

US House Rejects Obama on Trade Authority

WASHINGTON - The U.S. House of Representatives side-tracked a high-profile White House-backed trade bill, a blow to a pending Asian trade deal and a humiliating defeat for President Barack Obama inflicted by members of his own party. The 302-126 vote Friday leaves the trade legislation in perilous limbo and came a few hours after Obama journeyed to Congress to deliver a last-minute personal plea to fellow Democrats. The measure would allow him to negotiate global trade deals, including one with 11 Asian nations near completion, that



Congress could approve or reject but not change. The debate and vote are certain to reverberate in next year's presidential election. Most Republican contenders favor the trade bill. Among Democrats, Hillary Clinton is uncommitted, despite calls by rivals to take a position. Business groups generally favor the measure. But strong opposition by organized labor carries at least an implicit threat to the re-election of any Democrat who votes in the bill's favor. "Slow down the fast track to get a better deal for the... (More on P4)...(21)

Putin Meets Erdogan for Closed-Door Talks

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday met Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan for talks expected to touch on energy issues and the Syria crisis. The two leaders met a day after attending the opening ceremony of the inaugural European Games, hosted by Azerbaijan and tainted by controversy over the ex-Soviet country's rights record. Speaking ahead of their closed-door talks, Er-



dogan, a close ally of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, remarked to Putin on the absence of EU leaders from the Games in Baku. "It's called the European

Games but there aren't actually any leaders of EU member states here," Erdogan was quoted as saying by Turkish news agencies. "Turkey, a candidate for EU entry, represented the whole European Union," a smiling Putin said in televised comments before the pair held what Turkish media said was an hour and a half meeting. Ahead of what he said would be "very substan... (More on P4)...(22)

U.S. Military Advisers Arrive in Iraq, 57 Killed in Car Bombs

BAGHDAD - Up to 80 U.S. military advisers arrived in Iraq's western province of Anbar to train Iraqi forces and Sunni tribal fighters on Saturday, while suicide car bombs and an airstrike against the Islamic State (IS) militants killed a total of 57 people across the country, a provincial official and security sources said. Eid Ammash, a member of Anbar's provincial council, told reporters that the first batch of 80 U.S. advisers to train the Iraqi forces and tribal fighters have arrived in Habbaniyah airbase. "Those advisers will train the security forces and tribal fighters and provide logistical support and military plans to them during the battles of the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah to liberate them from the control of the terrorist organization Daash (IS group)," Am-

mash said. Ammash's comments came three days after the White House announced that U.S. President Barack Obama authorized the deployment of up to 450 more American troops to Iraq to train and assist the Iraqi forces and Sunni tribal fighters battling the IS extremist group. In Iraq's northern central province of Salahudin, three suicide bombers rammed their explosive-laden cars into checkpoints and military base in the village of Hijaj in south of the oil refinery town of Baiji, a provincial security source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity. The blasts killed a total of nine policemen and members of allied Shiite militias, known as Hashd Shaabi, or Popular Mobilization, and wounded at least 20 others, the source said. (Xinhua)

UN Chief Warns Worsening Rights Situation in CA

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan - United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-moon on Saturday warned of a worsening rights situation across Central Asia (CA), as he ended a visit to energy-rich Central Asia in ex-Soviet Turkmenistan. Ban said he "heard concerns about the deterioration of some aspects of human rights -- a shrinking of democratic space", during his first trip to the region in five years. Speaking to students at an international university in the capital Ashgabat as he re-

ceived an honorary degree, he said crackdowns on rights could be triggered by "perceived security threats - in particular, rising concerns about terrorism and violent extremism". Ban warned however that governments may use such threats "as a pretext to clamp down on civil society, minorities and human rights defenders." He said that the failure to respect human rights, promote participation in politics and create equal opportunities "creates gaps... The wider the gaps, the greater the openings for vio-

lent extremists." "I see this phenomenon on the rise in the region and it troubles me greatly," he said, adding that "democracy in Central Asia can work." On Friday, Ban had been in Uzbekistan, where he urged President Islam Karimov to end the practice of forced labour on its cotton plantations and the mistreatment of prisoners in his country. Previously in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, Ban also met with government... (More on P4)...(23)

Syrian Kurds Push Deeper into IS Stronghold

BEIRUT - The Syrian Kurdish YPG militia said it began an advance towards an Islamic State-held town at the Turkish border on Saturday, thrusting deeper into the jihadists' stronghold of Raqqa province in a campaign backed by U.S.-led air strikes. Redur Xelil, the YPG spokesman, told Reuters the YPG and smaller Syrian Arab rebel groups fighting alongside it had begun the move towards Tel Abyad after encircling the Islamic State-held town of Suluk 20 km (12 miles) to the southeast. The advance raises the prospect of a battle at the Turkish border between the well-organized YPG militia and Islamic State. Tel



Abyad is important to Islamic State as the nearest border town to its de facto capital of Raqqa city. Fighting near the border has already forced more than 13,000 people to cross into Turkey from Syria. Some 1,500 more are waiting to cross. Turkish soldiers sprayed water and fired into the air when some of them

approached the border fence on Saturday, a security source said. The YPG has made a determined push into Raqqa province from neighboring Hasaka where, with the help of the U.S.-led alliance, it has driven Islamic State from wide areas of territory since early May. (Reuters)

Australia Stoops to 'New Low' if Boat Payment Confirmed: Indonesia

JAKARTA - Australia would have stooped to a "new low" if reports that its navy paid people-smugglers bound for Australia thousands of dollars to turn back their boat are true, an Indonesian government official said on Saturday. Australia has vowed to stop asylum-seekers reaching its shores, turning boats back to In-

donesia when it can and sending asylum-seekers to camps in impoverished Papua New Guinea and Nauru for long-term detention. A boat captain and two crew members arrested this week on suspicion of human trafficking told Indonesian police Australian authorities had paid each of them A\$5,000 (\$3,860) to turn back their

vessel with 65 migrants on board. The passengers, including children and a pregnant woman, were from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and Immigration Minister Peter Dutton have both denied reports of payment to the smugglers but Prime Minister Tony Ab... (More on P4)...(24)

Saudi-Led Air Strikes Hit Yemen Rebels

SANAA - Warplanes from the Saudi-led coalition struck Saturday rebel positions in Yemen as warring parties in the impoverished nation prepared for UN-sponsored Swiss talks, witnesses said. Air raids targeted Shiite Huthi rebels in the central province of Dhamar, as well as air defence positions of allied troops loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, witnesses said. Rebel positions in their northern Saada stronghold were also hit, they added.

A wave of intensive overnight air strikes targeted arms depots around the capital and residences of people close to Saleh, including his brother's home, south of Sanaa, witnesses said. (AFP)

New York Rally Launches Clinton's Bid for White House

NEW YORK - Ardent supporters streamed into a manicured New York park Saturday to watch Hillary Clinton lay out her bid to become America's first woman president and her vision for the future. Thousands poured onto Roosevelt Island, a tiny sliver of land in the East River between Manhattan and Queens, where black clouds threatening rain did little to dampen the enthusiasm of devoted fans. Clinton, the 67-year-old former secretary of state, New York senator and first lady is expected to be joined by husband Bill and daughter Chelsea in the family's first joint appearance of the campaign. In her hotly anticipated

speech, she is expected to draw heavily on her mother's disadvantaged background to convince voters that she understands their problems and promises to fight for the middle classes. Her team sees the rally, on home turf in a state where Clinton was senator for eight years, as a chance to turn the tables on flagging opinion polls and position her as the champion of America's squeezed middle class. "Everyone deserves a chance to live up to his or her God-given potential. That's the dream we share. That's the fight we must wage," said the 67-year-old former secretary of state in a video released Friday. (AFP)

Neighbour News

Iran Brings Home Body of Top General Killed in Syria

DUBAI - Iran is bringing home the body of a top-ranking military officer killed in April in southern Syria, Iranian news agencies reported, at least the second senior Iranian to die there this year while supporting Damascus in the war. Hadi Kajbaf, a major general in the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), was killed near the rebel-held town of Busr al-Harir, about 100 km (60 miles) south of Damascus, the IRGC-linked Tasnim agency reported late on Friday. Three other Iranians were killed alongside Kajbaf including a mid-ranking Shi'ite Muslim cleric, the semi-official Fars news agency re-

ported. Iranian military and financial support have been crucial to helping President Bashar al-Assad survive the war, now in its fifth year. The conflict is a focal point for Shi'ite Islamist Iran's power struggle with Sunni Saudi Arabia, which supports the insurgents battling to topple Assad. Kajbaf held the highest rank used in Iran's armed forces, making him more senior than an IRGC brigadier general who was killed in January by an Israeli missile strike in Syrian territory near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, along with a number of fighters from the Lebanese Shi'ite Hezbollah group. (Reuters)

Pak Forces "Kill 2,763 Terrorists" in N. Waziristan Offensive: Army

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistan army said Saturday that the security forces had "killed 2,763 terrorists" in a major offensive launched one year ago. During the operation launched on June 15, 2014, a total of "347 officers and soldiers embraced martyrdom," military spokesman Major General Asim Bajwa said. The offensive code-named "Zarb-e-Azb" was started after a rare peace dialogue with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan collapsed due to an increase in terrorist attacks. Giving details of the operation, the spokesman said as many as 837 hideouts of the militants had been destroyed and 253 tons of explosives recovered during the one year of the operation. "Significant achievements have been made in FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) especially in North Waziristan

and Khyber agencies. Terrorists' communication, infrastructure and sanctuaries have largely been cleared," he said. The spokesman said 18,087 weapons including machine-guns, light machine guns, sniper rifles, rocket launchers, and AK-47s were seized from terrorist hideouts in North Waziristan alone. As many as 9,000 intelligence based operations were carried out, apprehending thousands of terrorists and their abettors in other areas of Pakistan. A total of 218 hard core terrorists were killed in the cities, Bajwa said. The army said earlier that the security forces had cleared over 90 percent of the area, including the main towns of Miranshah and Mir Ali since the launch of the operation and the militants have now confined to only a few pockets near the Afghan border. (Xinhua)

Construction Progress of Checkpoint on Tajik-Kyrgyz Border Considered

BISHKEK - cross-border Implementation progress of a project for improvement of border services in Central Asia was discussed at a meeting of the Customs Service of Tajikistan with representatives of the Asian Development Bank in Dushanbe. The sides thus discussed the progress of the project worth 11.2 million U.S. dollars to strengthen the borders, which has been begun in 2014 and is being implemented in three phases. It is expected to be completed

in 2018. First stage envisages construction of a Guliston border checkpoint in Isfara district on the border with Kyrgyzstan, as well as the purchase of equipment. The next phase involves institutional and technical support, establishment of a national one-stop shop system in Tajikistan and purchase of the required machinery. The last stage of the project is the management of the project steering group. (AKIpress)

China, S. Korea Eye All-round Practical Cooperation

SEOUL - Visiting Chinese top legislator Zhang Dejiang met here Thursday with South Korean President Park Geun-hye, with both sides pledging to further expand their all-round practical cooperation. China-South Korea relations are currently at an all-time high as the leaders of the two countries have made a successful exchange of visits and reached important consensus, Zhang, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), said during the meeting.

The two countries have enhanced political trust, increased trade and economic cooperation and deepened people-to-people exchanges, he said, adding that the two-way trade reached nearly 300 billion U.S. dollars in 2014 and the number of personnel exchanges between the two countries exceeded 10 million. The China-South Korea free trade agreement (FTA) officially signed on June 1 will also bring broader prospects for bilateral cooperation, Zhang said. (Xinhua)

U.S., Allies Conduct 15 Air Strikes in Syria And Iraq: Military

WASHINGTON - U.S. and coalition forces conducted 12 air strikes targeting Islamic State in Iraq on Friday and three strikes against the militant group in Syria, mostly focusing on urban areas, the U.S. military said on Saturday. "The coalition continues to strike Daesh (Islamic State) terrorists in com-

plex and congested urban terrain in Iraq and Syria," Brigadier General Thomas Weidley, chief of staff for the Combined Joint Task Force, said in a statement. All the Syrian strikes took place near the town of Kobani near the Turkish border, hitting tactical units and destroying a fighting position, the

military said. The strikes conducted in Iraq were spread out near Baghdad, Al Huwayjah, Baiji, Makhmur, Mosul, Sinjar and Tal Afar, where they hit tactical units, firing positions and a staging area. They also destroyed vehicles, fuel tankers, weapons and a structure, the military added. (Reuters)