

Syrian Talks to Resume After Cessation of Hostilities

GENEVA/UNITED NATIONS - Intra-Syrian peace talks are set to resume in Geneva on March 7, after the United Nations (UN) Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution on Friday to endorse a cessation of hostilities agreement for the war-torn country.

"The first phase of these talks will last for three weeks and then we will reassess the situation together with the Syrian parties in order to make sure that they are seriously engaged in what they are supposed to do," said UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de



Mistura in a statement late Friday night. "The agenda has not changed, it

is the same," he said, after briefing the UN Security Council in New York via a

video conference. "Within the framework of the Geneva Communique, the

clear guidance is UN Security Council resolution 2254: a new inclusive gov-

ernment, a new constitution, and new presidential and parliamentary elections within 18 months," said de Mistura. The statement came shortly after the cessation of hostilities, backed by Russia and the United States, came into effect in Syria at midnight Damascus time (2200 GMT Friday), in line with an agreement reached by 97 armed groups and the Syrian government. The deal excludes the Islamic State (IS) group and the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front, as both are listed by the UN as terrorist groups. (Xinhua)

UN Agencies Set up More Support Centers for Refugees, Migrants in Europe

UNITED NATIONS - The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) are joining forces to set up special support centers for children and their families along the most frequently used migration routes in Europe as part of a joint effort for better protection for the rising numbers of children and others with specific needs arriving in

Europe, a UN spokesman said here Friday. Twenty Child and Family Support Hubs, to be known as "Blue Dots," will provide safe spaces for children and their families, where vital services such as counselling are available, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said at a daily news briefing here. "The hubs aim to support vulnerable families on the move, especially the many



unaccompanied or separated children at risk of sickness, trauma, violence, exploitation and trafficking," the spokesman said. The first hubs are now operational or about to open in... (More on P4)... (23)

Islamic State Attacks Kurdish-Held Town on Turkish Border

BEIRUT/DIYARBAKIR - Islamic State militants launched an assault on a Kurdish-controlled town on Syria's border with Turkey on Saturday, prompting air strikes by the U.S.-led coalition to try to drive them back. The hardline Sunni fighters attacked Tel Abyad, which is controlled by the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia, and the nearby town of Suluk in the early hours of Saturday, YPG spokesman RedurX-lil and Turkish security

sources told Reuters. Coalition war planes carried out 10 air strikes to try to repel the assault, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported. It said at least 45 Islamic State militants and 20 Kurdish militia fighters had been killed. The attack was launched hours after a "cessation of hostilities" came into effect under a U.S.-Russian plan, although the temporary truce does not apply to Islamic State and al... (More on P4)... (24)

Thousands Stranded as Greece becomes a Migrant 'Warehouse'

ATHENS - Greece is fast becoming the "warehouse of human beings" that its government has vowed not to allow. Hastily setup camps for refugees and other migrants are full. Thousands of people wait through the night, shivering in the cold at the Greek-Macedonian border, in the country's main port of Piraeus, in squares dotted around Athens, or on dozens of buses parked up and down Greece's main north-south highway. On Thursday, hundreds

of frustrated men, women and children abandoned their stranded buses or left refugee camps, setting off on a desperate trek dozens of kilometers (miles) long to reach a border they know is quickly shutting down to them. About 20,000 migrants were in Greece on Thursday, Defense Minister Panos Kammenos said. Of those, Macedonia allowed just 100 people to cross over from Greece's Idomeni border area. By late Friday, not a single... (More on P4)... (25)

Thousands March in London Against Nuclear Weapons

LONDON - Thousands of people joined a protest in central London Saturday against the renewal of Britain's nuclear weapons system Trident. Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of Britain's main opposition Labour party, were set to address a rally following the march. A decision is expected to be taken later this year on replacing the ageing submarines which carry the Trident missiles at an estimated cost of £31 billion (39 billion euros,

\$43 billion). Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative government is in favour, saying the system is vital to safeguard Britain's security. "Disarming now would be a reckless gamble with our national security that would play into the hands of our enemies," Defence minister Philip Dunne said ahead of the march. Labour is deeply divided on the issue between leftwingers like Corbyn, who want to scrap it, and some centrists who want



to keep it. Britain currently has four submarines in its Trident fleet, at least one of which is on patrol somewhere in the oceans 24 hours a day. The government wants to replace those with four so-called Successor submarines, the first of which would enter service in the early 2030s. (AFP)

Saudi-Led Airstrikes Hit Market in Yemen, 45 Killed

ADEN - Warplanes of the Saudi-led Arab coalition launched airstrikes that mistakenly hit a public market in the northeastern parts of Yemen's capital Sanaa on Saturday, killing about 45 civilians, residents told Xinhua. One of the Sanaa-based residents said by phone that "Several Saudi-led airstrikes directly struck people gathered in a crowded market in Nehm district of Sanaa province and killed about 45 civilians while 50 others were injured at the scene." Witnesses confirmed to Xinhua that "the air bombing targeted the popular market in Nehm at first and then returned



back to hit the rescuers in double tap airstrikes." Meanwhile, the Houthi-affiliated Masirah TV channel reported that "more than 25 citizens were killed and nearly 30 others during airstrikes by the Saudi-led aggression on Nehm's market."

Fierce armed confrontations are still going on between pro-government forces and the Shiite Houthi rebels in the district of Nehm and others areas overlooking capital Sanaa. The Saudi-backed Yemeni government... (More on P4)... (26)

Iran JCPOA Implementation Satisfies IAEA

TEHRAN - The UN nuclear agency has verified Iran's commitment to its nuclear agreement, dubbed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with the P5+1 group of countries. In its first regular report since the implementation of the JCPOA on January 16, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said it "has been verifying and monitoring the implementation by Iran of its nuclear-related commitments", saying it was satisfied. The report said Iran "has not pursued the construction of the existing Arak heavy water research reactor" and has "not enriched uranium" above levels authorized under JCPOA. It noted that "all stored centrifuges and associated infrastructure have remained in storage under continuous Agency monitoring" and that there has been no accumulation of enriched uranium through research and... (More on P4)... (27)

Burundi Agrees to Deployment of AU Personnel

CAPE TOWN - Burundi has agreed to the deployment of observers and military monitors from the African Union (AU) as part of peace restoring efforts, it was announced on Saturday. "The AU will deploy 100 human rights observers and 100 military monitors to Burundi to monitor the situation," an AU high-level delegation to Burundi said in a statement issued by the South African Presidency. The statement was issued following the conclusion of a "fruitful and productive" visit by the delegation comprising five heads of state, led by South African President Jacob Zuma. "We have spent the last two... (More on P4)... (28)

Iraq Summons UAE Envoy over Shiite Militia Comments

BAGHDAD - Baghdad on Saturday summoned the United Arab Emirates envoy to protest the comments of the UAE foreign minister on Shiite militia forces fighting the Islamic State (IS) group, which were deemed as an interference in Iraq's internal affairs. On Friday, UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah Bin Zaid said in a press conference in Moscow that there must be no differentiation between the IS group and those Iranian-backed Shiite militias, including Hashd Shaabi paramilitary groups. The Iraqi Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it summoned UAE Ambassador Abdulla Ibrahim al-Shihi to hand him over an official letter of protest at the ill intended... (More on P4)... (31)

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 rep-

resents 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... (More on P4)... (29)

Cuba, EU to Resume Negotiations to Normalize Ties

HAVANA - Cuba and the European Union (EU) are expected to resume talks on normalizing the bilateral relations next week, according to the EU office in Havana Wednesday. Negotiators from the two sides will meet in Havana on March 3-4 for the seventh round of talks, said a statement released by the EU representative in Cuba. The meeting "will address pending issues... on political dialogue and coopera-

tion as well as the institutional provisions and general provisions of the agreement," the statement said. The talks will be chaired by Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Abelardo Moreno and Christian Leffler, Secretary-General for Economic and Global Affairs of the European External Action Service. Cuba is the only Latin American country without a bilateral treaty... (More on P4)... (30)

Neighbor News

China's Wanda to Jointly Develop Leading Project in Europe

PARIS - China's largest commercial property group Dalian Wanda and its French partner Immochan announced Friday that they have reached an agreement over investment contract to develop together the project of Europacity, a leading private project for leisure, culture, retail and entertainment in Europe. According to a press release by Immochan, the leaders of both groups signed a partnership agreement Friday night to develop the major project which will be located between Paris and the Charles de Gaulle international airport. Immochan said that Europacity, launched and implemented by the French company, was fully based on a private

investment of over 3 billion euros (about 3.3 billion U.S. dollars), and it would create a destination of leisure, that will foster economic, social and urban development around Paris. Dalian Wanda will contribute to the funding of the project and provide its expertise and know-how in terms of leisure, hotel service and entertainment. Wang Jianlin, president of Dalian Wanda Group, said in the press release that for Wanda, Europacity "is the most important project outside of China". Vianney Mulliez, President of Immochan, said that EuropaCity was a key project for the development of the north-eastern part of Greater Paris... (More on P4)... (32)

PIA, Pakistan Steel Divestment Delayed Beyond this Fiscal Year

ISLAMABAD - The transactions of Pakistan's state-owned entities, including Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM), under the privatisation programme have been deferred beyond this fiscal year. This impression was gathered at the end of a presentation given to media by Privatisation Commission Chairman Muhammad Zubair on Friday. The divestment of 26 per cent government stake in PIA and the strategic asset sales of PSM became highly politicised, dashing hopes for the privatisation of power distribu-

tion companies (Discos). Mr Zubair said bids for the Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (FESCO) were received but the process has been delayed due to the unfriendly environment for privatisation. The privatisation minister said the government was revisiting its strategy with respect to distribution companies. Once the government has confirmed a strategy, a decision on the fate of the Fesco transaction would be made, Zubair said. "We are trying to ensure a conducive environment for reinitiating the privatisation process," he told newsmen. (Agencies)

ICD Provides \$10 Mln to Develop Uzbekistan's Healthcare Sector

BISHKEK - An opening ceremony of a multi-disciplinary medical center, Vitamed Medical Center, was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, said Arab News. The Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD) extended a \$10-million Murabaha facility (financing mechanism in Islamic finance) for the financing of medical equipment, furniture and fixtures required for the operations. Vitamed Medical is now the only center in the

country cooperating with foreign industry experts, in particular, with the Medanta Clinic of India. Some of the center's specialists have received training in India, where they were acquainted with the modern methods of diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation in various areas. During the ceremony, Khaled Al Aboodi, ICD CEO, expressed belief in the center's future positive impact on the city's residents. (AKIpress)

Early Results Show Reformists Gain Ground in Iran's Parliament Election

TEHRAN - The reformist camp has regained ground it lost after 2004 in Iran's Majlis (parliament), according to the early results released by the Iranian media on Saturday. By 2:30 p.m. local time (1100 GMT), reformists and conservatives are neck and neck in the regions where the count of votes has been concluded, the Iranian semi-official ISNA news agency reported. The observers believed that the next Majlis will open further space for the reformists and moderates. Currently, almost two-thirds of the Majlis representatives are from the principlists camp, and the rest encompasses independents and a small

portion of reformists. The count in major cities is advancing slowly since the work requires diligence, said Iranian Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani-Fazli on Saturday. The final results will hopefully come out in the following days, RahmaniFazli said, adding that in some regions the candidates have not been able to win the required number of votes in the first round, so they have to run for another contest in the runoff voting. According to the Iranian law, Majlis candidates shall win at least a quarter of the votes in the first round in each region so as to win a seat in the parliament. Otherwise, a second round of voting is needed. (Xinhua)