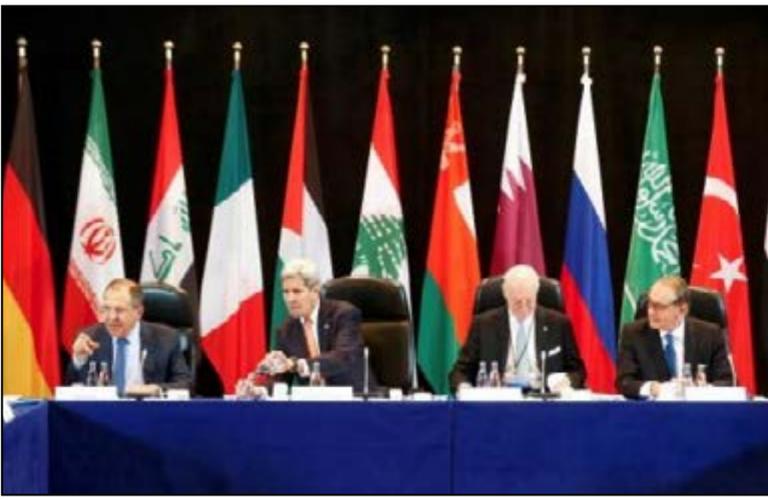


'Cessation of Hostilities' in Syria Lets Russia Keep Bombing

MUNICH - Major powers agreed on Friday to a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria to begin in a week, doing nothing in the meantime to halt Russian bombing poised to give government forces their biggest victory of the five-year-old war.

If implemented, the deal would allow humanitarian aid to reach besieged towns. It has the potential to be the first diplomatic breakthrough in a conflict that has fractured the Middle East, killed at least 250,000 people, made 11 million homeless and sent hundreds of thousands fleeing into Europe. But by allowing fighting to rage on for at least another week, it gives the Damascus government and its Russian allies time to press on with an offensive that has trans-



formed the conflict since the start of this month.

Russian warplanes were bombing northern Syria on Friday, showing no sign of slowing the pace of attacks despite the agreement hammered out overnight.

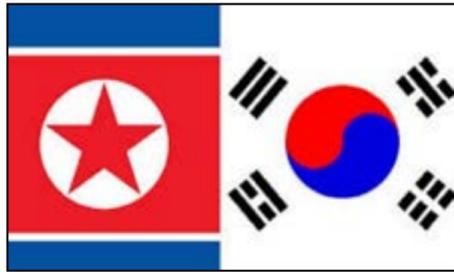
Syrian government forces, with Lebanese and Iranian allies and vigorous Russian air support, are now poised to recapture the northern city of Aleppo, Syria's biggest city before the war, and seal off the border with Turkey.

Those two victories would reverse years of insurgent gains and effectively end rebel hopes of dislodging President Bashar al-Assad through force, the cause they have fought for since 2011 with the encouragement of Arab states, Turkey and the West. (Reuters)

All Communication Hotlines Between S. Korea, DPRK Cut off

SEOUL - All of communication hotlines between South Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) have been in a state of complete cut-off after the shutdown of an inter-Korean factory park, Seoul's defense ministry said Friday. Defense Ministry spokesman Moon Sang-gyun told a regular press briefing that all communication hotlines linking the two sides have been blocked as Pyongyang cut off the lines on Thursday following the shutdown of the Kaesong Industrial

Zone. Two military hotlines had been run between the two sides in the western and eastern regions, but the eastern hotline was already closed in a forest fire in 2013. The telephone and fax lines in the western region were cut off from Thursday as the DPRK decided to shut down the joint factory park in its border city of Kaesong, Moon said. Pyongyang's decision came in the wake of Seoul's Wednesday announcement to completely stop operations at the joint industrial zone as part of



punitive measures to the DPRK's Sunday launch of a long-range rocket and the fourth nuclear test on Jan. 6. Two communication channels for Red Cross of-

officials and those in charge of inter-Korean affairs between the two sides were also closed at the truce village of Panmunjom, the spokesman said. (Xinhua)

DPRK Suspends Probe into Japanese Abductees in Response to Sanctions

PYONGYANG - The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is putting an end to investigations into Japanese abductees in the country in response to Japan's expanded sanctions on it following its fourth nuclear test and rocket launch, state media reported Friday. The special investigation committee probing the whereabouts of Japanese nationals abducted by DPRK agents during 1970s and 1980s "will be dissolved from Feb. 12,

2016," a statement carried by the official KCNA news agency said. The decision was made apparently in response to Japan's new sanctions on the DPRK adopted Wednesday following its fourth nuclear test and rocket launch. The new sanctions include banning the re-entry from DPRK of Japan-based foreign nuclear or missile engineers, banning ships from third countries that have visited ports in the ... (More on P4)...(29)

Nieghbor News

Iran Lifts Currency Controls with Russia

TEHRAN - Iran said on Friday that it had lifted the currency controls with Russia in a bid which is expected to boost commerce between the two countries.

The announcement was made by Masoud Karbassian, the head of Iran's Customs Administration who said the policy is in line with the government's push to promote trade ties with other countries.

On a related front, the media reported also on Friday that Iran is working over the establishment of

a direct commercial flight route to Russia's southern city of Astrakhan in what is expected to help boost trade between the two countries.

The Trade Promotion Organization of Iran said the two-way route will be launched through subsidies that will be provided by the government.

The first flight from Iran to Astrakhan is expected to take place on 23 February 2016. Planes from Iran's Taban airline will travel to the Russian city twice a week for a period of six months. (PressTV)

China Urges U.N. Action to Make North Korea 'Pay Price'

MUNICH - China will back a U.N. Security Council resolution to make North Korea "pay the necessary price" for recent rocket launches, its foreign minister told Reuters on Friday, adding the goal was to get Pyongyang back to the negotiating table.

Wang Yi also said he was concerned by a possible U.S. deployment of its sophisticated THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) missile defense system to South Korea, saying it could also be used to target China. North Korea has been

under U.N. sanctions since its first nuclear test in 2006. It has conducted three more atomic tests since then, including last month's, and numerous ballistic missile launches.

Washington and Beijing have appeared divided over how to respond to North Korea, with Washington urging tougher sanctions and Beijing stressing the need for dialogue.

However, Wang told Reuters at an interview in Munich that it was time for a "strong" resolution covering a wide range of areas. (Reuters)

U.S. Sees Saudi Arabia and UAE Providing Commandos for Syria

BRUSSELS - U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said on Friday he expected Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to provide special operations forces to help Syrian opposition fighters battling Islamic State, including to retake the city of Raqqa. "We're going to try to give opportunities and power to ... particularly Sunni Arabs in Syria who want to re-seize their territory back from ISIL, especially Raqqa," Carter said after defense talks in Brussels. Carter, who met with offi-

cials from UAE on Friday, said it had also promised to resume participating in the U.S.-led air campaign against Islamic State. He received a similar assurance from Saudi Arabia on Thursday. "We're not looking to substitute for them (the Syrian rebels), any more than we're looking to substitute for the Iraqi forces. But we are looking to enable them strongly and help them organize themselves," Carter said. He said the United Arab Emirates could also play ... (More on P4)...(30)

Bad Weather in Feb. Causes Drop in Migrant Sea Arrivals in Greece: IOM

GENEVA - The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reported Friday that some 5,110 refugee and migrant maritime arrivals were reported in Greece in the first 10 days of February, a significant decrease compared to the 72,193 arrivals recorded in the whole of January. "Last weekend's high winds and low temperatures, which saw ferry services to the islands diverted due to rough seas, resulted in a dramatic drop in the number of migrants risking their lives trying to reach Greece," IOM ex-

plained in a statement. So far this year, 83,201 migrants and refugees have reached European shores, with the bulk of arrivals (77,303) registered in Greece. According to Hellenic police, around 44 percent of January arrivals in the southeastern European country were Syrian, 27 percent Afghan and 17 percent Iraqi. IOM indicated that 410 people have lost their lives while attempting to reach Greece and Italy since the beginning of 2016. The Eastern Mediterra-



nean route separating Turkey and Greece remains by far the deadliest passage, claiming the lives of 320 people since the start of the

year. Ninety individuals have died while crossing the Central Mediterranean passage which links North Africa with Italy. (Xinhua)

EU is Poised to Restrict Passport-Free Travel

BRUSSELS - European Union countries are poised to restrict passport-free travel by invoking an emergency rule to impose controls at several borders for two more years because of the migration crisis, according to EU documents seen by The Associated Press.

The switch will reverse a decades-old trend of expanding passport-free travel in Europe.

Since 1995, people have been able to cross borders among Schengen Area member countries without document checks. Each of the current 26 countries in the Schengen Area is allowed to unilaterally put



up border controls for a maximum of six months, but that time limit can be extended for up to two years if a member is found to be failing to protect its borders. The documents show that EU policy makers are preparing to make unprecedented use of an emergency provision by

declaring that Greece is failing to sufficiently protect its border. Some 2,000 people are still arriving daily on Greek islands in smugglers' boats from Turkey, most of them keen to move deeper into Europe to wealthier countries like ... (More on P4)...(31)

Turkey Says 100,000 Refugees in Border Camps inside Syria

ONCUPINAR - Some 100,000 Syrian refugees are being looked after in camps inside Syria close to the Turkish border, including 35,000 who this month fled a Russian-backed regime offensive in northern Aleppo province, a top Turkish official said Friday. Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Yalcin Akdogan, whose country has come under increasing pressure to open its border to people fleeing the violence, said the refugees were being accommodated in nine camps just across the border with Syria. "There are nine camps on the other side of the border accommodating 100,000 people including the 30-35,000 new arrivals," Akdogan told reporters at Oncupinar border crossing in televised comments. He added that a tenth camp was being built three kilometres (1.85 miles) inside Syria. The refugees are looked after by organisations such as Turkey's emergency ... (More on P4)...(32)

Thousands of Iraqi Refugees Leave Finland Voluntarily

HELSINKI - Thousands of Iraqi refugees who arrived in Finland last year have decided to cancel their asylum applications and to return home voluntarily, citing family issues and disappointment with life in the frosty Nordic country. Europe is in the grip of its worst migrant crisis since World War Two, with more than a million people arriving last year, fleeing wars and poverty in the Middle East and beyond. Germany and Finland's neighbor Sweden have taken in many of the migrants but Finland too saw the number of asylum seekers increase nearly tenfold in 2015 to 32,500 from 3,600 in 2014. Almost two thirds of the asylum seekers last year were young Iraqi men, but some are now having second ... (More on P4)...(33)

Israeli Security Forces Keep Palestinian Village Under Siege

BETHLEHEM - Israeli security forces have kept Nahalin village near Bethlehem under a military siege for the fourth consecutive day, the head of the village council said on Friday. Ibrahim Shakarneh, head of Nahalin village council, told Xinhua that the Israeli security forces surround the village and banning residents movements out of it since Tuesday. Israeli forces have turned several roof tops and buildings in the village to military points, said Shakarneh, accusing Israel of imposing "collective punishment" against Palestinians. Israeli public radio reported that an Israeli was stabbed near the Gush Etzion settlement bloc, and the assailant ran ... (More on P4)...(36)

Hopes for Peace As S. Sudan President Names Rival as Deputy

JUBA - South Sudan's President Salva Kiir has named his arch-rival Riek Machar as vice-president, raising hopes for the implementation of a repeatedly broken peace deal to end more than two years of civil war. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and over two million forced

from their homes since war between the rivals broke out in December 2013, pushing the world's youngest nation to the brink of famine. "I, Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan, do hereby issue this Republican Decree for ... (More on P4)...(34)

2 Peacekeepers Killed, 30 Injured as Militants Attack UN Base in Northern Mali

BAMAKO - Two Guinean peacekeepers under the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) died while 30 others injured, five of them critically, in a Friday morning attack targeting MINUSMA base in Northern Mali town of Kidal. Security sources who spoke to Xinhua on phone said the attack began on

Friday at 6:55 a.m. local time when rockets were launched on the UN forces camp. The attack lasted for less than two hours but left numerous victims. Eyewitnesses told Xinhua a UN helicopter was equally attacked by the assailants. A MINUSMA military official who requested for ... (More on P4)...(35)

Pakistan Concerned over DPRK Rocket Launch: Foreign Ministry

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan on Friday expressed deep concerns over the recent launch of a rocket by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and described it as violation of the UN resolutions.

The DPRK on Sunday launched a long-range rocket, saying it carried an earth observation satellite, but Japan and South Korea, among other nations, believe the launch was a test of a long-range ballistic missile.

In response to media questions, the Pakistan foreign ministry spokesperson said that the rocket launch by DPRK on Feb. 8 is a "matter of deep concern."

"Every country has the right to peaceful uses of

outer space. However, in this case we have noted that the launch is in violation of UN Security Council resolutions, which require DPRK to refrain from such actions," the spokesperson said in a statement.

"We have persistently maintained that DPRK should abide by all its international obligations and all parties should avoid actions that are detrimental to the objective of the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free Korean peninsula within the framework of Six Party Talks," he said. The rocket had been launched from the DPRK's Tongchang-ri launch station on its west coast, according to South Korean defense authorities. (Xinhua)

Germany Donates €54.5 Million to Social Development Project in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Germany expected to donate €54.5 million to support the implementation of social development projects in Tajikistan.

According to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan (MEDT), a financial cooperation agreement for €54.5 million was signed between the governments of Tajikistan and Germany in Dushanbe on February 11.

Besides, a government-to-agreement between Tajikistan and Germany on technical assistance was signed on the same day, the source said. The documents were re-

portedly inked by Tajik Minister of Economic Development and Trade Neamtullo Hikmatullozoda and Germany's Ambassador to Tajikistan Holger Green.

The agreements reportedly provide for the implementation of social development projects in Tajikistan due grants awarded by the German Government.

The source says Germany will donate €54.5 million to support development of vocational education, construction of schools, development of micro-lending institutions in rural areas, rehabilitation of social infrastructure, etc. (Asia-Plus)