Pakistan as a result of army operations and that a peaceful environment in and around Pakistan is the army's "top priority". The army chief's statement was posted to Twitter on Tuesday by

Director General Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) Asim Bajwa. General Raheel was addressing army officers in Bahawalpur to pay his tribute to their resilience, professionalism and sacrifices in their ongoing operation against terrorism, the statement said. (Agencies)

China to Adjust Resource Tax and Fees

BEIJING - China will reform the resource tax of several natural resources and cut unnecessary fees starting from May, according to a statement released after a State Council executive meeting presided over by Premier Li Keqiang on Tuesday. Resource taxes of rare earth, tungsten and molybdenum will be levied according to price instead of quantity. Reasonable tax rates will be worked

out with no more tax burdens on enterprises. Meanwhile, the central government will exempt mineral resources compensation fees, and ban illegal charges on the three resources by local governments below the provincial level. The three resources will also be exempt from export tariffs from May, the Ministry of finance announced last Thursday. (Xinhua)

Tajik President Invites APS Students to Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan's President, Emomali Rahmon, has invited a group of affected students of the Peshawar Army Public School (APS) to visit to Tajikistan for convalescence. According to the directions of President Emomali Rahmon, various ministries and agencies have chalked out a comprehensive program for students of Peshawar Army Public School, said a press release issued by the Embassy of Tajikistan on Monday. The program includes cultural

performances and trip to historical places in Tajikistan. The purpose of President Emomali Rahmon's initiative is to share grief of these students and their families and help them recover from the traumatic situation they have been facing ever since that horrible incident took place. Tajikistan, after China, is the second country, which has invited students to Tajikistan, the News International said. Meanwhile, the social and political circles... (More on P4)...(25)

US, Japan Widen Defense Ties in Historic Sea Change

NEW YORK - The United States and Japan unveiled new rules for defense cooperation in a historic move that will give Japanese forces a wider global role amid concerns over China's rising sway. US Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Secretary Ashton Carter revealed the new rules alongside Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and Defense Minister Gen Nakatani after talks at a New York hotel.

Although officials said the new doctrine is not aimed at China, there has been increasing concern over moves by Beijing to try to scoop up disputed areas of the South China and East China Seas. But they pointedly made mention of North Korea as another source of tension in the region. Kerry stressed the United States saw the disputed Senkaku Islands, known in Chi-

nese as the Diaoyus, as firmly under Japan's control. Washington "commitment to Japan's security remains ironclad and covers all territories under Japan's administration, including the Senkaku Islands," Kerry said. The sovereignty of the isles has been a source of friction between Tokyo and Beijing for decades. The top US diplomat said the new guidelines

would make Japan safer, and bring greater stability to the Asia-Pacific region. "Today we mark the establishment of Japan's capacity to defend not just its own territory, but also the United States and other partners as needed," Kerry told a joint press conference. "This is a historic meeting. It's a historic transition in the defense relationship between our two countries." (AFP)

Obama Welcomes Abe to White House

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama welcomed Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday with full pomp and ceremony on a bright, dewy morning at the White House, calling the state visit a "celebration of the ties of friendship" and praising the alliance the U.S. and Japan have built over time.

"Prime Minister Abe is leading Japan to a new role in the world stage," Obama said, setting the tone for their meeting. Abe, speaking in Japanese, said he and Obama have been working to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance since they first met two years ago. "Now our bilateral relationship is more robust than ever," he said. The two leaders then huddled in the Oval Office for their meeting. They planned a joint news conference later. The visit aims to highlight the reconciliation between two nations once at war and to point the way toward expanded economic ties. The two countries are working toward a 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement that would further open vast Asian and Pacific rim markets to U.S. exports. Obama faces stiff resistance to the trade deal among members of his own Democratic party. While Obama and Abe won't be ready to announce a trade breakthrough, officials on both sides say they will likely declare they have made considerable progress in closing remaining gaps. The toughest sticking points are U.S. tariffs on Japanese pickup trucks and barriers in Japan on certain U.S. agricultural products. Abe's visit comes on the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and has already prompted demands that he use his trip to address the use of sex slaves by the Imperial Army during the war. (AP)

Separatists Step up Attacks, Poroshenko Warns of 'Threat of War': Ukraine

KIEV - Ukraine's leader warned on Tuesday that a war with pro-Russian separatists could still break out again as its military said the rebels had greatly stepped up attacks and widened the area of their operations despite a ceasefire. The latest violence has revived concerns that a peace deal, brokered in Minsk, Belarus, by the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France, in February could collapse. Both sides accuse each other

of violations. Speaking at a conference called to reassure Ukraine's Western backers that Kiev would stick to reforms to earn a place in mainstream Europe, President Petro Poroshenko said Kiev saw no other solution to the conflict in the east other than by negotiations and diplomacy. But he added: "We are still under a threat of war." More than 6,100 civilians, separatists and military personnel have

been killed so far in the conflict. Fighting erupted in Ukraine's Russian-speaking east after the Moscow-backed president was ousted in a public revolt and Russia annexed Crimea. "In the past 24 hours the resistance (from separatists) has significantly increased. The geographical area of ceasefire violations by the separatists has widened," military spokesman Oleksander Motuzyanyk told journalists. (Reuters)

Iran General Slams 'Declining' Saudi over Yemen Strikes

TEHRAN - Iran's Revolutionary Guards chief said Monday Saudi Arabia is verging on collapse as Tehran's position strengthens, putting the kingdom in the same camp as arch-foe Israel over its military intervention in Yemen. "Now that these attacks have taken place, reservations should be put aside," said General Mohammad Ali Jafari, head of Iran's elite Guards force. "Today the Saudi dynasty is on the verge of decline and fall," he said, asserting that Iran was in the ascendancy, the official IRNA news agency quoted him as saying.



"We hope this will be realized quickly," he added, according to the Tasnim news agency. "Every day we are witnessing the strengthening of the Islamic revolution's power and dimensions outside. Enemies and America have submitted to it."

Jafari's remarks are a further sign of deteriorating relations between Tehran and Riyadh, after recent heavy criticism by Iran's supreme leader and other top officials. As the Middle East's foremost Sunni... (More on P4)...(22)

Houthis and Tribesmen Battle in Central Yemen, at Least 15 Dead

CAIRO - At least 15 people were killed in heavy fighting between Houthi fighters and tribesmen in the oil-producing Marib province in central Yemen. Tribal and medical sources said on Tuesday, as Saudi-led air strikes against the Iran-allied militia continued. The Houthis occupied

the capital Sanaa in September last year, demanding political change. Talks with President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi soured quickly and he announced his resignation, effectively leaving the reins of the central government in the Houthi's hands. Rattled by what they see as

expanding Iranian influence in the Arabian Peninsula, a coalition of Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia launched air strikes in late March. Riyadh announced a halt to its campaign last week, but fighting has intensified again since Sunday. Residents said there were... (More on P4)...(23)

As War Rages at Home, Thousands from Yemen Stranded in Egypt

CAIRO - As a Shiite rebel offensive and Saudi-led airstrikes rage on in Yemen, thousands of Yemenis remain stuck in Egypt, unable to return home. Saudi Arabia, which launched its campaign against Houthi rebels in late March, has closed the airspace over the Arab world's poorest country, halting all commercial flights. And while the plight of foreigners in Yemen trying to escape has caught the attention of many, Yemenis trying to return home increasingly have fewer options as their money runs out, with some saying they even sleep on the streets of

Cairo. "We have nothing left to sell," said Saleh Hadad, a Yemeni man from the country's Marib province. "Where are we supposed to go?" Many, like Hadad and his mother, who has liver cancer, traveled to Egypt for medical care they can't receive back home. Some families have been able to scrounge up small apartments to rent. Others say they have become effectively homeless. Estimates widely range on how many are now stuck, with activist Rawan al-Aghbary saying some 3,800 Yemenis are trying to get home. (AP)

Saudi Arabia Arrests 93 Jihadists, Attacks Foiled



RIYADH - Saudi Arabia has arrested 93 jihadists, most of them linked to the Islamic State group, and has foiled several plots to carry out attacks across the kingdom, authorities said Tuesday. The arrests have taken place since December and most of those detained were Saudis, the interior ministry said in a statement published by the official news agency SPA. Security services had proof that led to the "early uncovering of terrorist activities in several parts of the kingdom by members of the deviant group", a Saudi term used to refer to jihadists, the statement

said. Among those held is a 65-strong IS-linked group plotting to target "residential areas, and operations to incite sectarian sedition" in attacks similar to the killing of seven members of the minority Shiite community in Eastern Province in November, it said. The group includes a Palestinian, a Syrian and two stateless people, it added. Another 15 Saudis formed a group calling itself "Jund Bilad al-Haramain", or Soldiers of the Land of the Two Holy Mosques in reference to Saudi Arabia, home to Islam's holiest sites... (More on P4)...(24)

ASEAN to Assess Partnership Applications from Ecuador, DPRK, Mongolia

KUALA LUMPUR - The secretary-general of ASEAN will conduct an assessment on the applications for formal partnership with association from Ecuador, DPRK and Mongolia, Malaysian Foreign Minister Anifah Aman said here Sunday. In the press conference after the ASEAN Ministerial Meetings, Anifah said that the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting discussed applications for Formal Partnership with ASEAN by Ecuador for Development Partner status, and DPRK as well as Mongolia for Dialogue Partner status. "The meeting agreed for the secretary-general of ASEAN to conduct an assessment on the applications, in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives, and submit the results of the assessment," he said. ASEAN had formalized partnership with several countries including Australia, China, Canada, European Union, New Zealand, South Korea and Pakistan. (Xinhua)