

Turkey has no Unilateral Plans for Ground Operation in Syria

ANKARA - A unilateral ground operation in Syria is not on the agenda of Turkey, spokesman for Turkish presidency said on Friday.

Turkey would work in line with the international coalition, Ibrahim Kalin told reporters at a news conference in Ankara.

"We had neither any preparations nor any statement for ground operation in Syria. We have repeatedly said we will act in line with the coalition. Therefore, any ground incursion in Syria, unilateral or with Saudi Arabia or other countries, is out of the



question," the spokesperson said.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu earlier said that a ground military operation in Syria would need to involve all the countries in the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State (IS).

Saudi Arabian military jets have been arriving in Turkey to carry out missions against the IS, Kalin also said. Four aircrafts will be based at the Incirlik air base in Turkey's southern Adana province, from which many U.S. bombers have been bombing the IS areas in Syria. (Xinhua)

Airstrikes on Syrian Rebels Continue Ahead of Truce

DAMASCUS - Heavy black smoke bellowed the eastern countryside of Syria's capital Damascus on Friday, in what appeared to be airstrikes pounding rebel positions, just hours ahead of the implementation of a planned ceasefire, activists said.

At least 25 air strikes, believed to be Russian, targeted Damascus' eastern town of Douma, a main rebel bastion, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The UK-based watchdog group

said the air strikes were coupled with shelling from the Syrian ground troops. It added that the shelling and air raids have left wide-scale destruction in Douma, a bastion for the rebels' Islam Army, which presumably included in the truce, as it's not designated as a terrorist group by the UN. Meanwhile, witnesses, who live near the eastern countryside of Damascus, told Xinhua that the shelling was so intense and consecutive. They added that



the cloud was so thick. "People are afraid because the sounds are close and strong," one witness, who

lives in Damascus' eastern district of Tijara said, as his house overlooks areas close... (More on P4)...(24)

Iran Navy Plans to Hold Joint Military Drills with India

TEHRAN - Iran's Navy chief says the Islamic Republic plans to hold joint military drills with India. "We will stage short-term maneuvers with the Indian army and we are also after holding tactical, extensive, large-scale maneuvers as well as rescue and relief drills with India," Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari told reporters on Thursday.

Sayyari made the remarks after he met with the Indian deputy commander for naval opera-

tions and his entourage to discuss cooperation to establish security in north of Indian Ocean.

"The Indian Ocean is of high significance to the world and the Islamic Republic of Iran and its security is very important to us and the globe. Therefore, we have announced that we are capable of ensuring security in the north of the Indian Ocean to prevent any insecurity there," the admiral said. Sayyari added... (More on P4)...(25)

Int'l Efforts on Syrian Refugee Crisis Fruitless: Turkish Experts

ISTANBUL - Leyla Ibrahim and her family arrived in Kilis, a southern Turkish border city, three years ago after fleeing war-torn Aleppo in northwestern Syria.

This family of 12 now lives in a single apartment whose rents are paid by the local government.

"Since I came here, I only get help from Kilis people and from the municipality," Leyla told Xinhua over the phone, adding she has not seen any single foreign civil society organization offering help in the town. In the view

of Turkish analysts, the international efforts on Syrian refugee crisis, which are based now on a perception of threat, are far from yielding a long-term solution. The analysts urged the Western nations to develop social policies to integrate the growing number of refugees into the rest of the world rather than isolate them as a threat to their security and social structure. The European Union countries, amid an ever-growing wave of refugees, are resorting... (More on P4)...(26)

Russia, Arab League Support Creation of Anti-Terrorist Front

MOSCOW - Russia and the Arab League support the creation of a broad coalition against terrorism under the auspice of the United Nations, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said here on Friday. The remarks were made after the Russian Arab Cooperation Forum in Moscow as the two sides issued a joint statement declaring support for Russian President Vladimir Putin's initiative on forming an anti-terrorist front on the universal international legal basis. Lavrov noted it is their common

position to launch an "uncompromising" campaign against "this absolute evil" by military means, and to combat the spread of the extremist ideology. He also confirmed Moscow's readiness to promote normalization of relations between the Arab League and Iran. In the statement, the Arab League said it welcomes the Russia-U.S. agreement on ceasefire in Syria which is expected to take effect from 12:00 Damascus time (1000 GMT) on Saturday. The Arab League is a regional organization comprising 22 states of the



Middle East and North Africa which is aimed at promoting the interests of the Arab world. The Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum was set up in 2009

to promote regional and global peace and security. Two previous meetings of the forum were held in Moscow and Qatar, respectively. (Xinhua)

Former Austrian Vice-Chancellor Urges EU-Wide Efforts to Tackle Refugee Crisis

VIENNA - Facing the ongoing refugee crisis, the European Union (EU) member states need to learn to tackle the crisis as a whole union, or the union will not exist anymore, former Austrian Vice-Chancellor Erhard Busek said.

The currently adopted measures for handling the refugee crisis have "nothing to do with reality," the former vice-chancellor said in an interview with Xinhua, citing some member states' border controls within the EU.

The EU has yet to find a common solution to the refugee crisis as mem-



ber states wish to remain separate but are unable to deal with the crisis on their own, according to Busek, sitting head of the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM) Scientific Research Institute. Busek added that to tackle

the crisis as a whole union, member states would have to give up part of their power. But that has proven to be a huge psychological problem, as governments and parliaments do not wish to "liquidate" themselves. ... (More on P4)...(27)

UK Treasury Chief Issues Stark Warning Against EU Exit

LONDON - Treasury chief George Osborne says Britain will undergo a "profound economic shock" should voters decide to leave the European Union.

Osborne, who is in China for a meeting of the Group of 20 leading economies, told the BBC that the recent weakness of the pound "reminds us all that this is not some political parlor game." The pound has hit seven-year lows as jittery investors react to uncertainty about the June 23 referendum on whether to remain in the 28-country bloc.

Osborne says that "leaving the EU would represent a profound economic shock for our country, for all of us." The warning comes amid a report in the Financial Times that Osborne would urge other leaders attending the meeting in Shanghai to warn against a so-called British exit or Brexit. (AP)

Cambodia Slams U.S. Envoy for Remarks on Human Rights

PHNOM PENH - A Cambodian senior diplomat on Friday lashed out at U.S. ambassador to ASEAN Nina Hachigian for her critical remarks on human rights situation in Cambodia, saying the envoy has interfered in Cambodia's internal affairs.

"As the Ambassador of the United States to ASEAN, your utmost duty is to solely focus on how to follow up and enhance ASEAN-U.S. strategic partnership and not on interference in an improper manner in Cambodia's internal affairs," Cambodian ambassador to ASEAN Norng Sakal said in a letter sent to Hachigian. His reaction came after U.S. envoy was quoted as saying by the Cambodia Daily on... (More on P4)...(28)

Palestinian Journalist Held by Israel Ends 3-Month Hunger Strike

JERUSALEM - A Palestinian prisoner announced he is ending a three-month hunger strike over detention after reaching a deal with the Israeli authorities, his lawyer said on Friday.

Mohammad al-Qeeq, a Palestinian journalist from Ramallah, had been on a hunger strike for the past 93 days, since he was placed under administrative detention in November. Security forces said he was suspected of involvement in Hamas-affiliated terrorist activities.

Administrative detention is a controversial procedure used by Israeli security forces against suspects in security-related matters, allowing authorities to detain suspects for renewable periods of six months without bringing them to trial. Jawad... (More on P4)...(310)

Refugee, Migrants Maritime Arrivals in Europe Surpass 120,000 in 2016

GENEVA - Some 120,065 refugees and migrants have reached European soil by sea since the beginning of the year, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said Friday. Most of these arrivals, or 111,099, have been reported in Greece, with the remaining 8,966

taking place in Italy. These numbers represent a sharp increase from the same period in 2015, when 11,834 people reached European shores in the first two months of the year. With the number of arrivals continuing to rise, IOM figures reveal that 418... (More on P4)...(29)

UN Chief Tells South Sudan Leaders to Prioritize Peace

JUBA - UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called on South Sudan leaders to move beyond rhetoric and respect the terms of the signed August 2015 peace agreement to end more than 21 months of conflict.

Ban who arrived in South Sudan on Thursday after visiting crisis-stricken Burundi and DR Congo stressed that implementing the peace deal must be a matter of

priority for the government, including the urgent formation of a transitional government.

"My message to the leaders of South Sudan is clear: put peace above politics. Pursue compromise. Overcome obstacles. Establish the Transitional Government of National Unity. And do not delay it," Ban told journalists late on Thursday. ... (More on P4)...(30)

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China, Tajikistan Pledge Security Cooperation

BEIJING - China is willing to strengthen security cooperation with Tajikistan, Chinese State Councilor Guo Shengkun said.

Guo, who is also public security minister, made the remarks during talks with Minister of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan Rakhimzoda Ramazon Hamro in Beijing.

Guo called on the two sides to implement the consensus reached by

President Xi Jinping and Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon. Guo said the two countries should enhance mutual trust and make joint efforts in fighting terrorism, major cooperation projects security, police technology exchanges, and law enforcement personnel training in order to maintain national security and protect people's lives and property. (Xinhua)

Pakistan Army is Best Army in the World: Gen. Raheel

BAHWALPUR - Pakistan Army has concluded large-scale exercises in the Cholistan desert, with Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Raheel Sharif, attending the concluding phase of the maneuvers.

The exercise involved large-scale integrated maneuvers of infantry, mechanised, armoured, army aviation and Pakistan Air Force (PAF) assets.

Large scale defensive and offensive maneuvers were practiced by the participating troops, reports Dawn.

General Raheel Sharif said the exercises indi-

cated that the 'Pakistan Army is the best army in the world'.

We have to remain ready for the full spectrum of threats," said the army chief on the occasion, while commending the morale and battle readiness of the troops.

The large-scale maneuvers were being conducted by the XXX Corps (Gujranwala) and XXXI Corps (Bahawalpur), are tasked with waging war in the deserts of Cholistan and the plains of Punjab, and holding the vital area which connects Pakistan's Punjab and parts of Kashmir. (ANI)

Iranian Leaders Urge Nationals to "Actively" Attend 2 Key Elections

TEHRAN - Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Friday called on all eligible Iranian voters to take part in two major elections of the country that kicked off at the early hours of the day.

Large groups of voters in Iran's major cities lined up in long queues before mosques since the early morning on Friday to cast their ballots for the elections for Iran's parliament (Majlis) and Assembly of Experts, starting at 8 a.m. local time (0430 GMT) with Khamenei casting his votes.

The Iranian supreme leader urged the nation to vote in both elections, arguing that doing so will "disappoint" enemies and boost "national sovereignty."

"Anybody who likes Iran, the Islamic republic, the glory and dignity of the nation, should participate in the election," Khamenei said in a live broadcast on the state TV.

Also, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said upon voting that "today's election is an embodiment of the country's political independence as well as the national sovereignty."

"If before the Islamic revolution (in 1979) the foreigners decided for the country, following the revolution over the past 37 years, these are the Iranians who decide for their country at the ballot boxes," Rouhani said, asking the Iranians to actively participate in the votes. (Xinhua)

UN Resolution Should not Affect DPRK People's Daily Life: China

BEIJING - The UN Security Council's upcoming resolution should not affect the everyday life of people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on Friday.

The United States on Thursday introduced a draft resolution to the UN Security Council that would sharply enhance sanctions against the DPRK for its recent nuclear test and a subsequent satellite launch that violated previous resolutions.

The UN resolution should aim to prevent the DPRK from developing its nuclear and missile programs,

spokesperson Hong Lei said at a daily news briefing, noting that the sanctions should not affect the daily lives of the DPRK's people.

Important progress has been made in the UN Security Council's consultations on the new resolution against the DPRK, which is expected to be adopted in the coming days, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in Washington earlier this week.

The UN Security Council's resolution cannot provide the fundamental solution to the Korean nuclear issue, and relevant parties need to return to dialogue and negotiation, Hong said. ... (More on P4)...(32)