

Germany Pledges 6 Bn Euros for Refugees, France to Take in 24,000

BERLIN - Germany pledged billions in new funds for refugees Monday, as Chancellor Angela Merkel said the tens of thousands of people flowing into her country in Europe's biggest migrant crisis in decades would lead to profound change. As European leaders stepped up efforts to tackle the historic crisis, France also said it would take 24,000 more asylum-seekers under a European plan to relocate 120,000 refugees from hard-hit frontline countries. Meanwhile, the poor and desperate kept coming, both on the land corridor through Turkey



and the Balkans and on overcrowded boats in the Mediterranean on jour-

neys that have claimed thousands of lives this year. Underscoring the

danger brought home so graphically by last week's picture of three-year-old

Aylan lying drowned in the surf, a Greek passenger ferry on Monday sent

its lifeboats to rescue 61 migrants whose boat was at risk of sinking off Lesbos island. And migrants rescued by Italian coastguards on Sunday said five of their group were still missing. Merkel, at a joint news conference with her vice-chancellor, said: "What we are experiencing now is something that will ... change our country in coming years." "We want the change to be positive, and we believe we can accomplish that." Germany is expecting at least 10,000 more refugees to arrive on Monday, an official in the south of the country said. (AFP)

NATO Chief to make First Visit to Ukraine Amid Strains with Moscow

BRUSSELS - NATO's secretary general will make his first visit to Ukraine this month, Ukraine's foreign minister said on Monday, dismissing the idea that this would provoke Moscow, which is backing the pro-Russian rebellion in eastern Ukraine. After a meeting with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, Pavlo Klimkin said the visit, which he called symbolic as his ex-Soviet nation seeks to integrate with the West, would upgrade NATO's representation in Ukraine and broaden technical cooperation. Klimkin rejected the idea that the visit would worsen relations with a Russian

government that wants to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence and has made clear its adamant opposition to Ukraine's ambition of joining NATO. Against a backdrop of "Russian aggression" in eastern Ukraine, he said the visit could hardly be classed as "further provocation". Both Ukraine and NATO say they have overwhelming evidence that Russia has provided men and weaponry to the rebels in eastern Ukraine, but Moscow denies providing anything other than political support. Stoltenberg is expected to inaugurate NATO-Ukrainian civil protection exercises at a



time when the deadline is nearing for fulfillment of a peace agreement that has so far failed to stop low-level fighting in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine dropped its bid to join the 28-nation

U.S.-led Atlantic alliance in 2010 to please Moscow, but has now again set its sights on joining, seeing NATO membership as the only way to protect its territory. (Reuters)

Turkish Jets Strike PKK Targets after Deadly Militant Attack

DIYARBAKIR - Turkish warplanes bombed Kurdish insurgent targets overnight after the militants staged what appeared to be their deadliest attack since the collapse of a two-year-old ceasefire in July and claimed to have killed 31 government soldiers. The military confirmed soldiers had been killed but gave no number. Its operations continued on Monday, with helicopters dropping special forces in a mountainous area near the Iraqi frontier, while drones sought out targets for the warplanes. The clashes, weeks before polls the ruling AK Party hopes will restore its ma-

majority, threaten to sink a peace process President Tayyip Erdogan launched in 2012 in an attempt to end an insurgency that has killed more than 40,000 people. Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) rebels said they had killed 31 members of the armed forces in an attack on a convoy and clashes on Sunday in the mountainous Daghlica area of Hakkari province, near the Iraqi border. A security source told Reuters 16 soldiers had been killed, which would be the highest military death toll in a single attack for years. (Reuters)

Neighbour News

China Launches Training for UN Military Observers

BEIJING - The Ministry of National Defense (MOD) on Monday started an international training course for military observers of the United Nations (UN). More than 40 military personnel, including Chinese training instructors and foreign attaches to China from 22 countries such as Australia, Denmark and the United States, gathered in Beijing to attend the three-week training course. The sessions will be oriented around UN peacekeeping missions and will be in English.

Courses will include a range of topics including case analysis and simulation drills. Combat exercises will cover 14 themes such as conflict mediation, field rescue, and kidnap and ransom response. Attendees will be evaluated throughout the whole course. The UN has more than 1,800 military observers deployed around the globe. China has dispatched 1,670 military observers since 1990, when it started participating in UN peacekeeping missions. (Xinhua)

Iran's Minister Criticizes Calls for Ouster of Syria's Assad

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign minister on Monday criticized demands for the resignation of Syrian President Bashar Assad, saying such calls have prolonged the Arab country's civil war. Mohammad Javad Zarif went so far as to say that those who have in the past years demanded Assad's ouster "are responsible for the bloodshed in Syria." The top Iranian diplomat did not name any specific country in the region but was likely referring to Turkey's and Saudi Arabia's repeated calls for Assad to step down. The two Sunni Muslim countries have supported rebels fighting

against Assad. Also Monday, French President Francois Hollande, in announcing that France will send reconnaissance flights over Syria beginning Tuesday and is considering airstrikes in the fight against the Islamic State group, said that resolving Syria's war will only happen if Assad leaves power. The Shiite-majority Iran is a leading patron of Assad and Tehran has also sent military advisers to Damascus to help the Syrian president's troops against the Islamic State group. Iran, however, denies sending combat forces to help Assad militarily. (AP)

U.S. Asks Greece to Deny Russian Flights to Syria

WASHINGTON - The United States has asked Greece to deny Russia the use of its airspace for supply flights to Syria, a Greek official said on Monday, after Washington told Moscow it was deeply concerned by reports of a Russian military build up in Syria. The Greek foreign ministry said the request was being examined. Russian news wire RIA Novosti earlier said Greece had refused the U.S. request, quoting a diplomatic source as saying that Russia was seeking permission to run the flights up to Sept. 24. Russia, which has a naval base in the Syrian port of Tar-

tous, has sent regular flights to Latakia, which it has also used to bring home Russian nationals who want to leave. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry told his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov on Saturday that if reports of the build-up were accurate, that could further escalate the war and risk confrontation with the U.S.-led alliance that is bombing Islamic State in Syria. Lavrov told Kerry it was premature to talk about Russia's participation in military operations in Syria, a Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman told RIA Novosti on Monday. (Reuters)

Iraqi DM Unharmmed after Sniper Hits Convoy: Spokesman



BAGHDAD - Iraqi Defense Minister (DM) Khaled al-Obeidi's convoy came under sniper fire on Monday but he was unharmmed, a ministry spokesman said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, which joint operations spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Rasool said took place in the western outskirts of the town of Baiji, 190 km (120 miles) north of Baghdad. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has said the battle over Baiji

and its refinery, Iraq's largest, is critical to the fight against Islamic State forces. If Iraqi security forces and Shi'ite militia fighters regain full control of the area around Baiji, it could help them push north toward the Islamic State-held city of Mosul and offset losses in the western province of Anbar. Obeidi was in Baiji as part of a field visit to Salahuddin province. He earlier inspected troops at Camp Speicher, a former U.S. military base. (Reuters)

N.Korea Continues Developing its Nuclear Capabilities: UN

VIENNA - The head of the U.N. atomic energy agency says satellite imagery of North Korea's main nuclear site indicates that the country is expanding its atomic program. Yukiya Amano spoke Monday at the opening of a 35-nation board meeting of his International Atomic Energy Agency. Most of the focus at the meeting will be on Iran. But the agency

is also trying to keep tabs on North Korea, where it has had no presence since the country told its inspectors to leave after withdrawing from the Nuclear Nonproliferation treaty 12 years ago. Since then Pyongyang has test-exploded three nuclear weapons. Amano says construction at the Yongbyon site observed through satellite photos appears to be consistent



with North Korea's statements "that it is further developing its nuclear capabilities." (AP)

Russia Says has not Changed Stance on Syria, Assad



MOSCOW - The Russian Foreign Ministry on Monday denounced as "falsifications and fabrications" media reports it was changing its stance on the war in Syria or on the future of President Bashar al-Assad, whom it has shielded throughout the conflict. "We don't appoint or dismiss foreign presidents, neither on our own or in cahoots with anyone else," the ministry said in a statement. Ministry representatives on Monday also declined immediate comment on a U.S. request to Athens to close Greek airspace for Russian supply flights to Syria. Nor have Russian officials confirmed recent media reports of Moscow increasing its military assistance to Assad, saying only that it has long been supplying Damascus with arms and training to help it fight Islamist radicals, and will continue to do so. Nor have Russian officials confirmed recent media reports of Moscow increasing its military assistance to Assad, saying only that it has long been supplying Damascus with arms and training to help it fight Islamist radicals, and will continue to do so. (Reuters)

France to Begin Syria Reconnaissance Flights, Mulls Air Strikes



PARIS - France will begin reconnaissance missions over Syria on Tuesday and could launch air strikes against Islamic State militants in the country, President Francois Hollande said on Monday. U.S. leads 13 air strikes in Syria, Iraq against Islamic State -statement Reuters France until now had only taken part in air strikes against Islamic State in Iraq because it feared strikes against the group in Syria could strengthen Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. "We have proof that attacks have been planned from Syria against several countries, notably France," Hollande told a news conference. "My responsibility is to ensure that we are informed as much as possible on the threats to our country ... so I have asked the defense minister that from tomorrow

reconnaissance flights begin over Syria that will enable us to consider air strikes against Islamic State." France was poised to join air strikes on the Assad regime in Syria in 2013, before U.S. President Barack Obama unexpectedly backed off the plan. Hollande said Islamic State had cemented its position in Syria over the last two years and that Paris now needed to know exactly what was happening on Syrian soil. Britain is also moving closer to taking military action, with reports saying a parliamentary vote could take place next month to authorize the bombing of Islamic State targets. Prime Minister David Cameron was defeated in parliament in 2013 when he sought to join the proposed action then. (Reuters)

Pakistan Military Uses Local made Drone Against Militants

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani forces Monday started using its own spy aircraft to target the hideouts of the militants in North Waziristan tribal region, the military said. The security forces battling the Taliban in the region have so far used fighter jets and gunships to hit the militants. Pakistan military spokesman Maj. Gen. Asim Bajwa said the country's homemade drone was used for the first time in North Waziristan and a strike killed 3 militants. "1st ever use of Pak made Burraq Drone today. Hit a terrorist compound in Shawal Valley (North Waziristan), killing 3 high profile terrorists," the spokesman said on his Twitter account. The region had been focused of the U.S. drone strikes that also caused some rift

between the U.S. and Pakistan. In June last year, Pakistan launched a major offensive against the Pakistani Taliban and foreign militants, who had been using North Waziristan as a major operational base for attacks in the country and across the border into Afghanistan. A parliamentary committee was informed last week that nearly 3,500 militants have been killed in the region so far. Up to 300 Pakistani security men have also lost lives. The army chief General Raheel Sharif told the country's defense day function late Sunday that the operation codenamed "Zarb-e-Azb" was started at a time when the chaotic forces were challenging the state of Pakistan and law and order situation in the country was at its lowest ebb. (Xinhua)

Tajikistan and Russia Develop Common Approaches in Combating Militants



DUSHANBE - Calculations of drones "Leer-2" and "Pomegranate-1" began to provide joint training of Russia and Tajikistan military on a mountain range Lyaur, 40 km south of Dushanbe, said assistant commander of the Central Military District Yaroslav Roshupkin. "In the course of combat training of action against illegal armed groups in the mountainous and hilly terrain, drones provide maintenance of the optical and electronic reconnaissance, search contingent of

armed groups, monitoring the deployment of troops in battle formations and frontiers advancement" - said Roshupkin. He explained that the main purpose of trainings in Tajikistan is to develop common approaches in combating militants and joint tactical operations and ensuring consistent communication and control systems. In Tajikistan situates one of the largest overseas military facilities in Russia - 201st military base stationed in Dushanbe, Kurgan-Tube and Kulyab. (Asia Plus)