

UN Envoy Confirms Giving 12-Point Vision Paper to Both Sides of Syrian Peace Talks

GENEVA - UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura on Friday confirmed that he has distributed a 12-point post-war vision document to both the Syrian government and opposition delegations participating in the current round of the Geneva peace talks.

The paper, called Special Envoy's 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles paper, was distributed by the Special Envoy to the delegations in parallel meetings yesterday, de Mistura's office said in a statement.

"Over several rounds of talks, the Special Envoy periodically identified commonalities emerging from his separate



consultations with the government and the opposition. These included 12 points of commonalities regarding the end-state of Syria," the statement said.

The statement added that then the Special Envoy has received valuable proposals regarding the content of the 12 points from the government and the opposition, and he and his team have consulted "painstakingly and carefully" on all material received.

"In light of this, yesterday the Special Envoy shared with the two delegations a document entitled Special Envoy's 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles," the statement said. (Xinhua)

Nieghbor News

China to Step up Oil, Gas Exploration to Ease Reliance on Imports

BEIJING - China will step up exploration for oil and gas and develop unconventional resources to ease the country's reliance on imports, a research center said Saturday.

By 2035, China is likely to keep the dependence rates on oil, gas imports within 70 percent and 50 percent, respectively, according to a strategic research center under the Ministry of Land and Resources. The share of oil-gas in China's primary energy structure would be 32 percent and 35 percent, respectively, by

2035 and 2050, the center said, predicting the ratio of oil consumption would peak at 2030.

China aims to increase domestic crude oil output to 200 million tonnes by 2020, while supply capacity for natural gas should exceed 360 billion cubic meters, according to the government's industry plan. Major tasks for the oil industry include accelerating exploration to ensure domestic oil supply, speeding up construction of pipeline networks and developing clean alternatives. (Xinhua)

Business Aviation is being Established in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev got acquainted with the project of a new airport that is being built in Tashkent on the basis of international requirements.

Uzbekistan occupies stable positions not only in the sphere of civil aviation, but also in the market of international freight traffic. Uzbekistan Airways provides convenient, safe and reliable delivery of goods to various countries of the world.

Further increasing the potential of our country in this area, strengthening positions in the market and ensuring quality compliance of air freight with the highest requirements is important.

At the initiative of the Head of our state, business aviation will be established in Uzbekistan.

This is a new direction for Central Asia, known in the world as business aviation, or commercial aviation. The business aviation that is being established in our country will be specialized in individual and corporate transportation, as well as providing related services.

Shavkat Mirziyoyev, during the familiarization with the project, noted that the transport and communication sphere is of great importance for the development of the economy of any country. Business aviation will open new opportunities in this direction and create convenience for entrepreneurs. The project will help domestic and foreign businessmen to export their products to foreign market, to find business partners. (Monitoring Desk)

Belarus to Start Exporting Gomselmash Cotton Pickers to Tajikistan in 2018

MINSK - Belarus will start supplying Gomselmash-made cotton pickers to Tajikistan in 2018, Belarusian Industry Minister Vitaly Vovk told the media, BelTA has learned.

"We successfully tested Gomselmash cotton pickers in 2017. Certain recommendations have been made, and we will take them into account. We will start supplying the cotton pickers in 2018," the minister said. A deal has been sealed to deliver 24 Amkodor vehicles to Tajikistan via the Promagroleasing company. "We need a guarantee either from a bank or from the government. I think that we will sort things out during this visit, and the first vehicles will be delivered

via Promagroleasing," Vitaly Vovk clarified. Further supplies of MAZ and BelAZ vehicles are under consideration, too. The minister recalled that an assembly plant for MIZ vehicles was opened in Tajikistan in November 2017. The first tractors have already been assembled; the plant's further development is now under discussion. "We have great and interesting prospects. We will make much headway in industrial cooperation. Then, there are plans to set up a free economic zone between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. We have certain interests there, too, namely to expand the possibilities of this zone, including for trade with Afghanistan. (MD)

Senior army Commander Rules out Negotiations on Iran Missile Program

TEHRAN - A senior commander of the Iranian Armed Forces says the Islamic Republic vehemently rejects any request for negotiations about its missile capability.

"Our country's defense prowess, as the main deterrent against the enemies of the Islamic Revolution, will always be on the path to progress," Deputy Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Brigadier General Massoud Jazayeri said on Saturday. He added that in addition to clear guidelines issued by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on

boosting the country's defense power, the Iranian nation and officials are also in agreement in this regard.

The senior commander advised all those who pass opinions about the Islamic Republic not to meddle in the country's defense and missile program. Speaking at a graduation ceremony for Iran's Army cadets in October, Ayatollah Khamenei said Iran's defense might was not up for negotiation, stressing the country's resolve to strengthen its defense capabilities despite enemy attempts to weaken the nation. (Press TV)

Senate OKs Tax Bill as Trump, GOP Near Big Legislative Win

WASHINGTON - US Republicans pushed a nearly \$1.5 trillion tax bill through the Senate early Saturday after a burst of eleventh-hour horse trading, as a party starved all year for a major legislative triumph took a giant step toward giving President Donald Trump one of his top priorities by Christmas.

"Big bills are rarely popular. You remember how unpopular 'Obamacare' was when it passed?" Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said in an interview, shrugging off polls showing scant public enthusiasm

for the measure. He said the legislation would prove to be "just what the country needs to get growing again." Trump hailed the bill's passage on Twitter, thanking McConnell and Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah. "Look forward to signing a final bill before Christmas!" the president wrote. Presiding over the Senate, Vice President Mike Pence announced the 51-49 vote to applause from Republicans. Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., was the only lawmaker to cross party lines, joining the Democrats in opposition. (AP)

Syria Confirms Israeli Missile Attack on Military Base near Damascus

DAMASCUS - Syria's state TV has confirmed earlier report about an Israeli missile attack on a military post near the capital Damascus early Saturday.

The air defenses responded to the Israeli attack, destroying two rockets while the rest hit the base in the southwestern countryside of Damascus, leaving damages only, said the TV.

Earlier in the day, pro-government media outlets said the air defenses were triggered by a missile attack and people in

the capital heard explosions in different areas.

Reports said the Israeli warplanes fired the rockets from inside the Lebanese airspace.

Syrian pro-government activists said the Israeli attack targeted military positions in the Kisweh area in the southwestern countryside of Damascus, causing several explosions that shook the area and reverberated across the capital.

Meanwhile, the online media "Damascus-now" posted a video on its Facebook page, showing "the

moment when the air defenses destroyed an "enemy target" in western Ghouta in rural Damascus.

Witnesses told Xinhua that cautious calm prevailed in western Ghouta following the attack, which came hours after rebels downed a Syrian military helicopter there. Syria's rebels fired a missile at the helicopter near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and the Lebanese border, said the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Israeli officials have said several times that they would not

accept any Iranian influence near their borders.

The Syrian government has repeatedly accused Israel of aiding the rebels near the Golan Heights. Both the Syrian government and opposition are participating in United Nations (UN)-mediated Syria peace talks in Geneva. UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura said Friday he has distributed a 12-point post-war vision document for the Syrian invitees to discuss when they resume their ongoing talks someday next week. (Agencies)

Declining 'International Interference' a Chance for Libya Vote: UN



ROME - UN Libya envoy Ghassan Salame on Saturday urged the conflict-torn country to seize an opportunity to forge its own path towards hoped-

for elections next year while "international interference" is declining. Countries from Britain and France to Egypt, Turkey and Russia have been ac-

used by critics of manoeuvring in Libya outside of the UN process in bids to secure their own interests. Salame said he hoped the necessary conditions to hold a national vote would be in place "a few months from now" and urged Libyans "to seize the opportunity of attention being directed elsewhere" to work without foreign interference.

"I feel that there is a lot of interference in the Libyan case... with weapons, money, you name it," he told a conference in Rome discussing today's challenges

in the Mediterranean. But he said there was now "a window during which there is not the same level of interference." "Support for various actors has gone down," he added. "There is declining international interference (and) Libyans must come together and build permanent institutions." Salame unveiled a plan in September for a legislative and presidential vote by next year in a bid to end years of political turmoil after the 2011 overthrow of long-time dictator Moamer Kadhafi. (AFP)

Saudi-led Coalition Announces Observation of New Clashes in Yemen, Says Trusts will of Yemenis

RIYADH - Saudi-led coalition in Yemen announced on Saturday it observes the new developments in Yemen, citing confidence in the will of Yemenis, Sabq local news reported.

The loyalists of Yemen's former President Ali Abdallah Saleh are clashing with the Iran-backed militia in the capital Sanaa. Saleh called in a live TV on Saturday for a joint ceasefire to be agreed on by his loyalists and the Houthi militia, after clashes entered their fourth day and

have resulted in the deaths of at least 80 people. "The people have revolted against Houthi aggression," he said.

Saleh urged an end to "militia rule on Yemeni land," adding that Houthis had continued their "provocative acts against Yemeni citizens." He also demanded that armed Yemeni forces refrain from taking any orders from the Houthi militia, and called for "opening a new page with neighboring countries." (Xinhua)

Erdogan says Turkey cannot be 'Condemned by Courts' in US

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday said Turkey could never be "condemned by virtual courts" in the US after he was implicated in a scheme allegedly designed to subvert US sanctions on Iran during a trial in New York.

Turkish-Iranian gold trader Reza Zarrab had been due to go on trial over the accusations but, to Turkey's chagrin, he agreed to cooperate with US prosecutors and told a court on Thursday that Erdogan authorised two Turkish banks to circumvent the sanctions and launder money from Iran. The case has angered Erdogan, who accused the trial of being linked to the network of Fethullah Gulen, the US-based Muslim cleric blamed by the Turkish government for last year's failed coup.

"My country can never be condemned by virtual courts set up by FETO scoundrels, fake representatives," Erdogan said during a televised speech in the eastern city of Kars, referring to Gulen's group that Turkey has dubbed the "Fethullah Terrorist Organisation".

"Someone has got up and decided they will apparently try my country in their falsely set-up courts. Don't bother!" Erdogan added.

Turkey has repeatedly called for Gulen to be extradited, but he denies any involvement in the coup or terrorism. Since Zarrab became the prosecution's star witness in the trial, deputy chief executive of Turkish lender Halkbank Mehmet Hakan Atilla is now the lone man in the dock accused of violating sanctions, bribery and money laundering. (AFP)

Zimbabwe's New Leader Drops 2 Ministers after Public Outcry

HARARE - Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa on Saturday dropped two ministers he had appointed to his new cabinet just a day earlier, a move widely seen as a response to a public uproar over the nominations.

Mnangagwa, 75, named his cabinet overnight Thursday, and is expected to appoint two vice presidents following a special ZANU-PF congress in mid-December. But he quickly replaced education minister Lazarus Dokora with Paul Mavima, a professor and also a lawmaker in the governing ZANU-PF party.



Professor Clever Nyathi was dropped as labour minister in favour of Petronella Kagonye, also a ZANU-PF lawmaker, though Nyathi will remain as special advisor on national peace and reconciliation.

A government statement said the changes were necessary to "ensure com-

pliance with the constitution and considerations of gender, demography and special needs."

But Mnangagwa has come under fire for recycling officials from the era of ousted president Robert Mugabe, and for naming two military allies to top positions in his new cabinet. (AFP)

UN Relief Wing Asks for \$22.5 bln for 2018

UNITED NATIONS - The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has asked for a record amount of 22.5 billion U.S. dollars for 2018 as funds to help people around the world in need of aid and protection due to conflicts, natural disasters, epidemics and displacement.

These funds aim to reach 91 million of the world's most vulnerable people in 2018 with food, shelter, health care, and other basic assistance, said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric on Friday.

The countries this appeal targets include Afghanistan, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Haiti, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, he said. UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock emphasized that investing in coordinated response plans is a sound choice, which helps to deliver tangible and measurable results and has a proven track record of success. Aid workers can only respond to the growing needs with the generous support of donors, said Lowcock. (Agencies)

Macron Calls on Iraq to Dismantle all Militias

PARIS/BAGHDAD - French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday called on Iraq to dismantle all militias, including the government sanctioned Iran-backed Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), a rare public request to do so by a major Western leader.

Macron's call, which followed a meeting with Iraqi Kurdish leaders in Paris, underscores the tough balancing act Baghdad has to perform between its allies in the war on Islamic State, Iran and Western powers, which do not see eye to eye.

Iraqi Kurdish authorities accuse the majority Arab Shi'ite PMF of widespread abuses against Kurds in ethnically-mixed regions.

The meeting with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and his deputy Qubad Talabani was the first high profile international meeting for the Kurdish leadership after a Sept. 25 independence referendum.

"It is essential that there is a gradual demilitarization, in particular of the Popular Mobilisation that established itself in the last few years in Iraq, and that all militias be gradually dismantled," he told a joint news conference held with Barzani and Talabani.

Macron called for dialogue in Iraq between the central government in Baghdad and the semi-autonomous KRG within the framework of the Iraqi constitution, saying he was convinced a "constructive dialogue" could lead to lifting Baghdad's restrictions on the Kurdish region. (Reuters)