

Russian, German FMs Call for Anti-Terror Cooperation

MOSCOW - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his German counterpart, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, on Wednesday called for the strengthening of international anti-terror cooperation.

The two ministers agreed that issues related to the fight against terrorism would be studied more closely in the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Steinmeier said Tuesday's attacks in Brussels once again showed the necessity



of OSCE coordination on the issue. At least 34 people were killed in explosions

Tuesday at the Brussels international airport and a metro station close to Eu-

ropean Union institutions. The Islamic State militant group claimed the attacks.

"It is in our common interests to counter global terrorism," Steinmeier

said, suggesting that the exchange of information should be intensified.

For his part, Lavrov agreed on the important role of the OSCE, but stressed the need for European countries to break geopolitical and ideological barriers in face of terrorism.

The two sides also talked about bilateral relations, key international problems like Syria and Ukraine.

A meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Steinmeier is scheduled later in the day. ...*(More on P4)...(16)*

US to Press Russia on Syria's Assad

MOSCOW/GENEVA - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is expected to press President Vladimir Putin on how Russia sees a future political transition in Syria and the fate of President Bashar al-Assad.

With a fragile truce in place in Syria and warring sides attending peace talks in Geneva, Kerry wants to "get down to brass tacks" on the question of Assad's future, a State Department official said. While the United States want Assad to step

aside, Russia says only the Syrian people can decide his fate at the ballot box and has bristled at any talk of regime change. Kerry is holding talks with Putin at the Kremlin on Thursday, in a meeting arranged after the Russian leader's surprise announcement on March 14 that he was partially withdrawing his forces from Syria. "The Secretary would like to now really hear where President Putin is in his thinking ... on a political ...*(More on P4)...(17)*

French PM Calls for Stronger Controls on EU's External Borders

BRUSSELS - French Prime Minister Manuel Valls has called for "strengthening external border controls" in the European Union (EU) during a visit to Brussels on Wednesday. Valls and his Belgian counterpart Charles Michel paid tribute to the victims of the Brussels attacks in vigil at Maelbeek metro station, where one of the bombs exploded on Tuesday.

"It is urgent that we strengthen the controls of the European Union's ex-



ternal borders. France has been proposing this for months," Valls said in an interview. He added that there was also an urgent need to adopt plans for a

Europe-wide Passenger Name Record (PNR), Belgian broadcaster RIBF reported. "We must urgently make sure that nobody can use fake identity

documents any more. We know that the Islamic State has stolen a large number of passports in Syria," he added. ...*(More on P4)...(18)*

Kremlin Says Syria Peace Talk Participants Must Show Patience

MOSCOW - Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday that peace talks on the Syria conflict taking place in Geneva were always set to be long and difficult, and that it was too early to talk about patience running out on any side of the negotiations. Peskov was replying to a Reuters question about whether Russia would encourage the Syrian government delegation in Geneva to engage in substantive negotiations about a political transition in Syria.

Western diplomats and op-

position delegates say Damascus has so far limited talks to procedural issues. "No one ever expected easy negotiations, and it would hardly be right to already be feeling a lack of patience. Patience, a lot of it, will still be required on all sides. That is obvious," Peskov said on a conference call with reporters. "Russia has consistently followed an approach of providing as much assistance as possible for the talks among Syrians to advance successfully. And without ...*(More on P4)...(19)*

Dutch Consulate in Istanbul Closed over "Possible Terror Threat"

ISTANBUL - The Netherlands on Wednesday closed its consulate general in Istanbul over "possible terror threat," said source from Dutch consulate.

And the Dutch consulate advised its citizen to avoid the area which is close to the location of a suicide bombing days ago that killed four foreigners.

"As a preventive measure the Dutch Consulate General in Istanbul is temporarily closed," tweeted Robert Schuddeboom, the Dutch consul general.

Earlier in the day the



Dutch government released a written statement saying the consulate was temporarily closed as a precaution in light of possible terrorist threat. A man later identified as an Islamic State mili-

tant blew himself up on Saturday in Istanbul's Istiklal Street, where the Dutch consulate is located, killing four tourists and wounding dozens of others. At least 34 people were killed and more

than 170 others injured in Brussels on Tuesday when two explosions struck the Belgian capital's main international airport and another hit a metro station close to the European Union institutions. (Xinhua)

UAE Ratifies WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement

ABU DHABI - The United Arab Emirates (UAE), a major oil supplier, on Wednesday became the first Arab country to ratify the Trade Facilitation Agreement, state news agency WAM reported. The Trade Facilitation Agreement is "one of the most important agreements" within the World Trade Organization (WTO) multilateral trading system, UAE Minister of Economy Sultan bin Saeed Al-Mansouri said. Al-Mansouri added that the agreement is in line with the UAE policy of facilitating cross-border trading through simplification of procedures at borders and administrative requirements, providing information and electronic procedures. "This helps save time, reduce costs and improve customs and logistics standards," the minister said. The Trade Facilitation Agreement contains provisions for expediting the movement, ...*(More on P4)...(20)*

Syrian Gov't Forces Reach Outskirts of IS-Held Palmyra City

DAMASCUS - Syrian government forces have become close to the outskirts of the millennia-old city of Palmyra in central Syria, which is held by the Islamic State (IS) group, a monitor group reported on Wednesday.

The Syrian forces, backed by Russian airstrikes, have approached the outskirts of Palmyra, following days of intense battles for recapture of the city in eastern countryside of the central province of Homs, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The UK-based watchdog group said intense battles are raging at the southern and southwestern outskirts of Palmyra between



the Syrian forces and the IS militants.

It added that the Syrian army is heavily shelling the IS positions inside Palmyra amid heavy airstrikes against the terror group.

The progress came just a day after the Syrian forces captured all hills and highlands surrounding Palmyra, according to pan-Arab

al-Mayadeen TV. The progress secured the Syrian army progress on the western entrance of Palmyra, which supported by joint Russian-Syrian airstrikes. Since capturing it last May, the terror-labeled IS group destroyed the city's notorious military prison and several Islamic tombs. (Xinhua)

Russia Accuses Ukraine of Ignoring Peace Deal

MOSCOW - Opening a day of intense international diplomacy, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Wednesday accused Ukrainian's government of dragging its feet on implementing last year's cease-fire agreement.

Fighting in Ukraine's industrial heartland, which has close ties to Russia, has killed more than 9,100 people and left large swaths of land under rebel control. Germany, France and Russia mediated talks between representatives of the Ukrainian government and Russian-backed separatists at talks in Minsk, Belarus, which resulted in a broad cease-fire agreement. That has largely held, but none of the political elements, including calling a local election, has been implemented. Lavrov, who was hosting German ...*(More on P4)...(21)*

New Ukrainian Government must be Formed Next Week: Poroshenko

KHARKIV - Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko Wednesday urged parliament to approve a new government next week that could end a raging political crisis and unlock crucial Western aid. The economically-depressed and conflict-riven country has been roiled by weeks of uncertainty over its future and a sharp drop in the popularity of both Poroshenko and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. Poroshenko attempted to resolve the political strains by asking Yatsenyuk to step down on February 16 due to his seeming failure to tackle government graft. Yatsenyuk refused and that same day survived ...*(More on P4)...(24)*

Security Guards Replace Tourists as Europe's Capital Mourns

BRUSSELS - The rain has washed away the defiant chalk slogans from the square in front of Brussels' stock exchange, the barriers are gone from many subway stations and trams are back running in the streets.

Europe's capital returned to work Wednesday but it isn't business as usual. A platoon of soldiers is now standing guard outside the city's central train station. There's only a trickle of tourists flowing through Brussels' gothic Grand

Place and gardeners at Brussels' 18th-century Warandepark are checking each trash can extra carefully. Defiance and fear mingled in residents' minds, as the city came to terms with the violence that they had long expected but had hoped wouldn't come. "You can't protect yourself against terrorism. Are you going to stay at home today? Tomorrow? The day after tomorrow?" asked Dirk Verstraeten, 53, who ...*(More on P4)...(22)*

Sisi Reshuffles Cabinet, Swears in 10 New Ministers

CAIRO - Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi reshuffled the cabinet on Wednesday, swearing in 10 new ministers, as the country strives to revive its economy, official Ahram online reported.

The partial change comes four days before Prime Minister Sherif Ismail is scheduled to present the government's program to the parliament. Judge

Hossam Abdel Reheem was appointed justice minister, replacing sacked minister Ahmed El-Zend, according to Ahram. Dalia Khorshed was named as investment minister replacing Ashraf Salman and Amr El Garhy as finance minister succeeding Hany Kadyr Dimian. Ashraf El-Sharqawy was appointed as ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

Neighbor News

Iran Announces Major Jump in Oil Exports

TEHRAN - Iran says its oil exports have already reached around 2.2 million barrels per day (bpd) in what could highlight a major progress in the country's post-sanctions oil industry performance. Iran's First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri said the figure marked a rise of 900,000 bpd in the country's oil production that had been materialized within only two months after the lifting of the sanctions.

In mid-January, a series of economic sanctions that had been imposed on Iran for multiple years were removed after a deal between the country and the P5+1 - the five permanent members of the Security

Council plus Germany - was implemented.

The sanctions barred foreign investments in the Iranian oil industry and also limited a low ceiling of 1 million bpd on the country's oil exports. "Until this past [Persian calendar month of] Bahman (21 January-February 2015), Iran was able to sell 1.3 million bpd," Jahangiri told reporters. "But within two months after the removal of the sanctions, we have been able to export 2.2 million bpd of crude oil."

Last Saturday, figures provided by Bloomberg showed that Iran's oil production had climbed to 3.37 million bpd in January, the highest level since February 2014. (PressTV)

Iranian President to Visit Pakistan on March 25-26: FM

ISLAMABAD - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani will visit Pakistan on March 25-26 for talks on bilateral and regional matters, an official announcement said on Wednesday.

This will be Rouhani's first visit to Pakistan as the president of Iran. The Iranian president will be accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising ministers, senior officials and businessmen, the Foreign Ministry said.

During his stay in Islamabad, the president of Iran will hold meetings with the president and the prime minister of Pakistan.

"The Leadership will have an exchange of views on strengthening bilateral relations,

particularly after lifting of the sanctions on Iran that has opened new avenues for enhancing economic interaction," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

Cooperation on regional and international issues of mutual concern will also be discussed, the Foreign Ministry said.

"Relations between the two countries are rooted in a long history of mutual trust, based on cultural, linguistic and religious bonds. The visit of Dr. Rouhani will further deepen the existing fraternal ties between the two countries."

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Iran in May 2014 and January 2016. (Xinhua)

Uzbekistan to Attend Central Asia+Japan Dialogue Meeting in Tokyo

BISHKEK - The delegation of the Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan will take part in the 11th Senior Officials Meeting of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue this week in Tokyo, reports the Ministry.

The delegation will hold bilateral political consultations and a number of meetings and negotiations during its trip to Tokyo.

The "Central Asia plus

Japan" Dialogue was established in August 2004 as a framework for dialogue and cooperation between Japan and the countries of Central Asia. The first meeting of the Foreign Ministers took place on August 28, 2004 in Tashkent, the second meeting was held on June 5, 2006 in Tokyo and the third one was held on August 7, 2010 in Tashkent. (AKIpress)

President Xi Stresses Training Capable Commanders for Joint Warfare

BEIJING - President Xi Jinping on Wednesday stressed the importance of training commanding officers capable of leading joint warfare.

In an inspection tour of the National Defence University of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Xi noted that this goal should be the university's priority. He urged the university to improve educational theories and training models for a more competent and professional faculty.

Xi, also chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), promised that the CMC will also harness the efforts

of military headquarters and armed forces for the training of commanding officers. Xi urged the military academy to seek breakthroughs in warfare strategies to create a "military theory that is up-to-date, pioneering and unique."

They were encouraged to closely follow global military changes, research information technology's role in military operations and address major problems in the country's combat readiness. They are also expected to better carry out their duty as a think tank for the Party leadership and the CMC. (Xinhua)