

NATO FMs Agree in Proposals to Deepen NATO-EU Cooperation

BRUSSELS - NATO foreign ministers on Tuesday agreed on over 40 proposals to deepen NATO-European Union (EU) cooperation, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told a press conference following the meeting.

All 42 proposals made by two blocs focus on seven key areas, including countering hybrid threats, maritime security and cyber defense, which have been identified in a joint declaration by NATO and the EU at the Warsaw Summit in July.

"On maritime, we en-



hanced cooperation between Operations Sea Guardian and Sophia in the Mediterranean. On cyber, we will strengthen our mutual participation in exercises, and foster research," Stoltenberg noted.

According to the proposals, NATO and the EU will also advance capacity-building cooperation with partner countries, including Georgia, Ukraine and Tunisia.

Moreover, the two organizations will reinforce the "coherence" in the development of their defense capabilities. (Xinhua)

Asia-Pacific Countries Gear up for RCEP Negotiations

JAKARTA - Asia-Pacific countries are gathering in Indonesia for the 16th round of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiation with eagerness shifting to the regional free-trade pact as the U.S. plans exit from Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Launched in November 2012, the RCEP talks involve 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states and six dialogue partners - China, Japan, South Korea,

Australia, New Zealand and India - with an aim to facilitate expansion of regional trade and investment. Indonesian Trade Minister Enggartiasto Lukita said that the negotiation process among TPP members now becomes crucial following the uncertain fate of TPP and recent development in global trade after Britain's exit from the European Union. "With such a condition, the RCEP becomes a hope. Huge anxieties on major ... (More on P4)...(24)

UK Brexit Minister Says Expects Parliament to Get Vote on Final Deal

LONDON - It is inconceivable that Britain's parliament would not be able to vote on the country's final deal with the European Union, but that would not reverse the fact it was leaving the EU, he added: "That is entirely correct".

Davis also said that the political scene in the EU was not set, and that the at least 15 elections due to take place across the bloc during the two-

year negotiating period could change the backdrop to Britain's exit process, making it "a challenging climate" for talks. (Reuters)



Syrian Army Enters Aleppo's Ancient Citadel

DAMASCUS - After capturing the old city of Aleppo, Syrian forces entered the historic citadel of Aleppo on Wednesday, meeting with a military unit that has been besieged in the time-honored place, a military source told Xinhua. The unit met with the storming military forces, who have captured all of the old city of Aleppo, and entered the citadel from its main gate, the source said, on condition of anonymity. Before the recently military offensive in Aleppo, the citadel was almost besieged by the rebels, and the military forces inside

used to go out and in via sub routes and in armored vehicles.

Parts of the citadel were also under the control of the rebels, who reportedly withdrew from their positions on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV said Syrian airstrikes targeted rebel positions near the citadel, after they fired mortar shells that slammed the citadel, causing no casualties. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the Syrian army has become in control of 80 percent of the rebel-held part in eastern Aleppo. (Xinhua)

Merkel's Conservatives Back Tougher Rules on Dual Citizens

BERLIN - Members of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's party voted Wednesday to scrap rules that allow the children of immigrants to be dual citizens, a move opposed by party leaders and rejected by its partners in government.

Until 2014, German-born children of immigrants from outside the European Union or Switzerland had to pick one nationality between ages 18 to 23, a rule largely affecting Germany's Turkish community. Merkel's current center-left coalition partners, the So-

cial Democrats, insisted on dropping the requirement as a condition for entering the government. That was never popular with Merkel's conservative Christian Democratic Union. Delegates at a convention in Essen narrowly backed a motion from the party's youth wing that advocated returning to the old system.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere had argued



against the motion, noting that no potential coalition partner after next year's election would agree to it. Wednesday's decision ap-

pears to reflect a desire among some CDU members for a sharper conservative profile. Merkel has ... (More on P4)...(25)

Russian-Turkish PMs Agree to Quickly Restore Bilateral Relations

MOSCOW - Tuesday's talks between Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and his Turkish counterpart Binali Yildirim in Moscow are believed to have been key in reviving bilateral relations, particularly economic ties.

"The main goal is to reset our trade and economic cooperation. We must resume steady growth," Medvedev told reporters Tuesday after the meeting. Relations between the two countries soured last year after Turkey downed



a Russian warplane near the Turkish-Syrian border, which Russian President Vladimir Putin called a "stab in the back," and ordered a range of sanctions

against Ankara, devastating the Turkish economy. The eight-month-long period of icy relations began to thaw in June after Turkish ... (More on P4)...(26)

U.N. Rights Watchdog Calls on Sri Lanka to Investigate Torture

GENEVA - A U.N. rights watchdog called on Sri Lanka on Wednesday to investigate documented allegations of torture and rape of detainees by security forces and to rein in broad police powers.

The United Nations Committee against Torture described continuing reports of abductions, deaths in custody, poor conditions of detention and the use of forced confessions in court.

There was no immediate response from the Sri Lankan authorities. But the committee's report said the island's attorney general, Jayantha Jayasuriya, had told its investigators that his government had a zero tolerance policy when it came to torture. The report included recommendations by the panel of 10 independent rights experts citing "consistent reports" from national and U.N. ... (More on P4)...(27)

WH Defends New Air Force One Deal after Trump's Attack on Expense

WASHINGTON - The White House defended the deal of new Air Force One aircrafts with Boeing company, after President-elect Donald Trump called for cancelling the order claiming the new aircraft too expensive in a Twitter post earlier on Tuesday.

"I think the American people would expect that future presidents would benefit from unique and upgraded capabilities while flying aboard Air Force One," White House press secretary Josh Earnest told reporters on board the presidential plane flying to Tampa, Florida.

However, it's up to the Trump administration to determine whether the project will be completed, said Earnest.

"The updated Air Force One is not set to come online until 2023," he said. "This is a longer-range plan, but ultimately the planning work that we have done on behalf of future presidents is something the next administration will have to decide to carry forward," he said.

"Boeing is building a brand new 747 Air Force One for future presidents, but costs are out of control, more than \$4 billion. Cancel order!" Trump tweeted. "We want Boeing to make a lot of money, but not that much money," he then told reporters in a briefing. However, the 4-billion-dollar price tag Trump claimed for the cost of the new aircraft couldn't be immediately confirmed. (Xinhua)

Russian Military Adviser Killed in Syria: Defense Ministry

MOSCOW - A Russian military adviser had died of wounds in a round of shelling by militants in Syria's Aleppo, the Russian Defense Ministry said Wednesday.

Col. Ruslan Galitsky, who will be presented a high state award, died in a hospital as a result of serious wounds received in a shelling by the so-called "opposition militants" in western Aleppo, the ministry said in a statement.

This is the second case within one week where Russians were killed in Syria. On Monday, Syrian rebels shelled a Russian mobile hospital in Aleppo, in which two Russian nurses were ... (More on P4)...(28)

Iraq Approves Budget Amid Debate on Controversial Items

BAGHDAD - Iraqi legislators on Wednesday endorsed a bill for the country's 2017 federal budget with about 85 billion U.S. dollars and a deficit of about 18 billion dollars, reported Iraqi official television.

"The parliament approved the proposed 2017 budget by majority of the lawmakers who voted in all the budget items," the state-run Iraqiya channel said.

The budget approval came following several heated sessions of debate among the various political blocs over multiple controversial items, including payment of the Kurdish security forces, known as the Peshmerga.

The proposed budget was based on an av-



erage oil price of 42 dollars per barrel and export of 3.75 million barrels of crude oil per day (bpd), including exporting 250,000 bpd from the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan and 300,000 bpd from federal oilfields in the province of Kirkuk. Parliament also ... (More on P4)...(29)

Neighbor News

About 40 People Feared Dead in Pakistan Plane Crash

PESHAWAR/ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - A plane carrying about 40 people crashed on the slope of a mountain in northern Pakistan on Wednesday, with witnesses on the crash site saying there were unlikely to be any survivors.

The military said 21 bodies had been recovered and rescue efforts continued. Pakistan Interna-

tional Airlines (PIA) said its plane lost contact with the control tower en route to the capital, Islamabad, from the northern region of Chitral.

The airline said the plane crashed at 1642 local time (1142 GMT) in the Havelian area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, about 125 km (77 miles) north of Islamabad. "All of ... (More on P4)...(30)

Iran Seeks Japan's Investment as Stimulus to Diversify Economy

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif urged Japanese companies and businessmen for investments in the country's different economic sectors, Pres TV reported on Wednesday. Iran is the safest destination for foreign investments in the troubled Middle East, and the Japanese businesses should seize the opportunity and promote their roles in the Iranian market, Zarif was quoted as saying.

The Iranian top diplomat made the remarks at a economic gathering bringing together the Iranian and Japanese businessmen in Tokyo on

Wednesday. Zarif, who is heading a large high-ranking political and economic delegation, arrived in Tokyo on Tuesday following the visits to India and China. In the wake of terror threats destabilizing the Middle East region, "Iranians are enjoying peace," and under such circumstances, Iran can serve as a safe haven for investments and economic cooperation, Zarif told the meeting.

He described Iran as a corridor connecting Persian Gulf littoral states through its southern port city of Bandar-Abbas to Central Asia, Azerbaijan ... (More on P4)...(31)

IMF Brings More Bad News on Economic Front: Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - A team of International Monetary Fund (IMF) specialists have concluded their latest visit to Turkmenistan and returned with some sobering observations on the state of the energy-dependent nation's economy. One key takeaway from a statement issued on December 6 is that the government will have to adopt greater measures to compensate for the expected persistence of low prices for oil and gas.

"Hydrocarbon prices remain low and trading partner growth is muted. As a result of these external factors, Turkmenistan's overall economic

growth has slowed down," the IMF mission said in a post-visit statement.

These confluence of developments means that Turkmenistan is spending beyond its means, and that this trend is worsening.

"The current account deficit is expected to widen significantly in 2016 as a result of lower energy revenues, and in spite of an active policy effort to substitute imports with domestic production, promote exports, and reduce public investment expenditures," the IMF mission said. (Monitoring Desk)

Tajikistan Plans to Reduce Poverty Two-Fold

DUSHANBEH - The National Development Strategy of Tajikistan until 2030 proposes to reduce the poverty in the country from 31% to 15%, reported Avesta news agency. A number of poor people will be reduced in 14 years, according to it. The plans are expected to be implemented in three phases: in 2020, 2025, 2030 years.

The living standards in the country are expected

to be increased more than two times within 14 years, according to the document.

According to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of the country, the full implementation of the National Development Strategy will increase the living standards from 22% to 50%. It was earlier reported that Tajikistan changes its approach to the poverty reduction. (AKIpress)

Uzbekistan Announces International Competition for Karimov Monument

TASHKENT - Uzbek President-elect Shavkat Mirziyayev has signed a resolution announcing an international competition to erect a monument to his late predecessor Islam Karimov. Media reports in Uzbekistan said on December 7 that the resolution was signed on December 2, and carried its text. "An international competition has been announced to create a monument to the first president of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, in order to preserve the memory

of him," it said. Uzbekistan's government said that Karimov died on September 2, at 78, after suffering a stroke. He had ruled the Central Asian nation with an iron hand since 1989, when it was still a Soviet republic. In mid-September, a reconstructed ancient mosque in Tashkent was named Islam-Ota (Father Islam) in his honor. Mirziyayev, prime minister since 2003, became interim president after Karimov's death and was elected to a five-year term on December 4. (Monitoring Desk)