

UN Chief Seeks 'Global Action' on Climate Change this Year

GENEVA - UN chief Ban Ki-Moon on Monday called for "global action" this year to limit climate change as international weather experts began a quadrennial congress in Geneva.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) meeting comes ahead of a key conference in Paris at the end of the year which will be the first attempt to clinch a planet-wide deal on global warming since the near-disastrous 2009 UN summit in Copenhagen.

The Paris accord, which would take effect from



2020, would aim at limiting global warming

to a maximum of two degrees Celsius (3.6 de-

grees Fahrenheit) over pre-industrial levels.

"This 17th World Meteorological congress

comes at a pivotal moment," Ban said of the Geneva meet, which runs until June 12.

"As the global thermostat rises, meteorological services are more important than ever," Ban said.

"This year governments will make major decisions on sustainable development and climate change. 2015 must be a time for global action," he added.

WMO head Michel Jarraud said the congress must buttress cooperation and investment in weather and climate observations and services. (AFP)

UN Urges Lebanon to Pick President, End Political Vacuum

BEIRUT - A United Nations envoy urged Lebanon's feuding political leaders to pick a new president, warning on Monday that the country's year-long power vacuum had undermined its ability to deal with the impact of the Syrian crisis and a host of other problems.

The Middle East's only

Christian presidency has been vacant since May 2014 because lawmakers cannot agree on a candidate. Lebanese politics has long been dogged by sectarian divisions and personal rivalries but the war next door has exacerbated divisions even further.

"I urge Lebanon's lead ... (More on P4)...(21)

Hezbollah Captures Hilltops from Al Qaeda's Syria Wing

BEIRUT - Hezbollah fighters have captured two hilltops from al Qaeda's Syria wing Nusra Front in areas close to the Lebanese border and have killed dozens of enemy combatants, Hezbollah-run al-Manar television reported on Monday.

It said in a newsflash that the Lebanese Shi'ite Muslim group had

captured the hilltops of Quba'a and Naqar in Syria's southwestern Quinetra province, which lies in sensitive territory close to Lebanon and Israel.

Iranian-backed Hezbollah has backed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his country's civil war. The group's leader, Sayyed Hassan Nasral ... (More on P4)...(22)

US, Allies Conduct 35 Air Strikes against Islamic State in Syria, Iraq

WASHINGTON - The United States and its allies carried out 10 air strikes against Islamic State militants in Syria and 25 strikes in Iraq since Sunday, the U.S. military said on Monday. Kurdish fighters, supported by the coalition, were forcing militants to cede territory in northern Syria at an increasing rate, U.S. Brigadier General Thomas Weidley, chief of staff of the coalition effort, said

in a statement. Most of the air strikes in Syria were targeted in the area near Al Hasakah, where they destroyed four Islamic State fighting positions, a checkpoint, an excavator and other equipment, according to the statement.

In Iraq, the strikes were targeted at Islamic State positions near Baghdad, Baiji, Fallujah and Mosul, among other sites. (Reuters)

Putin Wants 'Constructive' Poland Ties after Duda Presidential Win

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday called for "constructive ties" with Poland as he congratulated conservative challenger Andrzej Duda on his surprise victory at presidential polls.

The Russian leader expressed hope that "the building of constructive ties between Russia and Poland, based on the principles of good neighbourly relations and a mutual respect for

each other's interests, would help strengthen security and stability in Europe", the Kremlin said.

Relations between Moscow and Warsaw -- historically complicated -- are in the doldrums as Poland has been one of the fiercest critics of Russia over its alleged meddling in Ukraine. The European Union -- of which Poland is a member -- and the Unit ... (More on P4)...(23)

Iran FM Slams UNSC's Unprincipled Approach to Mideast

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has criticized the UN Security Council for pursuing discriminatory and unprincipled approaches to conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Yemen, Syria and Iraq.

"The situation in the region is very sensitive and complicated and the West Asian and Central Asian countries are faced with terrorist and extremist threats more than others," Zarif said in a Monday meeting with Secretary General of the Austrian Ministry of European and International Affairs Michael ... (More on P4)...(24)

US-Turkey Agree on Air Support to Syrian Rebels: Turkey

ISTANBUL - The United States and Turkey have agreed "in principle" to give air support to some forces from Syria's mainstream opposition, Turkey's foreign minister said, in what if confirmed could mark an expansion of U.S. involvement in the conflict. There was no immediate comment from U.S. officials on the assertion -- though Washington has so far refrained from committing to enforcing a "safe

zone" for Syrian rebels, as it could be seen as a declaration of war on the Syrian state. The air support would protect Syrian rebel forces who have been trained by a U.S.-led program on Turkish territory, said minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. The long-delayed scheme is meant to send 15,000 troops back to Syria to fight Islamic State militants. Cavusoglu did not go into details on what "in principle" meant or

what kind of air power would be provided or by whom. "They have to be supported via air. If you do not protect them or provide air support, what is the point?" Cavusoglu told the pro-government Daily Sabah during a visit to Seoul. "There is a principle agreement on providing air support. How it is going to be provided is in the responsibility of the army."

The U.S.-led program has been mired in de-

lays amid media speculation of disagreements between the two NATO allies.

Turkey has said that any support program must be part of a comprehensive strategy which includes battling forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Washington has maintained its opposition to Assad but said that the goal of training is only to defeat Islamic State militants. (Reuters)

IS Executes 16 Traders on Iraqi Road



BAGHDAD - The Islamic State group has executed 16 Iraqi traders taking food from the city of Baiji to the government-controlled western city of Haditha, officials said Sunday.

"The victims were transporting mostly food goods, such as vegetables, from Baiji to Haditha," he said.

Baiji, which lies on the Tigris about 200 kilometres (125 miles) north of Baghdad, is under IS control.

Haditha, which sits on the Euphrates about 130 kilometres (80 miles) southwest, is the last major city in the province of Anbar still under government control.

"They were stopped at a checkpoint and abducted," the mayor said.

"They then executed them, some by shooting them, others by slitting their throats."

He said Haditha residents found the bodies on the road and were able to bring them back. A police lieutenant colonel confirmed the 16 executions. The victims were buried on Sunday, several sources said. Abu Maath al-Jughaihi, a tribal fighter from Haditha, said a paper was found on one of the bodies in which IS said the executions were to avenge the deaths of jihadist fighters during a recent battle near Haditha. According to government sources, at least 23 IS militants were killed in clashes in Khasfa last week, including two French nationals who drove suicide truck bombs. (AFP)

Germany Protests Russia's Ejection of Conservative MP from Moscow

BERLIN - Germany formally protested to Russia on Monday over Moscow's refusal to let a conservative German lawmaker into the country, a decision the Foreign Ministry criticized as unacceptable amid East-West tensions over the Ukraine crisis.

Karl-Georg Wellmann, a member of Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) and chairman of the German-Ukraine parliamentary group, had called Russia a "war-monger" earlier this year for its perceived support of separatists in Ukraine.

Wellmann, who has called for tougher sanctions

against Russia over its role in Ukraine, could not be reached for comment. But he was quoted by Focus magazine online's edition as saying that he spent Sunday night in the transit section of the Moscow airport before returning to Germany on Monday morning. He said that although he had a diplomatic pass to enter Russia, he was told at the Moscow airport he was barred from visiting until 2019. Wellmann also told Focus that during his visit he had intended to meet Konstantin Kosachev, the international affairs committee chairman in Russia's upper house of parliament, Sergei Glaziev, an economic adviser to President Vladimir Putin, and German embassy officials. The German government issued a protest to the Russian ambassador in Berlin and Germany's ambassador in Moscow Ruediger Freiherr von Fritsch made a demarche to the Russian Foreign Ministry as well, the Foreign Ministry in Berlin said.

"From the German government's point of view Russia's refusal to allow ... Wellmann's entry is incomprehensible and unacceptable," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

"Germany expects the refusal to allow him in to be lifted." (Reuters)

Top Muslim Body Urges Protection of Syria's Palmyra

CAIRO - Leading Sunni Muslim body Al-Azhar said Sunday the world must unite in a "battle of all humanity" to prevent the Islamic State group from destroying Syria's ancient city of Palmyra.

The appeal came a day after Syria's antiquities director said that IS fighters had entered the museum in Palmyra and raised their black flag over the ancient citadel that overlooks the archaeological site.

"Protecting archeological sites from destruction



and plundering is the battle of all of humanity," the Cairo-based Al-Azhar, a prestigious seat of Islamic learning, said

in a statement. "We have to unite our efforts in order to protect one of the most im ... (More on P4)...(20)

US Defense Chief's Criticism of Iraqis Raises Questions

WASHINGTON - The Islamic State group's takeover of the Iraqi provincial capital Ramadi has prompted criticism from Defense Secretary Ash Carter and raised new questions about the Obama administration's strategy to defeat the extremist group. The Islamic State group, which had already seized a strategically important swath of the Middle East, seized Ramadi in central Iraq a week ago, which has re-

vived concerns about U.S. efforts to fight the group. The Obama administration's approach in Iraq is a blend of retraining and rebuilding the Iraqi army, prodding the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad to reconcile with the nation's Sunnis and bombing Islamic State group targets from the air without committing American ground combat troops. President Barack Obama's strategy is predicated on Baghdad

granting political concessions to the country's alienated Sunnis, who are a source of personnel and money for the Islamic State group. But there has been little visible progress on that front. Baghdad has continued to work closely with Shiite militias backed by Iran, which have been accused of atrocities against Sunnis, a religious minority in Iraq that ruled until Saddam Hussein fell from power. (AP)

Neighbour News

Only Iran is Confronting Islamic State: Paramilitary Chief

DUBAI - The general in charge of Iran's paramilitary activities in the Middle East said the United States and other powers were failing to confront Islamic State, said Soleimani, whose

Major General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the elite Quds Force responsible for protecting the Islamic Republic's interests abroad, has become a familiar face on the battlefields of Iraq, where he often outranks local commanders. "Today, in the fight against this dangerous phenomenon, nobody is present except Iran," the Tasnim news agency

quoted Soleimani as saying on Sunday in reference to Islamic State. Iran should help countries suffering at the hands of Islamic State, said Soleimani, whose force is part of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Mehr news agency reported. The Sunni militant group has taken key cities in Iraq and Syria in the past week, routing regular forces in both countries with apparent ease. "Obama has not done a damn thing so far to confront Daesh: doesn't that show that there is no will in America to confront it?" Mehr quoted Soleimani as saying, using a derogatory Arabic term for Islamic State. (Reuters)

Pakistan Seeks FBI Assistance to Probe Axact Scam

ISLAMABAD - The Interior Ministry of Pakistan along with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) wrote a letter seeking legal assistance from the US agency Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), to further probe into the Axact fake degree scam, officials said Monday. According to interior ministry officials, the letter was sent to the Foreign Ministry of Pakistan which will be sent to the Pakistan Embassy in the United States to be forwarded to the State Department. The letter includes an overall report of the FIA's investigation into the Axact scam, seeking help from the FBI to in-

vestigate the case as US-based universities were involved. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said on Saturday that a decision had been taken to seek legal assistance from the FBI and Interpol for investigations into the alleged sale of fake degrees by the software company, Axact. Addressing a press conference at Punjab House, Nisar had said the inquiry against Axact would be completed within 10 days. A request for legal assistance might be made to the United Kingdom as well, but a final decision to this effect had yet to be taken, he added. (Agencies)

China Lodges Complaint with U.S. over Spy Plane Flight

BEIJING - China said it had lodged a complaint with the United States over a U.S. spy plane that flew over parts of the disputed South China Sea in a diplomatic row that has fuelled tension between the world's two largest economies. Friction in the region has grown over China's land reclamation in the Spratly islands. China last week said it was "strongly dissatisfied" after a U.S. spy plane flew over areas near the reefs, with both sides accusing each other of stoking instability. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said on Mon-

day China had lodged a complaint and that it opposed "provocative behaviour" by the United States. "We urge the U.S. to correct its error, remain rational and stop all irresponsible words and deeds," she said. "Freedom of navigation and overflight by no means mean that foreign countries' warships and military aircraft can ignore the legitimate rights of other countries as well as the safety of aviation and navigation." China had noted "ear-piercing voices" from many in the U.S. about China's construction on the islands and reefs. (Reuters)

Uzbek President to Pay 8th Visit to South Korea



TASHKENT - From May 27 to 29, Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov is to pay an official visit to South Korea to have talks with the country's President Park Geun-hye. It will be Karimov's first visit abroad after his reelection in March 2015, which testifies to Tashkent's desire to demonstrate the importance of relationships with Seoul, the Fergana international information agency reported. During his long presidency - from 1991, Karimov has paid seven visits to South Korea. The most recent talks between the leaders of the two countries took place in June 2014, during Park Geun-hye's official visit to Tashkent.

The parties then agreed to extend cooperation in information technology, solar energy, agriculture, and education, as well as confirmed mutual support in the framework of international organizations and regional structures. Uzbekistan is South Korea's largest trade partner in Central Asia, with a most favored nation regime in action since 1992. In 2014 bilateral trade amounted to \$1.9 billion. Korean investments in Uzbekistan's economy exceed \$5 billion. Uzbekistan is home to more than 400 companies with Korean investments and representative offices of 81 Korean companies. (TCA)