

# U.N. Seeks to Build Peace Talks on Fragile Syria Truce

BEIRUT - A total of 135 people were killed in the first week of a partial truce in Syria in areas covered by the deal, a monitoring group said on Saturday, highlighting its fragile nature just days before the United Nations attempts to reconvene peace talks. U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura said the talks, originally due to begin on Monday in Geneva, would get off to a staggered start later in the week, with delegates arriving from Wednesday onwards. The U.N. said the delay was due to "logistical and technical reasons and also for the ceasefire to better



settle down". (Thursday) March 10 process," de Mistura said Arab newspaper Al Hayat. A pro-Damascus Lebanese

TV channel, al-Mayadeen, reported from its own sources that talks had been moved to March 13. Reuters could not independently verify this. The five-year Syrian civil war has killed more than a quarter of a million people and created a massive refugee crisis in Lebanon, Turkey and the European Union. The partial truce, drawn up by Washington and Moscow, came into force a week ago and has slowed the pace of the war, although it does not include Islamic State militants or the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front. (Reuters)

## Nieghbor News

### Pak PM to Attend Summit of Saudi-Led Military Bloc

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is scheduled to pay a three-day visit to Saudi Arabia from March 9 for underscoring the importance of the kingdom for Pakistan. The visit has not been officially announced yet, but multiple government sources confirmed that Mr Sharif planned to visit Saudi Arabia from March 9 to 11. During the visit, the prime minister is likely to meet Saudi King

Salman. Separately, there are reports that he might also attend the inaugural summit of the 34-nation military alliance which Saudi Arabia has announced for fighting terrorism. The meeting is reportedly taking place on March 10. The prime minister is making the trip ahead of a planned visit of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to Islamabad that is likely after March 20. (Agencies)

### Iran President, Turkish PM Hold Key Talks in Tehran

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and visiting Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu hold talks in Tehran on mutual relations and the latest developments in the Middle East, particularly the Syrian crisis. Davutoglu arrived in Tehran at the head of a high-ranking political and economic delegation Friday night for a two-day official visit. Iran's Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri earlier on Saturday officially received Davutoglu in Tehran. During a joint news conference with Jahangiri, the Turkish premier said Tehran and Ankara

must develop a "common perspective" in order to help end the crises plaguing the region. "It is extremely important for Turkey and Iran to develop some common perspectives in order to end our region's fight among brothers, to stop the ethnic and sectarian conflicts," the Turkish PM said. Tehran and Ankara may have differences over regional issues, "but we cannot change our history or our geography," he added. Jahangiri, for his part, said the restoration of peace to the Middle East is in the interest of both Iran and Turkey. (PressTV)

### India wants Smarter but Leaner Army: DM

NEW DELHI - The Indian government has said that it wants a smarter and leaner Army to cut down the inevitable salary bills. "Flab in the military has to be cut. I have asked the Army to identify the areas, it will take time and cannot be done overnight," Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar said Friday. He said that in one area where the manpower can be reduced is telephone operators, saying they are redundant these

days. "What is the need for operators in today's time when everything is automated? Much of the training can be carried out through simulators," the minister said. "However, these reductions in manpower will be decided by the forces. A smart, lean military is better than a big, unwieldy, manpower-centric military," Parrikar said. India's 1.3 million military is the third largest in the world. (Xinhua)

### Merkel Urges Greece to Speed up Efforts to Shelter Refugees

BERLIN - Greece needs to deliver quickly on its promise to provide accommodation for 50,000 refugees and the European Union should help Athens with this task, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in a media interview published on Saturday. Austria, one of the last stepping stones to Germany for hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants, recently imposed border restrictions, setting off a dom-

ino effect in Europe and leaving tens of thousands stranded in poor conditions in Greece. "Originally, Greece should have created 50,000 accommodation places for refugees by the end of 2015," Merkel told German tabloid Bild am Sonntag. "The backlog must be resolved now at lightning speed because the Greek government has to guarantee decent accommodation." Merkel, under pressure



to reduce the number of new arrivals after more than one million migrants entered Ger-

many last year, said Greece could count on more help from other EU states. (Reuters)

### 13,000 Refugees at Greek Border Ahead of EU-Turkey Migration Summit

IDOMENI - Some 13,000 refugees are crammed in unhygienic conditions on Greece's border with Macedonia, officials said Saturday, with all eyes on a key EU-Turkey summit on Monday that is seen as the only viable solution to the crisis. The huge influx of refugees and migrants has caused major tensions and divisions within the European Union, but EU President Donald Tusk on Friday struck an upbeat note about Monday's summit in Brussels, which will include Turkey. European

leaders are expected to use the summit to press Ankara to take back more economic migrants from Greece and reduce the flow of people across the Aegean Sea. Greece has been plunged at the heart of Europe's greatest migration crisis in six decades after a series of border restrictions along the migrant trail, from Austria to Macedonia has caused a bottleneck on its soil. Over 30,000 refugees and migrants have been trapped in the country, around a third of them at ... (More on P4)... (21)

### Islamic State is Losing; Coalition to Step up Pressure: U.S. Envoy

BAGHDAD - Islamic State is losing a battle against forces arrayed against it from many sides in Iraq and Syria and the focus would turn to stabilizing cities seized back from them, the U.S. envoy to a coalition fighting the group said on Saturday. Addressing a press conference in Baghdad, U.S. official Brett McGurk declined to put a timeline on when the group would be defeated or when Mosul and Raqqa, the main cities under its control in Iraq and Syria

respectively, would be retaken. McGurk met in Baghdad Iraqi officials including Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi who said in December that 2016 would be a year of "final victory" over the group in Iraq. "Daesh is feeling pressure now from all simultaneous directions and that's going to continue .. that's going to accelerate," McGurk said at the press conference, using an acronym for Islamic State. "Daesh is losing; as they lose we focus increasingly on



stabilization," he added, referring to plans being made to rehabilitate and police cities recaptured from militants. Islamic State has come

under pressure from air raids and ground forces actions by various parties in both countries, but they still hold large tracts of land. (Reuters)

### Russia's Lavrov, Kerry Call for Prompt Start to Syria Talks

MOSCOW - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, in a late phone conversation on Friday called for a prompt start to the next round of Syria peace talks, Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. The talks, under the aegis of the United Nations were originally due to begin on March 7 in Geneva, but have been postponed until March 9, due to "logistical and technical reasons and also for the ceasefire to better settle down," the U.N. said. "The two sides called to start the negotiations as soon as possible ... between the Syrian government and the whole spectrum of the opposition, during which the Syrians themselves should determine the future of their country," the ministry said in a statement. Kerry and Lavrov also reaffirmed the need for mutual cooperation to ensure the end of hostilities in Syria, the ministry said. (Reuters)

### World Leaders Hail 'Real Progress' in Syria

PARIS - World leaders hailed "real progress" in Syria on Friday, but fresh air strikes showed the fragility of the week-old truce as the opposition cast doubt on its attendance at talks next week in Geneva. Warplanes struck a key rebel bastion east of the Syrian capital for the first time since the US-Russia brokered truce -- which excludes the fight against jihadists -- began last weekend, a monitor said. "Two air strikes hit the edge of the town of Douma in Eastern Ghouta and one person was killed," said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Britain-based



Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. He said either Syrian or Russian planes carried out the strikes. Eastern Ghouta had been regularly bombed by government forces, but has been relatively calm since the ceasefire came into force, which has also allowed the United Nations began delivering aid to three rebel towns in the area. British, French, German and EU foreign ministers met in Paris to discuss the truce, saying there had been "real progress". ... (More on P4)... (22)

### IS Blamed for Yemen Care Home Attack, Pope 'Shocked'

ADEN - Yemeni authorities have blamed the Islamic State group for an attack on a care home run by missionaries that killed 16 people and was condemned by Pope Francis as "diabolical". Rival jihadist movement Al-Qaeda distanced itself from the mass shooting Friday in the main southern city of Aden, saying it was not responsible. Gunmen stormed the refuge for the elderly operated by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, killing a Yemeni guard before tying up and shooting 15 other employees, officials said. Four foreign nuns working as nurses were among those killed. The Vatican missionary news agency Fides identified ... (More on P4)... (23)

### Slovakia's Fico Eyes Victory in Boon to EU's Anti-Refugee East

BRATISLAVA - Slovaks voted in a general election Saturday expected to hand firebrand leftist Prime Minister Robert Fico a third term on the back of a staunchly anti-refugee platform. His policies echo hardliners in the EU's poorer ex-communist east like Czech President Milos Zeman, Hungarian Premier Viktor Orban and Poland's Jaroslaw Kaczynski. All have shunned refugees as Europe grapples with its worst migration and humanitarian crisis since World War II. Arguing that jihadists posing as refugees could infiltrate the European Union, the populist Fico has insisted on "monitoring every Muslim" in predominantly Catholic Slovakia after November's ... (More on P4)... (26)

### China, Russia Call for Restraint on Korean Peninsula Nuclear Issue, U.S. Urges DPRK to Stop Provocative Actions

MOSCOW - China and Russia have called for restraint in the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue, while the United States urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to end its provocative actions. At a second meeting on Northeast Asia security Friday in Moscow, China and Russia called for the denuclearization of the peninsula, stressing that the nuclear issue can only be re-

solved through dialogue. The two countries urged all parties involved to dampen their rhetoric and seek a peaceful solution to the issue. Yet they stressed the full implementation of UN Security Council resolutions on the DPRK to effectively curb the country's ability to further develop its nuclear and missile programs. China and Russia ... (More on P4)... (24)

### S.Korea Slams DPRK's Denunciation of UN Security Council Resolution

SEOUL - South Korea on Saturday slammed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) for its denunciation of new tougher UN Security Council resolution, saying it will be an outright challenge to the international community. Seoul's foreign ministry spokesman Cho June-hy-

uk said in a statement that Pyongyang's rejection of the UN Security Council resolution is tantamount to an outright challenge to the international society's unified will. It also indicates Pyongyang's choice to run counter to a path to peace on the Korean Peninsula and the ... (More on P4)... (25)

### President Xi Says Shanghai can 'Pioneer' Reform, Innovation

BEIJING - President Xi Jinping said Shanghai should continue to serve as a vanguard and pioneer in reform and innovation when talking to lawmakers from the coastal city Saturday. Xi made the remarks when he joined a meeting of Shanghai deputies, who were deliberating the government's work report, at the ongoing annual session of the National People's Congress. Shanghai should use its courageous, pioneering spirit and youthful vigor to be innovative in the way it advances reform, Xi said. Xi asked the region to accelerate measures that will help it establish itself as a globally influential center for technology and innovation. As the country's finance and trade center, Shang-

hai was chosen as the location for China's first-ever free trade zone (FTZ) and has been used by policymakers as a testing ground for new policies, such as the negative list for foreign capital management, which defined sectors in which foreign entities could invest. Speaking highly of Shanghai's efforts in reform and innovation, Xi said he hopes Shanghai could deepen reforms by focusing on the China (Shanghai) Pilot FTZ. The FTZ should be used to trial and test mechanism innovation, Xi said. He urged Shanghai to take the lead in creating a convenient, international business environment based on the rule of law, as this would influence a fair, unified and efficient market. (Xinhua)

### Law Enforcers, Prison Officials of Turkmenistan Discuss Ethics of Penitentiary Staff

BISHKEK - Representatives of law enforcement bodies and prison officials from across Turkmenistan discussed the principles and ethics of penitentiary staff at an OSCE-organized training course that concluded in Ashgabat on Saturday. The four-day training course was organized to support the host government's efforts in building the capacity of penitentiary staff by upgrading their knowledge and understanding of international standards related to the prisoners' rights as well as professional standards regarding the treatment of inmates. "An essential part of the penitentiary staff's

job is awareness of the rights and duties of prisoners," noticed Head of the OSCE Center in Ashgabat Ivo Petrov. The training course highlighted the main international instruments addressing the rights of prisoners and how to implement them in the daily work of prison staff. Two international experts elaborated on the right to the physical and moral integrity of inmates, treatment of prisoners who are under stress or depression, the right to adequate life conditions and respect for private and family life as well as the right to the freedom of thought, conscience and belief. (AKIpress)