

Russia Urges Joint Action with US Against Syria's Al-Qaida

MOSCOW - The Russian defense minister proposed on Friday that Russia and the U.S.-led coalition launch joint action against al-Qaida's branch in Syria, known as the Nusra Front. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said that Moscow had proposed to Washington that the coalition call on all factions eager to abide by a cease-fire in Syria to leave the areas where the al-Qaida branch is active by May 25.

Moscow suggested that starting from that date, Russia and the U.S.-led



coalition conduct joint strikes against the Nusra Front and any other

groups refusing to honor the truce, Shoigu said. However, the Russian

minister warned that Moscow reserves the right to unilaterally strike mili-

itants refusing to respect the cease-fire, as well as weapons and militants

crossing into Syria from Turkey, starting from May 25.

Russia long has accused Turkey of serving as a conduit for weapons and supplies flowing to the Islamic State and the Nusra Front — claims which Ankara has denied.

The U.S.-Russia-brokered cease-fire, which went into effect in late February, has helped reduce violence in Syria, but it has been steadily eroding. The Nusra Front and its much more powerful rival, the ...*(More on P4)...(25)*

IOM Assist Some 7,000 Victims of Trafficking in 2015

GENEVA - The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported Friday that nearly 7,000 victims of human trafficking were helped by the agency in 115 countries last year.

Up 9 percent from 2014, last year's assistance caseload shows that 74 percent were handled for labor exploitation, with construction, domestic work and fishing amongst the top sectors in which exploited individuals worked.

Figures reveal that 20 percent were trafficked for sexual exploitation, while a further 5 percent of all assisted individuals were trafficked for both labor and sexual exploitation.

"In addition to the fact that there were more victims assisted by IOM who have been trafficked for the purpose of labor exploitation than for the purpose of sexual exploitation, there were more male (55 percent) than female victims," said IOM's Migrant Assistance Divi-



sion head Anh Nguyen. Additional statistics show that on average those assisted by IOM in 2015 had spent three years in the

trafficking process, a time which could range from zero to 25 years. Around 13 percent of the ...*(More on P4)...(26)*

Lithuania Must Implement Deep Tax Reforms: EU Commissioner

VILNIUS - Lithuania must implement deep tax system reforms in order to reduce the tax burden on low-income earners by shifting the burden to other sources, European Commissioner Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis said on Friday.

Andriukaitis, European Commissioner responsible for health and food safety, paid a visit to Vilnius in order to present the newest Commission's recommendations on the national reform and stability programme.

"It should be a long-term review of tax system based on a broad national agreement involving all social partners," Andriukaitis was quoted as saying by ELTA news agency while speaking during joint press conference with Algirdas Butkevicius, Lithuania's prime minister.

According to Andriukaitis, Lithuania's head of government "understands that it is an issue on a longer-term political agenda in the country". ...*(More on P4)...(27)*

President Obama to Visit Pagoda in Vietnam's HCM City

HO CHI MINH CITY - U.S. President Barack Obama will visit a century-old pagoda in the downtown of Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City on May 24, local media reported Friday.

After flying from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City, Obama will call at Ngoc Hoang (Jade Emperor) Pagoda in District 1 on Tuesday afternoon, online newspaper VnExpress quoted the U.S. General Consulate in the city as saying.

According to the U.S. side's request, the pagoda,

built in 1892, dedicated to the Jade Emperor and Buddha, will not receive Buddhists and visitors at the time Obama visits.

Covering an area of over 2,000 square meters, the pagoda has over 300 statues and many century-old trees, pigeons and turtles. Many local people go to the pagoda to pray for children or good chances in love.

Daniel Kritenbrink, U.S. National Security Council's senior director for Asian affairs, recently ...*(More on P4)...(28)*

Turkish Parliament Approves Bill Lifting Lawmakers' Immunity

ANKARA - The Turkish parliament on Friday approved a controversial constitutional amendment which would lift immunity of dozens of lawmakers against being prosecuted. In the second round of voting, the first clause of the bill was approved with 373 votes out of the 550-seat parliament. As many as 531 deputies attended at the session.

In the first round of voting on May 18, the first clause received 350 votes while the second received 357 votes. For a constitutional



change in parliament, 367 votes are required, although 330 are enough to take a constitutional change to a referendum. As passed, this bill would

suspend article No. 83 of the constitution, which guarantees parliamentary immunity. As soon as the temporary constitutional amendment, proposed by

the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), goes into force, all 600 waiting files of summaries of proceedings will be ...*(More on P4)...(29)*

Japan to Allow 150 Syrians to Study At Universities, Pledges 7.1 Bln Dollars to Help Refugee Crisis

TOKYO - Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Friday that as many as 150 Syrian nationals will be granted access to Japan to study at universities here over the next five years, in a marginal reversal of an almost blanket ban on physically supporting Syrian refugees mandated by the Japanese leader last year.

Abe said that the Japanese government would also provide 7.1 billion U.S. dollars in ODA to help countries in the Middle East that are reeling under the refugee crisis,



with some of the funds earmarked specifically for boosting healthcare facilities and personnel, as well as medicine.

As Japan is gearing up to host the Group of Seven summit next week in

central Japan, at which the current refugee crisis will be one of the central themes, the Japanese leader said he will urge member countries to push forward with the United ...*(More on P4)...(30)*

Greece Sends 51 Migrants Back to Turkey

BERLIN - Greece has sent 51 people, including five children, back to Turkey from Greek islands as part of the European Union-Turkey agreement to stem the flow of migrants across the Aegean Sea toward Europe's prosperous heartland.

Police said 23 people were sent back to the Turkish port of Dikili on Friday and another 28 to the Turkish port of Gulluk. The returnees were from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Nepal and Morocco. The new returns bring to 441 the number of people sent back to Turkey under the controversial EU deal that stipulates those arriving on Greek islands after March 20 face ...*(More on P4)...(31)*

Syrian Army Takes Control of Strategic Areas in Eastern Ghouta

DAMASCUS - The Syrian army backed by the Lebanese Hezbollah group have taken control of the entire southern part, which groups over 10 towns, in the strategic region of Eastern Ghouta in east of Damascus, a monitor group reported Friday. The huge advance, which has been achieved over the past 24 hours, was supported by airstrikes, and artillery shelling, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The army is now in control of the key towns of Zabdin and Deir al-Asafir, as well as other towns, namely Nuleh, Bzyineh, Harasta al-Qantara, Hosh Homs, Hosh Dweir, Bala, Rkabiye and al-Bayad in the southern sector of Eastern Ghouta region east of Damascus, according to the ...*(More on P4)...(32)*

Egyptair Plane Wreckage Found in Mediterranean

CAIRO - Egypt found wreckage including seats and luggage Friday from the EgyptAir plane that crashed in the Mediterranean, as investigators tried to unravel the mystery of why it swerved and plummeted into the sea.

Search teams spotted personal belongings of passengers and parts of the Airbus A320 about 290 kilometres (180 miles) north of Egypt's coastal city of Alexandria, the military said. The country's aviation minister has said a "terrorist attack" was a more likely cause than technical failure for the plane's disappearance on a flight from Paris to Cairo with 66 people on board. But French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said there was "absolutely no indication" of why the plane came down. "We're looking at all possibilities, but none is being favoured over the others," he said. The tragedy raised fears of a repeat of the bombing of a Russian passenger jet by the Islamic State jihadist group over Egypt last October that killed all 224 people ...*(More on P4)...(35)*

India to Sign Iran Port Deal During Modi Trip

TEHRAN - India said on Friday that it will sign a contract with Iran to build and run a strategic port in the country's southeast during the next visit to Tehran by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The deal envisages the development of two terminals and cargo berths at Chabahar, on the Gulf of Oman. Gopal Baglay, a foreign ministry official in charge of Iranian ties, has told reporters that India would make an initial investment of more than \$200 million in the port, of which India's Exim Bank ...*(More on P4)...(33)*

German Companies Threaten to Scale Back Investment if Britain Leaves EU

BERLIN - A majority of German companies are prepared to reduce their investment in Britain if the country decides to leave the European Union at a referendum next month, a study showed on Friday. The United Kingdom is scheduled to hold a referendum on June 23 on its membership of the EU. A total of 61 percent of German companies running business in the UK said they would scale back their investment if British

voters were to say "No" in the ballot, according to a survey released by the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Four in five German companies expected a "Brexit" to have negative impacts on their business. Nearly one third of companies said it would affect their investment at a "very negative" level, meaning that more than 10 percent of the investment would be drawn back. "A Brexit

would be highly detrimental to all involved," said Clemens Fuest, head of German Ifo economic institute, "Germany would be the EU's biggest loser since Britain is a key market for its exports. As for Britain, it would damage itself with a Brexit." Currently, some 2,500 German companies have subsidiaries in Britain, which is the fifth biggest trading partner for Germany. ...*(More on P4)...(34)*

Neighbor News

Dushanbe Hosts Tajikistan-Turkey Business Forum

DUSHANBE - A conference of representatives of the business communities of Tajikistan and Turkey took place in Dushanbe in Thursday. According to Tajikistan's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), presentation of investment potential of Tajikistan and Turkey was given during the event. The CCI press center says the forum participants included Tajik entrepreneurs and Turkish exporters working in the spheres of construction, agriculture, food industry, information

technologies, individual and central fating systems, etc.

Forum's main objective was reportedly in promoting establishment and expansion of bilateral trade and economic cooperation, launch of joint ventures, and creation of new jobs, the forum organizers noted. Speaking at the forum, Ms. Manzoura Rustamova, Deputy Chairperson of Tajikistan's CCI, in particular, invited Turkish entrepreneurs to cooperate more actively with their Tajik counterparts. (Asia-Plus)

Iran Dismantles More 20 Terrorist Groups in One Year

TEHRAN - Iran dismantled more than 20 terrorist groups that had planned to detonate bombs and cause insecurity across the country during the last Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), Iran's intelligence minister says.

Addressing worshippers at the weekly Friday Prayers in Tehran, Mahmoud Alavi added that a number of would-be bombers were killed or arrested during several sting operations by Iranian intelligence forces. He said that a large amount of weapons and ammunition was confiscated from the terrorists. The minister reaffirmed that Iran enjoys high

security while insecurity has been prevailing in most countries in the Middle East and across the world.

"Despite plots by intelligence services of hostile countries and terrorist groups to [cause] security challenge [in Iran], the Islamic Republic experienced a year full of security and peace," Alavi said.

The Iranian intelligence minister emphasized that the country witnessed no instance of insecurity.

He said Iran's intelligence forces also arrested several teams supporting terrorist groups and uncovered centers where terrorist operatives were manufacturing explosives. (PressTV)

US House Decides on Conditional Military Aid for Pakistan

WASHINGTON - The United States (US) House of Representatives on Thursday voted 277 to 147 in favour of a defence policy bill seeking to increase restrictions on military aid for Pakistan unless certain conditions are met.

The House, expressing frustration over what they term Islamabad's failure to crack down on the Haqqani network, passed the \$602 billion National Defense Authorization Act 2017, or NDAA late on Wednesday.

The NDAA will block \$450 million in aid to Islamabad unless it does more to fight the

militant group, which lawmakers see as a major threat to US forces in Afghanistan.

The bill requires the Pentagon to certify that Pakistan is conducting military operations to disrupt the Haqqani network, not letting the network use North Waziristan as a safe haven and actively coordinating with Afghanistan's government to fight the network along their border.

As they finalised the 2017 version of the annual bill, House members added three amendments related to Pakistan. All passed by unanimous voice vote. (Agencies)

Chinese Vice Premier Calls on G20 Countries to Expand Tourism Market

BEIJING - Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang Friday called on G20 countries to expand the global tourism market and help drive economic recovery. In his address to the 7th G20 Tourism Ministers Meeting held in Beijing, Wang said the meeting is an important platform for G20 members to enhance tourism cooperation. Wang spoke highly of the achievements G20 members have made in areas including visa facilitation, tourism investment, and international tourism statistics since the first meeting was held in 2010. He said expanded tourism cooperation among

G20 members has made remarkable contributions to employment, self-employment and poverty reduction worldwide.

The theme of the meeting, "Sustainable Tourism - An Effective Tool for Inclusive Development," reflects the high expectations all sides have for tourism and inclusive development, he said.

The vice premier called on all G20 countries to ease visa restrictions, simplify entry and departure procedures, improve policies on customs clearance, duty-free shopping, tax refunds and currency ...*(More on P4)...(36)*