

Russia Brings Forward Parliamentary Elections

MOSCOW - President Vladimir Putin has signed off on a law that brings next year's Russian parliamentary elections forward by three months, a move some commentators said gives an unfair advantage to pro-Kremlin parties. "The election of the seventh convocation of State Duma deputies will take place on the third Sunday of September 2016," the Kremlin said in a statement on Wednesday. Parliamentary elections were initially scheduled to take place in December



2016. Supporters of the initiative, including State Duma speaker Sergei Naryshkin, have said an early election would ensure continuity between the adoption and implementation of the 2017 budget. Critics of the move have argued it is unconstitutional and unfairly plays into the hands of the Kremlin. Many analysts point to mounting economic troubles, saying pro-Putin parties will likely ... (More on P4)...(21)

EU Publishes Greece Assessment, Sees Debt Reprofiting

BRUSSELS - The European Commission published on Wednesday its assessment of Greece's bailout request, taking a different view of Athens' debt sustainability than the IMF, but also signaling a possibility of debt relief. A day after the IMF published its latest assessment, saying Greece would require extensive debt relief from its mostly euro zone sovereign

creditors, the EU executive's note said the Greek debt-to-GDP ratio would be 150 percent in 2022 if Athens implemented reforms, but could reach 176 percent if it did not. The IMF, which contributed to the Commission assessment made last week, expects a debt-to-GDP ratio in 2022 of 170 percent and called for much greater debt relief than has been proposed. The Commission's as-

essment said reprofiling of the debt was possible, but no write-offs, and only if Greece implemented reform measures demanded by its creditors. "The concerns could be addressed through a far-reaching and credible reform program, very strong ownership of the Greek authorities for such a program and, after full restoration of the loans agree-

ments, debt-mitigating measures that would be granted only once the commitments to reform from the Greek authorities has been demonstrated," it said. "A very substantial reprofiling, such as a long extension of maturities of existing and new loans, interest deferral, and financing at AAA rates would allow to cater for these concerns from ... (More on P4)...(22)

French FM to Visit Iran after Nuclear Deal

PARIS - French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius on Wednesday announced he would visit Teheran, the first of such visits since 2005, a day after a nuclear deal was concluded. Fabius told local broadcaster Europe 1 that he was invited by his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif but did not elaborate further on the visit. With sanctions to be removed, the French top

diplomat expected "important perspectives" for French companies which "have been very active in the past before the sanctions". On Tuesday, Iran and six major world powers reached a nuclear deal, ending 12 years of negotiations with a win-win agreement and paving the way for Teheran to "be reintegrated into what we call the international community," Fabius said. (Xinhua)

Iran's Nuclear Program Shifts From Confrontation to Scientific Activities: FM

TEHRAN - With the recent nuclear deal between Iran and the world major powers, the nuclear program of the country will shift from confrontation to scientific and commercial activities, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif said here on Wednesday. Iran will use all its tech-

nological and software capacities as well as the global technologies to move towards commercial uranium enrichment and advanced nuclear program, Zarif said upon arriving in the capital Tehran on Wednesday. As with the supreme leader's guidelines, all the banking, economic

and financial sanctions will be removed on the day when the agreement becomes operational, he said. Zarif referred to the deal between Iran and world powers as the success for Iranians since it paves the way for "Iran's uranium enrichment right to be recognized by the UN Security Council." (Xinhua)

Saudi Expects Thaw of Ties with Iran after Nuclear Deal Clinched

RIYADH - Saudi Arabia highlighted the importance of the existence of an agreement over Iran's nuclear program preventing Iran from possessing nuclear weapons, Saudi Press Agency reported. This was highlighted by a Saudi official regarding Iran's nuclear program agreement, where the country stressed the need for firm inspection mechanisms for all Iranian sites,

including military posts. He said there should be plans to quickly reinstall sanctions in the event Iran violates the agreement. He said that Saudi Arabia joins the P5+1 countries and the international community in maintaining sanctions against Iran for its support of terrorism and violation of international armed-related conventions. The official added that re-

garding the agreement, Iran should pool its resources to develop its economy and improve the living condition of its citizens, rather than cause regional agitation. He concluded that Saudi Arabia considers Iran as a neighboring country, and looks forward to improved relations in all fields, and abstaining from interfering in other countries' internal affairs. (Xinhua)

EU Proposes Energy Package to Help Transform Energy System

BRUSSELS - The European Commission said on Wednesday it presented a package of proposals to help transform its energy system as part of the Energy Union strategy. The package included delivering a new deal for energy consumers, launching a redesign of the European electricity market, updating energy efficiency labeling and revising the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS). The package was an important step towards implementing the Energy Union strategy with a forward looking climate change policy, launched as one of the political priorities of the Jean-Claude Juncker Commission in February 2015, said

the Commission in the press release. The proposals also gave prominence to the "energy efficiency first" principle and put households and business consumers at the heart of the European energy market, added the Commission. "Today, five months after the adoption of the Energy Union strategy, this Summer Package shows our determination to decarbonize our economy and to give consumers a central role in Europe's energy transition. It marks not only a new deal for consumers, but a new deal for Europe's entire energy system," said Maros Sefcovic, European Commission Vice-President for Energy Union. (Xinhua)

Kerry, Zarif Recommended for Nobel Peace Prize

STOCKHOLM - The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a leading Swedish think-tank, has recommended US Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif for the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize for their leading roles in the nuclear deal, reports the International Business Times on Wednesday. Tariq Rauf, director of SIPRI's Disarmament and

Non-Proliferation Program and formerly chief of Verification and Security Policy at the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from 2002 to 2011, said the two deserved a Nobel prize. He called the Iran nuclear deal the "single-most important multilateral agreement in decades," comparing it to the 1996 Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) on nuclear detonation testing. (Agencies)

Iraqi Forces Repel IS Attack, Suicide Bombing



TIKRIT - Iraqi security forces Wednesday repelled an attack by Islamic State (IS) militants, including a suicide bombing in the oil refinery town of Baiji in the Salahudin province, killing at least 12 IS militants and 12 security members, a provincial security source said. The attack occurred in the early morning hours as a suicide bomber rammed his explosive-laden truck into the posts of the troops and allied paramilitary militias, known as Hashd Shaabi, or popular mo-

bilization, in the central part of the town of Baiji, 200 km north of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, the source informed Xinhua on condition of anonymity. The powerful bomb blast was followed by the advance of dozens of IS militants towards the troops' posts, sparking heavy clashes lasting for hours, the source said. "At least 11 soldiers and militiamen were killed and 10 others injured, while 12 IS militants died," the source said ... (More on P4)...(24)

Syrian Army, Hezbollah Advance in City Near Lebanese Border



BEIRUT - The Syrian army backed by Lebanese ally Hezbollah has advanced deeper into the besieged Syrian city of Zabadani two weeks into a campaign to capture it from insurgents, rebels and the army said. The control of the city, about 45 km (30 miles) northwest of the capital Damascus, is seen as crucial to consolidate government-held areas linking Lebanon and Syria. Zabadani is a former popular resort on the main Beirut-Damascus highway. (Reuters)

Hezbollah militiamen and the army, aided by reinforcements, advanced closer to Zabadani's center under cover of heavy artillery fire and intense aerial bombardments of insurgent hideouts, rebels and the army said. Footage released by the Syrian army showed troops in the heart of the southeastern district of Sultani, the focus of street fighting. Rebels said some 500 families were still inside Zabadani and had taken shelter but the city was mostly deserted. (Reuters)

Philippine President Appoints New Army Chief

MANILA - Philippine President Benigno S. Aquino III has appointed Major General Eduardo Ano as the new chief of the Philippine Army. Aquino, during the change of command on Wednesday, expressed confidence that Ano would continue the reforms in the Army. Ano replaced Lieutenant General Hernando Iriberrri who was appointed as the

new chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines last week. Prior to becoming the Army chief, Ano was the commanding general of the Army's 10th Infantry Division based in southern province of Compostela Valley. He also became the chief of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. (Xinhua)

Neighbour News

Xi Meets German SDP Chairman for Broadening Common Ground

BEIJING - President Xi Jinping said China and Germany aimed to broaden common interests and realize mutual benefits during his meeting with Sigmar Gabriel, chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) of Germany, Wednesday in Beijing. Xi said during his visit to Germany last year, he reached a consensus with German Chancellor Angela Merkel to transform bilateral relations into a comprehensive strategic partnership. The aim of this move is to further enrich the content of bilateral cooperation, expand their common interests and realize mutual benefits, Xi said. He said since China and Germany established diplomatic relations 43 years ago, bilateral rela-

tions have maintained stable and healthy growth. The two sides have maintained close high-level contact and continued to enhance mutual trust. China and the European Union (EU) are to celebrate the 40th anniversary of official links this year. Noting that Germany is an important member of EU, Xi expressed the hope that the German side will continue to play a leading role in advancing China-EU cooperation in various areas, integration of the Investment Plan for Europe with the Belt and Road initiatives and the four major partnerships between China and EU. Xi emphasized that the Communist Party of China (CPC) places great importance on its relations with the German SDP. (Xinhua)

Iran to Resume Carpet Exports to US When Sanctions Removed

TEHRAN - Head of the Iranian National Carpet Center says the country has plans to resume carpet exports to the United States once sanctions imposed on Tehran over its civilian nuclear program are removed. Hamid Kargar told IRNA on Wednesday that when Iran and the P5+1 group of countries clinch a final deal over Iran's nuclear program, exports of Iran's hand-made carpets to all markets, especially the United States, will see a sharp rise. The official added that before 2009, the United States ranked first among

countries importing Iranian hand-made carpet accounting for 16.5 percent of total Iranian exported carpets, worth USD 82 million. He added that sanctions imposed on Iranian carpet imports by the US in 2010 practically "deprived Iranian carpet exporters of trading in the US as the biggest importer of hand-made carpets from Iran." Kargar stated that Iranian carpet exporters have not been present in American market for five years as a result of which Indian carpets have taken the place of Iranian rugs. (IRNA)

China Extends Special Grant for Pakistan's Terror-Hit People, Areas

ISLAMABAD - China on Wednesday signed an agreement with Pakistan on providing a special grant in cash to support the rehabilitation program for residents in Pakistan's northwestern restive tribal region. The agreement, involving a grant of 10 million U.S. dollars, was signed by Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Sun Weidong and Secretary of Pakistan's Economic Affairs Division Muhammad Saleem Sethi in Islamabad. Sethi said the signing of the agreement is the implementation of an important outcome of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan in April this year. "We are very grateful

to the government and people of China for this assistance. With this grant, we shall be able to rehabilitate thousands of internally displaced people who were affected by the military operation in the region," said Sethi. Ambassador Sun, "We shall continue our support to Pakistan for economic development and its efforts to safeguard national security and the well-being of people in the tribal areas." "China and Pakistan always stand together through thick and thin. We shall stand together to promote peace and prosperity through the construction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," said Sun. (Xinhua)

Uzbekistan, Japan Interested in Boosting Economic Co-Op

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan and Japan discussed the prospects for developing the bilateral relations in political, cultural, humanitarian and other spheres, as well as some regional problems. The discussions were held during the meeting of Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov with Japan's Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Kentaro Sonoura in Tashkent, Uzbek Foreign Ministry said. The sides praised the results of the meeting of Uzbek-Japanese and Japanese-Uzbek economic cooperation committees held in Tokyo in January 2015.

During that meeting, the sides signed a large package of investment and loan agreements and technical assistance projects. The total cost of the agreements stood at \$3.8 billion. Kamilov and Sonoura focused on cooperation in the format of "Central Asia + Japan" dialogue, as well as the relations with international organizations. The sides also exchanged views on the practical issues related to the forthcoming bilateral contacts at various levels. They reiterated mutual interest in further boosting the cooperation primarily in trade and economic sphere. (Agencies)

China Welcomes UN Libya Deal

BEIJING - China welcomed a UN-brokered political deal to form a unity government in Libya and called on parties to restore peace in the country, a spokesperson said on Wednesday. Some warring Libyan factions agreed late Saturday in Skhirat, Morocco on the UN-brokered political agreement despite the absence of the General National Congress (GNC), the Tripoli-based parliament. "China supports the UN-led political dialogue in

Libya and welcomes the Libyan factions to sign the political deal," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said. Hua urged all Libyan parties to achieve reconciliation through continued dialogue and restore national peace and stability at an early date. "This is in the interests of the Libyan people and contributes to regional security, stability and development," she added. Libya, a major oil producer ... (More on P4)...(23)