

# Germany's Refugee Policy under Scrutiny after Berlin Attack

BERLIN - Tensions over Germany's large migrant community reignited after authorities detained an asylum-seeker from Pakistan in connection with the deadly truck attack that killed at least 12 and injured nearly 50 at a bustling Christmas market Monday.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has faced criticism for opening Germany's borders to more Middle Eastern refugees than any other European nation during the current crisis, said it must be assumed that the incident outside Berlin's Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial



Church was a "terrorist attack" and was quick to acknowledge the possibility that an individual who entered the country under the guise of seeking refuge might be responsible. "I know that it would be particularly hard for us all to bear if it were confirmed that a person committed this act had asked for protection and asylum in Germany," Merkel said on Tuesday. "This would be particularly sickening for the many, many Germans who work to help refugees every day and for the many people who really need our help and are...(More on P4)...(14)

## Obama Bans Future Oil, Gas Drilling in Arctic, Atlantic Oceans

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Barack Obama on Tuesday banned future oil and gas drilling in most of the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, the latest move to cement his environmental legacy before he leaves office next month.

Using his authority under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act that allow presidents to withdraw areas from oil and gas leasing and exploration, Obama has protected the entire U.S. Chukchi Sea and the vast majority of the U.S. Beaufort Sea in the Arctic

Ocean and 31 canyons in the Atlantic Ocean from drilling, the White House said.

Canada will also freeze offshore oil and gas leasing in its Arctic waters, to be reviewed every five years through a climate and marine science-based assessment, according to the White House.

"These actions, and Canada's parallel actions, protect a sensitive and unique ecosystem that is unlike any other region on earth," Obama said in a... (More on P4)...(15)

## Syrian Refugee Families Returned to Turkey under EU-Turkey Deal

ATHENS - Syrian refugee families totaling 19 persons were relocated on Tuesday to Turkey under an EU-Turkey agreement to stem the refugee-migrant influx into Europe, the Greek Public Order Ministry has announced.

Six men, three women and 10 children who recalled their asylum bids or did not submit requests were sent back to Turkey by plane from Lesbos island, according to the press release.

Under the deal signed in spring last year between

the European Union (EU) and Turkey, all incomers who are not eligible for asylum should be returned to Turkey.

A total of 801 persons of various nationalities have been sent back to Turkey since March, according to the announcement.

In addition, 410 foreign nationals who had reached Greece from Turkey willingly returned to their countries in the same period under an International Organization of Migration program, the Greek ministry... (More on P4)...(16)

## IS in Mosul Targets Civilians as it Retreats: Rights Group

BAGHDAD - Islamic State militants in Mosul are deliberately targeting civilians who refuse to join them as they retreat ahead of advancing Iraqi forces involved in a large-scale government operation to retake the militant-held city, an international watchdog said on Wednesday.

The statement from Human Rights Watch also said that Mosul civilians were increasingly being caught in the crossfire, with at least 19 killed and dozens wounded in

the period from the third week of November into the first week of December.

The New York-based group said the fatalities incurred from IS mortar or sniper fire, car bombs, roadside bombings and direct attacks, as well as in airstrikes by the Iraqi forces and the U.S.-led coalition. The findings were based on interviews with more than 50 residents who had fled eastern Mosul, HRW said.

It cited instances of IS militants telling residents that



those who stay behind are "unbelievers" and therefore valid targets beside the Iraqi and coalition forces. HRW warned that

targeting civilians or using them as human shields is a war crime, and appealed on both sides to spare civilians. (AP)

## Turkey Says Gulenist Behind Russian Envoy's Murder

ANKARA - Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told his U.S. counterpart John Kerry on the phone call Tuesday that Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETO) was behind Russian envoy's assassination, local media reported.

During the phone conversation, Cavusoglu briefed Kerry on Russian Ambassador Andrey Karlov's murder, who was shot dead on Monday evening, state-run Anadolu Agency reported.

Kerry offered condolences to Cavusoglu and

expressed sorrow about the incident. The two top diplomats also discussed the trilateral meeting that took place Tuesday in Moscow between Russian, Iranian and Turkish foreign ministers.

The Russian ambassador was killed during a speech at an exhibition in Ankara on Monday evening by a gunman dressed as a guard. Late Tuesday, Turkish



Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag said that it is a great disrespect and defamation for the Turkish

police to be involved as the perpetrator of Russian envoy's assassination. (Xinhua)

## Obama Signs Law Making it Safe to Yelp Again

WASHINGTON - If that hotel room really was filthy, that pet sitter really fell down on the job, or that wedding planner really screwed up the big day, it's now safe to say so in a truthful online review, thanks to bipartisan legislation President Obama has signed into law.

The Consumer Review Fairness Act takes aim at so-called gag clauses sometimes embedded in the fine print of some commercial agreements, including hotel room rentals. Some consumers sign off on the restrictions, have



a bad experience and post online about it, only to find themselves on the business end of a lawsuit. The White House announced in an early Thursday morning statement that Obama had signed the measure.

"Too many companies are burying non-disparagement clauses in fine print and going after consumers when they post negative feedback online. This will now end," according to... (More on P4)...(17)

## Italian Coastguard Praised by UNICEF for Rescuing Migrants, Refugees

ROME - The Italian coast guard was named new Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on Tuesday, as recognition for its efforts in rescuing thousands of minor migrants and refugees.

In a ceremony held here in the afternoon, President of Italy's National Committee for UNICEF Giacomo Guertera said the coast guard was worth such appointment because "it represents the spirit of solidarity that should guide all those who care about the fate of the children in the world." Italy's coast guard carries out daily rescue operations, and coordinates all missions in the central Mediterranean involving naval forces from various European Union (EU)... (More on P4)...(18)

## Arab, EU FMs Urge Intra-Syria Talks, Condemn Aleppo Attacks

CAIRO - Arab and European foreign ministers urged on Tuesday intra-Syria talks as basis for political settlement and strongly condemned Syrian regime's recent attacks on Aleppo, the Arab League (AL) and the European Union (EU) stated following their fourth ministerial meeting in Cairo.

"The ministers stressed that intra-Syria talks are the only way for a credible and genuine political transition based on power sharing as well as lasting peace," the two bodies said in a declaration issued after the meeting held at the AL headquarters in the Egyptian capital city.

The declaration "strongly condemned the deliberate and indiscriminate attack on eastern Aleppo by the regime and its allies, and the targeting of civilians and humanitarian infrastructure."

The fighting and bombardment in Syria have recently escalated in war-torn Aleppo city, where the army of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad supported by Russian forces launched massive attacks to clear the city of militants, leaving dozens of civilians killed and hundreds displaced and taking control of the ruined rebel-held city. In his opening remarks, AL Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul-Gheit warned that Syria "has become a theater for international polarizations and regional ambitions all at the expense of the Syrian people who suffer one of the gravest humanitarian crises."

He said that a political settlement is "the only possible solution for this crisis," urging the... (More on P4)...(19)

## At Least 31 Dead, 72 Hurt in Mexico Fireworks Market Blast

TULTEPEC, Mexico - A massive explosion gutted Mexico's biggest fireworks market, killing at least 31 people and injuring 72, the authorities said.

The conflagration in the Mexico City suburb of Tultepec set off a quick-fire series of multicolored blasts that sent a vast cloud of smoke billowing over the capital.

The market had been packed with customers buying pyrotechnics for traditional end-of-year festivities. Christmas and New Year parties in many Latin American countries often wrap up with clattering firework blasts. "You just heard the blast. And everything... (More on P4)...(20)

## French Military Chief: New Threats Require More Spending

PARIS - France's military chief is urging the country's next president to ratchet up defense spending to better confront Islamic extremists and authoritarian states that increasingly rely on military muscle.

Gen. Pierre de Villiers, chief of the general staff, said in an appeal published Wednesday in the business daily Les Echos that attacks on France and other European countries in recent years showed that "peace no longer happens by itself."

He called for upgrading France's nuclear arsenals and other equipment, and boosting defense spending over the next five years to 2 percent of gross domestic product, compared to 1.77 percent currently.



France had promised such an increase to NATO by 2025, but de Villiers urged a faster effort.

France's military, among Europe's biggest, is active in anti-extremist operations in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. President Francois... (More on P4)...(21)

## Nieghbor News

### China, Britain Reaffirm "Golden Era" for Ties Amid Brexit Uncertainty

LONDON - China and Britain on Tuesday reaffirmed their commitment to a "golden era" for Sino-British bilateral ties amid Brexit uncertainty.

The latest mutual reassurance emerged as the eighth China-UK Strategic Dialogue was held in London. The dialogue was co-chaired by visiting Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi and British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson.

Yang said that China stands ready to fully implement the important consensus reached by the two countries' leaders along with the British side. The two sides should strengthen strategic communication, enhance political mutual trust and deepen mutual-

ly beneficial cooperation to promote the development of the bilateral ties as well as world's peace, stability and development, he said.

Chinese and British leaders met on the sidelines of the eighth G20 Summit in China in September, months after the Brexit referendum and British government reshuffle. Leaders of the two countries reassured each other of commitment and confidence in a "golden era" for bilateral relations. Yang said that the two countries should have frequent exchanges at all levels, and advance pragmatic cooperation in various areas such as investment, trade, finance, innovation and infrastructure construction. (Xinhua)

### Pak PM, Bosnian PM Discussed Cooperation in Coal and Hydro-Power

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif while addressing a joint press conference with Bosnian counterpart Denis Zvizdic in Sarajevo briefed journalists regarding the plans for cooperation of the two countries on coal and hydro-power projects. He said, "Denis and I have just concluded a session of most productive and detailed round

of talks. We reviewed and expressed satisfaction on the progress of the entire spectrum of bilateral relations." "We have agreed to further strengthen our relations in trade, business, investment and education," he added. Earlier on arrival at the PM office, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was presented a guard of... (More on P4)...(22)

### Iran President Visits three Central Asian States for Closer Ties

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday started his tour to three Caucasian and central Asian states, Armenia's Yerevan Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Press TV reported.

A high-ranking political and economic delegation is accompanying Rouhani to discuss ways of improving mutual relations. Ties with the three countries are highly important to Iran in the light of mutually-benefi-

cial economic potentials, Rouhani said upon his departure.

"We are pursuing economic relations featuring preferential tariffs and ultimately free trade with these countries," Rouhani was quoted as saying.

Cooperation with the three countries will contribute to the Islamic republic's national security, Rouhani said, adding that talks with these countries will also focus on... (More on P4)...(23)

### Turkmenistan, Bangladesh Interested in Energy Co-Op

ASHGABAT - The energy cooperation prospects between Turkmenistan and Bangladesh were discussed during a meeting with Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Bangladesh to Turkmenistan (with a residence in Tehran) Mahbur Rahman in the Turkmen Foreign Ministry, the Turkmen Foreign Ministry said in a message on Wednesday.

Turkmenistan and Bangladesh expressed interest in establishing contacts between the business cir-

cles of the two countries, the message says. According to the message, the sides also stressed that Turkmenistan and Bangladesh have all the possibilities to intensify partnership in agriculture, textile industry, political, trade-economic spheres. Earlier, it was reported that Bangladesh is considering the possibility of joining the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) project, promoted by the Asian Development Bank. (Trend)

### Deputy PM of Uzbekistan to Visit Tajikistan

TASHKENT - The delegation of Uzbekistan led by Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov is expected to arrive in Tajikistan on December 26, reports Asia-Plus.

The meeting of the inter-governmental commission of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on trade and economic cooperation will be held in Dushanbe next week. Vice Prime Ministers Rustam Azimov and Davlatlali Said will chair the meeting. The talks will focus on the opening of transport

routes. The new border crossing points will be opened on the border of the two countries, said the report. The sides will also consider mitigation of visa regime, which was introduced in September 2000. The two countries may touch upon the students exchange programs among other issues. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan earlier agreed on the launch of air communication between the countries since the beginning of the coming year. (AKI press)