

# One Third of German Firms Plan to Hire Refugees: Survey

BERLIN - A survey showed on Wednesday that one out of three German companies wants to hire refugees. Thirty-four percent of human resources directors contacted by the Ifo Institute for Economic Research said they planned to hire refugees this year or next year. The Munich-based think tank surveyed around 1,000 human resources managers of German companies for the poll. If all these firms go ahead with their plans, it would be a big increase compared with the past two years, when just seven percent of them hired refugees, according to German media



Spiegel Online. The poll also showed that the managers surveyed were well aware of the administrative hurdles they would need to overcome to hire refugees. Companies in Germany that want to hire

non-EU citizens usually have to show that there is no other German or EU applicant suitable for the job. But bosses who have hired refugees in the past said the challenge was worth it, with 68 percent saying they planned to hire more in the next two years. At the same time, the poll also showed the difficulties that companies may face once they've overcome the bureaucratic obstacles to hiring refugees. Language is a concern for 86 percent of the managers surveyed, with the qualifications of refugee job-seekers troubling 46 percent of respondents. (Xinhua)

## Stopping Bloodshed in Syria Now Crucial: Kremlin

MOSCOW - Stopping the bloodshed in Syria is currently the main goal of all those interested in a political settlement in the war-torn country, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday. "The main goal is to stop the bloodshed in Syria and to prepare the ground for a settlement," Peskov told reporters. On Monday, Russia and the United States announced a plan of cessation of hostilities in Syria, demanding that any party

engaged in the conflict in Syria indicate to Russia or the United States their commitment to the ceasefire by no later than 12:00 p.m. Damascus time (1000 GMT) on Saturday. But the agreement excluded the Islamic State (IS), the Nusra Front and other terrorist organizations designated by the United Nations Security Council. "Russia and the United States are using their influence and potential to bring parties with opposing views on the Syria set-



tlement closer together," Peskov said. Earlier in the day, Russian President Vladimir Putin

## Assad Reassures Putin over Cease-Fire

DAMASCUS - Syrian President Bashar Assad reassured his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in a phone call Wednesday that his administration will resolve to observe a cessation of hostilities as planned by Russia and the United States, according to SANA. President Putin phoned Assad on Wednesday, in which both leaders discussed the current situation in Syria in light of the agreed upon ceasefire, according to SANA. Both presidents also agreed on the need to continue the

war against the terrorist-designated groups, namely the Islamic State (IS) and the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front. Russia and the United States agreed to enforce a cessation of hostilities starting from Feb. 27. Any party engaged in conflicts in Syria will indicate to Russia or the United States their commitment to and acceptance of the terms for the cessation of hostilities by no later than 12:00 Damascus time (1000 GMT) on Feb. 27, according to a joint statement issued by the U.S. State Department. (Xinhua)

## Kerry Issues Warning as Syrian Parties Back Halt to Fighting

BEIRUT/WASHINGTON - The government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and rebel groups accepted a plan for a cessation of hostilities to begin on Saturday and the United States warned it would be hard to hold the country together if the fighting did not stop. With hostilities reported on several fronts, rebels backed by Saudi Arabia expressed doubts about the proposal, which excludes attacks by the Syrian army and its Russian backers on the jihadist

groups Islamic State and the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front. Saudi-backed rebels said Russia had stepped up air strikes since the plan was announced on Monday. For its part, the government in Damascus has made clear that continued foreign help for the rebels could wreck the deal. Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States would soon know if the plan would take hold. "The proof will be in the actions that come in ... (More on P4)...(20)

## French Special Forces Waging 'Secret War' in Libya

PARIS - French special forces and intelligence commandos are engaged in covert operations against Islamic State militants in Libya in conjunction with the United States and Britain, the French newspaper Le Monde reported on Wednesday. It said President Francois Hollande had authorized "unofficial military action" by both an elite armed forces unit and the covert action service of the DGSE intelligence agency in the conflict-ridden North African state, which has two rival gov-

ernments and largely un-governed desert spaces. What Le Monde called "France's secret war in Libya" involved occasional targeted strikes against leaders of the ultra-radical Islamist group, prepared by discreet action on the ground, to try to slow its growth in Libya. The defense ministry declined comment on the substance of Le Monde's story but a source close to Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said he had ordered an investigation into "breaches of national defense secrecy" to iden-



tify the sources of the report. Hollande said that France was at war with Islamic State after it claimed responsibility for a wave of

## Neighbor News

### Enemy Failed in Plots Against Iran: Ayatollah Khamenei

TEHRAN - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says enemy has failed to prevent the Iranian people's allegiance to the Islamic establishment through pressure over the past 37 years. "When enemy witnesses that after 37 years [since the victory of the Islamic Revolution], [and] with all [kinds of] pressure, cruel sanctions and spiteful and damaging propaganda it has failed to prevent people's allegiance to the establishment," it comes to realize the grandeur of the Islamic establishment, Ayatollah Khamenei said in an address to thousands of people from the central city of Najafabad on Wednesday.

day. Ayatollah Khamenei further warned against enemy schemes to infiltrate into the country, calling on the nation to remain vigilant in the face of enemy plots to "create discord" in the country. The Leader said enemy is attempting to create a "false bipolarity" in Iran like "pro-government and anti-government parliament," stressing that the Iranian people will stand up to enemy plots by voting in the upcoming elections. The next elections for the 10th term of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) and the 5th term of the Assembly of Experts will take place simultaneously on February 26. (PressTV)

### China Hopes Russia, Japan Properly Resolve Island Dispute

BEIJING - China hopes Russia and Japan can properly resolve their territory dispute through dialog, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said on Wednesday. "The outcome of World War II should be respected and protected," Hua said at a regular news briefing. Earlier, Toshihiro Aiki, a Japanese official, said that "not all the results of WWII have been summed up," and that the territorial issue between the two

countries needs to be addressed. The Russian Foreign Ministry expressed "sincere regret" later in a statement, saying the Japanese side had "distorted historical facts." Russia and Japan have long been at odds over four disputed Pacific islands, known as the Northern Territories in Japan and the Southern Kurils in Russia, which has hindered a peace treaty between the two countries since the end of WWII. (Xinhua)

### Tajikistan, Azerbaijan Review Cooperation on Fight Against Drugs



BISHKEK - Director of the Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan Sherkhon Salimzoda and Ambassador of Azerbaijan in Dushanbe Abbasali Hasanov met in Dushanbe to review cooperation on fight against the illegal drug trafficking, said the Agency. During the meeting the Tajik side briefed

the Ambassador on the drug situation in Tajikistan and Central Asia. Sherkhon Salimzoda spoke about the experience of Tajikistan in conducting anti-drug activities. Both sides agreed to strengthen further relations between the Agency and the Azerbaijani Embassy. (AKIpress)

### Gen. Raheel Gives Go-Ahead for Final Phase of Operation in Shawal

RAWALPINDI - The Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif has given the go-ahead for the initiation of the final phase of operation Zarb-i-Azab in the Shawal valley region of North Waziristan. The go-ahead was given by the army chief during his visit to forward positions of the army in Shawal valley. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated that the army chief was briefed regarding operational gains and

impending operations. The deep and forested ravines of Shawal valley and the area of Data Khel are frequently used infiltration routes used by the militants, the army chief was told. The last phase of the operation aims to clear the last remnants of the militants from their hideouts in the forested ravines, isolate them and destroy them in detail, while also severing their links to their abettors across the country. (Agencies)

## Abe to Ignore Call from Obama Not to Visit Russia

TOKYO - Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will visit Russia despite the United States urging him not to do so, a top government official said Wednesday. According to Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, Abe's top spokesperson, the prime minister will make an unofficial visit to Russia to discuss a long-standing territorial dispute between Tokyo and Moscow. "Prime Minister Abe is planning an unofficial visit to Russia at an appropriate time before Russian President Vladimir Putin visits Japan," Suga told a press briefing. The Russian President is expected



to visit Japan at some point later this year. Local media quoting diplomatic sources said however that U.S. President Barack Obama, in talks on the telephone on Feb. 9, had pressed Abe to refrain from making the trip to Sochi in May, due to the

U.S.'s stance over Russia's actions in Ukraine and Syria. The sources were also quoted as saying that Washington feels that Tokyo is overly cozying up to Moscow as it seeks to resolve the territorial spat. To ... (More on P4)...(21)

## Brexit would Change Europe Forever for the Worse: EU Chief

BRUSSELS - An "out" vote in the June 23 British referendum on European Union membership will change Europe forever - and "for the worse," the bloc's president said Wednesday. EU President Donald Tusk oversaw the EU reform deal that British Prime Minister David Cameron brokered with the other 27 EU leaders last weekend for a new relationship for Britain in the bloc. He said, with all the challenges facing the West, now is not the time for Britain to split away from the bloc. The referendum in Britain is expected to be hard-fought, especially after popular London Mayor Boris Johnson announced last weekend that he would join the campaign urging voters to back leaving the EU. Cameron is the top politician promoting the "stay" side. Tusk insisted there would be no second chance if Britons vote "out." "If the majority votes to leave, that is what ... (More on P4)...(22)

## 11 Killed in Clashes between Turkish Forces and PKK

ANKARA - The Turkish General Staff announced on Wednesday that two Turkish soldiers were killed on Wednesday in Diyarbakir province during clashes with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants. A total of nine PKK militants were killed on Wednesday in the Idil district of Sirmak province during an air operation, according to Dogan News. On Wednesday, a soldier was dead in an armed attack, the General Staff said in a statement, adding that another one was heavily wounded and died later in a hospital. A group of PKK militants, who were trying to penetrate the district's center, were targeted in an air operation conducted by ... (More on P4)...(23)

## UN Promises to Facilitate Peaceful Resolution of Burundi Crisis

BUJUMBURA - The United Nations will do everything possible to facilitate peaceful resolution of the Burundi crisis, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said Tuesday at the end of his official visit to Bujumbura. The political crisis began in April 2015 after incumbent President Pierre Nkurunziza announced plans to contest for a third term, a move that was contested by both opposition and civil society groups. Ban, who spoke after holding talks with Nkurunziza, said the discussions were sincere and productive, especially with regards to the crisis the country is facing now. "I came to Burundi at a time when the country is going through a crisis. We cannot leave the crisis to fester," he said. The UN secretary general said the Burundian crisis had serious ... (More on P4)...(26)

## Israeli Security Forces Arrest 21 Palestinians Amid Ongoing Wave of Violence

JERUSALEM - Israeli security forces arrested 21 Palestinians overnight and early Wednesday as a wave of ongoing violence, which started in October, continues, Israeli police and military said. Overnight, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers along with members of the

paramilitary border police unit arrested 18 Palestinians in the West Bank, according to a statement by the IDF spokesperson. Out of those arrested, eight are suspected of affiliation with the Hamas Islamist group, deemed a terrorist group by Israel and the ... (More on P4)...(24)

## PM Calls for European Cooperation as Refugee Pressure Piles up in Greece

ATHENS - Unilateral actions do not help in the resolution of the refugee crisis, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said on Wednesday during a meeting here with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Filippo Grandi. "Unilateral and uncoordinated actions do not contribute to the

handling of an international problem. Solution can be reached only through the closer cooperation at European and international level," said Tsipras, according to an e-mailed press release from his office. During Grandi's first visit to Greece after assuming office earlier this year, ... (More on P4)...(25)