

US Asks Germany for more Military Help in Fight Against IS

BERLIN - The United States has asked Germany for more military help in the fight against Islamic State, a German magazine reported on Saturday, a week after parliament approved a plan to join the campaign in Syria. Der Spiegel said U.S. Defence Secretary Ashton Carter had sent a letter asking for a bigger military contribution from Berlin. Its mission currently includes six Tornado reconnaissance jets, a frigate to protect the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, refueling aircraft and up to 1,200 troops. The deployment is a di-



rect response to a French appeal for solidarity after militant attacks in Paris killed 130 people. Germa-

ny does not plan to carry out air strikes in Syria. A German Defence Ministry spokesman con-

firmed a letter had been received from the United States and its content was under consideration, giv-

ing no further details. Germany has over the last two years shown a growing readiness to commit

troops to foreign missions. Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen said last week Germany might need bigger armed forces to cope with the more assertive role. She said an analysis into staffing and the organization of combat forces would report in a couple of months on whether personnel levels were appropriate. More than 3,000 personnel are currently deployed overseas and the Syria mission will raise that by up to 1,200. Von der Leyen also wants to send 650 troops to Mali to help the French campaign against Islamist militants there. (Reuters)

Houthi Group Says Ceasefire to Start on December 14

DUBAI - A ceasefire in Yemen's civil war will start on Dec. 14, the eve of planned peace talks in Switzerland next week, the head of the Houthi delegation to the peace talks said on Saturday. "Based on what had been agreed upon, there will be a halt of the aggression on the 14th of this month," Mohammed Abdul-Salam told a news conference broadcast live from the Yemeni capital Sanaa. The United Nations has invited Yemeni President Abd-

Rabbu Mansour Hadi's government and the Houthis to peace talks in Switzerland starting on Dec. 15, after the sides agreed a draft agenda and ground rules for the talks. Hadi's Prime Minister Khaled Bahah said on Friday he was determined to end the fighting that had killed nearly 6,000 people since March and caused widespread damage to the economy and infrastructure. Abdul-Salam complained that the ... (More on P4)...(20)

France Submits Proposed UN Climate Agreement

PARIS - France on Saturday delivered the final text of a global agreement on climate change to participants of the marathon climate talks in Paris. Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, who presided over nearly a fortnight of talks in Paris that ran into overtime, said the proposed UN accord would be "fair, lasting, dynamic, balanced and legally binding." According to sources, the proposed accord eyes 100 billion U.S. dollars a year for developing world from 2020. It also calls for aim-

ing to hold global average temperature rises to below 2 Celsius over pre-industrial levels and strives for limiting the increase to 1.5 Celsius. The draft text also proposes a collective review every 5 years of each country's progress, which "allows us to react collectively". For the president of COP21, "if the draft text would be adopted (during the day of Saturday), it is going to represent a historic turning point", Fabius said. The draft text "fixes a long-term ambi ... (More on P4)...(21)

Merkel Against Set Limit to Number of Migrants

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel has reinforced her opposition to setting a limit to the number of refugees the country can take in. The chancellor said in an interview published Saturday by two regional papers that although she wants to reduce the number of migrants, she doesn't agree with demands within her Christian Democratic Union party to set a limit for the number of asylum seekers entering the country. Her remarks in Badische-



Neueste Nachrichten and Augsburg Allgemeine came before a regular congress Monday of her conservative party amid

tensions over refugee policy. Almost one million asylum seekers have entered Germany so far this year

and cities and communities have been struggling to accommodate and process the influx of people. (AP)

Russia Slams Syria Opposition Meet in Riyadh

MOSCOW - Russia on Saturday slammed as unrepresentative the talks held this week in Saudi Arabia among Syrian political and armed opposition groups which culminated with a call for President Bashar al-Assad to step down. "We cannot agree with an attempt made by the group that gathered in Riyadh to monopolise the right to speak on behalf of the entire Syrian opposition," said the foreign ministry in Moscow, which supports Assad.

Gathered in the Saudi capital for the first major talks among various political and armed factions, representatives on Thursday agreed a framework for negotiations sought by world powers. But the opposition groups insisted that Assad and his aides quit power "with the start of the transition period" set out by world powers in Vienna last month. The United States welcomed the Riyadh accord but warned that some problems remain to be resolved between the



opposition forces if UN-backed peace talks are to resume next week. Russia had said it would con-

firm whether next week's planned meeting of the 17 nations of the International ... (More on P4)...(22)

S.Korea, DPRK end Vice Ministers' Talks without any Agreement

SEOUL - South Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on Saturday ended their vice ministers' talks without any agreement on differences over sensitive issues. The senior-level dialogue, which continued for two days at the DPRK's border city of Kaesong, ended without any joint press release, according to a pool report. The two sides failed to reach an agreement on a schedule for the next round of the vice ministerial-level talks, indicating a de-facto failure of the talks. The two Koreas "did not reach any agreement," Hwang Boo-gi, South Korea's vice unification minister who led the three-member del-



egation, told reporters in Kaesong. Hwang's DPRK counterpart was Jon Jong-su, vice director of the secretariat of the DPRK's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea. From the very beginning, the high-level talks showed signs of differences over sensitive issues such as the regular reunion of Korean families separated by the 1950-

53 Korean War, which Seoul has called for from Pyongyang. Pyongyang has wanted the resumption of tour to the DPRK's scenic resort of Mount Kumgang. The tour, launched in 1998, was suspended in July 2008 when a South Korean female tourist was shot dead by a DPRK soldier after allegedly venturing into an off-limit area. (Xinhua)

Saudi Holds First-ever Election Open to Women

RIYADH - Covered from head to toe and driven by male guardians, Saudi women voted Saturday for the first time, in a tentative step towards easing sex discrimination in the ultra-conservative Islamic kingdom. In another first, women were allowed to stand as candidates in the polls for municipal councils, the country's only elected public chambers. "Now women have a voice," Awatef Marzooq told AFP after casting her ballot for the first time at a school in the capital. "I cried. This is something that we only used to see on television taking place in other countries." Despite the presence of female contenders for the first time, Marzooq said she picked a male candidate because of his ideas including more nurseries. "I voted for a man, but I hope a woman will win," she said. Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy with some of the world's tightest restrictions on women, including a ban on driving. It was the last country to allow only men to vote. In a reminder of the continued gap between the two sexes, polling stations were segregated. Outside one centre for women in Riyadh, cars driven by men arrived every few minutes with female voters dressed in black robes. (AFP)

Turkmenistan's Neutrality Helped its Growth: Ansari

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan's permanent neutral status led the central Asian country to develop and progress on its own terms over the last two decades, Indian Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari said on Saturday. "Permanent neutrality of Turkmenistan has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy, guiding the nation-state founded on the ancient culture of Turkmen people to transform into a fast-growing economy marked by political stability," Ansari said at the international neutrality conference here. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on December 12, 1995 had adopted the resolution, co-sponsored by India, recognising and supporting the permanent neutrality status of Turkmenistan. The GNSA also passed a resolution on June 3 this year to welcome the Turkmen government's decision to declare 2015 as the "year of peace and neutrality" and host an international conference on neutrality as its theme. (Agencies)

WTO Meeting to Boost Africa's Agriculture Trade: Experts

NAIROBI - The upcoming World Trade Organization (WTO) Nairobi meeting would offer African countries a major opportunity to improve the supply chains of agriculture produce and boost its agriculture trade, experts said ahead of the 10th WTO Ministerial Conference to be held next week. Darlington Mwape, Former Permanent Representative of Zambia to WTO, said in Nairobi that one of the possible deliverables at the meeting, first of its kind in Africa ... (More on P4)...(24)

India and Japan Sign Deals on Military, Train Sales, Nukes

NEW DELHI - Japan and India signed agreements Saturday that could pave the way for Tokyo to supply New Delhi with military aircraft and high-speed trains, as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe promised to fully support India's efforts to become an economic powerhouse. The two countries also laid the groundwork for Japan to help India further develop its nuclear power, with a final deal to be signed after technical details are

finalized. Abe described the agreements, signed during his weekend visit to New Delhi, as a new era of cooperation between the two countries. "In September 2014 in Tokyo, Prime Minister Abe spoke of \$35 billion of Japanese finance and investments for India over five years," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at a news conference with Abe. "It was ambitious. But together, we are quickly turning it into ... (More on P4)...(23)

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Beijing Needs more as Water Diversion Eases Thirst

BEIJING - Water diverted from the Yangtze River has helped to ease the chronic water issue in Beijing over the past year, yet the city needs more amount as well as water conservation efforts to tackle the issue. Saturday marked the first anniversary of the starting of water diversion through the middle route of the massive south-to-north water diversion project. The project is the world's largest of its kind at an estimated cost of 500 billion yuan (77.5 billion U.S. dollars). It was officially approved by the State Council, China's

Cabinet, in 2002, five decades after late Chairman Mao Zedong came up with the idea. The first phase of the middle route is designed to deliver an average of 9.5 billion cubic meters of water each year from the Danjiangkou reservoir in central China's Hubei Province to the northern provinces of Hebei and Henan as well as Beijing and Tianjin, benefiting some 100 million people. In the first year, it diverted 2.22 billion cubic meters of water northward, and Beijing received 822 million cubic meters, or ... (More on P4)...(25)

Iran VP Urges Genuine Campaign Against Extremism

TEHRAN - Iran's First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri says the lack of genuine international fight against extremism will be highly detrimental to all countries across the world. "We are witnessing the expansion of violent extremism and killing of defenseless people in the region these days, a trend which has unfortunately become further complicated due to the interference of extra-regional countries," Jahangiri said in Ashgabat on Saturday during a ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of

the day the United Nations officially recognized Turkmenistan's "permanent neutrality." He added that extremist groups are committing inhumane, non-Islamic and the most heinous crimes in the name of justice and Islam. He said Iran's foreign policy has always been based on promotion of relations with neighboring and regional countries and expressed Tehran's keenness to bolster ties with Ashgabat in all fields, particularly in the reinforcement of peace and stability. (PressTV)

488 Soldiers, 3,400 Militants Killed in Army Operation in NW Pakistan

ISLAMABAD - A total of 488 soldiers and 3,400 militants have been killed in the ongoing armed offensive by Pakistan army in the country's northwest tribal area of North Waziristan over the last 18 months, an official with the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media wing, said Saturday. Major General ISPR, Asim Bajwa, said that at least 1914 security personnel including officials and men from Pakistani army and paramilitary troops were also injured in the operation. He said that the military has also destroyed 837 hideouts of the militants from where they were carrying out terrorist activities. Aiming at the eradication of local and foreign militants from

the volatile North Waziristan agency, the armed offensive called "Zarb-e-Azb" (an Urdu name for the Islamic prophet's sword) was launched on June 15 last year. Bajwa said that during the last eighteen months a phenomenal success has been achieved by the army who is currently busy in clearing the last pockets close to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. He maintained that terrorists' backbone has been broken in the operation and their main infrastructure has been dismantled. He said that the nexus of the Taliban militants with sleeper cells has been largely disrupted while intelligence-based operations (IBOs) are going on in the country to burst the remaining. (Xinhua)

Turkmenistan Ready to Step up Multilateral Co-Op to Address Issues of Caspian Sea

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan is ready to step up multilateral cooperation to address all issues related to the Caspian Sea, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said. He made the remarks at the international conference "The policy of neutrality: International cooperation for peace, security and development" held Dec. 12 in Ashgabat and dedicated the 20th anniversary of Turkmenistan's Neutrality. "Ensuring lasting security

in the Caspian Sea on the basis of equality and mutual respect of all the Caspian littoral states should become the main objective in this case," the president said. "The Caspian Sea has always been and must remain a sea of peace, reconciliation, good neighborliness and effective international cooperation." Caspian states signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea in November 2003. (Agencies)