

Deadly Week in Mediterranean As Smugglers Pack Boats before Ramadan: UNHCR

GENEVA - At least 880 migrants and refugees died trying to cross the Mediterranean last week, the U.N. refugee agency said on Tuesday, amid speculation that people smugglers may be trying to maximize their income before Ramadan begins. This year is proving to be particularly deadly, with 2,510 lives lost in shipwrecks and capsizes, compared with 1,855 in the same period in 2015, UNHCR spokesman William Spindler said.

Nearly 204,000 people have made the perilous crossing to reach Europe so far this year, the U.N.



High Commissioner for Refugees said. Citing reports from survivors interviewed in Italy,

it said smugglers may be trying to maximize income their before the start of the holy month of

Ramadan, when Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. Ramadan is expected to begin around June 6 or 7.

"At the moment smugglers are packing people on boats that are barely sea-worthy and that in

many cases are not meant to make the crossing. So what happens is that as soon as they depart from the shore they call for rescue and then the rescue services come and rescue them," Spindler told a briefing. "In fact, it's a race against time to get there before these boats sink, and on some occasions they get there too late." The Italian coastguard has rescued 14,000 people and is coordinating search and rescue operations with vessels of other countries, Spindler said. The flow has dropped between ...*(More on P4)...(20)*

Russia won't Cede Kurils to Japan: FM

MOSCOW - Russia has no plan of ceding parts of the Kuril Islands to Japan, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Tuesday. "We aren't doing this and we won't do this. We won't cede the Kuril Islands and we won't beg Japan for a peace agreement," Lavrov said during a web chat on the website of Russian newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda. Moscow and Tokyo have territorial disputes over the four Pacific islands, known

as the Southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan, which prevented the two sides from inking a peace treaty after World War II. The Russian foreign minister, fielding questions from the readers and journalists of the newspaper, also said that the sanctions against Russia imposed by the United States and its allies should be seen as an opportunity to diversify the Russian economy. *(Xinhua)*



Netanyahu Turns to Arab Peace Plan to Face New Challenges

JERUSALEM - Benjamin Netanyahu has turned to a 14-year-old Arab peace plan in trying to project a softer image internationally for a new governing coalition in Israel widely seen as more hardline toward Palestinian statehood. In what some political commentators and opposition politicians called spin but a spokesman for Netanyahu dubbed "an important development", the right-wing prime minister said on Monday the

2002 Saudi peace initiative had "positive elements", although some revisions would have to be made. He drew new attention to Arab countries' past offer of normal relations with Israel, in return for a full withdrawal from occupied territory where Palestinians seek statehood, at a time when he is trying to counter a French push for an international conference on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Netanyahu's par-*(More on P4)...(21)*

Refugee Children Continue Dreaming of Better Future in Europe

IDOMENI - Before being evacuated, several children at the makeshift Idomeni refugee camp on Greece's northern border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) shared their dreams of attending school and growing up in a peaceful environment far away from war.

Aya, 19, narrated how she received scars from bombs on her face and hands, and spoke of the psychological trauma of losing her father during a bombing three years ago. This prompted her moth-



er and seven siblings to leave Syria and cross into Turkey and then Greece. Her father was a construction worker. He wanted his kids to study and live a better life. "After dad died, I went to university but I also

had to go to hospital in Turkey for four months because my face burned by white phosphor," she said. The young woman from Aleppo and her family have been through hell to ...*(More on P4)...(22)*

Russia Denies Strikes Against Syria's Idlib

MOSCOW - The Russian Defense Ministry Tuesday denied a report that the Russian air force had launched strikes against Syria's northwestern province of Idlib. "The Russian air force performed no combat missions, nor launched strikes in the province of Idlib," Defense Ministry spokesman Major-General Igor Konashenkov said in a written statement. Earlier on Tuesday Reuters news agency quoted a report from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, saying at least 23 people were killed in the rebel-held provincial cap-



ital city of Idlib. Konashenkov urged a more critical attitude to "horror stories" from the "British tandem" of the London-based pro-opposition Syrian human rights group and Reuters, which he said had been previously found distrib-

uting false information. The Russian air force has been deployed in Syria for anti-terror missions at the request of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in September 2015, while the bulk of troops withdrew in March. ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

Iran to Award Power Plant Deal to Turkey

TEHRAN - Turkey's media reported on Tuesday that Iran is preparing to award a major deal to Turkish private companies over building a power plant in the Islamic Republic.

Hurriyet newspaper reported that the value of the deal is estimated to be around \$3 billion, adding that the production capacity of the planned power plant will be 5,000 megawatts.

It quoted Iran's Deputy Energy Minister Hushang Falahatyan as saying the Turkish energy sector had shown strong interest in Iran after the lifting of sanctions this past January.

"In the coming days, we will sign an investment deal with Turkish private sector companies for the construction of a 5,000 megawatt power plant in Iran. The size of this deal is \$3 billion," he has been quoted as saying in Hurriyet's report that was also carried by Reuters.

"We have other agreements with Turks but they have not been finalized and talks are continuing." The official further invited Turkish companies to invest in gas-fired power projects as well as wind power projects in Iran.

He also noted that power trade between Iran and Turkey would increase, adding that Iran now sells around 350 megawatts of electricity to Turkey.

In line with a deal which was recently signed between Iranian authorities and Turkish Energy Minister ...*(More on P4)...(26)*

NATO Marks 40th Anniversary of Committee on Gender Perspectives

BRUSSELS - NATO on Tuesday marked the 40th anniversary of the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives (NCGP), an advisory body on gender related issues, the security organization said.

Addressing the committee, NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow said, "We have placed gender perspective at the heart of NATO's analysis, planning, execution and evaluation of our planning missions."

Calling the conference a good opportunity to share experiences, ambitions and challenges,



Vershbow said "integrating gender across all activities contributes to a more modern and more responsive NATO."

The conference from May 31 to June 3 will bring together experts from NATO and partner coun-

tries and national delegates in order to discuss how NATO and partner countries can strengthen military leadership and accountability to implement a gender perspective. An exhibition with ...*(More on P4)...(24)*

Libyan Forces should Fight IS, Not Each Other: UN Envoy

PARIS - The U.N. envoy for Libya on Tuesday urged rival factions there to unite against the Islamic State group and stop fighting each other. Martin Kobler held diplomatic meetings in Paris on reinforcing the fledgling U.N.-backed government as various Libyan forces are advancing on Islamic State strongholds.

He called for a joint army - "a sound effective structure for the fight against Daesh. Libyans should not fight amongst each other. They should fight united against the terrorism in this country." Daesh is the Arabic acronym for the IS group.

Different militias loyal to the U.N.-backed government, as well as military forces allied with authorities based in the east, are making unilateral moves against the central city of Sirte, the main IS bastion in Libya. IS has exploited the turmoil gripping Libya since the 2011 uprising that ended Moammar Gadhafi's four-decade rule. The U.N.-backed government ...*(More on P4)...(25)*

UN Worried for Syrians Stranded By Islamic State Advance

BEIRUT - The United Nations said on Tuesday it was worried about 8,000 Syrians trapped by fighting north of Aleppo where Islamic State has advanced against rebels, and that both Kurdish and rebel authorities had hindered people fleeing the area.

The fighting has displaced thousands more Syrians near the Turkish frontier where more than 160,000 people are already sheltering, most

of whom fled fighting earlier this year, the U.N. says.

"An unknown number of people are also unable to flee due to fighting and the closure of the main road leading north towards the town of Azaz in northwestern Syria," said a joint statement from the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria and the Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis. Islamic State advanced

in recent days into the opposition-held town of Marea.

The Turkish-backed rebels who are battling Islamic State north of Aleppo have also been involved in hostilities with the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia, which controls wide areas of territory to the west of Marea. In a separate report on the situation, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian ...*(More on P4)...(28)*

Neighbor News

President Xi Extends Greetings to Children of Island Workers

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping has extended greetings to children of workers on islands in East China Sea ahead of June 1, International Children's Day.

In a letter written on Monday and made public on Tuesday, Xi wrote of a visit to the Dachen Islands ten years ago when he talked with the children's grandparents, who left home to develop the uninhabited islands 60 years ago.

The Dachen Islands are located off Taizhou Bay in Zhejiang Province. In 1956, 467 young volunteers went there to cultivate the virgin land.

Xi's letter was written in response to 12 pupils who are the descendants of those volunteers. Xi said their grandparents were most beloved people.

The 12 pupils said they would remember their grandparents' dedication, and study hard to contribute to the country when they grow up.

Xi hoped they would learn from their grandparents, love the Communist Party of China, the motherland and the people, and make contributions to the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. *(Xinhua)*

Iran FM Urges US to Take More Steps over Nuclear Deal

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says the US should take more steps toward guaranteeing trade and banking relations with Iran under last year's nuclear agreement between Tehran and the P5+1 group of countries.

"Certain measures have been carried out by the US to guarantee that banks will not be penalized for trade ties with Iran given the lifting of sanctions after the nuclear agreement but I

believe that the US must take more steps," Zarif said at a joint press conference with his Finnish counterpart Timo Soini in Helsinki on Tuesday. He added that many countries have expressed their keenness to resume trade relations with Iran following the implementation of the JCPOA in January.

"Many countries, from South Korea and Japan in Asia to European states, have signed several agreements with ...*(More on P4)...(29)*

Sharif's Open-Heart Surgery Successful: Maryam Nawaz

LONDON - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's open-heart surgery has been performed successfully in London, confirmed the premier's daughter on Tuesday.

Maryam added the prime minister will be shifted to the ICU with in the next hour. In a separate tweet she also thanked the people for their prayers and well wishes. The surgery was started earlier in the day at 8am UK time. "PM's surgery started at 8am UK time. Spoke to him earlier, he was in

high spirits," Maryam tweeted earlier.

"All arteries successfully grafted," Maryam said, adding that surgery may take another 60 to 90 minutes to conclude.

Earlier, Maryam had said the surgery was progressing fine. However, there is a great deal of secrecy surrounding the PM's surgery and it is not known which hospital he has been admitted to. The premier could not be found at the Royal Brompton Hospital in ...*(More on P4)...(30)*

In Crisis-Hit Tajikistan, A Personality Cult Blossoms

DUSHANBE - Along the road passing through an impoverished district of ex-Soviet Tajikistan near the capital Dushanbe, strongman President Emomali Rakhmon's presence is ubiquitous.

Propaganda posters flank the highway in Gissar, one showing the 63-year-old autocrat -- emboldened by constitutional changes passed in a May referendum

-- in a pensive mood, crouched in a field of red poppies.

In another the former collective farm boss, who led the Central Asian country out of a five-year civil war that began in 1992, is seen reaching joyfully into a heaving bough of grapes. "Thanks to you Gissar region is prospering," the poster ...*(More on P4)...(14)*

Turkmenistan Building up Oil Refining Capacities

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan's Turkmenbashi Complex of Oil Refineries (TCOR) is increasing the volumes of oil refining and building up production of new types of oil products, the Ministry of Oil and Gas said in a message on Tuesday.

Currently, more than 10 million tons of hydrocarbons are refined per year at the TCOR. The TCOR includes two refineries - one in the city of Turkmenbashi and the other one in the city of Seydi.

The refined oil is exported to Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Georgia, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates and Switzerland.

Turkmenistan plans to increase the capacity of its oil refining industry to 20 million tons of oil by 2020, to 22 million tons by 2025, and to 30 million tons by 2030. Currently, the country produces nearly 10 million tons of oil per year and the major part of this volume is refined locally. *(Agencies)*