

Kerry to Visit Moscow next Week for Syria, Ukraine Talks

PARIS - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said on Wednesday he would travel to Moscow next week for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Ukraine and a political settlement in Syria. Speaking during an event on the sidelines of the Paris climate talks, Kerry said despite its military and political interests in Syria, Moscow "has been constructive" in trying to find a political settlement to end the Syrian conflict. "I'm ... traveling to Moscow in a week and will be meeting with him (Putin) and with Foreign Minister Lavrov on



the subject of Syria and on Ukraine," Kerry said.

"They have helped us in this process. Russia

has been constructive in helping the Vienna pro-

cess to take place, to be successful, and I think

they want a political settlement there." He did not elaborate on dates for the meeting. Kerry often meets with Lavrov during events around the globe, and it will be his second trip to Russia this year to discuss Syria and Ukraine. He met Putin in the Black Sea resort town of Sochi in May. The Moscow talks will take place ahead of a possible meeting in New York on December 18 on trying to push the Syrian political process forward. But Kerry has warned that the New York meeting hinges on efforts currently un-
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Nieghbor News

China Calls for Dialogue on Iraq-Turkey Tension

BEIJING - China on Wednesday called for better coordination and dialogue as Iraq demanded Turkey withdraw its troops from northern Iraq. "China is closely following the development of the incident. We noticed that defense ministers of Turkey and Iraq talked over phone about the matter," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a press briefing. Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity should be respected, she said. China urges state-to-state relations be han-

dled in accordance with the UN Charter and basic norms of international relations, said the spokeswoman. In the face of a grave terrorism situation, all parties should fight terrorism, and give full play to the leading role of the UN and its Security Council, Hua said. All anti-terror operations should be carried out under international law, respect relevant UN Security Council resolutions, have the consent of countries concerned and truly help maintain peace
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Iran, Russia Eye Joint Armenia Gas Export Plan

TEHRAN - Russia's energy giant Gazprom announced on Wednesday that it has started talks with Iran over a scheme to exchange natural gas for exports to Armenia. The announcement was made by the company's CEO Alexey Miller. "Yes, we did discuss this issue, currently we are working on the issues of exchange operations with our Iranian colleagues," Miller has been quoted as saying by Sputnik news agency. He made the comment when answering a question on whether the gas supplies to Armenia from Iran was touched upon

while discussing the transit through Georgia. On Tuesday, Miller met Georgian Energy Minister Kakhaber Kaladze in Luxembourg for gas supply talks. At the moment, the Russian gas is supplied to Armenia via Georgia. In November, Iran's Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh said Tehran was already in talks with Moscow on certain oil and gas swaps agreements. Reports emerged last month that suggested Georgia was preparing to sign contracts with Iran over imports of natural gas from the country. (PressTV)

Pakistan-Turkey Relationship to Grow Stronger: PM

ISLAMABAD - Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday said that Turkey is a trusted friend of Pakistan and the relationship between the two countries would continue to grow stronger. The prime minister expressed these views in a meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Melvet Cavuso-

glu here in Islamabad. The Turkish foreign minister said that Pakistan is a second home to Turkish people. He said that his country supports Pakistan's efforts in promoting peace and reconciliation in the region. He thanked Pakistan for its hospitality at the Heart of Asia conference. (Agencies)

Iran, Pakistan Stress Dialog to end Syria Crisis

TEHRAN - Iran and Pakistan have underlined the need for the resolution of the ongoing crisis in Syria through political negotiations. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Pakistani Prime Minister's Adviser on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, met and held talks in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, on Tuesday night, during which they discussed latest developments in the region, including the Syrian crisis. The two sides called for the promotion of coop-

eration among regional countries to fight terrorism and extremism and contribute to the establishment of peace and stability in Afghanistan. Zarif, who arrived in Islamabad on Tuesday to attend the 5th "Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process" Ministerial Conference, also sat down with his Afghan counterpart, Salahuddin Rabbani, in Islamabad. In the meeting, the Iranian official voiced the Islamic Republic's support for Afghanistan's national unity government. (PressTV)

Tajikistan Parliament Votes to Name President 'Leader of Nation'

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan's parliament on Wednesday unanimously voted to grant President Emomali Rakhmon the title 'Leader of the Nation' for life, reinforcing his blossoming personality cult in the ex-Soviet state. The honorary title guarantees 63-year-old Rakhmon legal immunity for life and calls for the foundation of a museum and library dedicated to his legacy. Other authoritarian leaders in the region have assumed similar titles amid a fanfare of praise from lawmakers and tightly controlled state media.

"The words and deeds of Emomali Rakhmon occupy an important place in our hearts," said Shukurzhon Zuhurov, speaker of the lower house, at Wednesday's session. Zuhurov said Rakhmon's main achievement during 23 years in power was "the restoration of peace and stability" after a bloody five-year civil war that ended in 1997. Even mild opposition to the Rakhmon regime is not tolerated as economic and social tensions mount in the impoverished Central Asian country of 8 million. (Agencies)

Syrians Leave Rebel-Held Homs Area in Truce Deal

HOMS - Busloads of Syrians including rebel fighters left the last insurgent-held area of Homs on Wednesday under a rare local truce agreement in Syria's nearly five-year conflict that will shore up government control over the city. The rebels and their families are being moved to insurgent-held areas of the northwest near the Turkish border under the deal, an example of the type of local truce U.S. President Barack Obama has said could happen in Syria more frequently.

Homs was a centre of the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad. The deal follows a major Syrian army ground offensive to the north of the city backed by Russian air strikes. Witnesses saw 15 buses leave the area. Homs governor Talal al-Barazi told reporters 300 fighters were on board, together with 400 members of their families. The fighters took with them light weapons, he said. The deal echoes a local ceasefire agreed in
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Sri Lankan President Vows to Eliminate Corruption

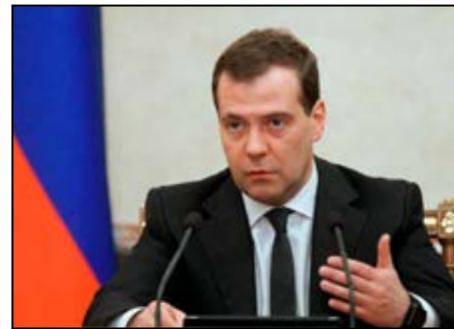
COLOMBO - Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena on Wednesday vowed to eliminate corruption from the island nation under his tenure. Sirisena was speaking at the conclusion of the Anti-Corruption walk, an event held in the national capital city that attracted more than over 1,500 people. Sirisena, along with several government ministers and representatives, led the walk from the Viharamahadevi Park to the Independence Square in a fresh bid to show their strong

determination to get rid of corruption in the country. The event was organized by the country's anti-graft commission in collaboration with Transparency International and activists from public and private sectors and the civil society. A three-year plan to prevent corruption was also unveiled at the event. Earlier on Wednesday, Secretary to the President P. B. Abeykoon called on the country's public servants to shun corrupt practices and help raise
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Russian Economy Stops Falling, Growth Expected in 2016: PM

MOSCOW - The Russian economy has stopped decreasing and is expected to start growing next year, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said Wednesday. "We had a goal to stop the decline of production, to stop the decline of the economy. And now, on the basis of the data provided by the government and the Economic Development Ministry, I can say the fall of the economy and the decline in production have been curtailed. And we believe next year the economy will be growing," Medvedev said in

a live annual interview broadcasted by Russian TV channels. "A relatively optimistic estimate of economic growth is around 1 percent," he added, noting that the anti-crisis plan adopted in January proved to be effective, with slow but efficient progress made in import substitution programs. The State Duma, Russia's lower parliament house, approved on Friday a rigid federal budget for 2016 based on the government's macroeconomic forecast for 2016-2018, according to which inflation in Russia would



shrink to 6.4 percent in 2016 from 12.2 percent expected this year. "I believe this forecast, this scenario is quite realistic, and we will really be able to halve the infla-

tion to 6.4 percent," Medvedev said, adding that the inflation had practically stopped rising in the last few months. Monthly inflation in Rus-
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Europe Talks Tough on Migrant Strategies

BRUSSELS - Germany and France have proposed giving an EU border force the power -- in theory at least -- to patrol Greece's frontiers uninvited by Athens in the latest sign of hardening attitudes towards solving Europe's migration crisis. The proposal, in a letter sent last week to the EU executive in Brussels and seen by Reuters on Tuesday, would in principle apply to any member state, not just Greece. But it is driven

by frustration that Greek failure to control large numbers arriving by sea is putting the EU's open borders Schengen zone at risk. EU leaders, struggling for unity and facing competing pressures at home, will again discuss the crisis at a summit on Dec. 17. Diplomats expect calls for more coercive pressure on both governments and migrants to follow policy set in Brussels. A draft of conclusions for the summit speaks of



"rapidly" fixing failings in border control and of "measures to discourage refusal of registration"

by migrants -- the closest official EU language has come to calling for the use
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E. Ukraine Death Toll Exceeds 9,000 Despite Drop in Fighting: UN Report

KIEV - More than 9,000 people have been killed in the 21-month-old conflict in eastern Ukraine even though the fighting has substantially eased in recent months, the United Nations (UN) said on Wednesday.



According to the report released by the UN human rights office, at least 9,098 people, including combatants and civilians, have been killed and 20,732 others have been wounded during the confrontation in Donetsk and Lugansk regions since April 2014. At least 47 civilian were killed in eastern Ukraine

between mid-August and mid-November, although certain areas, the report said, have witnessed a significant reduction of hostilities since a fresh ceasefire three months ago. According to the report, the new casualties were

caused mainly by the remnants of the conflict, such as landmines and improvised explosive devices planted in the battlefields. The report also highlighted a challenging humanitarian situation in the restive area,
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Human Rights Situation Precarious in Ukraine Despite Lull in Hostilities

GENEVA - The Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) said on Wednesday that though a significant reduction of hostilities in parts of Eastern Ukraine has been observed over the last few months, serious human breaches continue to persist. Based on the twelfth UN Human Rights report of its kind on the situation in Ukraine, findings show that 47 civilians were killed and 131 injured between August 16 and November 15, a considerable

drop compared to the 105 fatalities and 308 injured recorded over the previous reporting period (May 16 - August 15). According to findings, the 'ceasefire within the ceasefire' agreed upon in Minsk on August 26 this year helped reduce hostilities as heavy weapons were withdrawn by both the Ukrainian military and armed groups while exchanges of artillery and light weapons fire became almost non-existent in September and
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German Chancellor Merkel Named Time's 'Person of the Year'

WASHINGTON - Time magazine named German Chancellor Angela Merkel its 2015 "Person of the Year" on Wednesday, noting her resilience and leadership when faced with the refugee crisis and turmoil in the European Union over its currency this year.

In a statement explaining the magazine's choice, managing editor Nancy Gibbs said despite crises in the region that caused "reason to wonder whether Europe could continue to exist," Merkel, 61, emerged as an "indispensable player." "For asking more of her country than most politicians would dare, for standing firm against tyranny as well as expedience and for providing steadfast moral leadership in a world where it is in short supply, Angela Merkel is TIME's Person of the Year," Gibbs wrote.

In response to the news, Merkel spokesman Steffen Seibert told a government news conference: "I am sure the chancellor will cherish this as an incentive in her job." Merkel celebrated her 10-year anniversary as chancellor last month, making her the European Union's longest-serving leader. For years she was seen as a cautious, risk-averse leader who paid close attention to public opinion in formulating policy. But her leadership in the Ukraine crisis last year, her clinching of a deal this summer to keep Greece in the euro zone and her stance in the refugee crisis have changed that view. (Reuters)

Kenya to Inject \$26mln into Economy from WTO Conference

NAIROBI - The World Trade Organization (WTO) tenth Ministerial Conference slated for Nairobi next week is expected to inject about 26 million U.S. dollars to the economy, a government official said on Wednesday. Tourism Cabinet Secretary Najib Balala said the preparations were 98 percent complete, noting that the government expects more than 7,000 delegates from all over the world to attend the Dec. 15-18 global conference.

"We expect an average delegate spend of 3,750 dollars. This should inject approximately 26 million dollars to the Kenyan economy through the multiplier effect," Balala said after inspecting the preparations of the conference in Nairobi. "This is the biggest conference ever to be hosted in Sub-...*(More on P4)...(34)*

Greece, Egypt and Cyprus to Boost Cooperation for Stability and Peace

ATHENS - The leaders of Greece, Egypt and Cyprus expressed their willingness to boost cooperation to promote stability, peace and prosperity in the wider region at the end of a trilateral one-day summit hosted in Athens on Wednesday. At the end of talks Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades signed the "Declaration of Athens" which foresees the further closer collaboration between the three countries in a wide range of issues of mutual interest. The Athens Declaration foresees the establishment of a permanent mechanism of trilateral cooperation between Greece, Egypt and Cyprus and pushes for a
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