

US Defense Chief Meets Iraqi Leaders over IS Fight

BAGHDAD - U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter on Wednesday held talks with Iraqi leaders over fighting the Islamic State (IS) militant group, and means to boost military support for Iraqi forces.

A statement, issued by the office of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, said Abadi and Carter "discussed the war on terrorist Daaesh (IS group) gangs and the latest victories achieved on the enemy, in addition to tackling means to enhance cooperation between the two countries in the areas of arming and training."

The two sides also dis-



cussed the political and security development in the Middle East region,

the statement said. For his part, Carter reiterated Washington's

support to Iraq's integrity and sovereignty, it added. Carter also met with his

Iraqi counterpart, Khalid al-Obeidi, and the two discussed means to enhance

coordination in fighting IS, the state-run Iraqiya television reported.

Earlier in the day, Carter arrived in Baghdad on an unannounced visit with the aim of meeting the U.S. commanders in Iraq and with Iraqi leaders.

Carter's visit, his second as Pentagon chief, came amid reports that Washington is looking for ways to broaden its military assistance to Iraq, including the possibility of sending in attack helicopters and deploying elite American military teams in Iraq to conduct raids against IS in Iraq and in neighboring Syria. (Xinhua)

Turkey Says not Acting Aggressively with Moscow

ANKARA - Ankara said on Wednesday that it is not acting in an aggressive way toward Moscow, amid tense relations between the two countries following Turkey's downing of a Russian fighter jet last month.

"The Russian military has been acting for some time as if there is a perceived threat from Turkey to them, which is an exaggerated situation and has nothing to do with reality," Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Tanju Bilgic told a press con-

ference. He also vowed that Turkey would not shoot down any more Russian warplanes if they stop violating Turkish airspace. "If the Russian Federation also guarantees that there will not be any airspace violations, a similar incident will not happen again," Bilgic said in an apparent response to remarks by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Meshkov. Earlier in the day, Meshkov said that Turkey should guarantee that a similar incident will not happen in



the future. The Turkish spokesman also rejected Meshkov's call for Turkey to pay compensation for downing the Russian military plane. "The Rus-

sian airplane was shot down because it violated our airspace," Bilgic said. "Meeting the Russian side's demands is not ... (More on P4)...(21)

Ukraine to Suspend Trade with Crimea: PM

KIEV - Kiev will suspend its trade ties with Crimea starting from mid-January, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk announced here on Wednesday. "The supplies of works, goods and services, except socially important foodstuff and humanitarian aid, will be halted," Yatsenyuk told a cabinet meeting. The decision on whether to supply electricity to Crimea will be adopted later by the country's National Security and Defense Council, Yatsenyuk said. The Ukrainian government's latest move was

another step in a series of restrictions imposed by Ukraine on Crimea in recent weeks. In late November, the cabinet suspended cargo traffic to Crimea citing "escalation of tensions" between Crimean public activists and the authorities of the peninsula. The activists from the Crimean Tatar community and members of Ukrainian nationalist movements blocked trucks from entering the peninsula and prevented the authorities from restoring electricity after explosions dam ... (More on P4)...(22)

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Iranian Commander Soleimani Meets Putin in Moscow

DUBAI - The commander of foreign operations for Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards visited Russia last week and met President Vladimir Putin, Fars news agency reported on Wednesday, a sign of closer ties as their regional alliance gains momentum.

General Qassem Soleimani, head of the Quds Force, last visited in July to aid in planning the Russian military intervention in Syria. Russia and Iran support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against rebels in that country's civil war.

Backed by Russian airstrikes, hundreds of Iranian troops have arrived in Syria since late Sep-

tember to take part in a pro-government ground offensive, their biggest deployment in the country to date. Soleimani has been subject to an international travel ban and asset freeze by the U.N. Security Council since 2007 for his alleged role in illicit arms trafficking and smuggling nuclear materials. "General Soleimani held a meeting with President Putin and high-ranking Russian military and security officials during a three-day visit last week... They discussed the latest developments in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon," Fars said, quoting unnamed sources. (Reuters)

Chinese, Russian Vice Prime Ministers Meet on Cooperation

BEIJING - Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin met on Wednesday to prepare for the upcoming 20th Regular Prime Ministers' Meeting between Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev in Beijing.

Wang and Rogozin had "candid and in-depth" discussion on cooperation in fields including nuclear power, aerospace, trade, frontiers and agriculture, according to a press release.

The regular meeting has worked efficiently and pushed forward development of pragmatic co-

operation between China and Russia, Wang said. He called on the two sides to improve the cooperation model, speed up cooperation on major projects and make new progress.

Rogozin echoed Wang saying Russia and China are comprehensive strategic partners of coordination, supporting each other on major issues concerning sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.

The meeting has played a significant role in pragmatic cooperation. The two sides should continue to explore new areas for cooperation, Rogozin said. (Xinhua)

Tajikistan's Creates the Position of Ombudsman for Children

DUSHANBE - Majlisi-Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament) on Wednesday endorsed a bill amending the country's Ombudsman law.

Under this bill, the position of Ombudsman for Children in created in Tajikistan.

The Ombudsman for Children is reportedly appointed by the President for a term of five years. Citizens who reached 35 years of age and have higher education are eligible to be appointed Ombudsman for Children. The law sets a limit of two five-year terms for the Ombudsman for Children. Parliamentarians noted that the Ombudsman

for Children should attention to, first of all, problems facing more than 46,000 orphaned children and more than 2,600 children who remain out of school.

The Children's Ombudsman, Children's Commissioner, Youth Commissioner, Child Advocate, Children's Commission, Children's Ombudsman, Youth Ombudsman or equivalent body is a public authority in various countries charged with the protection and promotion of the rights of children and young people, either in society at large, or in specific categories such as children in contact with the care system. (Asia-Plus)

Pakistan Top Leaders Pay Homage to Army School Attack Victims

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Army Chief, General Raheel Sharif, on Wednesday joined families of students who were massacred in a terrorist attack on an army-run school last year on the first anniversary of the incident.

The outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan had claimed responsibility for the brutal attack that killed nearly 150 people, mostly students on Dec. 16, 2014. The first anniversary of the brutal attack on the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar was observed across the country with functions to show soli-

arity with the bereaved families.

"The attack on the army school has united the whole nation against terrorism as it was a painful incident for everyone. Time has come to root out terrorism," Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told a largely-attended gathering at the school building in Peshawar. "Terrorists who have killed innocent children will be brought to justice. We will take revenge of every blood of the martyr children," Sharif said. He said the APS tragedy has united the whole nation and fixed the future course for Pakistan. (Xinhua)

Abe, Gates Promote Global Healthcare Vision at Tokyo Conference

TOKYO - Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe alongside other dignitaries including Microsoft Corp. founder Bill Gates and World Health Organization Director General Margaret Chan were in attendance at an international symposium in Tokyo Wednesday centered on the creation of a global healthcare framework. The global health system, or "universal health coverage" (UHC) is part of Japan's basic global health policy vision and is being pushed

by Abe as a means to tackle diseases and infections in developing countries, alongside the UN Sustainable Development Goals, with Wednesday's colloquium seen as a prequel to the Group of Seven summit next May also being hosted by Japan. The conference saw around 300 people in attendance, with Abe beginning talks by urging international organizations and other stakeholders to collabo ... (More on P4)...(23)

Sweden Temporarily Exempted from EU's Refugee Relocation Scheme

STRASBOURG - Sweden could be exempted from refugee relocation scheme of the European Union (EU) as the country battles to cope with the strain of processing record numbers of asylum seekers. The European Commission, EU's top executive body, proposed on Tuesday to grant Sweden a one-year suspension from its refugee redistribution quotas, in view of "the unique strain on its capacities created by the sharp increase in applications for international protection".

"The Commission has proposed to grant Sweden a one-year suspension of its obligations, to allow its asylum and reception system to recover from the exceptional burden it is under." EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos said. According to the Relocation Schemes adopted in September 2015, a member state could request the temporary suspension of its obligations in the case of a sharp shift of migration flows creating an



emergency situation and a sudden inflow of third country nationals.

Sweden previously agreed to take around 5,800 people as part of the EU's scheme to relocate 160,000 asylum seek-

ers arriving in Italy and Greece. However, refugees poured into Sweden as European influx rises this year, and the country was struggling to provide enough accommodation for new arrivals. (Xinhua)

France Uses Long-Range Missiles to Strike IS Targets In Iraq: Ministry

PARIS - France used for the first time long-range missiles to strike Islamic State (IS) targets in Iraq as it pledged to step up military offensive against the terrorist cell after Paris attacks, the country's defence ministry said. Based on the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, 10 French Rafale and Mirage 200 war planes bombed and launched cruise missiles on Tuesday morning, the ministry said in a statement on Tuesday. The air raid targeted a command center, training site and logistics depot in Al Qaim region in western Iraq, it added. "In par-



allel with these planned strikes, Chammal forces (French forces deployed in Iraq) continue their mission to support ground troops engaged in Iraq's battle against Daesh, an Arabic acronym used

commonly to refer to IS. France was the first European country to join United States-led coalition in September 2014 to strike Islamist militants at the request of Iraqi authorities. (Xinhua)

ASEAN Ministers Meet in Cambodia on Disaster Management

PHNOM PENH - The 3rd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management kicked off here on Wednesday, aiming to further strengthen the bloc's cooperation in disaster control.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said disaster management has become a topic for the world, specifically for the ASEAN region that is vulnerable to natural disasters such as flood, drought, storm, and so forth.

"In the context of the rising disasters risk, our essential measures for disaster management must be focused on preparedness and prevention which necessitate close cooperation among neighbouring countries in the region," he said.

The prime minister added that as ASEAN is transforming itself into a stable, peaceful, harmonized and prosperous community, the bloc must spearhead disaster management through promoting, mainstreaming, and investing in disaster risk reduction for the safety and resilience of the community in line with "One ASEAN, One Response."

"I strongly hope that the draft One ASEAN, One Response strategy will be finalized at this meeting without further delay in order to prevent and mitigate disasters as well as enhancing preparedness, restoration and resilience," he said. (Xinhua)

India Launches 6 Singaporean Satellites

NEW DELHI - India Wednesday launched six Singaporean satellites into space from the southern spaceport of Sriharikota, a senior official said. "The six satellites, weighing over 600 kg, were launched by the state-owned space agency on board the indigenous Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle at 6 p.m. (local time)," he said, on condition of anonymity. The satellites include TelEOS, weighing around 400 kg. The others are small and nano satellites. This was the last satellite launch by the Indian Space Research Organization for 2015. In the entire year, it has launched 14 satellites, including 11 foreign ones. (Xinhua)

Germany Ready to be 'Extremely Helpful' to Cameron on EU Reform

BERLIN - Germany is ready to be "extremely helpful" to British Prime Minister David Cameron in his renegotiation of Britain's membership of the European Union, a senior German official said on Wednesday, in a strong signal of support from Berlin. Cameron has promised to renegotiate Britain's EU ties ahead of a membership referendum by the end of 2017. While he favors staying in a reformed EU, he has said he rules nothing out if he does not get the changes he wants. German government officials have expressed alarm at the possibility of Britain leaving the EU - a scenario they believe would leave the bloc severely weakened. "The German government has a very great interest that Great Britain remains a member of the EU and in allowing Cameron to run a successful campaign," ... (More on P4)...(25)

Calls for Investigation after "Massacre" in Nigeria

LAGOS - Human rights advocates and the United States called for an investigation following the Nigerian army's raid on a Shiite sect in which hundreds of people were reportedly killed.

Details of the weekend violence in Zaria have been slow to emerge, with the three attacked areas of the northern town on lockdown as late as Tuesday, with no one allowed to enter or leave. "The United States calls on the Government of Nigeria to quickly, credibly, and transparently investigate these events in Zaria and hold to account any individuals found to have commit-

ted crimes," the U.S. Embassy said in a statement Wednesday. "It is essential that all sides refrain from actions that further destabilize the situation," U.S. Ambassador James Entwistle added. He said he expects that a visit to Zaria on Tuesday by Nigeria's interior minister is a first step in a "timely, transparent investigation." The bloodshed was yet another blow to Africa's most populous nation, already beset by a 6-year-old insurgency waged by Boko Haram, a violent Islamic group which is at odds with the Shiites and others who oppose its extremist ... (More on P4)...(24)