

New U.S. Sanctions May Hamper Dialogue on Iran, Syria: Russia

MOSCOW - Russia's Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday that a widening of U.S. sanctions against Moscow this week may hamper bilateral cooperation on issues such as Iran's nuclear program and the Syrian crisis.

"The actions by the United States are putting in doubt the prospects

of bilateral cooperation on solving the situation around the Iranian nuclear program, the Syrian crisis and other acute international problems," the ministry said.

"As Washington could have seen previously, we don't leave such unfriendly acts without an answer," the statement added. (Reuters)



UN Envoy to Be Represented At January 26-29 Syria Talks in Moscow

GENEVA - U.N. Syria envoy Staffan De Mistura will be represented at talks about Syria in Moscow between Jan. 26 and Jan. 29, his spokeswoman Juliette Touma told Reuters on Tuesday.

"It's a Russian initiative that focuses on intra-Syrian negotiations,"



Touma said in comments sent by email. "The Office of the Special Envoy will be present at these talks. The Office of the Special Envoy welcomes any initiative that would push forward reaching a peaceful and diplomatic end to the crisis in Syria." (Reuters)

IS Group Claims Suicide Attack in Iraq

BAGHDAD - The Islamic State group on Tuesday claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on a funeral tent north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad the day before that killed 16 people and wounded 34 others.

The claim was made in a statement posted on a Twitter account frequently used by the extremist group. It did not mention the nationality of the attacker.

Monday's attack targeted the funeral of the father of two members of pro-government Sunni militias. The Islamic State group frequently targets Iraq's Shiite majority as well as Sunnis allied with the Shiite-led government.

The bomber showed up at the funeral disguised as a Shiite, with a religious flag and a portrait of a Shiite imam, according to Hussein Ali, a local resident who said he witnessed the attack.

In a separate incident, a Shiite militia commander was killed Monday by a sniper's bullet during fighting with Islamic State militants in the town of Duluyah, about 75 kilometers (45 miles) north of Baghdad, said another senior militia commander. (AP)

Scottish Ebola Patient Arrives At London Hospital

LONDON - A female healthcare worker, confirmed as having Ebola after returning to Scotland from Sierra Leone on Sunday night, has arrived at the Royal Free Hospital in west London for better treatment.

The patient was admitted to hospital early Monday morning after feeling unwell and then was placed into isolation after returning to Scotland via Casablanca of Morocco and London Heathrow, arriving at Glasgow Airport late Sunday night.

According to BBC, she left Gartnavel Hospital in Glasgow early in the morning, with six police cars accompanied two ambulances as she was taken to Glasgow Airport.

The patient was then moved to the Royal Free Hospital. Her bed there is surrounded by a tent, with access restricted to specialist medical teams. British nurse William Pooley, who contracted Ebola in Sierra Leone earlier this year, was successfully treated at the same facility.

A statement on the hospital's website said: "The Royal Free London can confirm that it is expecting to receive a patient who has tested positive for Ebola. The patient will be treated in the high level isolation unit (HLIU)."

British health secretary Jeremy Hunt, who chaired an emergency Cobra meeting on Monday evening, said the government was doing "absolutely everything it needs to" to keep the public safe.

Public health experts have emphasized that, the risk to others is extremely low as the patient having been diagnosed in the very early stages of the illness. (Xinhua)

Nieghbor News

Iran's Regional Power Admitted By US: Speaker



TEHRAN - Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani underlined the country's regional power and clout, and said even senior White House officials have been forced to acknowledge this reality.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran enjoys such a high degree of power that it has now gained a geopolitical and geostrategic position," Larijani said, addressing an open session of the parliament in Tehran on Tuesday.

He referred to the strong relations between the Iranian government and nation and the Islamic Revolution's influence in the region as well as the country's scientific and technical development, and said the country's defensive power has created serious deterrence to

enemies' threats. "A few days ago, the US president admitted that Iran has the possibility for turning into a successful regional power," Larijani added. In relevant remarks in November 2013, a top military commander underlined Iran's preparedness to confront any possible enemy threats, and said that it is evident to everyone that Iran is a regional power. "Now everyone regards the Islamic Republic as a big power in the region," Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri said. "If we want this power to be increased, we should stand up on our own feet and do not rely on foreign countries," General Jazayeri said. (FNA)

Special Courts will Only Conduct 'High Terrorism' Trials: Sharif



ISLAMABAD - Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a prolonged meeting discussing national security on Tuesday decided to implement all points of the National Action Plan on emergency basis, Dunya News reported.

The recommendations of taking steps to stop funding and elimination of armed groups were presented to the PM who said that the special courts are only meant for trials of severe terrorism.

According to the details, the session chaired by the Prime Minister

continued for over six hours. Federal ministers, legal advisers, Army Chief General Raheel Sharif and Director General (DG) Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) also participated in the meeting.

As per the declaration issued, it was decided to implement all plans of National Action Plan on emergency basis.

The participants also reviewed steps taken to intercept funding sources of the terrorists. The actions taken to prevent illegal sim cards also came under review. (Monitoring Desk)

Xi Cheers on Chinese Ebola Medical Personnel in Africa

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping urged the country's Ebola medical staff working in Africa to make greater effort to combat the virus while guarding against infections.

Xi made the remarks in a letter offering New Year greetings to the health workers.

"Unfazed by hardships and risks, our medical personnel rushed to the front line of the Ebola epidemic in west Africa to save patients. Together with local people, they achieved obvious progress in testing viruses,

observing and treating patients and giving training on epidemic prevention," Xi wrote.

China has sent hundreds of medical workers to affected African countries following the Ebola outbreak.

Xi noted that the medical workers showcased the friendly ties between China and Africa, and won praise from local governments and people as well as international communities.

Xi called on them to strive for a victory against the virus and ensure zero infection. (Xinhua)

Rahmon Holds Govt. Year's Last Session

DUSHANBE - This year's last session of the government, presided over by President Emomali Rahmon, was held on Monday.

According to the Tajik president's official website, the session endorsed the plan of government's work for the first half-year of 2015 and measures on implementation of the country's law on the national budget for 2015. The government reportedly also adopted an order on development of indicators of the national

budget for 2016-2018 and the draft law on the national budget for 2016.

The minister of agriculture reported on the progress of implementation of the president's decree on additional measures for development of gardening and viticulture in the country in 2010-2014. It was noted that over the past five years new orchards and vineyards have been planted on 53,562 hectares, which is 114.2 percent more than it was originally planned. (Asia-Plus)

Syrian Embassy in Kuwait Reopens Amid Tight Security

DAMASCUS - The doors of the Syrian embassy in Kuwait have opened again after nearly nine months as some Arab countries are showing signs of reduced hostility with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The embassy was officially reopened Monday amid tight security measures as thousands of Syrians gathered in the area waiting to know how and when the consular service is going to be restored.

According to reports, the embassy is expected to resume consular service in two weeks.

Diplomatic staff left the

Syrian capital Damascus for Kuwait earlier Monday as analyst in the region speculated about better ties between the two Arab countries.

However, Kuwait Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Khaled al-Jarallah said earlier this month that the return of Syrian diplomats does not spell a normalization of ties.

Under pressure from other members of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, Kuwait withdrew its diplomats from Syria in February 2012 and asked the Syrian ambassador to leave the country. The embas-

sy closed down in March 2014 in what the Kuwaiti government claimed was a volunteer departure of the diplomatic staff.

The embassy closure forced nearly 130,000 Syrian citizens living in the Persian Gulf country to seek consular services from the Syrian embassy that still remains open in neighboring United Arab Emirates. (Press TV)



Bangladesh Jamaat Leader Sentenced to Death for War Crimes

JAKARTA - Indonesian rescuers searching for an AirAsia plane carrying 162 people pulled bodies and wreckage from the sea off the coast of Borneo on Tuesday, prompting relatives of those on board watching TV footage to break down in tears.

Indonesia AirAsia's Flight QZ8501, an Airbus A320-200, lost contact with air traffic control early on Sunday during bad weather on a flight from the Indonesian city of Surabaya to Singapore. The navy said 40 bodies had been recovered. The plane has yet to be found. "My heart is filled with sadness for all the families involved in QZ8501," airline boss Tony Fernandes tweeted. "On behalf of AirAsia, my condolences to all. Words

cannot express how sorry I am."

The airline said in a statement that it was inviting family members to Surabaya, "where a dedicated team of care providers will be assigned to each family to ensure that all of their needs are met".

Pictures of floating bodies were broadcast on television and relatives of the missing already gathered at a crisis center in Surabaya wept with heads in their hands. Several people collapsed in grief and were helped away.

"You have to be strong," the mayor of Surabaya, Tri Rismaharini, said as she comforted relatives. "They are not ours, they belong to God."

A navy spokesman said a plane door, oxygen tanks and one body had been

recovered and taken away by helicopter for tests.

"The challenge is waves up to three meters high," Fransiskus Bambang Soelistyo, head of the Search and Rescue Agency, told reporters, adding that the search operation would go on all night. He declined to answer questions on whether any survivors had been found.

About 30 ships and 21 aircraft from Indonesia, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and the United States have been involved in the search.

The plane, which did not issue a distress signal, disappeared after its pilot failed to get permission to fly higher to avoid bad weather because of heavy air traffic, officials said. (Reuters)

Kazakhstan's Ex-Ambassador Charged With Murder

VIENNA - A prosecutor in Vienna says a former Kazakh ambassador to Austria has been charged with murder.

Prosecutor Thomas Vecsey identified the suspect Tuesday as Rakhat Alijev, a former son-in-law of Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbayev. He is suspected of involvement in the killings of two bank managers in Kazakhstan - an accusation he denies.

He has been sought by Kazakh authorities since 2007 after falling out with Nazarbayev.

Austria has turned down two requests for Alijev's extradition while investigating the allegations, and he has spent the last six months in investigative custody. (AP)

Global Markets Lower As Traders Eye New Year Break

SEOUL, South Korea - Global stocks fell on Tuesday as investors prepared for the upcoming New Year holiday weekend in many countries and amid concern over political uncertainty in Greece.

KEEPING SCORE: France's CAC 40 fell 0.8 percent to 4,281.85 and Germany's DAX dropped 0.7 percent to 9,862.49. Britain's FTSE 100 was down 0.9 percent at 6,573.79. Wall Street looked set for small losses, with futures for the Dow Jones industrial average and broader Standard & Poor's 500 index down 0.1 percent and 0.2 percent. ASIA'S DAY: Tokyo's Nikkei 225 closed

1.6 percent lower at 17,450.77 on 2014's final trading day. The benchmark gained 7.1 percent this year. South Korea's Kospi dropped 0.6 percent to 1,915.59, ending the year 4.8 percent lower. China's Shanghai Composite Index shed 0.1 percent to 3,165.81 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng was also down 1.1 percent to 23,501.10. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 fell 1 percent to 5,416.60. GREEK UNCERTAINTY: Greek stocks stabilized after a volatile trading session on Monday, when the government was forced to call elections that could bring more economic turmoil. (AP)

'Too Early' to Commit to 2015 Election: Myanmar's Suu Kyi



YANGON - Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi called on the government on Tuesday to hold a transparent election next year and said her party was waiting for a poll date to be set before deciding whether to run.

The Nobel laureate said it was "too early" to commit, when asked at a news conference if her party would contest the ballot scheduled for the end of 2015.

"As I'm not an astrologer, I cannot say what the situation will be," she said. "I'm just a politician. As politicians we can calculate, but we can't assume the situation will happen as we calculate."

Her reluctance to commit could further complicate a standoff in Myanmar centered on her National League for Democracy (NLD) party's bid to change the constitution, which has seen resistance from a military to which the charter grants a hefty political stake.

The NLD pulled out of a constitution-drafting process in 1995, five years after its election win was ignored by the ruling military.

It refused to run in the 2010 elections because of "unfair and unjust"

rules and two years later, after winning 43 seats in a by-election, it initially refused to take its parliament seats because of the wording of a swearing-in oath.

Suu Kyi said on Tuesday the NLD was waiting for the government to release "rules and regulations" for the election, which would be the first since a semi-civilian government took power in 2011 after 49 years of military rule.

The party would "announce officially whether we will take part in the elections or not once the government releases an election date officially", Suu Kyi said.

She has been frustrated in her attempts to reform the constitution, which reserves a quarter of parliamentary seats and key government posts for the military and bars her from the presidency, because her sons are foreign nationals.

The NLD has collected about five million signatures in support of its campaign to reduce the military's role in politics, while its efforts to discuss the issue with President Thein Sein and military chief Min Aung Hlaing have failed. (Reuters)