

Israel Hits Back after UN Settlements Resolution

JERUSALEM - Israel on Sunday summoned the envoys of countries that supported a UN resolution demanding an end to the settlements, while suspending some international diplomatic ties and coordination with the Palestinians.

Speaking at the cabinet's weekly meeting, Netanyahu told the ministers to "minimize" meetings and travels to the states that backed the resolution in the UN Security Council on Friday, and with which Israel has diplomatic relations.

The foreign ministers of the 12 countries will not be accepted for visits in



the Prime Minister's Office and Foreign Ministry, he said.

Earlier on Sunday, Netanyahu, who is also acting foreign minister, instructed the foreign office to summon envoys of these states for a reprimand meeting in Jerusalem.

Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman instructed the Israeli Coordinator of the Government's Activities in the Territories to cease all meetings and talks with senior Palestinian officials, as another mean of rebuke.

The moves were part of a "diplomatic and economic price" that Netanyahu ...*(More on P4)...(16)*

Palestinians Seek More Gains after Settlement Vote, Israel Fears the Worst

RAMALLAH - Palestinians look forward to building on the recent UN Security Council resolution against Israeli settlement activity, while Israel expressed fear of more international steps against it.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki on Monday told the official Voice of Palestine radio that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) will seek the help of law experts to utilize what was incorporated in the UNSC resolution against settlements.

Malki explained that it has now become possible to act against institutions and companies that deal with settlements.

He added "we can return to the International Criminal Court (ICC) with more

courage now, to pressure it and demand speeding up its procedures regarding Israeli settlements since the UNSC resolution is binding." The foreign minister said that it has now become possible for any Palestinian who was affected by the settlement building to consider seriously pursuing legal action against political leaders in Israel who ordered settlement construction on their land.

He pointed out that the Palestinian leadership is considering a series of steps in the coming period, including going to Switzerland, which is the dignitary of the Geneva conventions to assess Israel's commitment to the implementation of those agreements. (Xinhua)

Nazarbayev Says Ready to Host Syria Peace Talks in Astana

MOSCOW - Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said on Monday he was ready to host multilateral talks on the conflict in Syria in the Kazakh capital of Astana.

"Kazakhstan is ready to host all sides for talks in Astana," Nazarbayev said during a visit to St. Petersburg where he has been meeting with Rus-

sian President Vladimir Putin. Putin said on Friday that Russia, Iran, Turkey and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had all agreed the Kazakh capital should be the venue for new Syrian peace negotiations.

Putin also said last week the next step for Syria would be a nationwide ceasefire. (Reuters)

Balkan Countries Illegally Push Back Migrants: UNHCR

BELGRADE - Illegal deportations of migrants seeking to reach western Europe along the so-called Balkans route have been on the rise, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) warned Monday.

Some 1,000 people from the Middle East, Asia and Africa "were expelled in November alone along the Balkans route... more than before", the UNHCR spokeswoman in Serbia, Mirjana Milenkovska, told AFP.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants took the Balkans

route through Macedonia and Serbia, Croatia and Hungary as they tried to reach western Europe from Greece before it was largely shut down in March.

Non-governmental human rights organisations and activists also warned that an increasing number of legally-registered migrants were being "illegally deported" from Serbia to Bulgaria and Macedonia.

On December 17 "a seven-member Syrian family, including a two-year old



child, 16-year old girl and two women almost froze after being left in a forest in -11 Celsius degrees (12.2 Fahrenheit) to walk towards Bulgaria some

one kilometre (half a mile) away," an activist said.

"The family was registered in Belgrade and on its way to a refugee centre, ...*(More on P4)...(17)*

Turkey Says Ankara-Backed FSA to Join Fight in Raqqa Offensive

ANKARA - Turkey and the U.S. have agreed that the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and local forces will participate in the offensive to liberate Raqqa from the control of Islamic State (IS) terrorists, Turkish presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin told press on Monday.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Saturday that Manbij is Turkey's first priority as part of its Euphrates Shield Operation, adding that the so called IS capital, Raqqa, would be the sec-

ond target.

Turkish troops along with Ankara-backed FSA rebels have been fighting for Syria's al-Bab against the IS for over one month and clashes intensified last week.

The Syrian Democratic Forces, comprised mainly of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Party Union (PYD) and its military wing, the People's Protection Unit (YPG), along with Syrian Arabs, liberated Manbij from the IS in early August.

Turkey launched the Euphrates Shield opera-



tion on Aug. 24, to free its border of terrorist organizations, which not only include the IS, but also the PYD and YPG.

Turkey considers both of the PYD and YPG as ter-

ror organizations, due to their ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The U.S., on the other hand, regards the PYD and ...*(More on P4)...(18)*

Russia Hunts for Crashed Jet's Black Boxes, Says No Signs of Foul Play

MOSCOW - Russia expanded its search on Monday for the remains of a military plane that crashed into the Black Sea, killing all 92 on board, and said pilot error or a technical fault - but not terrorism - were likely to have caused the tragedy.

The plane, a Russian Defence Ministry TU-154, was carrying dozens of Red Army Choir singers and dancers to Syria to entertain Russian troops in the run-up to the New Year.

Nine Russian journalists were also on board as well



as military servicemen and Elizaveta Glinka, a prominent member of President Vladimir Putin's advisory human rights council.

Divers and submersibles seeking the jet's flight re-

870 Moroccans Fight Alongside Jihadist Groups in Middle East

RABAT - Some 870 Moroccans are fighting alongside jihadist groups in Middle East, local media reported on Monday.

Citing official statistics provided by the Morocco's Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations, the Moroccan daily Akhbar Al Yaoum said that the current number of Moroccan fighters represents 55 percent of the total number of those who left the country to join the ranks of jihadists groups in Syria and Iraq in 2012.

According to the same statistics, over 553 Moroccan fighters have been killed and 206 returned to the country since 2012. The same source revealed that the number of Moroccans who joined the conflict zones in Syria, Iraq and Libya has significantly ...*(More on P4)...(20)*

India Testfires Nuclear-Capable Agni V Intercontinental Ballistic Missile

NEW DELHI - India Monday successfully test fired its long-range, nuclear-capable and surface-to-surface Agni V intercontinental ballistic missile from a military island off the coast of the eastern state of Odisha.

Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the state-run Defense Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) scientists who were behind the launch.

"Congratulations DRDO for successfully test firing Agni-V. It will enhance our strategic and deterrence capabilities," Mukherjee tweeted.

"Successful test firing of Agni V makes every Indian very proud. It will add tremendous strength to our strategic defence," Modi wrote on Twitter.

Agni V, with a range of over 5,000 km, can carry a nuclear warhead of up to 1,000 kg. The solid propellant-driven missile, which is 17 metres long and weighs about 50 tonnes, is a fire-and-forget system that cannot be easily detected as it follows a ballistic trajectory.

Agni V is the fifth in the series of Agni group of missiles, which are among the country's most sophisticated weapons. Agni means "fire" in Hindi and Sanskrit languages. The first test of Agni V was conducted in April 2012, while the second was done in September 2013 and third in January 2015. (Xinhua)

Hungarian Priest Brings Migrants in from the Cold

KORMEND, Hungary - "Save us before we die from the cold," read the email in Father Zoltan Nemeth's inbox. It was an appeal that this Hungarian priest could not ignore.

The SOS was sent by an asylum-seeker, one of 14 relocated from a refugee camp earmarked for closure near Budapest to what they say are freezing military tents in Kormend close to the Austrian border.

Nemeth, the Catholic parish priest in Kormend, a town of around 12,000 souls some 230 kilometres (140 miles) west of Budapest, quickly offered them shelter in the parish community ...*(More on P4)...(21)*

Over 2,000 Saudi Jihadists Abroad: Ministry

RIYADH - More than 2,000 Saudis are fighting abroad with jihadist groups, with over 70 percent of them in Syria, the kingdom's interior ministry was reported as saying Monday.

"The number of Saudis proven to be in conflict areas is 2,093," interior ministry spokesman General Mansour al-Turki told daily newspaper Al-Hayat. He said that 1,540 of them were in Syria, where jihadists have flocked since the Islamic State group seized control of vast areas in mid-2014. Another 147 were in Yemen, which is the base of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, considered by Washington as the most dangerous affiliate of the global terror network. Another



31 were believed to be in Afghanistan or Pakistan, Turki said. Only five were believed to be in neighbouring Iraq, where IS also seized significant territory in 2014.

Turki said 73 Saudis had also been detained abroad "on charges related to acts of terrorism." (AFP)

Neighbor News

China Welcomes Putin's Comment on Bilateral Ties

BEIJING - China on Monday welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin's comment on the two countries' relations at his annual year-end press conference.

Russia and China have a relationship that is more than a simple strategic partnership, which will be further promoted, Putin said during his annual press conference.

"China highly appreciates the positive attitude in developing bilateral ties by the Russian side," spokesperson Hua Chunying said Monday at a daily press briefing.

Currently, the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination is at a historic high,

she said, adding that the two countries' all-round cooperation not only brings benefits to the two countries and two peoples, but also contributes to world prosperity and stability.

"Strategic coordination between China and Russia, which goes beyond bilateral level, serves as the ballast to safeguarding world peace and stability," she said.

China stands ready to work with Russia to continue consolidating and developing their comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination, so as to safeguard regional and world peace, security and stability, Hua said. (Xinhua)

Iran Launches Large-Scale Air Defense Exercise

TEHRAN - Iran has launched a large-scale air defense exercise in the country's southern regions on Monday.

Code-named "Defenders of Velayat Skies 7," the war game covers the Persian Gulf provinces of Hormozgan and Bushehr along with the southwestern province of Khuzestan.

According to the official IRNA news agency, Iran's Air Defense Commander Brig. Gen. Farzad Esmaili said that "the drill will be held for three days in an area covering 496,000 km and F-4 fighter jets and S300 defense missile systems will be test-fired

during the exercise." Participants in the drill include the air defense forces of both the Iranian army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), navy support units, the army and IRGC's ground forces artillery units, Esmaili said.

The military exercise features considerable volumes of artillery and missile practices, he was quoted as saying.

During the first stage, various defensive apparatuses falling under the integrated command and control center operated jointly by the army and the airbase, including ...*(More on P4)...(22)*

NAP Made Slow Progress in Blocking Funding to Terrorists: Nisar

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistani Ministry of Interior on Monday released a progress report on the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) in 2016.

In a report issued by the ministry, it conceded that NAP was unable to effectively block financial support for terrorists and terrorist organisations.

The report had been authorised by Pakistani Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar, who faces increasing criticism for the government's

inaction in curbing militancy in the country.

Also Read: Nisar responds to critics: 'I told PM Nawaz I can resign but he declined'

The report further stated that NAP had been unable to stop the re-emergence of 'proscribed organisations' under new names.

It further added that progress has been slow in Balochistan and that 'political reconciliation' with all the stakeholders in the province has yet to be achieved. ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

Presidential Electoral Campaign Starts in Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - Presidential electoral campaign has started in Turkmenistan, the country's Central Election Committee said in a message.

The election will be held in the country on Feb. 12, 2017. Electoral commissions together with local executive authorities and other organizations of Turkmenistan are responsible for organization of the events, according to the message.

Three candidates are nominated for the president in Turkmenistan.

The Democratic Party nominated the incumbent head of state Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan nominated chairman of the Commercial Bank Rysgal, Bekmyrat Atalyev, and the Agrarian Party nominated Durdygylych ...*(More on P4)...(24)*

Mirziyoyev Plans to Visit Kazakhstan

TASHKENT - President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev will visit Kazakhstan in the near future, reports the Ministry of Defense.

Yerlan Idrisov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan visited Tashkent on December 23, where he met Sh. Mirziyoyev and conducted negotiations with Uzbek colleague Abdulaziz Kamilov. At the meeting with

the leader of Uzbekistan Idrisov confirmed the invitation of Akorda to Sh. Mirziyoyev to pay a state visit to Astana.

"Sh. Mirziyoyev expressed gratefulness for the invitation and declared about intention to use it in the near future, emphasizing his adherence to strengthening of fraternal relations with Kazakhstan," the message...*(More on P4)...(25)*