

Strasbourg Reopens Christmas Market after Attacker Shot Dead

STRASBOURG, France - Strasbourg reopened its traditional Christmas market under heavy security on Friday, the morning after French police shot dead a gunman suspected of killing four people in the heart of the historic city.

Cherif Chekatt, 29, was killed in the Neudorf neighborhood of Strasbourg after firing on police, ending a two-

day manhunt that involved more than 700 members of the security forces. The attack on Strasbourg's cherished Christmas market, a target full of religious symbolism, evoked France's difficulties in integrating western Europe's largest Muslim minority and dealing with homegrown militants inspired by Islamic State. (Reuters)

Russia Ready to Discuss Inspections with U.S. on Arms Treaty: RIA

MOSCOW - Russia is ready to discuss mutual inspections with the United States in order to save the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, RIA news agency cited Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as saying on Friday.

Last week Washington said Russia must scrap its 9M729 nuclear-capable cruise missiles and launchers or

modify the weapons' range to return to compliance to the Cold War-era arms control treaty. It gave Moscow a deadline of 60 days or it would begin to withdraw from the pact.

"If the United States really wants to come to some kind of agreement with us, then we need to sit down at the negotiating table in an inter-agency format and agree on everything in

detail. We are ready for this," foreign ministry official Vladimir Yermakov was cited as saying. Yermakov also said Russia categorically ruled out inspections being carried out on Russia on a unilateral basis but that any serious actions on arms control "are only possible on the basis of mutually legally binding inter-government agreements." (Reuters)

Chinese Hackers Targeting U.S. Navy Contractors with Multiple Breaches: WSJ

WASHINGTON - Chinese hackers have breached U.S. Navy contractors to steal a raft of information, including missile plans, through what some officials describe as some of the most debilitating cyber campaigns linked to Beijing, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.

Victims have included contractors of all sizes, with some of the smaller ones struggling to invest in securing their networks, as hackers over the last 18 months have conducted numerous breaches to gather intelligence, sabo-

tage American systems, and steal intellectual property, the Journal reported. Reuters could not immediately confirm the report.

The Journal's report was based on information from experts and officials, who said that Navy Secretary Richard Spencer had ordered a review of cybersecurity weaknesses that led to an initial assessment validating concerns and laying groundwork for a response by the Navy. Officials in the Navy called the breaches troubling and unacceptable, the Journal reported.

National Security Agency official Rob Joyce said on Tuesday that in general Chinese cyber activity in the United States had risen in recent months. The digital attacks have targeted the U.S. energy, financial, transportation and healthcare sectors, and gone beyond efforts to spy and steal intellectual property into disrupting critical infrastructure. Chinese officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment but have denied they engage in cyberattacks, according to the Journal. (Reuters)

Yemenis in Hodeidah Hope Truce Holds as Warring Parties Talk Peace

HODEIDAH, Yemen - Yemenis dared to hope on Friday that a ceasefire agreed in the contested port city of Hodeidah might bring a permanent end to fighting that has driven many from their homes and into an existential struggle for food and medical care.

Hodeidah became the focus of Yemen's nearly four-year-old war this year after the Saudi-led coalition launched an offensive to seize the city, a Red Sea port and supply line for millions of people at risk of fam-

ine, from Iranian-aligned Houthis forces that also hold the capital Sanaa.

At talks in Sweden on Thursday, the Houthis and the coalition-backed government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi agreed to stop fighting in Hodeidah and withdraw forces.

It was a breakthrough for U.N.-led efforts to end the war that has killed tens of thousands of people and caused the world's worst humanitarian crisis. (Reuters)

(1) Afghanistan Opens...

such projects, including the \$10 billion TAPI - Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India - natural gas network launched this year, as essential to building a functioning Afghan economy.

The new corridor - which includes stretches of road, rail and maritime routes - runs from Afghanistan to Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia before crossing the Black Sea to Turkey and eventually Europe.

Ghani is trying to reduce landlocked Afghanistan's dependence on its eastern neighbour, Pakistan, with which it has long had complicated relations.

Afghanistan accuses Pakistan of providing safe haven and support to Taliban insurgents, a charge rejected by Pakistan. Major crossings on their border are regularly closed for political and security reasons.

"Afghanistan has to reduce its dependency on Pakistan for international trade, the country has to establish new trade routes to improve the domestic economy," said Abdul Nasheed, a senior member of the independent Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce.

Last month, Afghanistan inaugurated an air cargo service to China by sending 20 tons of pine nuts. It has a similar cargo link with India. (Reuters)

(2) EU Ready...

Besides discussing the peace process, the two sides also exchanged views regarding the security situation in Afghanistan and the joint fight against terrorism, the statement said. (Pajhwok)

(3) Ambassador...

Khalilzad's visit to NATO headquarters comes as part of his third swing through the region, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Belgium, the United Arab Emirates. During his visit, the top US diplomat has met Afghan government officials and other interested parties to facilitate the peace process in the war-torn country. (Pajhwok)

(4) Officials Reject...

He said the Afghan forces targeted a Taliban hideout from air and ground during this operation in Shegal district.

Musammim said that children and women were among those wounded in the clashes and that they were taken to the central hospital in the province.

Taliban has claimed that all those

killed in the operation were civilians.

This comes as reports indicate that dozens of civilians have lost their lives in Afghan and foreign forces operations in the past two months. On December 2, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) confirmed that at least 23 civilians were killed and three others were wounded in an airstrike in Garmsir district in Helmand province conducted by pro-government forces against Taliban in the area. (Tolo news)

(5) No Peace Deal...

you that no one will be allowed to compromise your rights in the name of peace. A government negotiating team has already been constituted for talks."

The presidential vote would be conducted on schedule next year, he said, stressing the incoming government must be capable of discharging its duties in an efficient manner.

All possible efforts would be made to hold the elections transparently, the president pledged, saying all government institutions were responsible for respecting voters' mandate. (Pajhwok)

(6) US Green Beret...

Matthew Golsteyn's immediate commander has determined that sufficient evidence exists to warrant the preferral of charges against him," Lieutenant Colonel Loren Bymer, a spokesman for the US Army Special Operations Command, said in a statement, as quoted by Reuters.

Golsteyn said in a statement he believed the allegations against him had been resolved years ago.

His attorney, Phil Stackhouse, said he would be "relentless" in defending Golsteyn against the charges. "Major Golsteyn is a humble servant-leader who saved countless lives, both American and Afghan, and has been recognized repeatedly for his valorous actions," Stackhouse said. (Tolo news)

(7) Afghanistan...

than 500 cubic meters complete shortage

He said in the north water zone, which includes Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Samangan and Sar-e-Pul provinces, the average access of water to people is 575 cubic meters annually, while in the Harirod river water zone, which includes Herat, Ghor, Farah and Badghis provinces, the average access of water to people is 693 cubic meters annually.

Water per capita in different zones:

Amu River - 4111 cubic meters
Helmand water zone - 2374 cubic meters

Kabul zone - 1437 cubic meters
Harirod and Murghab zones - 693 cubic meters

North zone - 575 cubic meters
"In the northern zone we are moving towards a crisis," said Osmani. Fahim said thousands of families have been affected by drought in the north.

"We had direct discussions with Mr Ali Shamkhani who serves as Iran's national security advisor. He said that as much as the issues of Daesh and Taliban are important for you, equally, water is important to us," said Fahim.

"Whenever a politician faces problems, the roots of social policy-making are also dried up, then he moves towards more infrastructural discussions and complicated issues, such as water, so that he can make something of himself," said Ibrahim Jaffari, member of National Resources Monitoring Network.

Osmani also criticized the government's advisor-oriented policies and urged the need for systematic change in the structure of the ministry of water and energy.

In addition, officials of the ministry of water and energy said the government is preparing to reassess the National Water Management Plan.

"National and international experts have worked on the plan. This strategy is more inclusive and comprehensive," said Sultan Mahmoud Mahmoudi, head of the water management department of the ministry of water and energy.

Based on the statistics of the ministry of water and energy, Afghanistan's water resources have declined to 49 billion cubic meters from 57 billion cubic meters due to climate change in the last 40 years, which shows a 14 percent decline. (Tolo news)

(8) Pakistan, Uzbekistan...

built for the small farmers, adding that this is a kind of facility for the cotton producers where all the process from growing to packing is done.

It was discussed in the subject meeting that Uzbekistan can expand its tractor and other agromachinery market in Pakistan. The Uzbek ambassador said that regarding the import of Uzbek cotton through Torkham border we can adopt a new approach and centralise the whole system and do away with "shadow economy".

He also informed that they still have 100,000 metric ton cotton and they can export that. (Monitoring Desk)

(9) High Advisory...

said a member of Hizb-e-Islami, Humayoun Jarir.

Certain members of Jamiat-e-Islami party of Afghanistan have also said the government had put their names in the peace board without consulting them.

"There are some prominent faces of the country on it, but we need more to be there. The efforts of the board will prove effective when the Taliban also comes onto this board," said HPC member, Qazi Amin Weqad.

"I have much doubt in the leadership and intention of this regime. It is not pursuing any honest program," said Ahmad Wali Massoud, chairman of the Massoud Foundation.

However, the political parties and movements have said they will announce their separate delegation for peace on Saturday, which will hold talks with the Taliban outside the country. (Tolo news)

(10) 6 Months on...

Ghazni Governor Wahidullah Kalimzai confirmed the Ghazni-Paktika road had been shut. "We had prepared a plan to reopen the road, but the plan could not be executed following the Taliban attack on Ghazni City."

He said the Taliban had closed the road in order to collect taxes from vehicles.

Ghazni police chief Brig. Gen. Ghulam Daud Tarakhel also said they had devised a plan to reopen the road, but it could not be done due to Taliban attacks on Jaghori and Malistan districts.

But the police chief said an operation would be launched soon to drive insurgents from the Ghazni-Paktika road.

The Taliban also confirmed having closed the road over the past six months

Their spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said government forces attempted several times but were unable to reopen the road.

He said common people could use dirt roads for travelling, but all routes were closed for government forces.

He also denied the fighters took money from vehicles.

Some time ago, security forces launched an operation to reopen the Ghazni-Paktika road, but the operation had to be stopped midway. (Pajhwok)

(11) 'Technical Issues'...

"Fortunately, no one on board was hurt in this incident," said Naqibullah Fayiq, governor of Faryab, who talked about Wednesday's incident in his province.

The main repair workshop of the Afghan Air Force in Kabul has been built by the United States and mostly the US technology has been used in the workshop.

"The helicopters have crashed due to mechanical fault and due to lack of workshop. The workshops are equipped with US technology while they are repairing Russian helicopters," said Hashim Alokozay, head of the defense commission of the Meshrano Jirga, the Upper House of Parliament.

According to military analysts, Afghanistan is using Russian helicopters since 1980. It is expected that the Russian helicopters will be replaced by the American Black Hawks.

Officials of the United States Air Force stationed at Kandahar airfield said in March that the US will handover about 20 UH-60 Black Hawks helicopters in the next nine months to the Afghan Air Force.

According to the Associated Press, US Air Force officials said since last November that 11 Black Hawk helicopters have been handed to the Afghan Air Force and the process will continue.

Statistics of the Afghan Air Force show that the number of the Afghan Air Force aircrafts will increase to 260 from a total of 120 within the upcoming seven years. The statistics reveal that the AAF has 46 MI-17 Russian helicopters, which are mostly used to carry in reinforcements and to provide equipment to ground forces. Out of the 46, only 25 of them are active and the rest are not in service.

"The United States should provide the Afghan forces with modern and hi-tech helicopters," said Mohammad Radmanish, a military affairs analyst.

The helicopter crash incidents have taken many lives in the past nine months including a number of pilots of the Afghan Air Force. Taliban has often claimed that their influence has resulted in taking down the helicopters. (Tolo news)

(12) Protesting Candidate...

The parliamentary elections of Afghanistan were held in October where almost four million people cast their vote. The Independent Election Commission so far has announced the preliminary results for 23 provinces. (Tolo news)