

German Conservatives Address Concerns about Migrants as Support Wanes

BERLIN - Senior German conservatives sought at the weekend to reassure Germans concerned about a record migrant influx, saying numbers must go down and criminal refugees could be deported as a poll showed support for the bloc slipping. Some 1.1 million migrants streamed into Germany last year, and regions and communities have complained that they are being overwhelmed. Concerns about crime and security have also mounted since men of north African and Arab appearance assaulted women in Cologne at New Year.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said most refugees from



Syria and Iraq would go home once the conflicts there had ended and urged

other European countries to offer more help "because the numbers need to be

reduced even further and must not start to rise again, especially in spring". The

record influx and associated concerns are taking their toll politically, with

support for Merkel's conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) sister party falling by 2 percentage points to 34 percent in an Emnid survey for Bild am Sonntag.

That was its lowest level in that survey since July 2012, though another pollster has already shown them at 32.5 percent.

In an interview with the same newspaper, Peter Altmaier, who Merkel has tasked with overseeing the government's handling of the refugee crisis, said the government was negotiating with some countries including Turkey about taking...*(More on P4)...(19)*

Nieghbor News

Iran Gives Medals for Capture of U.S. Sailors



DUBAI - Iran's supreme leader has awarded medals to navy commanders for capturing U.S. sailors who entered Iranian territorial waters this month, Iran's state media said on Sunday.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has said Iran should remain wary of its arch-enemy the United States even after a landmark accord over Tehran's nuclear program, awarded the Fath (Victory) medal to the head of the navy of the Revolutionary Guards and four commanders involved in the seizure of two U.S. Navy boats.

Iran has awarded the Fath medal since 1989 to war heroes, military commanders and politicians, especially those

linked to the eight-year Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.

Iran freed the ten U.S. sailors on Jan. 13, a day after detaining them aboard the two U.S. Navy patrol boats in the Gulf, bringing a swift end to an incident that had rattled nerves shortly before the expected implementation of the nuclear accord with world powers.

The Revolutionary Guards said it had determined the patrol boats had entered Iranian territorial waters by mistake.

The quick resolution contrasted with previous cases in which British servicemen were held by Iran for considerably longer, in once case almost two weeks. (Reuters)

Cameron Meets EU President for Crunch Brexit Talks

LONDON - Prime Minister David Cameron was to meet EU president Donald Tusk at Downing Street on Sunday as negotiations reach a decisive point ahead of a referendum on whether Britain should leave the bloc. The working dinner comes with Tusk expected to publish draft proposals early this week for how to reform Britain's relationship with the EU, which Cameron can then use to campaign against a so-

called "Brexit". British officials hope that a final deal can be nailed down at a Brussels summit being held on February 18 and 19. That could then open the door to a referendum in June. But Cameron insists he is willing to hold out for as long as it takes to secure the right package of reforms, if necessary delaying the referendum to September or even next year. Opinion polls currently suggest that...*(More on P4)...(20)*

NATO Warns Russia over Alleged Violation of Turkish Airspace

BRUSSELS/ISTANBUL - NATO has called on Russia to act responsibly after Turkey summoned Russian ambassador to protest what it claimed a violation of its airspace by a Russian warplane. "A Russian combat aircraft violated Turkish airspace yesterday, despite repeated warnings by the Turkish authorities," said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Saturday in a statement.

"Previous incidents have shown how dangerous such behavior is," he said. He called on Russia to act

responsibly and to fully respect NATO airspace. Turkey has been a member of the alliance since 1952. Stoltenberg urged Russia to take all necessary measures to ensure that such violations do not happen again. "I welcome the direct contacts between Ankara and Moscow, and I call for calm and de-escalation," he said. The Turkish Foreign Ministry summoned Russian ambassador to Ankara late Friday and protested against the violation of Turkey's airspace by a Russian SU-34. In a written statement,



the ministry said Turkish air force warned the Russian aircraft several times on Friday in Russian and English, adding that the violation is also a new and concrete indicator of Mos-

cow's actions which aims at "accelerating problems despite open warnings by our country and by NATO." The claim was immediately denied by...*(More on P4)...(21)*

IS Claims Responsibility for Killing 76 in Triple Bombings in Syria

DAMASCUS - The Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility for three deadly bombings that rocked SayyidahZaynab district south of the capital Damascus on Sunday, killing over 76 people. The triple bombings rocked the sprawling SayyidahZaynab district, which is guarded by the Shiite Lebanese Hezbollah group in the southern countryside of Damascus. The first explosion was caused by a booby-trapped car that targeted a passenger bus on the al-Sudan

street in that area, state news agency SANA said, adding that after the first bombing, two suicide bombers detonated their explosive belt in a crowd of people, who gathered at the blast site. Meanwhile, a source familiar with the incident told Xinhua that the explosions killed 76 people, adding that the death toll could rise as tens of wounded people are critically wounded. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition monitor, said 25 Shiite fighters



were among those killed. The IS militant group holds deep grudges against the Shiite people, which are considered in the IS methodology as "infidels."

The enmity toward the Shiite people also emanates from the group's battles against Hezbollah and the Syrian army across Syria. (Xinhua)

At Least 69 Killed in Suicide Attacks Near Nigeria's Maiduguri City

ABUJA - At least 69 dead bodies have been registered in a morgue following multiple suicide attacks in a community near Maiduguri, capital of Borno State in Nigeria's volatile northeast region, sources at a government-run hospital said on Sunday.

An unnamed senior medical officer at the Borno State General Hospital said 55 others have been admitted into the emergency section of the health facility, following the suicide

attacks late Saturday in Dalori and Walori settlements in the province. Heavy shooting followed the explosions which rocked the settlements, while houses were razed as residents ran for lives, a local chief said.

A mortuary attendant said victims of the incident were conveyed to the hospital by officials of the Red Cross, the State Emergency Management Agency and some policemen. (Xinhua)

UN Envoy Pays "Courtesy Visit" to Syrian Opposition Delegation for Further Talks

GENEVA - The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, on Sunday paid a "courtesy visit" to the delegation of the main Syrian opposition at their hotel in Geneva following their arrival Saturday evening. The spokesperson of the UN Envoy said that de Mistura also held an informal meeting with the delegation of the Syrian High Negotiations Committee (HNC), and the short informal meeting was useful in addressing issues relating to the intra-Syrian talks. The U.N. Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, RamzyEzzeldinRamzy, also on Sunday afternoon paid a "courtesy" visit to the delegation of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to discuss practical arrangements related to the next steps in the talks, according to the spokesperson.

Syria's main opposition group is now here in Geneva...*(More on P4)...(22)*

Israel Still Bans 400 Kinds of Raw Materials Used in Gaza Industry: Official

GAZA - Israel still bans the shipment of 400 different kinds of raw materials to the Gaza Strip that are used in industry, a senior Palestinian official said Sunday. Jamal al-Khudari, an independent lawmaker and chairman of the Popular Committee to Defy the Israeli Blockade, said in an emailed press statement that "the Israeli occupation lists these materials in the list of forbidden goods." "The Israeli occupation care-

fully chooses the list of goods and materials in a way that keeps the cycle of industry blocked and consequently, this keeps thousands of workers, engineers and experts unemployed," said al-Khudari. He went on saying that the sector of industry in the Gaza Strip is basically based on these kinds of raw materials that are used in very important products that can compete with imported products to the enclave. "The ongoing endless Israeli

measures against the industrial and commercial sectors had mounted the populations' suffering and led to the closure of 80 percent of factories in the entire Gaza Strip," said al-Khudari. He insisted that these measures "are violating all international laws," adding that "what Israel does against the Gaza Strip is clearly a collective punishment and a war crime." He called on Israel to lift the siege and reopen all the closed crossings. (Xinhua)

France Wants to End C.Africa Military Operation this Year: Minister

PARIS - France wants to end its military operation known as Sangaris in the Central African Republic this year, Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Sunday.

"The aim is to bring Operation Sangaris to a halt. I hope this is done during 2016, with small units remaining on Central African territory as was the case beforehand," he told French media.

He said he wanted the force reduced from its current level of 900 soldiers to around 300.

At its peak in early 2014, when the country was suffering major ethnic violence, the force had some 2,500 soldiers - adding to around 10,000 UN peacekeepers who are tasked with overseeing elections and a political transition.

Le Drian's statement followed fresh allegations of child sexual abuse in the Central African Republic involving UN, European and French soldiers.

UN rights chief ZeidRa'ad al-Hussein described the new claims, that surfaced on Friday, as "extremely serious" and demanded they be "thoroughly and urgently investigated".

Le Drian has already ordered an investigation into the new cases, which are said to date to 2014 but have only been discovered in recent weeks as a result of a UN investigation.

French soldiers are already being investigated in their home country over allegations they forced children in CAR to perform sexual acts in exchange for food.

Le Drian also said he hoped the European Union would agree to train a Central African Republic armed force when the bloc's defence ministers hold informal talks on February 3 and 4 in Amsterdam. (AFP)

Security Forces Fight IS Militants in Iraq's Anbar

RAMADI - Iraqi security forces and allied Sunni tribal fighters on Sunday fought heavy clashes with the Islamic State (IS) militants in Iraq's western province of Anbar, a military commander and a security source said.

In the morning, a suicide truck bomb tried to approach the troops' positions in Sajjariyah district

in eastern part of the provincial capital city of Ramadi, some 110 km west of Baghdad, but an Iraqi warplane bombed the truck before reaching its target without causing human casualty among the troops, Major General Ismail al-Mahallawi told reporters in the province. The troops continued their...*(More on P4)...(23)*

AU to Intensify Conflicts Resolution, Terrorism Fight: Official

ADDIS ABABA - The African Union (AU) will engage the international community to intensify conflict resolution and the war against terrorism on the continent, a senior official said Sunday. SmailChergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, said at a media briefing on the sidelines of the AU Heads of State summit in Addis Ababa that the continental body will devote greater re-

sources towards peace initiatives alongside eradication of the terrorism scourge. "We are going to intensify the search for lasting peace in several trouble spots like South Sudan, Burundi and the great lakes region. Long-term stability for the post-conflict states is also our priority this year," said the commissioner. The 15-member AU peace and Security Council...*(More on P4)...(24)*

Pakistan Committed to Root out Terrorism: Pervaiz

LAHORE -Pakistan's Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage Senator PervaizRashid on Sunday said that Pakistan was committed to root out terrorism for a peaceful world. "The operation Zarb-e-Azb was

launched with the resolve to continue it till the elimination of the last bastion of terrorists in the country," he said while talking to the media here at the residence of former Lahore District NazimMian Amir Mehmood. (APP)

Iran, Turkmenistan Set to Enhance Bilateral Ties

ASHGABA - Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia-Pacific Affairs EbrahimRahimpour said on Saturday that bilateral and regional cooperation between Iran and Turkmenistan

will grow up considerably in the post-sanctions era, IRNA reported. Rahimpour made the remarks in a meeting in Ashgabat with Turkmen Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov.

The two officials discussed Tehran-Ashgabat cooperation on political, economic and trade areas as well as Caspian Sea affairs.

The Turkmen foreign minister congratulated the Iranian government on its nuclear achievements, voicing his country's readiness for further cooperation with Tehran on different areas including carrying out joint venture projects. (Agencies)

China Should Consumemore Natural Gas to Control Air Pollution

SANYA - China should increase the proportion of natural gas in an energy mix currently dominated by coal to cut air pollution, an expert said Sunday.

Compared with coal, the burning of natural gas emits 20 percent less of carbon dioxide and 99 percent of smoke dust, which can substantially improve efficiency and reduce waste, ZhengXinli, macro economist and president of China Association of Policy Science, told a seminar held in Sanya of southernmost Hainan Province.

China's coal-burning plants are considered one of the major

causes of smog across northern regions this winter.

Around two thirds of the country's energy comes from coal, while natural gas consumption only accounts for less than six percent.

Coal's dominance curbs the consumption of natural gas, Zheng said. China has measures in place to reverse the situation by promoting clean energy, including natural gas, and limiting the expansion of coal industry.

Coal consumption will be brought down to 62 percent of the energy mix by 2020, according to a government plan. (Xinhua)