

# Start of Intra-Syrian Talks Steeped in Uncertainty

GENEVA - As Syrian factions gather in Geneva to broker peace for the war-torn country, doubts remain as to whether UN-sponsored intra-Syrian talks will enable Bashar al-Assad's regime and Syria's opposition see eye to eye this time round.

The initial stages of talks, which ultimately aim to discuss governance, constitutional change and the holding of elections while addressing the implementation of a lasting ceasefire and stopping the threat of Islamic State (IS), have indeed been tainted with uncertainty from the outset.



Who to invite and whether or not the High Negotiations Committee (HNC)

for opposition groups would actually attend remained ambiguous until

the last minute, delaying the start of meetings originally planned for January

25 by four days last week. Despite this setback, both sides were present in

Geneva by January 31, though the HNC's appointed head, Riyad Hijab, was not amongst those who landed in the Swiss city on Sunday.

By the time Hijab's controversial chief negotiator Mohammed Alloush, who is part of the powerful Army of Islam rebel group, arrived in Geneva the following day, both the Syrian regime delegation and the HNC had held closed-door meetings on separate occasions with UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, whose role is to mediate between both ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

## U.N. Scrambles to Sustain Syria Talks; Russia Vows to Crush 'Terrorists'

GENEVA / MUSCAT - The United Nations strained to keep faltering Syrian peace talks alive on Wednesday as Damascus tried to press home gains against rebels and its ally Russia said its air strikes would go on until "terrorists" were defeated.

U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura announced the formal start on Monday of the first attempt in two years to negotiate an end to a war that has killed 250,000 people, caused a refugee crisis in the region and empowered Islamic State mili-

itants. But both opposition and government representatives have since said talks have not in fact begun, and fighting on the ground has raged on without constraint.

De Mistura acknowledged on Tuesday that a collapse of the Geneva talks was always possible. "If there is a failure this time after we tried twice at conferences in Geneva, for Syria there will be no more hope. We must absolutely try to ensure that there is no failure," he told Swiss television RTS. ...*(More on P4)...(24)*

## Ukraine's Poroshenko Sees Increased Risk of Open War with Russia

BERLIN - The risk of open war between Russia and Ukraine is greater than it was a year ago and Russian President Vladimir Putin has begun an "information war" against Germany, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko told the German newspaper Bild. Poroshenko, who met German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on Monday, said Russia had implemented "not one single point" of the

Minsk accord, which includes a ceasefire between Ukrainian troops and pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine. Russia was building up its military presence on the border with Ukraine, he said. "The danger of an open war is greater than last year," Poroshenko told Bild, in an interview published in its Wednesday edition. "Russia is investing a great deal in war preparations," Merkel pressed Putin by



phone on Tuesday to use his influence to ensure that a ceasefire is upheld in Ukraine and that monitors from the OSCE Eu-

ropean security organization are granted free access to conflict areas, her spokesman said. ...*(More on P4)...(25)*

## DPRK Satellite Launch Plan Defies Int'l Law: Russia

MOSCOW - Russia's Foreign Ministry Wednesday said it was greatly concerned about a plan of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to launch a satellite later this month. "We have to state that by intending to violate the requirements of the UN Security Council once again, the DPRK shows defiant disregard of the universal-

ly recognized norms of international law," an online Foreign Ministry statement said. The statement added that Russia called on the DPRK to seriously consider the consequences of openly acting in opposition to the international community and "to assess realistically the full costs of such short-sighted moves." A UN spokesperson said Tuesday that

three UN organizations have been informed by the DPRK of its plans to launch an Earth-observation satellite between Feb. 8 and 25. South Korea and Japan condemned this plan Wednesday on suspicion that Pyongyang was in fact intending to test a long-range ballistic missile. Also on Wednesday, China expressed its serious concern about

the plan and said it hoped the DPRK would exercise restraint and deal with the issue prudently so as to avoid a possible escalation of tension. China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said the DPRK is entitled to the peaceful use of outer space, yet this right is restricted by relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council. (Xinhua)

## China "Seriously Concerned" about DPRK's Satellite Launch Plan

BEIJING - China is "seriously concerned" about the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) plan to launch a satellite later this month, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on Wednesday. Spokesperson Lu Kang told a daily press briefing that Beijing hopes Pyongyang will exercise restraint on the issue and deal with it prudently so as to avoid possible escalation of tension. The DPRK is entitled to peaceful use of outer space, yet this right is re-

stricted by resolutions by the United Nations Security Council, Lu said. China will continue to communicate with all parties concerned to safeguard peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, he said. It is a shared responsibility of all parties concerned to maintain peace on the peninsula, and regional stability is in the interests of all sides, the spokesperson said. A UN spokesperson said on Tuesday that three UN organizations have been ...*(More on P4)...(26)*

## Cameron Urges Parliament to 'Fight together' on EU Reforms

LONDON - British Prime Minister David Cameron urged MPs on Wednesday to unite behind his drive to agree a series of European Union reforms at a Brussels summit next month ahead of Britain's EU membership referendum. "Let's fight this together," Cameron said as he defended a series of draft proposals put forward by the European Council president on Tuesday that have angered eurosceptics from his own Conservative Party. "I do believe that with these draft texts... Britain is getting closer to the decision point," he said in a parliamentary debate on the issue. Cameron did not give a timing for the referendum but, asked about June 23 - which has been mooted in British newspaper reports - he said the date would not ...*(More on P4)...(27)*

## French Gov't Seeks to Prolong State of Emergency Despite Critics

PARIS - France will extend the state of emergency for three months as terrorism threats remain "extremely high", the government's spokesman Stephane Le Foll said on Wednesday. "The state of emergency is useful in the fight against terrorism which remains extremely high," Le Foll was quoted as saying by local media after a weekly cabinet meeting. He also stressed that the state of emergency had been applied "with the respect of law" in a response to growing critics that blamed the Social-



ists for stifling freedom of expression and gathering by prolonging the state of emergency. On Saturday, thousands of people took to the streets in France's main cities to denounce the government's constitution reforms which aimed

at making it easier to impose a state of emergency and revoking citizenship from potential terrorist suspects. After gunmen stormed simultaneously restaurants, coffees shops, theatre hall and stadium in ...*(More on P4)...(28)*

## Arms, Financial Supply to Terrorists Must Be Blocked: Iran's Rouhani

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has described terrorism as a serious threat to the entire world, including Europe, calling for measures to stop financial and arms supply to terrorists. The Iranian president made the remarks in a meeting with visiting German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Tehran on Wednesday. Rouhani further pointed to the landmark nuclear agreement between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the UK, the US, France, Russia and China - plus Germany, noting that the precise and immediate implementation of the deal serves the interests of both sides. "The JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), as a successful model, has prepared a very good condition in the international area for dialogue and interaction on other issues. We should try to utilize this win-win equation for the resolution of other regional issues," Rouhani pointed out. (PressTV)

## Iraq Kurd Leader: 'Time has Come' for Statehood Referendum

BAGHDAD - Iraqi Kurdish leader Masud Barzani has declared that the "time has come" for the country's Kurds to hold a referendum on statehood, a move likely to raise tensions with Baghdad. But even if the various political challenges to independence are resolved, the major economic problems the region faces due to low oil prices are another bar to Kurdish independence. "The time has come and the conditions are now suitable ...*(More on P4)...(31)*

## UNHCR Announces \$10.8mln for 2016 Refugee Response in Rwanda

KIGALI - The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Tuesday announced it has earmarked 10.8 million U.S. dollars to help refugees in Rwanda. The UN organization said the money is for the first phase of the 2016 aid plan in response to 147,000 refugees living

in six camps across the Eastern African country. "As we continue to fund-raise on behalf of refugees during the course of the year, we hope to increase the amount we are signing today," Saber Azam, the UNHCR representative to Rwanda said. There are more ...*(More on P4)...(29)*

## Indonesia, Norway Boost Ties on Forest Fire Prevention

JAKARTA - The governments of Indonesia and Norway stepped up cooperation on efforts to prevent forest fire in Indonesia, particularly on peat land areas. Indonesian President Joko Widodo met with Norway's Minister of Environment and Climate Vidar Helgesen at the State Palace on Wednesday, stressing commitment on strengthening efforts to protect peat land from forest fire. Norway's sup-

port on Indonesia's efforts to restore peat land was inked in an agreement, said Nazir Foad, head of the Indonesia's peat land restoration agency. "This collaboration is a positive step and shows a seriousness of commitment of Indonesia and Norway to settle forest fire problem," he said after the meeting. "The president firmly stressed that during the moratorium ...*(More on P4)...(30)*

## Nieghbor News

### US Ambivalence Towards JCPOA Worrying: Iran

TEHRAN - Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani has criticized the US ambivalence vis-à-vis Iran's historic nuclear agreement with the P5+1 group. In a meeting with visiting German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Tehran on Wednesday, Shamkhani said the recent implementation of Iran-P5+1 agreement, dubbed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and the concurrent lifting of nuclear-related sanctions against Tehran are vital to building and boosting confidence between Iran and "non-

hostile Western" countries. "Despite the Islamic Republic of Iran's goodwill to implement JCPOA and effective efforts by some European countries to speed up the implementation process, double-standard and ambivalent approach of the United States is a source of serious concern," he said. The SNSC secretary noted that "constructive interaction" between Iran and European countries, in light of political, economic and cultural red lines, can prepare the ground for the opening of a new chapter in multilateral cooperation. (PressTV)

### Pakistani PM Warns Protesting Airlines Employees

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has warned that action will be taken against those workers of national airlines on a countrywide protest against the government's privatization plan. The comments came hours after hundreds of employees of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) clashed with the law enforcement agencies in the port city of Karachi on Tuesday. Hospital sources in Karachi confirmed that at least two employees died of bullet wounds and five others were injured in the clash. Riot police fired tear gas shells, used batons and water cannons to dis-

perse the protesters outside the Karachi airport. Prime Minister Sharif warned to take action against the PIA employees who are not attending their duties, saying, "The PIA is facing damages of 100 million rupees per day." He said passengers are facing problems due to the strike and some political parties are politicizing the PIA. The PIA employees had announced strike across the country; however, the strike did not affect flight operation, PIA spokesman Daniyal Gilani said. The protest turned into violence in Karachi when bullets were fired during the protest. (Xinhua)

### Russia to Render Maximum Assistance to Tajikistan by Supplying Arms

DUSHANBE - Russia will provide all possible assistance to Tajikistan's army by supplying weapons and military equipment, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov told Tajik Defense Minister Sherali Mirzo on Wednesday. "Our Tajik friends and brothers are experiencing new challenges and threats, taking into account the problems emanating from Afghanistan. For us it is important to understand what is going on there, what you are doing, and, of course, to render maximum assistance to the armed forces of Tajikistan by supplying arms, military equip-

ment and providing everything necessary to boost their combat readiness," Antonov said. He noted that Tajikistan was a priority area for Russia for developing military and military-technical cooperation. "We proceed from the assumption that the better Tajikistan's security is, the better Russia's security is," Antonov said. He also promised that Russia's 201st military base located in Tajikistan would be used, if necessary, "for protecting the national integrity and sovereignty of Tajikistan and, of course, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a whole." (TASS)

### China to Launch Nearly 40 Beidou Navigation Satellites in Five Years

BEIJING - China plans to launch nearly 40 Beidou navigation satellites in the next five years to support its global navigation and positioning network, a spokesperson said Wednesday. By the end of 2018, another 18 satellites will be put into orbit for Beidou's navigation service, said Ran Chengqi, spokesperson of the Beidou Navigation Satellite System and also director of the China Satellite Navigation Office. Ran said the positioning accuracy of the Beidou

Navigation Satellite System inside China has reached five meters, with the improvement of a software algorithm and other technology development. According to earlier reports, China planned to set up a complete Beidou system consisting of 35 satellites by 2020, which provided global coverage with positioning accuracy of less than 10 meters and timing accuracy of 20 nanoseconds. China launched a new-generation satellite, the ...*(More on P4)...(32)*