

French President in India to Strengthen Strategic Ties

NEW DELHI - French President Francois Hollande began a three-day visit to India on Sunday that could push a multibillion-dollar deal for combat airplanes and closer cooperation on counterterrorism and clean energy.

Hollande landed in the northern city of Chandigarh where Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined him at official engagements and lauded France's decision to invest \$1 billion every year in India in various sectors.

Chandigarh was designed in the 1950s by Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier and is one of three



places France has pledged to help develop as so-called "smart cities" —

with clean water supplies, efficient sewage disposal and public transportation.

Hollande and French business leaders met with Indian counterparts to boost

bilateral trade, which in 2014 was \$8.6 billion. New Delhi is also trying to en-

courage French companies to tap into India's economic boom.

Modi in his speech said India was looking forward to French expertise in defense production, developing railways and waterways and fighting global warming and terrorism.

Hollande is accompanied by the ministers of defense, foreign affairs, economy and culture and dozens of top corporate leaders.

Later in New Delhi, he will hold talks with Indian leaders on Monday and be a guest of honor on Tuesday at India's Republic Day... (More on P4)... (17)

Kerry off to Asia to Address Maritime Disputes, N. Korea Nukes

RIYADH - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is pressing for peaceful resolutions to increasingly tense maritime disputes in Asia and urging China to take a firmer stand on North Korea's nuclear program after its recent bomb test.

Kerry left Saudi Arabia on Sunday and planned stops in Laos, Cambodia and China, shifting his focus as he wraps up an around-the-world diplomatic mission that began in Switzerland with a heavy emphasis on the

Middle East, particularly Iran and efforts to bring an end to Syria's civil war.

His first stop is Laos, the current head of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, whose members are becoming more vocal in complaints about China's growing assertiveness over competing claims in the South China Sea and whose leaders President Barack Obama will host in California next month. Before that... (More on P4)... (18)

Syrian Govt. will Make no Concessions During Talks

BEIRUT - The Syrian government will not make any new concessions in future peace talks at a time when the Syrian army is making progress in different parts of the country, a senior official in President Bashar Assad's ruling Baath party said in remarks published Sunday.

Hilal al-Hilal's comments come ahead of scheduled peace talks in Geneva to work on ending Syria's nearly five-year conflict, which has killed more than 250,000 people. His



remarks were published by state media Sunday. The Geneva talks, which were to begin Monday but will likely be de-

layed, are part of a U.N. plan that envisions an 18-month timetable for a political transition. The Syrian opposition

says Assad should have no role in Syria's future, even during a transitional period. Assad, whose... (More on P4)... (19)

Germany 'Rejecting about 10% of Migrants': Minister

BERLIN - While Germany is still taking in around 2,000 refugees a day, it is now denying entry to about 200 others daily at its borders, the interior minister said Sunday.

The tighter border controls come after the EU's top economy last year took in a record 1.1 million refugees and migrants, straining resources and sparking heated political debate. "People who are fleeing war and persecution are offered

security and protection in Germany," the minister, Thomas de Maiziere, told the newspaper Bild am Sonntag.

"But that also means that those who do not seek this protection from us are refused entry at the border.

"Anyone who doesn't want to apply for political asylum in Germany and wants to illegally enter Germany has no right to be here." So far this year, federal police had re-



jected up to 200 people a day, he said -- compared to just 400 people in all of October when border controls and registration

procedures buckled under a mass influx. Those now sent back include people who want to apply... (More on P4)... (20)

Iran Urges Cooperation Between ASEAN, ECO

TEHRAN - Iran has underlined the necessity of cooperation between the Southeast Asian economic bloc of the ASEAN and the ECO Eurasian inter-governmental organization. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani pointed to the necessity in a meeting with visiting Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs Don Pramudwinai in the capital, Tehran, on Sunday.

"The reinforcement of cooperation between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) brings about regional eco-

nommic development," said the Iranian chief executive. "Developing countries should meet each other's demands in the economic, commercial, scientific, financial, and technological arenas, and benefit from one other's experiences in the cultural, social, and environmental fields," he added. Besides Thailand, the ASEAN, which lays emphasis on economic growth among its members, groups Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam. (PressTV)

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Chinese Navy Fleet Starts Visit to Indonesia

JAKARTA - Chinese navy's Fleet 152 on Sunday arrived in Jakarta, starting a five-day visit which is the final stop of its trip around the globe.

Those present at the welcome ceremony included Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia Xie Feng, Chinese Ambassador to ASEAN Xu Bu and Eko Wahyono, Deputy Commander of the Main Naval Base III of Indonesia Navy.

Some 300 people including representatives of Chinese institutions also attended the ceremony, held at Tanjung Priok Port in Jakarta.

In his speech, Eko said Fleet 152's visit was a great event for Indonesia, as it will promote and strengthen the friendship between the two navies.

Wang Jianxun, commander of the Chinese navy fleet, said the visit will further boost the traditional friendship between the two countries, promoting the cooperation between the two militaries, especially the ties between the two navies.

After the ceremony, Fleet 152, composed of a missile-equipped destroyer Ji Nan, a missile-equipped frigate Yi Yang and an integrated supply ship Qian Daohu, was open to public for visit.

During the fleet's stay in Jakarta, the officers and soldiers will visit a local orphanage. Fleet commander Wang Jianxun will also meet with Indonesia's western fleet commander and Jakarta's governor. (Xinhua)

Obama Urges 'Serious' Action Against Pakistan Extremists

NEW DELHI - US President Barack Obama has urged Pakistan to show it is "serious" about crushing extremist networks operating on its territory, saying the latest mass killing of students underlined the need for more decisive action.

egitimising, disrupting and dismantling terrorist networks," Obama told the news agency in Washington.

"In the region and around the world, there must be zero tolerance for safe havens and terrorists must be brought to justice."

In an interview with the Press Trust of India published on Sunday, Obama praised recent crackdowns by Pakistani security forces but said more should be done to eradicate violent Islamist groups.

"Pakistan has an opportunity to show that it is serious about del-

Twenty-one people were killed last Wednesday in an attack at a university campus in Pakistan's tribal northwest which was claimed by a faction of the Pakistani Taliban, barely a year after a massacre at a school in Peshawar that killed more than 150 people. (AFP)

Sanctions Lifted, Rouhani Heads to Europe to Drum up Business



PARIS/ROME - President Hassan Rouhani brings the case to Europe this week for Iran as a potential investment bonanza, after the lifting of financial sanctions brought his country of 80 million people back into the world of global commerce. Rouhani, a pragmatist elected in 2013 on a platform to reduce Iran's isolation, championed the deal under which Iran curbed its nuclear program in return for the lifting of U.S., EU and United Nations sanctions this month. On his first trip abroad since the accord took effect, he will lead a 120-strong delegation that includes Iranian entrepreneurs as well as the oil and gas minister

and other government officials for five days in Paris and Rome. He will meet Pope Francis and French President Francois Hollande. A week after nearly all sanctions were lifted, French and Italian officials still do not expect major deals to be signed yet during the trip. Rouhani himself has spoken of a "long road" to Iran's economic integration with the world. Nevertheless, Iran already demonstrated its hunger for Western goods at an aviation conference on the eve of the visit, announcing plans on Sunday to buy eight A-380 superjumbo jets from Airbus and eventually buy up to 100 planes from Boeing. (Reuters)

Iranian Deputy FM to Visit Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Pacific Affairs Ebrahim Rahimpour will travel to Dushanbe on Monday to hold talks with Tajikistan's officials on bilateral relations, campaign against terrorism

and the latest developments in the region and the world. The meetings will also include discussions on ways of taking advantage of the post-sanctions era to develop economic cooperation, IRNA reported. (Agencies)

US Says Following Events in Poland 'Very Closely' after EU Probe Launched

WARSAW - The United States is scrutinizing developments in Poland, the U.S. trade czar said on Sunday when asked if Washington was concerned about the European Union's rule of law inquiry into Poland and Standard and Poor's cut to Warsaw's credit rating.

"As a fellow democracy we do follow developments here very closely," U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman told reporters during his visit to Google Campus in Warsaw.

"We certainly do follow it. As a democracy,



we want to make sure that Poland's democracy continues to address the issues." The European Commission, the European Union's executive branch, has launched an unprecedented inquiry

into whether Warsaw's new nationalist-minded government has breached the bloc's democracy standards in taking more control of the judiciary and public media. Stand... (More on P4)... (22)

Norway Border Post Closed to Migrants for 'Security': Russia

MOSCOW - Russia on Sunday confirmed it had shut for "security reasons" an Arctic border post with Norway to migrants being controversially returned from the Nordic country. Norway on Saturday said it was temporarily halting its return of migrants -- mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq -- who had entered from Russia following a request from the authorities there. Some 5,500 migrants crossed from Russia into Norway last year, on the last leg of an arduous journey through the Arctic to Europe. But the right-wing government in Oslo has decided that migrants who had been living legally in Russia, or had entered Russia legally, should be immediately returned there, on the basis that Russia is a safe country. Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told AFP that Moscow had informed Norway on Friday that it was halting the return of migrants through the Borisoglebsk-Storskog crossing in line with a 2011 bilateral agreement. Exceptions will, however, be made for any migrants who can be shown to meet the criteria of an earlier agreement that obliges Moscow to readmit them if they do not fulfil Norwegian immigration laws and have valid Russian visas or residence permits. "The steps taken by Russia were dictated by security reasons and based on bilateral agreements with Norway," Zakharova said. Norwegian police returned 13 migrants by bus to Russia on Tuesday and two similar operations were scheduled for Thursday and Friday but were then cancelled, for what officials said were logistical reasons. (AFP)

Iraqi Christian Refugees Arrive in Prague

ORESTIADA - The latest developments in Europe's immigration crisis. The first of a total of 153 Iraqi Christians who have been offered asylum in the Czech Republic have arrived in Prague. The government approved the group's request for help because they were threatened by the aggression of Islamic State extremists. They originally used to live near Mosul in Iraq. Ten of them landed at Prague's international airport on Sunday and were to be taken to a hotel near the central city of Jihlava, where they will spend a couple of months.

The government will share the expenses for their move to the Czech Republic with NGOs, and religious institutions will help them settle in the country. They will be allowed to stay after the current conflict is over. The Czechs oppose an EU mandatory plan to redistribute 120,000 asylum-seekers among the bloc's 28 nations but say they... (More on P4)... (21)

Vietnam PM Nominated to Panel in Key Move to Seek Leadership

HANOI - Supporters of Vietnam's prime minister have nominated him for a key Communist Party panel, a necessary step to contesting the post of the party chief, in a last-minute maneuver to secure the top job in the country. Delegates at a Communist Party congress nominated

Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to the Central Committee in what amounts to open defiance of the party chief, General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, who for years has been trying to sideline Dung. His nomination was announced by Vu... (More on P4)... (23)

Syrian Army Captures Key Rebel Stronghold in Latakia Province

DAMASCUS - The Syrian forces on Sunday captured the strategic town of Rabiah, a main rebel stronghold in the countryside of the coastal province of Latakia, state news agency SANA reported. Rabiah is a key stronghold of the jihadist groups in the northern countryside of Latakia. The recapture of the town is the second hard blow for the rebels, just a week after the army forces captured the town of Salma.

Both Salma and Rabiah were considered the two main rebel bastions north of Latakia, close to the Turkey area. The fresh progress in Rabiah, located in the Turkmen Mountain where Turkey-backed rebels are operating, reflects the resolve of the Syrian troops to hit hard at rebel bastions in northern Syria. A military source told Xinhua on Sunday that the military units... (More on P4)... (24)