

Germany Must Set Exact Climate Goals Soon after Election: Merkel

BERLIN - Germany's next government must set exact targets for cutting CO2 emissions soon after September's national election to provide clarity for local governments and companies to plan, Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Tuesday.

Merkel said the goal of reducing emissions by 80-95 percent by 2050 from 1990 levels was a good one and had to be properly discussed. Those pledges are part of a global climate treaty agreed in Paris in 2015.

"But there is a big difference between 80 percent and 95 percent," she said in a speech to the VKU association for local infrastructure companies, adding it was a



big and important question to answer.

"It must be decided early in the next legislative period. A lot depends on it ... We must get clarity," she said.

Germany, which is switching to renewable energy sources as it phases out nuclear power and also gradually reduces its reliance on fossil fuels, has already set a firm goal to lower emissions by 40 percent by 2020 from 1990 levels.

Merkel, once dubbed the 'climate chancellor' for pushing G8 nations to address climate change, also expressed frustration that the extension of the power grid in Germany was trailing the expansion of renewable energy. (Reuters)

Syria a 'Torture-Chamber', U.N. Says in Call to Free Detainees

GENEVA - The top U.N. human rights official called on Tuesday for tens of thousands of detainees to be released from Syria's prisons and for torturers to be brought to court as part of a lasting peace.

Former Syrian detainees also testified before the U.N. Human Rights Council about their suffering and concern for men, women and children still in custody of the government or of extremist groups including al-Nusra and Islamic State.

"Today in a sense the en-

tire country has become a torture-chamber; a place of savage horror and absolute injustice," said U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini. "Ensuring accountability, establishing the truth and providing reparations must happen if the Syrian people are ever to find reconciliation and peace," he told the Geneva forum. Zeid urged the warring sides to halt torture and executions and to free detainees or at least provide basic information to their families. (Reuters)

Assad Says Priority in Syria for Fighting Terrorism, Talks about Politics "Luxury"

DAMASCUS - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said Monday that the priority in Syria is for fighting terrorism, adding that talks about politics at this time seems like luxury.

Speaking to European media outlets, whose content was carried by state news agency SANA, the president said that getting rid of the extremists is a priority and reaching reconciliation in other areas is another a priority.

"It's luxury talking about politics while you could get killed anytime by the terrorist attacks," Assad said.

His remarks came just a couple of days after two bombings rocked the capital Damascus, killing 74 people.

The bombings were carried out in swift succession near a cemetery in the Shaghour area in the old part of the capital Damascus.

The first explosion was carried out through an explosive device that went off near a gathering of busses carrying Shiite Iraqi visitors coming to the Bab al-Saghir cemetery to visit Shiite shrines, as part of... (More on P4)...(27)

UN Agency Reports Syrian Children Enduring "Unprecedented Suffering" in 2016

UNITED NATIONS - The suffering of children in war-torn Syria "hit rock bottom" in 2016 with the highest number of grave violations against them since verification began in 2014, the UN children's Fund (UNICEF) said on Monday.

UNICEF urged all parties to the conflict, those who have influence over them, and anyone who cared about children, to find an immediate political solution to end the conflict.

At least 652 children were



killed last year - an increase of 20 percent compared to 2015, 255 among them were killed in or near a school, according

Austrian Chancellor Seeks to Ban Turkish Ministers from Campaigning

VIENNA - The Austrian chancellor has said he would seek a ban to stop Turkish ministers from campaigning in Austria in support of a referendum for constitutional amendment in Turkey next month.

Speaking to the Austrian broadcaster ORF on Monday, Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern said he would try to prohibit Turkish ministers from campaigning in Austria to gather support from Turks in Austria for the April 16 referendum.

The referendum could bring drastic changes to the country's political system, including a shift to an executive presidential system from the current parliamentary system. (Xinhua)

Turkey, Russia Pledge to Boost Relations, but Syrian Crisis Remains Hurdle

ANKARA - Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan had a one-day visit on Friday in Moscow where he met his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. Both leaders announced that they were ready to strengthen ties in several fields and to overcome rifts but they still remain very divided on the most acute crisis in the middle east, Syria, according to local experts.

During a press conference after the meeting, Vladimir Putin said "we had a very trustful, very effective dia-

logue," while in turn, the Turkish leader expressed faith in continuing Turkish-Russian cooperation.

"As far as security matters in our region are concerned, I believe that it takes joint efforts to end bloodshed in Syria," said Erdogan.

The road to this point was long as the two leaders clashed repeatedly over the Syrian conflict and their different views on the fate of Moscow's ally, Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. First, there was the downing of a Russian jet by



Turkey in November 2015 in June 2016, however, amid Moscow's intervention into Syria, a neighbour of NATO member Turkey. Putin imposed travel and trade sanctions on Turkey in response. A failed coup changed things dramatically. The Russian leader expressed solidarity towards the Turkish regime. Following an apology by... (More on P4)...(26)

May Free to Trigger Brexit after Bill Clears both Houses of Parliament

LONDON - British Prime Minister Theresa May is finally clear to trigger Britain's exit from the European Union after peers in the unelected House of Lords backed down from challenging the elected House of Commons.

Two amendments in the House of Lords that could have delayed the progress of May's bill were finally rejected by the peers after MPs in the elected Commons rejected the amendments.

A formal royal assent from Queen Elizabeth II is all that stands in the way of May

informing Brussels as early as Tuesday of Britain's intention of leaving the European Union after 43 years.

The bill gives May the legal authority to trigger article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, the laid down procedure within the EU for a member state wishing to leave. Once article 50 is triggered, it kick-starts a two year process for negotiating a new relationship between both sides.

In the House of Commons, MPs rejected the two amendments put forward by the House of Lords, one



to guarantee the rights of 3.2 million European citizens to remain in Britain (by 335 votes to 287) and the second to insist on a meaningful parliamentary vote on a final Brexit deal (lost by 331 votes against 286). A committee of MPs was then elected to inform the Lords of their decision, calling on them to accept their... (More on P4)...(28)

Common European Regulations Needed in Turkish Campaigning Dispute: Austrian MEP

VIENNA - Europe should come to a common agreement on how to regulate the electoral campaigning of Turkish officials in EU members, an Austrian Member of the European Parliament (MEP) said on Monday, according to Kurier newspaper report.

Amid the ongoing debate on the issue both in Austria and wider Europe, Othmar Karas of the centre-right People's Party said a "patchwork carpet of different regulations" weakens the European community. At present it is claimed by some that no common solution is possible, and each member involved is therefore acting by their own national regulations.

Karas argued the EU must make every effort to define its fundamental rights so that they can be applied... (More on P4)...(30)

Murky Money Woes Mount for Fillon in French Election Race

PARIS - Fresh doubts surfaced on Tuesday over the financial propriety of French presidential candidate Francois Fillon with the opening of an inquiry by parliament's ethics chief into how he came to accept a gift of two bespoke suits worth 13,000 euros (\$13,835) last month.

The latest twist in a tale that has seriously hurt Fillon's chances of winning power in May emerged as he prepared to meet judicial investigators probing the circumstances in which he paid hundreds of thousands of euros of public money to his wife, Penelope, and their children.

Up to now, the scandal has focused on those payments but the gift of suits, which he has confirmed, as well as the elements concerning money transfers between Fillon family members, confirmed by lawyers for the family, add a new dimension.

Le Parisien newspaper reported that investigators were now also looking at payments to his daughter Marie and son Charles for assistance work, and money which they in turn sent back to an account he jointly holds with his wife.

The 63-year-old former prime minister has been summoned to meet examining magistrates on Wednesday for a meeting at which he says he is likely to be officially placed under investigation on suspicion of financial misconduct.

Fillon however says he has done nothing illegal and has vowed to stay in the race for the presidency despite what he calls an attempted "political assassination." (Reuters)

U.S. Pursues Constructive, Results-Oriented Relationship with China: Thornton

WASHINGTON - The United States is pursuing a constructive and results-oriented relationship with China, a senior U.S. State Department official said on Monday.

"We want to be able to pursue a constructive discussion with China that enables us to get at problem areas and make progress on issues," said U.S. Acting Assistant Secretary of State Susan Thornton at a briefing.

The upcoming visit to China by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will focus on "pursuing a results-oriented rela-

tionship with China," Thornton added.

"He (Tillerson) will be discussing with Chinese interlocutors all of the various challenges and also areas of cooperation that we are looking to continue to pursue and continue to discuss and make progress on," said Thornton.

According to a previous statement by the State Department, Tillerson will arrive in Beijing on March 18 after visiting Tokyo and Seoul.

"We're going to look for areas that we can expand our cooperation (between the United States)... (More on P4)...(31)

Neighbor News

China, U.S. Maintain Contact on Exchanges between Presidents: FM Spokesperson

BEIJING - China and the United States are maintaining close contact on exchanges between their presidents and at other levels, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Tuesday.

Spokesperson Hua Chunying made the remarks at a daily press briefing in response to media reports that U.S. President Donald Trump will meet Chinese President Xi Jinping in the near future.

"Both China and the United States attach great

importance to exchanges at the high-level and various other levels," said Hua at the press briefing. She said the two sides are keeping in close contact on exchanges between their presidents and at other levels.

"Should we have any further information, we will announce it immediately," she said. As for a visit to China by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Hua said the Foreign Ministry will release information soon. (Xinhua)

Iran May Eliminate Capital Punishment for Drug Smugglers

TEHRAN - Iran's parliament has taken steps to urge the country's judicial officials to eliminate capital punishment for minor drug traffickers, reported Tehran Times on Monday.

The Parliamentary Judicial Commission has presented a motion which, if passed, will overturn the death penalty for nearly 5,000 drug traffickers, a commission member, Jalil Rahimi, was quoted as saying.

Over 100 legislators helped draw up the preliminary legislation to counteract the increased execution reports in the country, the report said. Allegedly, under Iran's anti-drug regulations, those engaged in traffick-

ing or the sale of various drugs in amounts over five kg are immediately sentenced to death.

In Oct. 2016, Iran's Human Rights Council Secretary Mohammad Javad Larijani, in what appeared as an about face from a previous tougher stance, hinted that Tehran may reconsider capital punishment for drug traffickers by restricting it to drug lords.

According to Larijani, drug-related offenses account for 93 percent of the executions in Iran. Iran is located at the crossroads of international drug traffickers from Afghanistan, the world's top opium manufacturer, into Europe. (Xinhua)

Pakistan will not Transfer Weapons of Mass Destruction to States or Non-State Actors: Aziz

ISLAMABAD - Adviser to the Pakistani Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz on Tuesday reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment not to transfer weapons of mass destruction to states or non-state actors.

Delivering a keynote address on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1540 in Islamabad, Aziz said as a responsible nuclear state, Pakistan will continue to partner with international community to prevent non-state actors from acquiring these

weapons.

The adviser underscored the need for striking a balance between advancing the goals of non-proliferation and facilitating access of developing countries to strategic and dual-use goods, materials and technologies for peaceful purposes under appropriate safeguards. In this regard, Aziz expressed Pakistan's willingness to share its expertise and provision of technical assistance to developing countries in the region and beyond. (Monitoring Desk)

Merkel Vows to Strengthen Ties with Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - German Chancellor Angela Merkel in her congratulatory message to President of Uzbekistan over 25th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between the two countries expressed her country's readiness to continue the trustful cooperation with Uzbekistan, reports the press service of the Uzbek Foreign Ministry.

Merkel said the government of Germany as a partner is ready to support Uzbekistan in implementation of the strategy of the development of the country in 2017-2021 years that is aimed at strengthening the Parliament's power, economic liberalization and reforming the legal system. The German Chancellor also expressed confident in development of friendly relations in the field of foreign policy. (AKI)

'Neutral' Turkmenistan Breaks Away from Russia

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan ended 2016 as China's biggest natural gas supplier, however, the former Soviet republic simply substituted its dependency on Moscow with Beijing.

During the seven years following the completion of the transcontinental Central Asia-China pipeline, China imported 5.4 trillion cubic feet of natural gas from Turkmenistan. Such was the figure voiced by the China National Petroleum Corp's

(CNPC) General Manager in charge of the Turkmenistan branch, Deng Minmin, at the Oil and Gas Turkmenistan 2016 conference in Ashgabat in December last year.

However, when looking at the bigger picture, the reality is that Turkmenistan did not lower its dependency on foreign buyers, specifically Russia, who bought most of Turkmenistan's gas. Instead, Turkmenistan simply replaced Russia's role with China. (Agencies)