

EU Summit Gains "Significant Progress" on British Reform Demands

BRUSSELS - Britain is demanding fundamental reforms on the European Union (EU), challenging the bloc's core principles. After the EU leaders' first discussion on the demands in details at a summit, London triumphed that "significant progress" has been made and "a pathway to an agreement" emerged.

The EU leaders softened their tones on British Prime Minister David Cameron's demands after Thursday's dinner during which leaders at the first time held "frank" talks on the details of British requests. Cameron in November



set out four-area demands of reforms on Brussels, among which

to some member states, three were "supportable" but one was heavily

criticized as "unacceptable" that London sought four-year benefit

curbs of European immigrants in Britain, making it a sticking point of the

summit.

Following their "substantive and constructive" debate, "significant progress" has been made, European Council President Donald Tusk told a press conference Thursday night, adding that he was "much more optimistic" after the dinner.

"We had an open discussion yesterday, especially on the U.K.'s request to limit access to benefits to people who've worked for four years," said Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel Friday morning on his arrival for the second day of the summit. (Xinhua)

UNHCR Recommends Measures for Strengthening Refugees Security, Protection

GENEVA - The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on Friday released guidance aimed at helping states deal with security concerns while maintaining vital standards of refugee protection. The recommendations are contained in a paper presented at an inter-governmental meeting by UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Volker Turk. The paper argued that

national security and international protection for refugees are not mutually exclusive, and calls for an integrated approach that ensures both goals are being met. Currently, with growing polarization of political debate concerning refugees in some countries, the concern is that asylum-seekers and refugees could be victimized, and refugee protection, which has saved the lives



of millions of people since World War II, could be endangered. With border controls, UNHCR under-

stands the need of states to identify security concerns at the point of entry ... (More on P4)... (24)

Opposition wants Transition without Assad: Syrian Negotiator

RIYADH - Syria's opposition wants a political transition without President Bashar al-Assad, the coordinator of an opposition negotiating body in future peace talks said on Friday. The United States, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and major European and Arab powers outlined a plan last month for a political process in Syria leading to elections within 18 months, in the hope of ending its five-year-old civil war. It includes a nationwide ceasefire and six months of talks begin-

ning in January between Assad's government and the opposition on forming a unity government. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and more than a dozen other ministers will meet for a third time in New York on Friday in an effort to keep up momentum toward a peace deal. Riad Hijab, elected on Thursday as coordinator by an opposition body set up in Saudi Arabia last week, ... (More on P4)... (25)

Yemen's Houthis Fire 2 Ballistic Missiles on Coalition Targets

SANAA - Yemeni Houthi group said on Friday they fired two ballistic missiles on the Saudi-led coalition's targets as a week-long truce with the government forces enters the fourth day in the Arab country. In a statement, the Houthis said one missile was fired towards Yemeni province of Marib, now nearly under full control of government forces, while the other one was launched towards Saudi Arabia's southern region of Najran. The coalition

forces at the same time announced they intercepted both missiles, destroying them in the air before they reached to their targets. Also on Friday, Yemen's government troops seized two Houthi rebels-held towns in northern Yemen, military officials said. The troops, trained and equipped in Saudi Arabia, crossed the border from the oil-rich Kingdom early in the day. They engaged in heavy clashes against ... (More on P4)... (26)

Yemeni Gov't Troops Seize 2 Northern Houthi-Held Towns Despite Truce

SANAA/RIYADH - Yemeni government troops backed by Saudi-led coalition forces on Friday seized two Houthi-held towns in northern Yemen, military officials said, despite a seven-day ceasefire announced on Tuesday. The troops, trained and equipped in Saudi Arabia, crossed the border from the oil-rich Kingdom early on Friday. They engaged in heavy clashes against the Iranian-backed Shiite Houthi group and seized control of the Yemeni northwest border city of Harad, about 15

km from Saudi border, a military official there told Xinhua by phone. Harad had been under control of the Houthis since early in 2014 as a stronghold from where they used to launch missiles towards southern Saudi regions. Also, two Saudi-backed Yemeni government battalions advanced from near southern Saudi border and retook al-Hazm, the capital city of the northeast province of al-Jouf. They engaged in intensified clashes against the Houthis that led to the collapse of all rebel



military camps surrounding the capital city, an official source with the leadership of the Yemeni battalions told Xinhua. Tribal sources in al-Jouf confirmed that most parts of the province are now

under government troops control. Military sources said the troops are moving towards other areas of al-Jouf province to secure all its borders with oil-rich northeast province Marib. (Xinhua)

Russia Begins Decoding Flight Recorder of Warplane Downed by Turkey

MOSCOW - Russia has begun decoding the flight recorder of the Su-24 jet that was downed by Turkey near the Syrian-Turkish border, with the first set of data expected to be released on Monday, the country's Defense Ministry said Friday. An F-16 fighter of the Turkish Air Force shot down the Su-24 on Nov. 24 for allegedly violating Turkish air space. Russia claimed the jet did not cross into Turkey. The flight recorder was opened in a laboratory with the presence of experts from Russia, Chi-



na and Britain. Although the Defense Ministry has invited 14 countries to participate in the investigation, many of them refused to join in. Journalists could watch live pictures of the process in the

hall of the Interstate Aviation Committee, a supervising body overseeing the management of civil aviation in the Commonwealth of Independent States. The black box re ... (More on P4)... (27)

Juncker Recommends Visa Liberalisation for Ukraine, Georgia, Kosovo

BRUSSELS - European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker said Friday the EU should offer visa-free short-stay travel to the bloc for Ukraine, Georgia and Kosovo, all three locked in bitter disputes with Russia. "The Commission this morning took a positive position on the liberalisation of visas for Georgia, Kosovo and Ukraine," Juncker said after an EU leaders summit in Brussels. "Accordingly, the Commission was able to propose to EU leaders that they take rapid decisions on visa liberalisation for the three countries," he said.

Juncker said he had met pro-Western Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko earlier this week to iron out the last remaining issues on the dossier. Poroshenko enthusiastically tweeted: "Visa-free travels to Europe, here you go!" EU officials said the Commission will draw up a formal proposal early next year for approval by the European Council, the bloc's political leaders, and the European Parliament. The decision may prove especially galling for Moscow whose own efforts to secure visa-free EU access, if only for business leaders, languished for years before falling victim to the Ukraine crisis. The 28-nation European Union suspended visa liberalisation talks with Russia early last year as it ratcheted up punitive measures, later to include damaging economic sanctions, over its role in the deepening Ukraine crisis. Member states are expected later Friday to formally approve another six month rollover of the economic sanctions but there are differences over how Russia ... (More on P4)... (28)

Modi Visit Russia Next Week

NEW DELHI - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will embark on a state visit to Russia next week, sources said Friday.

"Modi will be in Russia from Dec. 23 to 25. During his three-day visit, the Prime Minister is scheduled to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin and other top Russian leaders," the sources said. The two countries will also negotiate a defense deal for the acquisition of Russian S-400 missile systems during Modi's visit, the sources said.

India's Defense Acquisition Council had Thursday approved the deal to buy five units of Russian S-400 missile systems, in a meeting chaired by Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar. (Xinhua)

US Missile Shield Completes Installation in Romania

BUCHAREST - A U.S. missile shield in Romania's Deveselu military base is technically ready as a ceremony in Romanian Foreign Ministry on Friday marks its completion. The Deveselu base is the first to feature the Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense system, a land-based version of the sophisticated radar-tracking system installed on U.S. warships since 2004. The anti-missile base is equipped with a SPY-1 radar system and a vertical-launch missile system armed with long-range SM-3 missiles.

Located in an old Romanian air base on the border with Bulgaria, construction of the missile shield began two years ago. A site in Poland is scheduled to become operational by 2018. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

China Welcomes UN-Brokered Deal to end Libya Crisis



BEIJING - China on Friday welcomed a UN-brokered deal signed by Libya's rival factions to form a unity government. China welcomes the signing of the Libyan Political Agreement by the participants of the Libyan political dialogue and "this is an important step in the political dialogue of Libya," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said at a regular news briefing. "China hopes all parties in Libya will resolve disputes through dialogue and achieve reconciliation and national stability at an early date," Hong said. He said China has

always supported and participated in Libya's political dialogue and backs the mediation efforts of the international community, particularly the UN. The spokesman said China will continue to work with others to contribute to peace and stability in Libya and the region. The agreement was signed on Thursday by the rival parliaments, an internationally-recognized one in Tubruk and a self-proclaimed one in Tripoli, alongside representatives of Libyan political parties, municipalities and civil society groups. (Xinhua)

Iranians Denounce Nigeria Massacre, Arrest of Shiite Leader

TEHRAN - Thousands of Iranians have taken to the streets of Tehran to condemn the killings of hundreds of Shiite Muslims in Nigeria and demanded the release of a Nigerian Shiite leader. Hundreds of Shiites were reportedly killed in an army raid in Nigeria last Saturday. Shiite leader Ibraheem Zakzaky suffered four bullet wounds and was taken into custody.

Human rights groups say as many as 1,000 people may have been killed.

Demonstrators at Friday's rally in Tehran carried banners demanding Zakzaky's "unconditional release." Iran, seen as the guardian of the Shiite Muslim faith, has condemned the killings. The Foreign Ministry summoned the Nigerian charge d'affaires earlier this week to protest the killing in Zaria, in northern Nigeria.

The Nigerian military said it acted after Shiites tried to assassinate Nigeria's army chief. (AP)

Pakistan's KSE Follows Global Bears Amid Low Turnover

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's Karachi Stock Exchange (KSE) kept tracking international equity markets for the second straight day on Friday as slumps in global stocks hurt local equities where investors refrained from active participation. The benchmark KSE 100-Index declined by 1 percent or 332.50 points to 32,777.04 points on Friday, from Thursday's 33,109.54 points. During the week, the main index trimmed down by 271.47 points as three out of five trading sessions ended in red zone. The KSE All Share

Index fell by 0.73 percent or 166.72 points to 22,741.42 points, the KSE 30-Index sank by 1.26 percent or 246.97 points to 19,319.32 points, the KMI 30-Index plummeted by 0.58 percent or 320.41 points to 55,050.91 points, whereas the Islamic All Share Index reduced by 0.4 percent or 61.20 points to 15,392.66 points. During Friday's trading session, the key index moved in a moderate range of 432.94 points as it touched an intraday peak of 33,176.72 points as against an intraday trough of 32,743.78 points. (Xinhua)

OSCE's Training Course on Human Rights of Convicts Completed

BISHKEK - The OSCE Office in Tajikistan, with the support of the Swiss Co-operation Office, on Friday concluded a three-day training course on the human rights of persons in police custody and the independent monitoring of police detention facilities, reports the press release of the OSCE.

The training at the OSCE Office premises brought together 30 participants, including representatives from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Office of the Ombudsman and members of the Coalition Against Torture comprised of Tajik NGOs. The course was led by international ex-

perts from the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), with the expert support of former police chief of Geneva, Laurent Walpen, as well as Tajik national experts. Participants learned about the essential human rights of persons in police custody, and how to raise awareness among the police about the importance and purpose of monitoring detention facilities, as well as how to build the capacity of civil society in monitoring them. The training was tailored to Tajikistan's National Strategy on Police Reform, and was developed with guidance from APT. (AKIpress)

Over 380,000 Children Remain out of School in Northern Mali: UNICEF

GENEVA - As the Malian school year enters its third month, over 380,000 children aged 7 to 15 remain without access to education almost four years after the security situation in northern parts of the country worsened, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said on Friday. "Children in northern Mali know too well the impact of conflict, poverty and deprivation," UNICEF representative in Mali Fran Equiza highlighted, adding "education is their best hope for the future." More than 280 schools in conflict-affected areas in northern parts of the African country are currently closed after having

been damaged, destroyed, looted or occupied by warring factions. With many schools unattended by students for the third year in a row, closures are affecting one in every six schools in northern Mali. In Kidal, one of the worst hit areas, almost eight out of every 10 schools are closed. UNICEF indicated that insecurity, unexploded mines and other war remnants are further compounding the situation as parents are forced to keep their children away from classrooms. "The dream of building a better future for Mali's children depends on action now," Equiza ... (More on P4)... (29)