

Merkel Tells Germans Not to Attend Anti-Islam Rallies

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday warned the country's citizens not to participate in weekly anti-Islam rallies that have attracted growing numbers of supporters in the eastern German city of Dresden. Merkel condemned the organizers of the protests and said they were driven by prejudices and hatred against for-

eigners.

The chancellor used unusually direct words in her New Year's speech on Wednesday for the rallies organized by a group calling itself Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West, or PEGIDA which have been attended by thousands. When the protesters chant "we are the people," they actually mean



to say "you don't belong — because of your religion or your skin color," Merkel said. PEGIDA organizers insist they are protesting only against extremism

and not against immigrants or Islam itself, but the demonstrations have received support from far-right groups, prompting concerns that anti-foreigner sentiment might be rising. Immigration has emerged as a contentious topic lately in Germany, partly due to a sharp rise in asylum applications, particularly from Syrians. (AP)

Russia's Putin Praises Crimea's 'Return Home'

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin said in a televised New Year's address on Wednesday that the "return home" of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula to Moscow's control would remain a very important epoch in Russia's history.

"Love for one's motherland is one of the most powerful and uplifting feelings. It manifested itself in full in the



brotherly support to the people of Crimea and Sevastopol, when they resolutely decided to return home," Putin said. "This event will remain a very important epoch in domestic history forever," he said.

Putin's address was broadcast to Russia's Far East regions many hours before Moscow, when it is typically shown just before midnight. (Reuters)

Tunisia's New President Pledges Reconciliation



TUNIS - Tunisia's new president pledged a rule of reconciliation and consensus as he took his oath Wednesday before the newly elected parliament to complete the country's democratic transition. The inauguration of Beji Caid Essebsi, an 88-year-old political veteran, comes in a year in which Tunisians wrote a new constitution and elected a new parliament and president, ending a transition kicked off by a revolution. Tunisians overthrew longtime dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011 and inspired similar pro-democracy uprisings across North Africa and the Arab world, but only in Tunisia did fierce political rivals find common ground. The victory of Essebsi, who served under Ben Ali and his predeces-

or and whose party includes many members of the previous regime, is widely seen as search for stability after the post-revolutionary turmoil. Essebsi won over 55 percent of the vote Dec. 21 after a campaign marked by bitter exchanges with outgoing president Moncef Marzouki, who feared a return to dictatorship. A human rights activist, Marzouki represented the fervor and possibilities of the revolution but his tenure was marked by unrest, terror attacks and economic problems. "We will work today to replace fear with hope," Essebsi said before parliament as he began his five-year term. "There is no future for Tunisia without consensus and without harmony between all the parties and civil society." (AP)

Syria Kurds Control 70 Percent of Besieged Kobani: Monitor

BEIRUT - Kurdish forces have regained control of around 70 percent of the Syrian town of Kobani near the Turkish border after pushing back Islamic State fighters that have spent months besieging it, a group monitoring the war said on Wednesday. Backed by U.S.-led air strikes, Kurdish forces made significant advances overnight on Tuesday after violent clashes with Islamic State in the south of the town, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Known as Ayn al-Arab in Arabic, the town has become a symbol in the fight between the ultra hardline Islamic State group and its enemies in Iraq and Syria. Hundreds of Islamic State fighters launched a sustained attack on the town more than three months ago. U.S.-led forces have bombed Islamic State positions around the



predominantly Kurdish town almost every day this month. The Observatory, which gathers its information from sources in Syria, said Kurdish fighters now control southern and central parts of the town as well as most of the west in an area stretching up to the border. Rami Abdulrahman, who runs the Observatory, said Kobani was the only clear example of U.S.-led forces cooperating with fighters on the ground in Syria to push back Islamic State. "There are air strikes every day, they have

destroyed many Islamic State bases in Kobani. If there had been no air strikes then I think Kobani would have been controlled by Islamic State by now," he said. He added Kurdish forces were close to controlling all of the town, thanks to the overnight gains in strategic positions. The United States says it wants to train and equip "moderate" rebel groups to fight Islamic State on the ground elsewhere in Syria but rebels say there is much uncertainty surrounding the plans. (Reuters)

7 Bodies Recovered in Airasia Plane Search Operation



SURABAYA - As many as seven corpses have been pulled out from the seas in search and rescue operation of AirAsia plane in Indonesia, rescue officials said here on Wednesday. Head of Search and Rescue Office in East Java province Moch. Hernanto said that two out of the seven bodies were already moved to the nearest evacuation base in Pangkalan Bun of Central Kalimantan province. While the rest remained in an Indonesian rescuer ship at sea, as poor weather hampered the ship to bring the bodies to the evacuation base, he said.

"Five bodies are still in KRI rescuer ship and two others are in Pangkalan Bun now," he told Xinhua by phone in Surabaya. The two bodies are being sent to a police hospital in Surabaya city for identification, he said. Poor weather and huge waves still hampered the search and rescue operation for finding the victims of AirAsia plane that lost contact on Sunday, said Hernanto.

As many as 162 people were on board flight QZ8501 of the budget airline en route from Indonesia's Surabaya city to Singapore. (Xinhua)

Palestinians Plan Next Steps After Failed UN Bid

RAMALLAH, West Bank - Palestinian leaders will meet Wednesday to plan their next steps after the U.N. Security Council rejected a resolution to end Israel's occupation and could set a date for applying to join the International Criminal Court, Palestinian officials said. The U.N. vote Tuesday against the Palestinian bid, which called for the Israeli occupation to end within three years, was a blow to an Arab campaign for international action to bring about an independent Palestinian state. The Palestinians long

have vowed to join the International Criminal Court to press charges against Israel for alleged war crimes, though their membership could expose the Palestinians to similar accusations. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said officials would hold a "very serious meeting" Wednesday and could set a date for applying for membership to the court and other international agencies. "There will be no more waiting, no more hesitation, no more slow-down," Erekat said. "We are going to meet and make decisions." (AP)

Israeli Officials Laud Failed Palestinian UN Bid

JERUSALEM - Israeli officials on Wednesday lauded the UN Security Council's rejection of a Palestinian statehood bid the night before, thanking countries for voting against it and saying unilateral moves only push peace further away.

The Palestinians needed nine votes in order for the Security Council to adopt the resolution. Eight member states voted in favor of the resolution, two voted against it, while five others abstained. The United States and Australia voted against the resolution late Tuesday. France and Luxembourg, among others, voted in favor of the resolution, while Britain, Lithuania, South Korea, Rwanda and Nigeria abstained.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters on Wednesday morning, prior to voting in his party's internal elections, he appreciated the votes against the resolution cast by the United States and Australia, and thanked the African states of Nigeria and Rwanda for abstaining. "I want to express ap-



preciation and gratitude to the United States and Australia, as well as special appreciation to the President of Rwanda, my friend Paul Kagame, and the President of Nigeria, my friend Goodluck Jonathan," Netanyahu told reporters Wednesday. "I spoke with them last night and they personally promised me not to support this decision, which tipped the scales," he added. Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said in a statement on Wednesday that the vote should show the Palestinians that unilateral moves would not resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "The failure of the Palestinian resolution must teach the Palestinians that provocation and attempts to impose unilateral measures on Israel

will not achieve anything -- to the contrary," Lieberman said, according to a statement from the Foreign Ministry. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

Nation's Resolve to Crush Terrorism is Undeterred: Sharif

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said Wednesday that the present government has taken concrete measures to address the challenge of terrorism. Speaking in the Senate, the premier said Operation Zarb-i-Azb has delivered a fatal blow to terrorists. He said their evil designs should be foiled at the earliest.

"In our resolve to rid the country of terrorism, we will march further than any of the world powers," he said, adding that there is no question of lagging behind in the fight against terrorism. "More than fifty thousand Pakistanis have

been killed in the war against terror," said the PM.

The premier said the government had called on all political parties for the formation of a National Action Plan. He said the meeting of parliamentary leaders had unanimously approved a 20-point agenda.

He said sub committees formed to prepare recommendations on 20 points of the National Action Plan have started submitting their reports and that these are being implemented. The premier also said he is personally reviewing the progress on a daily basis. (Monitoring Desk)

Fresh Sanctions Violate US "Goodwill Principle": Iranian Spokeswoman

TEHRAN - Fresh U.S. sanctions against the Islamic republic violate "goodwill principle" of the country in its interaction with Iran, the Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham said here on Wednesday.

"Such a move by the United States is an obvious violation of its goodwill principle and casts doubts on its goals" in interacting with the Islamic republic, Afkham told reporters in her weekly press briefing. The U.S. on Tuesday slapped sanctions on nine persons and entities for their alleged role in helping the Iranian government evade sanctions and supporting its human rights abuses.

The Department of Treasury said the administration, while opposing any new nu-

clear-related sanctions imposed on Iran during the ongoing negotiations over a comprehensive nuclear deal, remains committed to enforcing existing sanctions against the Islamic republic.

"The U.S. sanctions are totally political and propagandistic and they result from the U.S. domestic policies," Afkham said.

"The sanctions will have no impact on the will of the government and its commitments vis-a-vis Iranian nation, and we will continue our efforts to provide our needs," she added.

Iran is already under sanctions by the UN Security Council as well as unilateral embargoed by the U.S. and the EU on the country's energy industry and financial system. (Xinhua)

President Xi Stresses More Reform, Rule of Law in New Year Address

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping underscored the need to continue reform and to advance the rule of law in 2015 in his New Year speech on Wednesday, comparing them to "a bird's two wings".

In an address transmitted live by state broadcasters, the president told domestic and overseas audiences that 2014 was an "unforgettable" year. "In 2014, we pressed ahead with reform, cracked many hard nuts and introduced important reforms close to the interests of our citizens.

"We adapted to the new normal of economic growth; actively promoted economic and social development; and improved the quality of people's life," he said. Xi said cadres at all levels had "given it their best shot", a popular phrase with Chinese Internet users. "Of course, without

the support of the people, we could not have achieved anything. I must give our great people a thumbs-up."

In 2015, China will continue reform from which "there is no turning back" and advance the rule of law to protect the people's rights and interests, guarantee social justice and promote national development. Reform and rule of law must be advanced at the same time to achieve an "all-round well-off society" by 2020 as scheduled, he said. The President expects to see stricter Communist Party of China (CPC) rules and better working practices in the new year, "waving high the sword against corruption" and "fastening the cage of regulations". "In a socialist country under the CPC leadership, once identified, every corrupt official will be dealt with severely," Xi said. (Xinhua)

Fragile State Index Ranks Tajikistan 55th among 178 Nations

DUSHANBE - The tenth annual Fragile States Index, Fragile States Index-2014, ranks Tajikistan 55th among 178 nations.

The Fragile States Index (FSI) focuses on the indicators of risk and is based on thousands of articles and reports. It is useful to observe a country's performance over time. The Fund for Peace and the magazine Foreign Policy since 2005. The list only assesses sovereign states (as determined by membership in the United Nations). Several territories are excluded until their political status and UN membership is ratified in international law. (Asia-Plus)

Death Toll by Tropical Storm Jangmi Rises to 53 in Philippines

MANILA - Tropical storm Jangmi, or locally known as Seniang, has left at least 53 people dead as of 12 noon on Wednesday in central and southern parts of the Philippines, the government disaster relief agency said. Meanwhile, 26 others were injured and eight people were still missing, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDR-

RMC) said in its situation report issued Wednesday noon. A total of 52,082 families or 226,883 people were affected by Jangmi triggered landslide and flashfloods, the report said. Jangmi maintained its strength as it moved closer to Palawan island in western part of the country, Packing peak winds of 65 kilometers per hour with the center gustiness of up to 80 kph. (Xinhua)