

European Leaders Renew Support for Ukraine Ceasefire

PARIS - The leaders of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine renewed their support for a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine on Wednesday following phone discussions, the French presidency said in a statement.

"Angela Merkel, Francois Hollande, Vladimir Putin and Petro Poroshenko reaffirmed their commitment to a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine," and the "concerted withdrawal without delay of heavy weapons," the Elysee Palace said.

The leaders spoke for two hours in their first discussions since meeting in



Paris on October 2. Tensions have risen recently after a Ukrainian

soldier and two civilians were killed in the pro-Russian separatist Don-

bass region. The four leaders emphasised the need to follow

through on the Minsk II peace accords over the coming year, including

preparations for local elections in Donbass at the start of 2017.

Foreign ministers from the four countries are due to meet to discuss the peace process in greater detail by early February, the Elysee added.

The Minsk accords finalised in early 2015 effectively brought hostilities to an end after more than 9,000 people were killed in the civil war that broke out the previous April.

However, a ceasefire agreed in September remains fragile and had to be renewed yet again on Tuesday after the recent killings.(AFP)

Nieghbor News

Sharif Inaugurates Western Route of CPEC in Zhob

QUETTA - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif inaugurated the western route of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Balochistan's Zhob on Wednesday and laid the foundation stones of two key projects: upgradation of the Zhob-Mughal Kot section of the Dera Ismail Khan-QilaSaifullah Highway (N-50) and the QillaSaifullah-WaigamRud Road section of the Multan-Dera Ghazi Khan-QillaSaifullah Highway (N-70), reported Radio Pakistan.

The Zhob-Mughal Kot Section is part of the western route of the CPEC which starts from Burhan on the Peshawar-Islamabad motorway (M-1), and after moving through DI Khan, Zhob, Quetta, Surab and Hoshab, ends at Gwadar. The Zhob-Mughal Kot section is 81 kilometres (km) long and its upgradation will cost Rs9 billion, and is expected to be completed by 2018. The QillaSaifullah-WaigamRud section is 128km long and will cost around Rs 8bn.(Agencies)

China to Set up Third-Generation Nuclear Power Company

BEIJING - Two Chinese nuclear power giants on Wednesday concluded a deal on a joint venture to promote China's third-generation nuclear reactor design, Hualong One, in overseas markets technologies.

The Hualong international nuclear power technology company in Chinese, has a registered capital of 500 million yuan (77 million U.S. dollars), with China General Nuclear Power Group (CGN) and China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC) each holding 50 percent of shares.

The Hualong One design is the country's third generation of nuclear reactor design for safer and more efficient operations that

will be widely adopted in domestic nuclear power projects.

The two companies began R&D for Hualong One in 2013. In May 2015, construction on a pilot project using Hualong One started in Fuqing, southeast China's Fujian Province.

An agreement with Argentina was reached in November, guaranteeing the use of it in the fifth nuclear plant in Argentina, a key emerging market for Chinese companies.

In October, CGN and Electricite de France (EDF) signed a strategic investment agreement to build a nuclear power plant at Hinkley Point in the southwestern part of Britain.(Xinhua)

Hollande under Fire over Call to Strip Citizenship from Terror Convicts

PARIS—French President Francois Hollande's call for convicted French-born terrorists to lose their citizenship if they have a second nationality has triggered uproar among those who see him adopting right-wing ideas that recall dark moments in France's history.

Ever since the French Revolution in the late 1700s, "le droit du sol" ("the right of the soil") has been a fundamental principle, giving everyone born in the country the right to citizenship.

But in the aftermath of November's jihadist attacks in Paris, Hollande announced to an extraordinary session of both houses of parliament that he would seek changes to the constitution so that dual nationals -- even those born in France -- could be stripped of their French passport.

The idea has huge support from a jittery nation, with nearly 90 percent backing the measure in a poll for BFM TV.

Hollande's Socialist government has staunchly



defended the move with Prime Minister Manuel Valls saying the measure was already used in several Western countries including Britain, Canada and the Netherlands.

"Removing French nationality from those who blindly kill other French in the name of an ideology of terror is a strong symbolic act against those who ... (More on P4)...(16)

Iraq Tells Turkey to Pull out of North, Threatens Action

BAGHDAD - Iraq on Wednesday reiterated its demand that Turkish troops withdraw from a northern camp where they are training anti-Islamic State fighters, warning that it will consider military action if the soldiers remain.

The dispute flared up in early December after Turkey deployed reinforcements to a camp in northern Iraq's Bashiqa region where Ankara is helping to train Sunni and Kurdish fighters to battle IS. The deploy-

ment riled Baghdad, which considers the new troops an illegal incursion and has demanded their immediate and complete withdrawal.

Turkey has begun withdrawing troops, but some remain. Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari told a press conference Wednesday that Baghdad will continue to pursue a peaceful resolution, but warned that if "fighting is imposed on us, we will consider it to ... (More on P4)...(17)

US Monitored Israeli PM's Phone Conversations: Report

WASHINGTON - The U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) has eavesdropped communications between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. lawmakers and American-Jewish groups, the Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday.

The United States captured phone conversations of top Israeli officials, including Netanyahu's private conversations, as it believed the intercepted information could be valuable to counter Netanyahu's campaign against the U.S. nuclear deal with Iran, according to the report. The United States has been pursu-

ing a nuclear arms agreement with Iran at the time without telling its regional friend, while Netanyahu prepared for possible strikes against an Iranian nuclear facility in 2011 and 2012, the report said.

By 2013, though the U.S. intelligence agencies determined Netanyahu was not going to strike Iran, it had another reason to keep watch, for the White House wanted to know if Israel had learned of the secret negotiations with Iran. After Israel's lobbying campaign against the deal went into full swing on Capitol Hill, it did not ... (More on P4)...(18)

Russia Rejects 'Absurd' Claims over Civilian Deaths in Syria

MOSCOW - Russia on Wednesday dismisses as "absurd" accusations by the United States that Russian air strikes in Syria are killing hundreds of civilians.

Russia has come under growing criticism from the West as well as human rights groups and Syrian rebels for inflicting civilian casualties in its two-month bombing campaign in the war-torn country. The US State Department said Tuesday that the Russian strikes had killed hundreds of civilians" and hit "medical facilities, schools and

markets". "All of these anonymous and unsubstantiated statements about the alleged use of Russian aircraft on civilian targets in Syria is increasingly reminiscent of hypnotists' acts in traveling circuses," Russia's defence ministry said in a statement, calling the claims "absurd".

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Wednesday that Moscow's strikes had killed 2,371 people since they were launched September 30. It said the toll includes



792 civilians, among them 180 children.

Russia's defence ministry said it deplored the "absolute silence" about the strikes by the United States, which is leading a coalition conducting its own bombing campaign against Islamic State jihadists. It said the US raids had caused "mass casualties". Amnesty In ... (More on P4)...(19)

India Successfully Testfires Indo-Israeli Barak-8 Missile

NEW DELHI - India Wednesday successfully testfired a long-range, surface-to-air missile, Barak-8, jointly developed with Israel, from an Indian Navy warship off the coast of the western state of Goa, sources said.

"The maiden testfiring of the missile in the Arabia Sea has been successful. It has destroyed an aerial target after being launched from INS Kolkata. The missile was twice testfired onboard Israeli ships and this is the first time that such a test was held onboard an Indian warship," sources said. Indian Navy has described the testfiring as "a quantum jump in Indian ... (More on P4)...(20)

Burundians will Fight Against any AU Peacekeepers: President

NAIROBI - Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza said on Wednesday that Burundians would fight against any peacekeepers sent into the country by the African Union, in his first public response to the AU's plan to deal with an escalating political crisis.

The African Union said this month it was ready to send 5,000 peacekeepers to protect civilians caught up in months of violence, invoking for the first time powers to intervene in a member state against its will. "Everyone has to respect Burundi borders," Nkurunziza said in comments broadcast on state radio.

"In case they violate those principles, they will have attacked the country and every Burundian will stand up and fight against them ... The country will have been attacked and it will respond," he said.

Other government officials have already said any peacekeepers arriving without Burundi's ... (More on P4)...(22)

Iraq Risks Losing Generation Due to Lack of Schools, Healthcare: UNICEF

LONDON - Preventing violence from depriving millions of children in Iraq of education and decent healthcare is a key humanitarian priority for the country in 2016, a senior U.N. official said on Wednesday.

More than 2 million children in Iraq are out of school, up to 3 million more have had their education disrupted by the war, and nearly one in five schools have been damaged, destroyed or used for other purposes, the U.N. children's fund UNICEF says. Of the schools that are still in use, classes are often overcrowded and lessons



taught in shifts. "We're at risk of losing a generation through the lack of education, health and protection," Peter Hawkins, UNICEF's Representative in Iraq, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation during a brief trip to Britain.

"Schools, clinics, water facilities etc are deteriorating further and further which makes the life of children very difficult. (We're) seeing increasing signs of stunting. Nutrition is becoming a ... (More on P4)...(21)

IS Leader Killed in Air Strike was Close to Paris Attacker

PARIS - Charaffe al Mouadan, one of 10 Islamic State leaders killed by U.S.-led air strikes in the past month, was close to Paris attacker Samy Amimour and paved the way for him to leave France for Syria, the mayor of the French city where both grew up said.

An air strike in Syria on Dec. 24 killed al Mouadan, U.S. Army Colonel Steve Warren said, adding that he was directly associated with AbdelhamidAbaoud, suspected ringleader of the Nov. 13 Paris shootings and bombings that

killed 130 people. Jean-Christophe Lagarde, the mayor of Drancy, a northeastern suburb of Paris, said al Mouadan was also connected to Amimour, a 28-year-old former bus driver who blew himself up in Paris's Bataclan concert hall. "They were arrested in 2012 when they planned to leave for Yemen and were placed under judicial supervision," Lagarde told Reuters in a telephone interview, adding that a third man was part of their group.

"He (al Mouadan) ... (More on P4)...(23)

Russia Starts Shipping S-300 Air Defense Systems to Iran: Deputy PM

MOSCOW - Russia has started shipping S-300 air defense missile systems to Iran, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said Wednesday.

"The contract is being executed and paid for. Delivery is carried out, and this contract will be followed by others," Rogozin said in a live interview with Rossiya 24 TV channel. He added that the contract for the S-300 system opened up new opportunities for cooperation between Moscow and Tehran in both the military and civil spheres.

Moscow and Teheran signed an 800-million-U.S. dollar contract in 2007 to supply Iran with five S-300 systems.

In September 2010, then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev canceled the contract in line with a resolution of the United Nations Security Council, which banned the supply of conventional weapons to Iran.

Iran, in response, submitted a 4-billion-dollar claim against Russia to an international arbitration court in Geneva. In early April this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree to lift the ban on sales of S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems after Iran and six world powers, including Russia, reached a framework accord on parameters of Iran's controversial nuclear program.(Xinhua)

IRGC Fired Rockets Near US Warship in Hormuz Strait: US Officials



TEHRAN - US officials claim that Iran has fired several rockets near an American aircraft carrier in the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.

Unnamed US military officials claimed that the rockets were fired from vessels belonging to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) during a military exercise on December 26.

They said the rockets were fired some 1,500 yards from the US aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman and two accompanying warships.

The US officials, however, said that "the rockets were not fired at the Truman and other ships, only near them."

US military spokesman Kyle Raines said Tuesday that the rockets were fired "in close proximity" of the US warship and nearby merchant traffic "after providing only 23 minutes of advance notification."

Raines described the alleged incident as "highly provocative", claiming that incident "runs contrary to efforts to ensure freedom of navigation and maritime safety in the global commons."

The aircraft carrier reportedly entered the Persian Gulf last month to support US military operations in Iraq and Syria.(PressTV)

Tajikistan's Accession to EAEU is Difficult Step: Russian Ambassador

BISHKEK - Accession of Tajikistan to the Eurasian Economic Union still remains among the issue of today's agenda, said the Russian Ambassador in Dushanbe, Igor Lyakin-Frolov, to the reporters.

"President of Tajikistan EmomaliRahmon once said that the legal instruments of the Union are thoroughly being studied by the Tajik side. As we know, the accession to the EAEU is also important for

the Tajik business. Of course, Tajikistan's accession to the EAEU is a difficult step, and we respect the right of our Tajik friends and partners in evaluating and making the decision," he said.

According to him, integration processes give the participants of the Union a lot of advantages contributing to their rapid economic development during the globalization. (AKIpress)