

Syria Agrees to Cessation of Hostilities

DAMASCUS - Syria's Foreign Ministry announced on Tuesday the Syrian government consents to observe a cessation of hostilities as agreed upon by the U.S. and Russia.

The ministry said the military campaign against the Islamic State (IS) group and the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front will continue in accordance to the U.S.-Russian agreement.

It however warned that the Syrian army has the right to respond to any violation by the opposi-



tion forces against the people, or the military forces. A day earlier, Russia and the United States agreed to enforce a cessation of hostilities starting from Feb. 27.

Any party engaged in conflicts in Syria will indicate to Russia or the United States their commitment to and acceptance of the terms for the cessation of hostilities by no later than 12:00 Damascus time (1000 GMT) on Feb. 27, according to a joint statement issued by the U.S. State Department. (Xinhua)

Germany, France Urge Ukraine to Continue Reforms for Sake of Stability

KIEV - Germany and France on Tuesday called upon the Ukrainian authorities to fully implement the country's stalled reforms, including those prescribed in the Minsk ceasefire agreement.

"Reforms in Ukraine should not stop. The country needs both political stability and continuation of reforms," visiting German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier

said during a joint press conference in Kiev with his French counterpart Jean-Marc Ayrault.

In particular, Steinmeier stressed the need for Kiev to strengthen the fight against corruption and prepare local elections in areas controlled by independence-seeking insurgents in eastern Ukraine.

Neither Germany nor France sees an alternative to the Minsk deal to peace-



fully settle the Ukrainian crisis, and every single provision of the agreement should be implemented, said Steinmeier. For his part, Ayrault noted some progress in ... (More on P4)...(23)

US Surveillance of Merkel Wider than Thought: Wikileaks

Berlin - US intelligence spied on talks German Chancellor Angela Merkel held with the UN chief and key European leaders, a German newspaper reported Tuesday citing classified documents released by WikiLeaks. The US National Security Agency (NSA), which drew fire for tapping Merkel's mobile phone, also gathered information on a 2008 conversation about climate change she held with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, the Sueddeutsche Zeitung

daily said. In the exchange ahead of the Copenhagen climate summit, Merkel said the world expected the EU to take a leading role on the issue, while Ban praised Merkel's personal engagement on tackling climate change, the report said. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange said in an online statement that "today we showed that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's private meetings over how to save the planet from climate change were bugged ... (More on P4)...(24)

Putin Ally is Threat to Russian National Security, Says Kremlin Critic

MOSCOW - The hard-line leader appointed by President Vladimir Putin to maintain order in the turbulent Chechen region has created his own caliphate that may one day unleash an Islamic State-style jihad against Russia, according to opponents of the Kremlin. Ilya Yashin, a prominent figure in the People's Freedom Party or PARNAS, said the Kremlin-backed leader of largely Muslim Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, had flouted Russian laws and amassed military power while his fighters car-

ried out terrorist attacks against opponents in Russia and abroad. "In the last few years, our own local Islamic state has formed on Russian territory," Yashin wrote in a report titled "A Threat to National Security". He said a separate "Chechen Caliphate" lived by its own traditions and laws while receiving billions of roubles in subsidies from the Russian national budget. "Not one politician or department is able to guarantee today that ... (More on P4)...(25)

Italy's Navy Rescues 700 Migrants from Six Boats, Four Found Dead

ROME - More than 700 migrants were rescued from six leaky boats in the sea between Tunisia and Sicily on Tuesday and four were found dead, the Italian navy said. More than 400 migrants have died in the Mediterranean this year, as people continue to try to cross into Europe despite bad winter weather in the second year of Europe's biggest migration crisis since World War Two. More than 110,000 people, many fleeing poverty and war in Africa and the Middle East, have arrived in Greece and Italy this year,



a sharp increase on 2015, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The navy said one of its ships went to help three

boats, recovering 403 survivors and the four bodies. Another ship rescued 219 people from two vessels and a third coordinated the rescue of 105 migrants

from their sinking boat. The navy did not say what nationality the migrants were nor did it give any other information about their identities. (Reuters)

Migrant Arrivals to Europe this Year Top 110,000, up Sharply from 2015

GENEVA - The number of migrants and refugees arriving in Italy and Greece since the start of the year has risen sharply compared to the same period 2015 and hundreds are stranded at European borders due to rising restrictions, aid agencies said on Tuesday.

At least 102,500 people have landed on Greek islands including Samos, Kos and Lesbos this year, and 7,500 in Italy, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said in a statement.

"We've reached that figure in two months as op-



posed to last year when it was reached by the summer," IOM spokesman Itayi Viriri told a news briefing. In 2015, the 100,000 mark was not reached until the end of June, according to IOM figures. The vast majority of the latest arrivals

are from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, IOM said. In a separate statement, the United Nations refugee agency called on European countries to take a "unified approach" and denounced restrictions limiting access for asylum ... (More on P4)...(26)

DPRK Warns to Use Strategic Weapons Against U.S.-S.Korean Forces

PYONGYANG - The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) said Tuesday that its strategic and tactical weapons are ready to be used for preemptive strikes on South Korea and the United States even if any "small movements" were found among U.S.-S. Korean special forces, the

official KCNA news agency said Tuesday. The first target of the attacks would be Chongwadae, South Korea's presidential office, as well as South Korean authorities, said the KCNA, citing a statement issued by the supreme command of ... (More on P4)...(28)

Iraqi Kurds Rescue Swedish Girl from IS Militants

BAGHDAD - Iraqi Kurdish forces rescued a Swedish teenager from Islamic State (IS) militants near the IS-controlled city of Mosul, said a Kurdish government statement Tuesday. A statement from Kurdistan regional government's security council said that "Kurdistan's anti-terrorism special forces carried out an operation on Feb. 17 at an IS-held area near Mosul" located about 400 km north of

Iraq's capital, Baghdad. The statement identified the teenager as Marlin Stivani-Nivarlain, a 16-year-old girl from the Swedish town of Boras, who was misled by an IS member in Sweden and headed to Syria before being transferred to Mosul. Swedish authorities and the young girl's family had contacted the Iraqi Kurdish government ... (More on P4)...(29)

China Welcomes Russia-U.S. Agreement on Syria Ceasefire Plan

BEIJING - China on Tuesday welcomed a plan for a cessation of hostilities in Syria that the United States and Russia announced on Monday.

The U.S. and Russia said in a joint statement that any party engaged in conflict in Syria will indicate to Russia or the U.S. their commitment to the ceasefire by no later than 12:00 (Damascus time) on Saturday.

"The agreement indicates a willingness to convert consensus into action," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told a daily news briefing.

The cessation of hostilities can be traced back to a Feb. 12 meeting in Munich, Germany, of the International Syrian Support Group (ISSG), which comprises the Arab League, the European Union, the United Nations, and 17 countries including China. Hua said a ceasefire and an end to violence is an ... (More on P4)...(27)

Syrian Monitor Estimates More than 370,000 Dead in War

BEIRUT - The number of dead in Syria's five-year-long war is estimated at more than 370,000, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said on Tuesday, raising its toll for documented deaths to more than 270,000.

The Observatory said it could not document all deaths for reasons including secrecy over casualties on the part of the warring sides, and difficulties in reaching some areas. (Reuters)

S. Sudan Denies Army Involvement in Recent Violence at UN Camp

KHARTOUM - South Sudan government on Tuesday denied media reports on the army's involvement in the recent violence at a UN base sheltering civilians at Malakaltown which left more than 18 people dead, Radio Tamazuj reported.

"What happened was fighting between members of tribes inside the UN protection site and the government has nothing to do with it," South Sudan's Presidential Press Secretary Ateny Wek was quoted as saying.

"The government was like any other institution surprised by what has happened and the kind of guns used during the outbreak of the violence," Ateny said.

Violent clashes erupted last Thursday inside the base in Malakal, the capital city of Upper Nile State in South Sudan, where at least 18 people were killed and 90 others injured while around 26,000 refugees fled the camp according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. The UN ... (More on P4)...(30)

Neighbor News

Iran, Azerbaijan Sign Agreements to Boost Ties

TEHRAN - Iran and Azerbaijan signed 11 memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and agreements in Iran's capital Tehran on Tuesday to boost ties in diverse areas of interests. The ceremony was attended by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his visiting Azeri counterpart Ilham Aliyev, who arrived in Tehran earlier in the day heading a high ranking political and economic delegation, Tasnim news agency reported. Based on the agreements, both countries will cooperate in the management of emergency situations, customs affairs and veterinary and livestock health. Also, they signed agreement frameworks for power sale and exchange, connecting the railroads of Iran and

Azerbaijan, construction of a railroad bridge connecting the Iranian city of Astara to its namesake in Azerbaijan. An agreement for cooperation was also signed between Iran's vice-president for women and family affairs and Azerbaijan's public commission for women, children, and family affairs. The MoUs on health and medical sciences cooperation, labor, employment, and social support, as well as two MoUs on oil and gas projects cooperation were the other documents inked by the officials of two neighbors. After the ceremony, Rouhani and Aliyev acknowledged their similar views on most of the issues pertaining to the global and regional affairs as well as those of bilateral ties. (Xinhua)

FM's of Uzbekistan and Latvia Eye Bilateral Ties in Riga

BISHKEK - The Foreign Ministers and Latvia held political consultations in Riga to discuss bilateral ties on Tuesday. The delegation of Latvia was led by Political Director of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Eduards Stiprais, said the Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan. The sides reviewed the state and prospects of cooperation in political, trade-economic, in-

vestment, cultural-humanitarian and other spheres, analyzed the juridical base of cooperation and exchanged views on international and regional issues. During the talks, the sides considered the schedule for the further events in 2016. The Uzbek delegation in Riga held a meeting with State Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Latvia Andrejs Pildgegovics. (AKIpress)

Pakistan's Parliament Becomes First in World to "go Green" Completely

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's parliament on Tuesday became the first legislature in the world that functions on green energy completely with a solar power production project that was donated and constructed by China.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday attended a switch-on ceremony at the parliament in capital Islamabad, which was also participated by Chairman of Pakistan Senate (the Upper House), Senator Raza Rabbani, Speaker of the National Assembly (the Lower House), Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Sun Weidong, ministers, parliamentarians and other officials. On April 21, 2015, the inauguration ceremony for the project was jointly attended by Sharif and Chinese President Xi Jinping, who paid a two-day official visit to Pakistan from April 20-21 last year. Addressing the ceremony, PM Sharif expressed thanks to the Chinese government for its support in the materialization of the Green Parliament Project and termed it a testimony of the solid friendship between the two countries, and urged the public and private sectors to follow the exemplary project. (Xinhua)

China Reaffirms Self-Defense Legitimacy Regarding Reported Radar Deployment

BEIJING - China on Tuesday reaffirmed its right to self-defense and refuted U.S. accusation as "hyping with ulterior motives" after a U.S. think tank report said China might be installing radar on islands of the South China Sea.

The deployment of defense facilities is the result of China's right to self-defense granted by international law, which is fully legitimate, said a press release from the Ministry of National Defense.

The ministry's remarks came after a report from the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies on Monday saying satellite images showed China might be installing a radar system on the Nansha Islands. The

radar system would significantly bolster China's ability to monitor surface and air traffic across the southern portion of the South China Sea, the report said.

The ministry said the facilities including navigation and meteorological equipment are mainly for civil usage to provide public good for the international community.

The ministry accused the United States, which strengthened military deployment in the South China Sea, sent military vessels or planes to waters in the sea, and gathered allies to conduct joint drills or joint cruise with strong pertinence, of "being the root" of militarization on the South China Sea. (Xinhua)