

Constitutional Amendments Accepted in Referendum: Erdogan

ISTANBUL - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared on Sunday night that the proposed constitutional changes were accepted in a referendum, paving the way for the country to introduce the presidential system. In a televised address to the press in Istanbul, Erdogan said the amendments passed in the referendum held in the country the same day with 25 million "Yes" votes, or by leading the "No" camp by 1.3 million votes.

"Today Turkey made an historic decision about the governance system," he remarked, calling for countries that Turkey accepts as allies to "respect the decision of our



nation." The constitutional package voted on the day has 18 articles, the most controversial one being the switch to an executive presidency from the parliamentary system put in place ever since the Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923.

The package shall grant the office of the presidency sweeping powers with less checks and balances, a scenario that has been rejected by main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party.

CHP is calling for a recount after the initial result was unveiled, citing reported irregularities. ... (More on P4)... (22)

Russia Says Plans a Meeting with U.S. and U.N. on Syria in Geneva: Agencies

MOSCOW - Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said on Monday that diplomats from Russia, the United States and the United Nations plan to discuss the Syrian crisis in Geneva

next week, Russian news agencies quoted him as saying. Bogdanov also said Moscow was still waiting for confirmation from Washington that the meeting would take place. (Reuters)

China, US Working on 'N. Korea Problem': Trump

SEOUL - President Donald Trump asserted on Sunday that China was working with the United States on "the North Korea problem," and his vice president told American and South Korea service members that the North's latest "provocation," a failed missile launch shortly before his arrival in Seoul, laid bare the risks they face.

While the North did not conduct a nuclear test, the spectre of a potential escalated US response

trailed Pence as he began a 10-day trip to Asia amid increasing tensions and heated rhetoric.

Trump's national security adviser cited Trump's recent decision to order missile strikes in Syria after a chemical attack blamed on the Assad government as a sign that the president "is clearly comfortable making tough decisions." But at the same time, H.R. McMaster said, "it's time for us to undertake all actions we can, short of a military option, to try to



resolve this peacefully." In a broadcast interview that aired on Sunday, McMaster said the US would

rely on its allies as well as on Chinese leadership to resolve the issues with North Korea. (AP)

EU Calls on Turkey to Seek Broadest Possible National Consensus

BRUSSELS - The European Union (EU) on Sunday called on the Turkish authorities to seek the broadest possible national consensus.

In a joint statement issued by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini and EU enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn, the top brass said they "take note of the reported results of the referendum, and "are awaiting the assessment of the OSCE/ODIHR International Observation Mission, also with regard to alleged irregularities."

"The constitutional amendments, and especially their practical implementation, will be assessed in light of Turkey's obligations as a EU candidate country and as a member of the Council of Europe (CoE)," they

said, urging Turkey to "address the CoE's concerns and recommendations." "In view of the close referendum result and the far-reaching implications of the constitutional amendments, we also call on the Turkish authorities to seek the broadest possible national consensus in their implementation," they added. Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim declared late Sunday victory for the "Yes" camp in the referendum for constitutional amendments that will change the governing system of the country from parliamentary system to presidential system. With 99 percent of votes counted, 51.35 percent backed the constitutional changes, compared to 48.65 percent for the "No" side, according to figures by state-run Anadolu Agency. (Xinhua)

Turkey's Ties with EU to be Based on Common Interest: Deputy PM

ANKARA - Relations between Turkey and the EU will be based on "common interest" in the post-referendum period, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek said Monday.

Speaking to the reporters one day after Turkey's crucial constitutional referendum, Simsek said areas of common interest would be focused on in the post-referendum process, Daily News reported.

"Some of the 'noise' in Turkish-EU relations will calm down after elections in EU are completed," he said. Simsek also noted



that there are no plans to hold early polls in Turkey before the 2019 elections. He said that after the referendum the uncertainties have eased, adding

that the economic growth would likely speed up in the medium-term. Tensions have been escalated between Turkey and Europe, especially

Germany and the Netherlands, after Turkish ministers were banned from holding rallies as part of the referendum campaign. (Xinhua)

S. Korea, U.S. Agree to Strengthen Alliance During U.S. Vice President's Visit

SEOUL - Visiting United States Vice President Mike Pence and South Korean Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn agreed Monday to strengthen alliance of the two countries and take punitive actions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Pence and Hwang, who is serving as the acting South Korean president, held talks in Seoul before having a televised joint press conference.

The U.S. vice president arrived in South Korea Sun-



day as part of a 10-day trip to Asia. Earlier in the day, Pence visited a U.S. base near the Demilitarized Zone dividing the two Koreas. He will leave for

Japan on Tuesday. Pence told reporters that the United States and South Korea have, since 1992, made joint efforts to ... (More on P4)... (23)

Lavrov Cautions United States on N. Korea Moves

PANMUNJOM, South Korea - Russia's foreign minister says he hopes the U.S. will not take unilateral action against North Korea as it did recently in Syria. Sergey Lavrov is responding to Vice President Mike Pence's statement Monday in South Korea that the "era of strategic patience is over" with regard to North Korea's efforts to build nuclear weapons. Lavrov told journalists in Moscow that if Pence's words can be understood as a threat to take unilateral action against North Korea, "then this is a very risky path." He said, "I hope there will be no unilateral actions like those we saw recently in Syria and that the U.S. will follow the line that President Trump repeatedly voiced during the election campaign." China is urging a return to negotiations over North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons after Vice President Mike Pence warned that the U.S. has lost its patience with the regime. (AP)

Death Toll Hits 126 in Blast Against Syrian Shiite Evacuees

DAMASCUS - The death toll of the bombing that rocked the convoy of Shiite evacuees in northern Syria rose to 126, including 80 children and women, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor group reported on Sunday.

The blast, carried out by a suicide bomber driving a booby-trapped potato truck, rocked the rebel-held Rashideen area in the countryside of Aleppo province, where buses carrying 5,000 pro-government Shiite people were waiting the reactivation of a deal designed to secure their transportation to government-controlled area in Aleppo. The deal, recently reached between the rebels and the government under the supervision of Iran, Turkey and Qatar, was designed to secure evacuation of the people from the pro-government Shiite towns of Kafraya and Foa in Idlib province toward government areas in Aleppo province.

In return, the government will allow rebels and their families to leave the rebel-held towns of Madaya and Zabadani in northern Damascus to reach Idlib province.

The evacuation started on Friday, with 5,000 Shiite people leaving Kafaraya and Foa, and 2,300 rebels and their families leaving the town of Madaya as first batches.

The Shiite people reached the rebel-held town of Rashideen, while the rebels reached the government-controlled Ramouseh crossing in Aleppo. (Xinhua)

Japan PM Urges North Korea to Refrain from More Provocative Actions

TOKYO - Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe urged North Korea on Monday to refrain from taking further provocative actions, comply with U.N. resolutions and abandon its nuclear missile development. Tensions on the Korean peninsula have escalated as U.S. President Donald Trump takes a hard rhetorical line with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who has rebuffed admonitions from China and proceeded with missile tests. North Korea launched a ballistic missile on Sunday but it blew up almost immediately, the U.S. Pacific Command said. Abe told parliament he would ... (More on P4)... (24)

Mosul Operation has Displaced Nearly Half a Million: UN

BAGHDAD - The six-month-old operation to retake the Iraqi city of Mosul from the Islamic State group has forced around half a million people to flee their homes, the United Nations said Monday. Iraqi forces began the country's biggest military operation in years exactly six months ago and recaptured the east side of the city in January.

But an assault launched the following month on the part of Mosul that lies west of the Tigris river has seen a sharp rise in displacement.

"The sheer volume of civilians still fleeing Mosul city is staggering," Lise Grande, the UN's humanitarian coordinator in

Iraq, said in a statement.

"Our worst case scenario when the fighting started was that up to one million civilians may flee Mosul. Already, more than 493,000 people have left, leaving almost everything behind," she said.

Iraqi forces have been making significant gains in west Mosul over the past two months but the toughest battles could yet lie ahead, with die-hard jihadists hunkering down in the treacherous streets of the Old City. The UN estimated that another half million civilians were still in IS-controlled areas of west Mosul.

"Mosul has pushed us to our operational limits," said Grande. (AFP)

Neighbor News

China Welcomes U.S. Role on Korean Peninsula Issue: FM Spokesman

BEIJING - The United States is welcome to play a positive role in peacefully resolving the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue, said Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang on Monday.

"We are willing to work with all parties concerned to achieve denuclearization and safeguard peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula," Lu told a daily press briefing.

Lu made the comments in response to the remarks of U.S. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster on Sunday. McMaster urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to stop destabilizing behavior, saying it was the bottom line of

the United States to stop the DPRK developing nuclear weapons and to denuclearize the peninsula. "We have taken note of the remarks," said Lu, adding that seeking a peaceful solution to the Korean Peninsula issue is a right direction and meets interests of all related parties.

Dialogue and consultation is the only way to resolve the Korean Peninsula issue, said Lu, reaffirming China's stance.

China has put forward a "dual-track approach" and a "suspension for suspension" proposal to ease tensions on the peninsula and create conditions for peace talks, said Lu. (Xinhua)

It is Our Moral and National Obligation to Protect Minorities' Rights: Sharif

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Sunday reassured members of Pakistan's Christian community that Pakistan belonged to them and stressed that the country's peace and prosperity was in the unity of all Pakistanis.

"I wish our Christian brothers and sisters living in Pakistan the happiness and joys of Easter," a press release from the prime minister's office quoted him as saying.

"It is our moral and national obligation to protect the constitutional rights of each and every

Christian and all other minorities living in Pakistan, as enshrined in our Constitution," he said in his Easter address.

Prime Minister Nawaz further noted that the Pakistani Christian community has and is playing an important role in the progress and development of the country. "We deeply appreciate and are indebted to their valuable contributions and services towards our collective national objective of securing a truly strong, progressive and stable Pakistan," he was quoted to have said in the release. (Monitoring Desk)

Zarif in Central Asia as Iran Seeks to Fire up Economy

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has started touring Central Asia and the Caucasus to boost Iran's ties with three major countries in the region, especially in the field of economy.

The three-day tour spans Turkmenistan, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. A 20-member delegation of businessmen and company representatives is accompanying Zarif who cited transit cooperation among the objectives of the visit.

"There is a possibility for transit cooperation with Georgia to link the Black Sea to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean which is a very favorable way for the future of transit and the North-South Corridor," he said.

Zarif made the remarks as he landed in Ashgabat on Sunday and was received

by Turkmenistan's First Deputy Foreign Minister Vepa Hajiyev.

The Iranian foreign minister started his visit in Turkmenistan with a meeting with President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, discussing regional developments as well as ways of expanding bilateral ties, IRNA news agency reported.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC) was formalized among India, Iran and Russia in 2000 to link the Subcontinent and the Middle East to the Caucasus, Central Asia and Europe. Besides Iran, India and Russia, countries that are on board to integrate into the transit network include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Turkey, Tajikistan, Oman, Syria and Bulgaria. (PressTV)

Russia Ratifies Deal on Military, Technical Co-Op with Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - President of Russia Vladimir Putin has ratified an agreement with Uzbekistan to develop military and technical cooperation. A corresponding document was published on the Russia's official internet portal of legal information.

Earlier, Putin and President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev in a joint statement supported further development of military and technical cooperation.

It was previously reported that Shavkat Mirziyoyev signed a law on ratification of the agreement with Russia on April 3. The law was adopted by the Legislative (lower) house of the Uzbek parliament on Jan. 25 and approved by the Senate (upper house) on March 28.

The agreement on military and technical cooperation was signed between Russia and Uzbekistan in Moscow in November 2016.

The purpose of the agreement is to further deepen cooperation in the military and technical sphere, improve the system of equipping with prospective weapons and military equipment, maintain the scientific, technical, production and technological potential of the parties, as well as strengthen the sides' defense capabilities. (Trend)