

Two Russian Bases, S-400 Air Defense Systems to Remain Functioning in Syria

MOSCOW - Two Russian military facilities will keep functioning in Syria after Moscow announced a pull back of the bulk of its armed forces in the war-torn country, the Kremlin said Tuesday.

Some Russian personnel would remain deployed at the Hmeimim air base in Latakia and the naval base in the port city of Tartus in Syria to monitor the cease-fire between the



Syrian government and the opposition, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. Kremlin Administration head Sergei Ivanov also said Russia would maintain all necessary equipment to protect

its facilities in the region, including the sophisticated S-400 missile defense systems that were deployed at the Hmeimim air base after Turkey shot down a Russian Su-24 fighter jet in late Nov. last year. The S-400 Triumf is by far Russia's most advanced surface-to-air missile system, capable of hitting an airborne target at a distance of up to 400 km with

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Russian Military Withdrawal is Likely Prelude to Syrian Crisis Settlement

BEIJING - Russia's sudden announcement of troops withdrawal from Syria sends a positive signal that a political settlement of the five-year-old crisis is in the offing, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Monday that the decision was discussed and coordinated with his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad, adding that the fundamental tasks set for the Russian armed forces in Syria were resolved. Analysts believe the Kremlin move, after the implementation of a cease-fire and the provi-

sion of humanitarian aid in Syria, is favorable for the ongoing peace talks in Geneva, Switzerland. Russian air force entered Syria on Sept. 30, 2015, to help the Syrian government, its long-time ally in the Middle East, repel a major offensive launched by the opposition and extremist groups. Despite controversies and accidents, including the Turkish downing of a Russian warplane, the timely involvement has been proved effective as it al

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Turkish President Vows to Fight Against Terror

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday said Turkey will strongly fight against terrorism. Speaking during a joint press conference with visiting Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev at the Presidential Palace in the Turkish capital Ankara, Erdogan again strongly condemned Sunday's Ankara bomb attack, calling it an attack on every Turkish citizen. "Those who want to settle accounts by spilling blood

of innocent people will never bring Turkey to its knees," said the Turkish president.

Erdogan described the Ankara blast as a "cowardly terrorist attack against all of Turkey and all the 79 million Turkish people." Erdogan said that while the attack targeted the country's integrity as well as unity and solidarity of people, it "does not diminish our will to fight against terror." Erdogan and Aliyev both emphasized the need to stand against ter-



rorism after the fifth meeting of Turkey-Azerbaijan High Level Strategic Cooperation Council in Ankara. The Azerbaijani president ...*(More on P6)...*(20)

Abbas Says Ready to Cooperate with France on Holding Int'l Peace Conference

RAMALLAH - Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Tuesday announced the Palestinians are ready to cooperate with France on holding an international conference for achieving peace in the Middle East. Abbas' reiteration was made in a meeting held at his office in Ramallah with France's special peace envoy Pierre Vimont, who is visiting Israel and the Palestinian territories. According to the Palestinian official state-run news agency Wafa, Abbas explained to Vimont the Palestinians appreciation to France's backing role in the

peace process and the ideas that France presented for a peace solution. "The Palestinian leadership fully backs these important ideas," Abbas was quoted as saying, referring the French ideas of pushing forward the stalled peace process and find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to Wafa report, the French diplomat previewed to Abbas in details his country's ideas, mainly the point related to holding an international conference for peace in the Middle East, and the contacts with

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Kim Jong UN Says will Soon Test Nuclear Warhead

SEOUL - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country would soon test a nuclear warhead and ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads, the North's KCNA news agency reported, in what would be a direct violation of U.N. resolutions which have the backing of the North's chief ally, China. Kim made the comments as he supervised a successful simulated test of atmospheric reentry of a ballistic missile that measured the



thermodynamic structural stability of newly developed heat-resisting materials", KCNA said. "Declaring that a nuclear warhead explosion test and a test-fire of several

kinds of ballistic rockets able to carry nuclear warheads will be conducted in a short time to further enhance the reliance of nuclear attack

capability, he (Kim) instructed the relevant section to make prearrangement for them to the last detail," the agency said. (Reuters)

Undersea Pipeline to Take Iran Gas to India: Report

TEHRAN - The Indian government is reportedly determined to seal a deal with Tehran on laying a direct undersea gas pipeline from Iran to India. Indian media reports said Tuesday that the planned multi-billion project will circumvent Pakistan. "The deal for the Iran-India undersea gas pipeline will be done. Matters have become easier as the US-imposed economic sanctions on Iran have been lifted," the Indian daily, The Tribune, quoted an unnamed government official as saying. The 1,400 kilometer pipeline will link Iran's southeastern port of Chabahar to India's western Gujarat State, bypassing the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of Pakistan. New Delhi will also reportedly fund a rail link between Chabahar and Zahedan, the provincial capital of Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan. The railway will join the Iranian port with

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At Least 30 Civilians Killed in Saudi-Led Airstrike in Yemen

SANAA - At least 30 civilians were killed on Tuesday in an airstrike carried out by Saudi-led coalition aircraft on a crowded popular market north of Yemen's capital Sanaa, medics and a local source told Xinhua. "More than 30 civilians were killed and other 90 wounded when the Saudi-led fighter jets launched two airstrikes on Al-Khamees market in Mastaba district in Hajja province," a medic told Xinhua. "The airstrikes took place during the rush hour afternoon while people were crowding in the public market," he said, adding that hospitals in Mastaba and Abs districts don't



have enough medicine to treat the injured. Hajja, about 123 km north-west of the rebel-held Sanaa, is another stronghold of the rebel Shiite Houthis rebels, who also control northern provin-

ces, while southern provinces have been retaken over the past few months by the government forces loyal to the internationally recognized President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. (Xinhua)

Migrant Sea Arrivals in Europe Top 150,000 this Year: IOM

GENEVA - Since the beginning of the year, 152,697 refugees and migrants have reached European soil, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported Tuesday. Most of these arrivals (143,205) have been recorded on Greek islands, with the remaining 9,492 reaching Italy. While crossing the Mediterranean Sea, 456 people have lost their lives this year. By far the deadliest passage, the eastern Mediterranean route separating Turkey and Greece has claimed the lives of 354 people. A further 102 individuals have died while crossing the central and western Mediterranean passages. (Xinhua)

U.S. Relaxes Cuba Trade, Travel Rules Ahead of Obama Visit

WASHINGTON - The United States on Tuesday announced it would further loosen travel restrictions on Cuba and ease limits on the use of U.S. dollars in trade transactions there just days ahead of President Barack Obama's historic visit to the former Cold War enemy. The new rules reinforce Obama's move away from the long-standing U.S. economic embargo against Cuba by using his executive powers to sidestep U.S. lawmakers who so far have refused to lift sanctions toward the Communist-ruled country. The changes allow Cubans to open U.S. bank accounts and authorize those living in the United States to earn a salary or compensation, the U.S. government said. They also allow individuals to visit the island for "people-to-people educational travel," instead of requiring them to go in group tours. The easing comes as Obama prepares to travel on March ...*(More on P6)...*(25)

Greece Calls on Stranded Refugees to Avoid Perilous River Crossing in Border Area

ATHENS - The Greek government on Tuesday called on thousands of refugees stranded near its border with Macedonia to avoid any perilous crossing over rivers and streams. The move came a day after some 1,000 refugees, including children, risked their lives illegally entering Greece's neighboring country. Yorgos Kyritsis, spokesman of the newly established Refugees Crisis Management Mechanism, urged the refugees and migrants

to have faith in Greece and not to believe "messages of impostors that could put their life in danger." Greek police have been investigating individuals and groups who distributed pamphlets written in Arabic during the weekend, encouraging 12,000 people staying at the makeshift tent city of Idomeni in Greece to attempt the risky crossing and continue their journey towards central and northern ...*(More on P6)...*(23)

Austria to Tighten Checks at Italian Border Crossing Soon: Minister

VIENNA - Austria will have to introduce tougher controls at the Brenner border crossing with Italy, a vital north-south transport link, Defense Minister Hans Peter Doskozil said on Tuesday, anticipating a surge in arrivals. Even before Austria coordinated a tightening of border restrictions with nearby Balkan countries that

have left thousands of migrants stuck in Greece, it said it was preparing more stringent controls at crossings including Brenner. These would include extra inspections of the thousands of trucks going through the crossing each day. Austria's finance minister has promised an extra 100 customs officers. "I assume that in

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Neighbor News

Iran Stands by Turkey in Anti-Terror Fight: VP

TEHRAN - Iranian First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri has strongly condemned the recent "heinous and inhuman" bomb attack in Turkey, saying Tehran will stand by Ankara in the fight against terrorism. "Iran and Turkey are both victims of terrorism and the two countries understand the necessity of fighting this ominous and inhuman phenomenon," Jahangiri said in a telephone conversation with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on Tuesday.

A deadly car bomb explosion in the centrally-located Kizilay district of Ankara on Sunday claimed the lives of at least 37

people and injured over a hundred more.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility; however, the Turkish premier announced on Monday that there are strong indications that the blast was carried out by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Turkey deems as a terrorist organization.

Jahangiri further said cooperation between Tehran and Ankara in the region and the world would be instrumental in uprooting terrorism. He said terrorist attacks across the world show the expansion of groups that are threatening global peace and security. (PressTV)

Pakistan Air Force Needs to Replace 190 Planes by 2020

WASHINGTON - Pakistan Air Force needs to retire 190 planes from its current fleet by 2020, senior officials told Dawn while commenting on a report that the country was seeking another batch of 10 F-16s from the United States.

Jane's Defence Weekly reported this week that Pakistan would seek to purchase these additional planes from the United States if the current deal for eight of these fighter jets is successfully concluded.

Last week, the US Senate rejected a move to shoot down the proposed sale, which is now in its final

stages. On Saturday, the 30-day mandatory period, that allows Congress to block an arms sale to a foreign country, also passed. Although some technical details are still being worked out, the deal for these eight aircraft is almost final.

Jane's Defence Weekly reported that Pakistan is now interested in 10 additional 16C/D Block 52 multi-role fighters, which are equipped with precision strike capability. Pakistan says it needs this capability to reduce collateral damage in the war against terrorists who often hide among civilians. (Agencies)

Turkmenistan's President to Visit Pakistan

ISLAMABAD - President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov will visit Pakistan on for talks on bilateral relations that will mainly focus on trade and energy, officials said on Tuesday.

Berdimuhamedov visited Pakistan in November 2011. During this visit, the

president of Turkmenistan will meet Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain, Pakistan's foreign ministry said.

A business forum, comprising Turkmen and Pakistani businessmen, will also be organized during the visit. Several Memorandums of Understanding will be signed. (Xinhua)

China Hopes for More Cooperation with U.S. in Chasing Fugitives

BEIJING - China hopes for more cooperation with the United States in chasing Chinese fugitives and their illegal assets, senior security official Meng Jianzhu said on Tuesday. Meng, China's top official in charge of political and legal affairs, made the remarks when meeting with visiting U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation Director James Comey. Meng noted that Chinese President

Xi Jinping conducted a successful visit to the United States in September last year, during which the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to continuing the endeavor to build a new model of major-country relationship based on the principle of mutual respect and win-win cooperation. "China and U.S. law enforcement departments should implement the important

...*(More on P6)...*(26)

WB Group Helps Improve Tajikistan's Credit Reporting Infrastructure

DUSHANBE - The World Bank (WB) Group, with support of the Government of Switzerland, is launching the third phase of an advisory project to further strengthen Tajikistan's financial infrastructure and unlock affordable financing for smaller businesses, helping them

grow and create jobs. The IFC Office in Dushanbe says that over the next three years, the Azerbaijan-Central Asia Financial Markets Infrastructure Project III will continue to help develop an efficient credit reporting system. This system will enable lenders to

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