

Provisional Agreement on Terms of Ceasefire in Syria Reached: Kerry

AMMAN - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said here on Sunday that a provisional agreement on the terms of a ceasefire in Syria has been reached with Russia.

Speaking at a press conference in Amman, Kerry said the U.S. reached a deal with Russia over the truce in Syria and that a ceasefire agreement is likely to be announced very soon as well.

Kerry said he discussed the details of the truce with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

During the press conference with his Jordanian counterpart Nasser Judeh, Kerry said U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin will discuss the completion of the agreement in the next few days. (Xinhua)



Damascus Accuses Ankara, Riyadh of Expanding Syrian Conflict

DAMASCUS - Syria's Foreign Ministry said the deadly explosions rocking Syria's province of Homs Sunday revealed Turkish and Saudi roles in prolonging the Syrian crisis, according to state news agency SANA.

"The bombings are in reaction to Turkey's and Saudi's responses to their exposed role in advancing the Syrian conflict as well as an attempt to hinder the efforts towards finding a political solution," said the Foreign Ministry in

condemnation letters sent to the UN.

About 46 people were killed and tens of others were wounded in twin explosions from booby-trapped cars in Homs earlier in the day.

The explosion rocked Street 60 in the pro-government district of al-Zahra', which is populated by the Alwaite minority to whom the ruling elite in Syria belong, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Meanwhile, Syria's state-run TV aired



footage from the explosion site, showing scenes of substantial destruction and damage. Loyal neighborhoods to the government along with other

districts of Homs have suffered from frequent suicide bombings, as well as rocket and mortar fire shelling from rebels en ... (More on P4)...(18)

Syrian Ceasefire Long Way off Though Assad Says Ready

BEIJING - Syrian President Bashar Assad said that his government is ready for a ceasefire with opposition forces in the almost five-year-old armed conflict, but many more rifts must be mended before such an agreement can be clinched.

In a recent interview with a Spanish newspaper, El Pais, Assad said that his condition for a ceasefire is that the "terrorists" don't exploit it to enhance their own position, according to Syria's official news

agency, which published the full script Saturday.

Assad said Turkey may also take advantage of the ceasefire to send "terrorists and arms" into Syria. In the interview, Assad's tone considerably softened compared to that in an AFP interview released on Feb.12.

In the AFP interview he vowed to recapture the whole of Syria, including the Eastern province of Raqqa and the Northern province of Idlib, which ... (More on P4)...(19)

Top DPRK Leader Guides Military Drills

PYONGYANG - Top leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Kim Jong Un recently guided war maneuvers of the army's large combined units and watched a flight drill, the official KCNA news agency reported Sunday. Engaged in the maneuvers were metropolitan defense corps, a tank division and two motorized infantry divisions of the Korean People's Army (KPA), according to the KCNA.

The maneuvers were aimed at "further rounding off operational preparedness for reliably

defending Pyongyang from any enemy attack," it said.

Kim stressed the importance of "practical and actual drills." Meanwhile, he watched a flight drill carried out by fighter pilots of the KPA air and anti-air forces, and expressed satisfaction over the drill. He urged the pilots to intensify training and to round off combat readiness on the occasion of the 7th Congress of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea in May. Kim was accompanied by Minister of the People's Armed Forces Pak Yong Sik and ... (More on P4)...(20)

Muslim Nations Must Lead in Counterterrorism: Saudi Prince

ABU DHABI - A prominent Saudi prince said Sunday that Muslim countries need to take the lead in fighting terrorism and that a recently announced Islamic counterterrorism alliance of 34 nations should have been created sooner.

Prince Turki al-Faial's comments come as the kingdom hosts an 18-day military exercise with 20 members of the new alliance, which includes Pakistan, Sudan, Jordan and neighboring Gulf states. Defense Ministers from the coalition of



Muslim-majority countries are scheduled to hold their first meeting in Saudi Arabia sometime in March. "I consider this a leading and commendable step that should have

happened sooner and thank God it has taken place," he told reporters in Abu Dhabi. "It's no secret, unfortunately, that in our world today the majority of terrorism-related

acts, its victims are Muslim," he said. "Therefore, it is our responsibility as Muslim countries to play the primary role in fighting this disease that has ... (More on P4)...(21)

Clashes in Jihadist-Held Iraq City Halt After Residents Seized

BAGHDAD - Clashes between Iraqi tribesmen and the Islamic State group in Fallujah have halted after the jihadists detained dozens of residents of the city west of Baghdad, officials said Sunday. The fighting between the Sunni Arab tribesmen and IS in Fallujah, one of two cities it still holds in Iraq, challenges the jihadists' ability to maintain control.

But officials said tribesmen were running short of supplies on Saturday, and IS, which is known for its extreme violence, has already executed a large number of opponents elsewhere in Anbar province. Tribesmen in three areas of Fallujah



withdrew from the clashes (with IS), fearing for the fate of the detainees", an army lieutenant colonel told AFP on condition of anonymity. "The clashes stopped because of the imbalance of power and fear that the detainees would be executed," said Issa Sayir who was appointed by the Anbar gov-

ernor to administer the Fallujah area. Sayir said IS was likely to execute Fallujah residents for their alleged "cooperation with the security forces". Raja Barakat, a member of the provincial council in Anbar, where Fallujah is located, said: "We now fear that the (IS) organisation ... (More on P4)...(22)

Turkey Says Strikes on Syrian Kurd Fighters 'Legitimate Defence'

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has defended his country's fight against Kurdish fighters in Syria as "legitimate defence", after international powers urged Ankara to rein in its cross-border bombardments. Turkey has been shelling targets in northern Syria for the past week in a bid to stem the advances of a Kurdish-led coalition that has seized territory in the area.

Ankara blames Syrian Kurdish fighters for this week's suicide car bomb attack in the Turkish capital that killed 28 people and fears the creation of a Kurdish stronghold along its southern border. "The situation we are currently facing is one of legitimate defence. No-one can deny or limit Turkey's legitimate right to defence in the face of terrorist attacks," Erdogan said in a speech in Istanbul late on Saturday, according to the Dogan news agency. Erdogan's ... (More on P4)...(23)

Russia's Defense Minister in Tehran for Cooperation Talks

TEHRAN - Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu arrived in Iran's capital Tehran on Sunday to hold talks with senior Iranian officials on the latest regional developments and defense cooperation, Press TV reported. Shoigu will meet his Iranian counterpart, Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan, as well as Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. The trip by Shoigu follows Dehqan's last week visit to Moscow. During his stay in Russia, media reported that Moscow was expected to hand over the first batch of the missile system on Thursday and that Dehqan would attend a ceremony in Russia's Astrakhan port city for the purpose. However, on Thursday, the Kremlin announced that the shipment of Russian S-300 ... (More on P4)...(24)

Hollande Could Face Socialist Primary Challenger: Party Head

PARIS - Francois Hollande could face a challenger from his Socialist Party camp in a primary ahead of next year's election, the party head said on Sunday, as a new poll showed the French president falling further in public opinion. The incumbent French president traditionally represents his party in an election, without a contest. But Hollande's ratings are so poor that, as things stand, he appears unlikely to beat either far-right leader Marine Le Pen or whichever candidate is chosen by the center-right in primaries later this year. Hollande said last week he has not made up his mind if he will run in the 2017 election and has stood by his pledge not to if he fails to bring unemployment, currently ... (More on P4)...(28)

Battle Lines Drawn as Politicians Take Sides over British EU Membership

LONDON - The new Battle of Britain moved into full swing Sunday as politicians took sides in opposing campaigns that will decide whether the country should quit the European Union. It promises to be a roller coaster ride in the run up to June 23 when more than 40 million

Britons will vote in a referendum. Prime Minister David Cameron fired the starting gun in Downing Street by announcing the date, saying "Britain is approaching one of the biggest decisions this country will face in our lifetimes." He warned leaving Europe ... (More on P4)...(26)

Austria Seeks Talks with Balkan Neighbors after Capping Migrant Flow

VIENNA - Austrian leaders have invited Balkan states to a meeting on migration in Vienna on Wednesday following the country's move to limit asylum applicants to 80 per day. Interior Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner and Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz sent invitations to Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria,

Kosovo, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, Mikl-Leitner's office said in a statement on Sunday. The meeting, to include Defence Minister Peter Doskozil, is planned in advance of a separate European Union conference of interior ministers, planned ... (More on P4)...(27)

Neighbor News

UAE, Tajikistan Sign MoU

ABU DHABI - The Federation of United Arab Emirates (UAE) Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Tajikistan have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, MoU, to strengthen cooperation, on the sidelines of the Global Forum on the work of the Commonwealth of Independent States, CIS, organised recently by Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, DCCL. The MoU was signed by Humaid Mohammed bin Salim, Secretary-General of the Federation of UAE's Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and by Sharif Said, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tajikistan. Bin Salim said that the private sec-

tor in the country was able to achieve tremendous strides in several areas, including trade, tourism, industry, exhibitions and oil, pointing out that there are many areas for investment and the Federation of Chambers is keen to enhance cooperation relations with the Tajik private sector. He said that the UAE is witnessing great progress in infrastructural development and that there are huge projects being implemented, in addition to the projects of EXPO 2020, which provide major investment opportunities for international companies to establish genuine partnerships with Emirati businessmen, noting that there are about 410,000 companies operating in the country. (WAM)

Govt. Neither Irked at Nor Afraid of NAB: Nisar

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan on Sunday said the federal government is neither afraid of, nor annoyed with, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and is not planning to clip the body's powers. Addressing a press conference in Islamabad, Nisar clarified that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had only advised NAB not to threaten businessmen and investors after receiving complaints from the community, reported Radio Pakistan. "This institution, NAB was created by former dictator General Pervez Musharraf to target PML-N, and the previous PPP govern-

ment too used it against PML-N but if the bureau could not bring anything against the party in those years, how can they do it today," said Nisar. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday had said that the NAB is harassing government officers and bureaucrats are afraid of taking decisions (signing of files of different projects) because of the "NAB harassment". "The NAB terrifies the government officers, hindering them from performing their duty," the premier had said. Commenting on Nawaz Sharif's remarks, PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari said the FIA was also doing the same against the PPP. (Agencies)

Iranians Expect a Lot from Upcoming Parliament

TEHRAN - The election time in Iran has turned into a season to boost economic demands of people squeezed, over the past years, under the sanctions pressures by the West for a number of reasons. Although the recent historic deal between Iran and the world powers over Tehran's nuclear issue has loosened the grip on vital financial and economic institutions of the country, people are still looking for tangible impacts on their lives. Just a few days away from the Majlis (parliament) election on Feb. 26, over 6,000 qualified candidates

are trying to persuade people to vote for them by claiming that their policies are good for the economy of the country and households. The hopefuls, to be elected by the direct vote for next four years, will compete for 290 seats in the Majlis. The upcoming election in the Islamic republic is important in that it may alter the conservative-dominated texture of the Majlis and assembly with the moderate and reformist members. In case the final results make a shift of the power balance in favor of President Hassan Rouhani ... (More on P4)...(25)

Belgrade Launches Campaign to Attract Chinese Tourists

BELGRADE - Belgrade has launched campaigns in the hopes of attracting a significant number of visitors from China, director of the Tourist Organization of Belgrade told Xinhua in an interview at the International Tourism Fair on Saturday. Miodrag Popovic said that Serbian capital city has launched a new promotion video expected to draw attention of Chinese tourists, as well as a series of activities to promote Serbian capital, hoping this would result in a significantly higher number of visitors and tourists. "Chinese market is probably the most important one when it comes to

tourism and we think we can participate in it disregarding that we have modest means, limited budget and the fact that we have to compensate all this with our own creativity," Popovic explained. He reminded that the organization recently premiered a promotion video starring Velimir Bata Zivojinovic, an actor who played the main role in the 1972 movie "Walter Defends Sarajevo" at this year's 38th international tourism fair that takes place from Feb. 18 to Feb.21, saying the video is expected to draw attention in China. "This movie was both popular ... (More on P4)...(29)