

Britain Announces Official EU Referendum Campaign Groups

LONDON - "Vote Leave" and "Britain Stronger in Europe" were named as official campaigns in the referendum on British membership of the European Union, British Electoral Commission announced Wednesday. "The Electoral Commission has today designated the two lead campaigners at the EU Referendum - designating 'The In Campaign Ltd' to be the lead campaigner for the 'Remain'



outcome, and 'Vote Leave Ltd' for the 'Leave' outcome," the commission said in a statement. Britain Stronger in Europe is registered as "The In Campaign Ltd" and is referred to as such throughout the assessment matrices and Board documents published by the Commission, it said. There was one applicant for the "Remain" outcome and three for the "Leave" outcome, it noted. (Xinhua)

Parliamentary Election to Help Prevent Power Vacuum in Syria: Russia

MOSCOW - The parliamentary elections in Syria could prevent a power vacuum before a new constitution is worked out and new elections are held, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Wednesday. "We believe the parliamentary elections started today in Syria ensure the functioning of the Syrian government institutions set by the current constitution of the country," Lavrov said at a press conference. Syria's parliamentary elections, which are held

regularly every four years, kicked off earlier in the day, but were largely boycotted by opposition groups, which claimed that the elections contradicted intra-Syrian talks in Geneva. Lavrov said a new round of intra-Syrian talks between the Syrian government and the opposition groups, set to resume soon, would focus on political reforms in the war-torn country. The agenda included working out a new Syrian constitution, which would permit holding early elec-



tions, Lavrov said. The Russian minister urged all Syrian forces to reach a common understanding. Lavrov added that all

foreign players should ensure a successful settlement process by exercising pressure on all participants in the intra-Syrian talks. (Xinhua)

Syrians Pin Hope on Parliament Elections for Better Rights

DAMASCUS - Syrian university students participated in Wednesday's parliamentary elections, hoping the candidates would secure job opportunities for them. In the Damascus University dormitory, students from various Syrian cities, including those from rebel-held areas, waited in queues to cast their ballots in the parliamentary elections which started earlier in the day. Norhan, a university student from the southern province of Daraa, the birthplace of the country's five-year-old conflict, said Syrian youth must participate in

the elections to choose people capable of delivering their objectives. "The parliamentary election is an important process for the people and we should all participate and support this process in order to express our opinions and choose the right person who will live up to our hopes, represent us and deliver solutions to our problems to provide a better future," she told Xinhua. Her friend, Siham, also from Daraa, said the elections are important for those coming from hot-spots as it gives them a ... (More on P4)...(26)

Low Commodity Prices Continue to Impede Africa's Growth: WB

KAMPALA - Economic activity in Africa continues to slow down due to the low commodity prices, the World Bank has said in its new report. According to figures in 'Africa's Pulse', World Bank's twice yearly analysis of the economic trends on the continent, economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa slowed in 2015, with GDP growth averaging 3.0 percent, down from 4.5 percent in 2014. This means that the pace of expansion decelerated to the lows last seen in 2009. The report

issued on April 11 shows that the 2016 growth forecast remains subdued at 3.3 percent, way below the robust 6.8 percent growth in GDP that the continent sustained in the 2003-2008 period. Overall, growth is projected to pick up in 2017-2018 to 4.5 percent. This poor performance is attributed to the plunge in commodity, particularly oil, which fell 67 percent from June 2014 to December 2015, and weak global growth, especially ... (More on P4)...(27)

Ceasefire Observers Deploy in three Yemeni Provinces to Monitor Truce

CAIRO - Local ceasefire monitors arrived at three Yemeni provinces on Wednesday to consolidate a shaky truce, residents and officials said, ahead of U.N.-sponsored peace talks scheduled to start in Kuwait next week. Over 6,200 people have been killed in a year of fighting between forces loyal to President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and the Houthis, a conflict pitting the Yemeni allies of Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, against



those of Iran. Local officials said teams of 12 monitors were deployed in Marib province east of the capital Sanaa, in southwestern Taiz province

and in Hajjah province in the north to try to stop truce violations and allow humanitarian aid to pass through. The monitors - officers and tribal figures

from among the Houthis and followers of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, along with Hadi's government - would also ... (More on P4)...(28)

Germany Fears Return of Turkish-Kurdish Violence on Its Soil

BERLIN - As Germany scrambles to contain a diplomatic row with Turkey over a comedian's mocking of President Tayyip Erdogan, officials are growing worried about another byproduct of their Faustian migrant pact with Ankara: an upsurge in violence between nationalist Turks and militant Kurds on German soil. Germany is home to about 3 million people of Turkish origin. Roughly one in four are ethnic Kurds who came to Germany to work in the 1960s and 70s, or as refugees fleeing violence in the 1980s and 90s. Intelligence officials estimate that

about 14,000 of these Kurds are active supporters of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the militant group whose armed struggle against the Turkish state has escalated following the collapse of a 2-1/2 year ceasefire last July. Clashes between Turks and Kurds in Germany are not new. At the height of the conflict between Ankara and the PKK in the early 1990s, Kurdish militants overran the Turkish consulate in Munich and launched arson attacks against Turkish facilities across Germany. This led Germany to outlaw the PKK in 1993. But the combination of



rising violence in Turkey and Chancellor Angela Merkel's controversial refugee deal with Ankara has raised the risk of a new wave of clashes, government and intelligence officials worry. "When you have a full blown civil war

there, then there is the risk of direct transmission to German cities," said a senior German diplomat on condition of anonymity. "This is the other side of Merkel's refugee deal. It makes it all the more difficult to manage." (Reuters)

EU Concerned About Migrant Arrivals from Libya

THESSALONIKI - The European Union's president says he is concerned about an increase in the number of migrants arriving from Libya, as the EU focuses on sending people back to Turkey. EU Council President Donald Tusk said Wednesday that "the numbers of would-be migrants in Libya are alarming," and that member countries should be ready to help Italy and Malta should they call for it. The EU's ex-

ecutive arm estimates that more than 15,000 migrants have crossed the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy in the last month. Italy's coast guard said that more than 2,000 were rescued on Tuesday. More than 1 million people entered the EU last year seeking sanctuary or jobs, most of them arriving in the Greek islands from Turkey. New clashes have broken out between Macedonian police and ... (More on P4)...(29)

UN Employee 'Captured' by Ukraine Rebels

KIEV - The United Nations said Wednesday that one of its staff members had been captured by pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine's separatist east. The UN is carrying out a humanitarian mission in the war-torn republics of Lugansk and Donetsk. The world body's office in Kiev said it had mobilised

all channels to ensure its unnamed staff member's immediate and unconditional release. "The United Nations is deeply concerned about the fact that one of its staff members is being held captive in Donetsk," the United Nations said in a statement. It added that ... (More on P4)...(30)

Ukraine Eyes Thursday Vote on New Pro-EU Government

KIEV - Strife-torn Ukraine appeared to move a step closer Wednesday to agreeing a new pro-EU government headed by parliament speaker Volodymyr Groysman that could be voted on the following day. A senior member of President Petro Poroshenko's party said that "accord-

ing to my information, all the agreements have been reached and no further questions remain." "We will submit the prime minister's candidacy to the president and (on Thursday) be able to vote on the approval of both a new premier and government," Poroshenko party deputy ... (More on P4)...(33)

Russia has No Urgent Need to Return to G7: Lawmaker

MOSCOW - Russia has no urgent need to return to the Group of Seven (G7) as it has now become a club of U.S. friends, a Russian lawmaker said Tuesday. "Why do we have to go to the G7, where the United States is in charge and other countries assent? There is a united front against Russia there," said Alexey Pushkov, chairman of the State Duma's Foreign Affairs Committee. "In current position Russia doesn't need to be part of G7. The organization need to be reformed," he told Vesti FM. Pushkov also said that Western countries have a false opinion that Russia is not in a good position to be outside G7. Russia joined G7 in 1998, making it G8. The entry followed years of Moscow's unofficial participation in G7 meetings, ... (More on P4)...(31)

Sisi Defends Island Decision, Silences Audience

CAIRO - President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi sought to staunch an uproar on Wednesday over Egypt's unexpected decision to transfer two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia, saying he would not give up a single grain of Egyptian sand to Riyadh or anyone else. But showing that public criticism has stung, he beseeched his audience not to broach the subject again and silenced one person who attempted to ask him a question. In an impromptu two-hour policy speech to a group of parliamentarians, ministers and senior editors in the presidential palace, Sisi reiterated the official view that the islands had always been

Saudi and that Egypt had only been looking after them. "Egypt does not sell its land to anyone and it does not take anyone's land," he said. "I brought you here to reassure you about the man you entrusted with your land and honor. I did not take the issue personally ... Please let's not talk about this issue again." Though he appeared calm and adopted an avuncular tone for the most part, the former general silenced an audience member who tried to ask a question at the end of his speech, saying: "I did not give anyone permission to speak." State television ... (More on P4)...(32)

Neighbor News

CICA Foreign Ministers to Meet in Beijing this Month

BEIJING - Foreign ministers of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) member states will meet in Beijing from April 27 to 28, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang announced on Wednesday. It will be the foreign ministers' fifth meeting since CICA was established in 1992 as a forum for dialogue and consultations on security issues in Asia. CICA has 26 member

countries, including China, India, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russia, and Thailand. It includes some other countries and international organizations as observers. Foreign ministers of observer countries and representatives of international organizations will also attend the meeting, Lu said. China hosted the fourth CICA summit in Shanghai in 2014. It holds the CICA presidency from 2014 to 2016. (Xinhua)

Tehran, Rome Pen Deals on Major Economic Exchange



TEHRAN - The Islamic Republic of Iran and Italy have signed 12 major agreements in various sectors of economy. The agreements were inked on Wednesday in the presence of Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad-Reza Nematzadeh and visiting Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi in Tehran. According to the official IRNA news agency, Iranian firms reached deals with Italian companies in different areas of trade, including energy, construction, power generation, information and communication technologies as well as steel and textile among others. Delegates from both

sides attended the event at Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture in Tehran, where Italy's FATA SPA, the engineering unit of the country's leading industrial group, Finmeccanica, signed a \$237 million contract with Iran's Foulad Boutia on the transfer of equipment and services for the construction of a power plant in Iran's southern province of Kerman, IRNA said. The Iranian company also sealed a deal worth 350 million euros with Italy's Danieli Group on the transfer of industrial equipment and services for the construction of a steel company in Iran. (PressTV)

Nawaz Departs for London, Holds Meeting with Top Aides

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister (PM) Nawaz Sharif left for London from Lahore's Allama Iqbal Airport on Wednesday for a 'personal and medical visit'. The PM's plane made a brief stop in Moscow for unknown reasons. Before departing, the PM held a meeting with Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar, Ali and Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif among other senior aides to discuss the implications of the Pana-

ma Papers scandal and the current political situation in the country, according to sources. "It's just a personal visit and Nawaz Sharif will not hold political meetings during his stay in London," Asif Kirmani, the PM's political secretary said. His daughter Maryam Nawaz, who is speculated to take the reins of the party in the future, posted a photo of the PM taking the blessings of his mother before he left the country. (Agencies)

UNDP to Discuss Program of Relief Aid to the Victims of Natural Disasters in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Tajik Deputy Prime Minister, Azim Ibrohim, has met here with Mr. Charles Kelly, Consultant to the Disaster Risk Management Program (DRMP) of UNDP Tajikistan. The two sides reportedly expressed satisfaction with the level of participation of international organizations and donor countries in the process of providing humanitarian aid to the disaster-affected districts and cities of Tajikistan.

International experts of UNDP Tajikistan intend to additionally assess actual volume of losses caused by natural disasters to the economies of some cities and districts of the country in cooperation with the Government of Tajikistan and submit rehabilitation programs for disaster-affected areas for consideration to international financial institutions and donor countries, the source said. (Asia-Plus)