

S. Korea, U.S. Militaries Continue Discussion on Further Deploying "Strategic Assets"

SEOUL - Militaries of South Korea and the United States are continuing discussion on additional deployment of "strategic assets" on the Korean peninsula, a day after a U.S. B-52 bomber flew over South Korea, Seoul's defense ministry said Monday.

Defense Ministry spokesman Kim Min-Seok told a routine press briefing that Seoul and Washington are closely and continuously discussing an issue on deploying other strategic assets in addition to the B-52 bomber that flew over South Korea on Sunday.

The B-52 bomber, capable of delivering nuclear mis-



sile, returned to its base in Guam after flying over the air base in Osan, 40

km south of Seoul, in response to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s fourth nuclear test. The DPRK said last Wednesday that it had

successfully tested its first hydrogen bomb, the fourth in total. Previous

tests were conducted in 2006, 2009 and 2013 respectively.

Other strategic assets reportedly include a U.S. aircraft carrier, a U.S. nuclear-powered submarine and F-22 stealth fighters. The U.S. aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan, currently in Yokosuka, Japan, is widely expected to be deployed on the peninsula during the U.S.-South Korea joint annual war games scheduled to kick off in February. After the DPRK carried out its third nuclear test in February 2013, the U.S. military sent its strategic assets to the peninsula in retaliatory measures. (Xinhua)

Turkey Plans to Introduce Work Permits for Syrian Refugees: Minister

ANKARA - Turkey plans to offer Syrian refugees work permits in order to encourage fewer of them to migrate, Volkan Bozkir, Turkey's minister for European Affairs, said on Monday, amid EU pressure to reduce the flow of migrants.

Bozkir was speaking after meeting European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans, who last week said the European Union was far from satisfied with Turkey's efforts to prevent migrants from crossing the Aegean Sea to Greece.

"We are trying to reduce the pressure for illegal migration by giving Syrians in Turkey work permits," Bozkir told reporters in Ankara.

Turkish authorities detained more than 150,000 illegal migrants in 2015, about 500 migrants daily, Bozkir also said.

Turkey is the world's biggest host of refugees amid the greatest global movement of refugees ever recorded.

More than 2.2 million Syrians have sought refuge in Turkey from the civil... (More on P4)...(19)

Japanese PM Eyes Consolidating Power in Summer Elections

TOKYO - Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Monday he aims to consolidate his power in parliament by winning the upper house elections slated for this summer, as holding a full majority in both houses will make it easier for his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to pass legislation.

"In order to achieve results, we need a stable basis. We have to win the House of Councillors election," Abe was quoted as saying to a meeting of his supporters in Shimonoeki, Yamaguchi



Prefecture, the westernmost prefecture on Honshu island.

Abe, who also doubles as the LDP's president, said

Monday that the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that was agreed to last October and will greatly see trade tariffs eliminat-

ed or largely reduced between 12 Pacific nations, will be of significant benefit to Japan.

Abe has been visiting his constituency in western Japan to drum up support for his party ahead of the upper house elections and quell fears in rural areas that the TPP deal, while being a boon for exports, may pummel local agricultural business as reduced trade tariffs will allow for an influx of cheaper competition from overseas.

The prime minister... (More on P4)...(20)

Aid Convoy Enters Besieged, Starving Syrian Town

MADAYA - An aid convoy entered a besieged Syrian town on Monday where thousands are trapped and the United Nations says people are reported to have died of starvation.

Red Crescent trucks carrying food and medical supplies traveling with U.N. vehicles entered Madaya near the Lebanese border as part of an agreement between warring sides.

At least 10 people are said to have starved to death in the town and



activists say some inhabitants have been reduced to eating leaves.

Another convoy simultaneously entered two Shi'ite villages, al Foua

and Kefraya in the northwestern province of Idlib 300 km (200 miles) away, a U.N. source said.

Madaya is besieged by pro-Syrian government

forces, while the two villages in Idlib province are encircled by rebels fighting the Syrian government. The blockade of... (More on P4)...(21)

Ukraine Seeks to Boost Agricultural Cooperation with Kazakhstan

KIEV - Ukrainian Agriculture Minister Olexiy Pavlenko said Monday that Kiev is seeking ways to boost its agricultural cooperation with Kazakhstan to promote the future development of bilateral trade.

"We are interested in expanding trade of farm products and exchanging experience in the agriculture sector in order to enhance our overall trade ties and economic cooperation," Pavlenko was quoted as saying by the Agriculture Minis-

try's press service. Noting that Ukraine's sugar exports to Kazakhstan in January-November 2015 rose fourfold to 7 million U.S. dollars, Pavlenko said that cooperation in sugar industry between the two countries has a tremendous potential to be tapped. As to other promising areas for boosting agricultural cooperation between Ukraine and Kazakhstan, Pavlenko listed meat, grain and dairy sectors. From January to... (More on P4)...(22)

Kenya, Canada to Sign Investment Promotion Deal

NAIROBI - Kenya and Canada are set to sign an agreement on the promotion of investments and trade between the two countries, officials said on Monday.

Canadian High Commissioner to Kenya David Angell told Xinhua in Nairobi that the two governments are talking to each other and the two foreign affairs ministers have reaffirmed their commitment to signing the deal. "I hope the deal will be concluded by the end of 2016," Angell said on the sidelines of the launch of the Public Legal Education Initiative that is being funded by the Canadian government.

"The investment pact will help to draw the attention of investors to the opportunities that each market presents to each country," Angell said. He noted that there is need for more economic cooperation so as to build on the already existing good bilateral relations. Kenya and Canada have already signed a Double... (More on P4)...(23)

UN Chief Slams Deadly Attack on MSF-Supported Hospital in Yemen

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Sunday condemned the attack on a hospital supported by international medical group Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in northern Yemen and called for accountability. A rocket landed in an MSF-sponsored health center in Razeh area in northern Saada province on Sunday, killing at least four people and injured many others. It is unknown who was behind the attack. Ban said any such intentional attack is considered "a serious violation" of the international... (More on P4)...(26)

Racism Remains an Issue in S. Africa: Presidency

CAPE TOWN - South African President Jacob Zuma has never said racism is not an issue in South Africa, the Presidency said on Monday. The Presidency was responding to a report by the Independent Newspapers group which "erroneously" quoted Zuma as saying in his Sunday speech marking the 104th anniversary of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) that racism was not an issue in South Africa.

What Zuma stated was that South Africa had addressed institutionalized racism since 1994 and that the problem that remained was that



of individuals who still harbored racism and prejudice, presidential spokesperson Bogani Majola said. Zuma emphasized that all should be done to eradicate racism in society and

that there should be consequences for racism, said Majola. South Africa continues the task of building a non-racial society, Majola said. Anti-black comments have... (More on P4)...(24)

Al-Qaeda Affiliate wants Demands Met Before Releasing two Hostages

NOUAKCHOTT - Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has said the governments of Sweden and South Africa should meet its demands for "faster release" of their two respective nationals Johan Gustafson and Stephen Malcolm McGown who have been in detention since November 2011. The remarks were made by the Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist group through a video released on a Mauritanian website, Al Akhbar, which is always well informed on activities of armed terrorist groups in Northern Mali. In the video titled "Letter to Sweden and South Africa," AQIM urged the two governments not to resort to French mediation to resolve the issue of the hostages. The video shows the two hostages who were kidnapped on Nov. 25, 2011 when they were in a hotel in Timbuktu in northern Mali, as well as a masked man who was... (More on P4)...(25)

IMF Boss Upbeat about Cameroon's Economic Performance in 2016

YAOUNDE - The Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Christine Lagarde has expressed optimism that Cameroon's economy will record a good performance in 2016 despite the double challenges of insecurity and drop of the oil prices. Lagarde was speaking to Xinhua in Yaounde in an interview over the weekend, during her three-day visit to Cameroon. Besides the continued drop in

oil prices on the international market, Cameroon is currently confronted with security challenges caused by Boko Haram activities in the Far East region as well as armed groups from Central African Republic in the East. "I believe the Cameroon economy is well positioned to resist the double shocks of insecurity, which has seen more public funds diverted to fighting... (More on P4)...(27)

China to Continue to have Abundant Labor Force: Official

BEIJING - China will have an abundant labor force for decades to come, though its overall quality needs to be improved, said a senior official with the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) on Monday. Wang Pei'an, deputy head of the NHFPC, said at a press conference that in 2015, China

had a labor force of one billion, which is expected to slip slightly to 958 million in 2030. According to the official, the labor force is estimated at around 827 million for 2050. Therefore, the challenge for the nation in the next few decades lies not in the size of the labor force but in its... (More on P4)...(28)

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China Reshuffles Military Headquarters

BEIJING - China has reorganized its four military headquarters -- staff, politics, logistics and armaments -- into 15 new agencies under the Central Military Commission (CMC).

The new structure includes six new departments: joint staff, political work, logistical support, equipment development, training, and national defense mobilization. There are three commissions -- discipline inspection, politics and law, and science and technology -- as well as the general office and five more: administration, auditing, international cooperation, reform and organizational structure, and strategic planning.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the CMC, met with the new chiefs of each agency on Monday. He described the reshuffle as "a breakthrough" and "a crucial step" toward a stronger military.

Xi urged military leaders to unswervingly follow the CPC's absolute leadership over the armed forces. He stressed that military leaders must adhere to the Party spirit, obey political discipline, and "be politically intelligent," with firm political faith and right political stance. (Xinhua)

Iran Opens \$6 Billion Gas Operations

TEHRAN - Iran brings online two more operations in its biggest gas field, marking the opening of the first such project all carried out by domestic entities in the face of Western sanctions.

President Hassan Rouhani attended inauguration of phases 15 and 16 of the South Pars field in Asaluyeh on Monday along with other senior officials, including his Petroleum Minister Bijan Zangeneh.

The operations with \$6 billion of investment bring the number of phases producing gas in the field to 17, with

another 12 phases under development.

Zangeneh said, "I hope with the lifting of sanctions which will happen in the next days as the implementation day nears, the development of joint fields will be carried out with better access to equipment."

"Phases 15 and 16 of South Pars which were implemented and commissioned under sanctions will produce 56.6 million cubic meters of gas a day to meet domestic need for fuel especially by household, commercial and industrial consumers," he said. (PressTV)

Pakistan, Iran Constitute Joint Border Monitoring Committee

QUETTA - Pakistan and Iran have constituted a joint committee to monitor the 900-kilometre-long porous border between the two countries in order to prevent human trafficking and drug smuggling.

The committee will comprise security and district administration officers from both countries.

A 22-member Iranian delegation headed by Governor of the Iranian province of Sistan-Baluchestan, Aaqai

Ali OsatHashemi, met Balochistan Chief Minister NawabSanaullahZehri to discuss measures to ensure legal movement at the

border in addition to cooperation on power projects.

The Balochistan CM told the delegation that the Gwadar-Chabahar Memorandum of Understanding will be implemented in letter and spirit.

Zehri apprised the delegation that the Makran zone was receiving 70 megawatts of electricity from Iran. He said work was under way for provision of 1,000MW of power to Pakistan. "I will visit Iran with regards to power projects to end load shedding in the coastal belt and other parts of Balochistan," he said. (Agencies)

N. Korea's Alleged Hydrogen Bomb Test is A Serious Threat: Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - North Korea's alleged hydrogen bomb test is a serious threat to international security, the Tajik Foreign Ministry said in a statement condemning it on Monday.

"The statement of the North Korean government on the [testing of a] hydrogen bomb on January 6, 2015, is deeply regrettable, as such actions do not only increase tensions on the Korean Peninsula but also challenge international peace and security," the statement reads.

According to the ministry, Tajikistan supports the statements of the international community condemning North Korea's nuclear ambitions, and calls on Pyongyang to implement the UN Security Council resolutions related to the matter. On January 6, Pyongyang claimed it had carried out its first hydrogen bomb test, which triggered condemnation from the international community, denouncing the test as provocative and undermining stability in the region. (Sputnik)