

UNSC Hopes to See Early Resumption of Syrian Peace Talks

UNITED NATIONS - The UN Security Council on Friday welcomed the mediation efforts by the UN special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, to bring all warring Syrian parties to a negotiation table and looked forward to the early resumption of the intra-Syrian negotiations in order to end the Syrian crisis, which enters its seventh year this month.

"The members of the Security Council welcomed the conclusion of a further round of United Nations-facilitated intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva on 3 March 2017," the 15-nation UN body said in a press statement.

"The members of the Security Council looked forward to the early resumption of the intra-Syrian negotiations and encouraged the Syrian parties to return to talks in good faith and to engage constructively and without preconditions on the agenda set out by the UN special envoy when talks resume," the statement said.



After briefing the Security Council, De Mistura told reporters here Wednesday that a new round of Syrian peace talks is set to take place on March 23 in Geneva.

The fourth round of Syrian peace talks ended on Friday with no breakthrough achieved towards reaching a political solution to end the...

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Syria Urges "Immediate" Withdrawal of Turkish Forces from Northern Syria

DAMASCUS - The Syrian Foreign Ministry urged the UN Security Council on Friday to push Turkey to withdraw its forces from northern Syria, state news agency SANA reported. The ministry branded the Turkish forces as "invading forces" of Syrian territory in the north, saying they should halt aggression "immediately."

The condemnation came a day after the Turkish army fired on Syrian military positions west of the city of Manbij in the northern province of Aleppo, leaving an undisclosed number of military personnel killed or wounded.

The shelling targeted the Syrian border corps, which has recently been deployed in the western countryside of Manbij to separate the Turkish forces and the Kurdish-led groups, which are in control of the city.

Russia and the Kurdish groups in northern Syria recently agreed that the Kurdish-led Manbij Military Council (MMC) should hand over areas in the western countryside of Manbij to the Syrian army, as the Turkish forces and...

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Tusk Urges EU Countries to Stick Together Politically

BRUSSELS - European Council President Donald Tusk urged member states of the European Union (EU) to strive towards maintaining political unity after Brexit as the debate over a multi-speed Europe is getting fierce. Tusk chaired the debate on the future of Europe on Friday with all EU leaders, with the exception British Prime Minister Theresa May, who are gathered in Brussels for a two-day summit which ends on Friday.

"When discussing the various scenarios for Europe, our main objective should be to strengthen mutual trust and unity among 27," Tusk said at a press conference with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker on Friday.

"After today's debate, I can openly say that all 27 leaders agree with this objective. This was an optimistic discussion about our common future, with a positive approach from all sides, without any exception," Tusk added.

The debate on a 'multi-speed' Europe gained momentum after the publication of the European Commission's White Paper and a meeting of leaders...*(More on P4)...(25)*

EU Summit Concludes but Debate on EU Future, Unity Continues

BRUSSELS - A two-day summit of European Union (EU) leaders and heads of state here concluded on Friday, but the fierce debate on the direction of Europe is likely to continue for a longer time.

TUSK'S JOB ROW Polish fury over the re-election of European Council President Donald Tusk overshadowed the two-day EU summit.

Tusk was given the green light to continue in the post until 2019 despite fierce opposition by the Polish government, which had put forward its own candidate. Afterwards,



French President Francois Hollande said: "I don't see how one country could oppose this solution when all the others are in favor." But Poland's government argued that Tusk supported the domestic opposition in Poland and has failed to protect the country's interests in the EU.

Modi Wins Landslide Election Victory in India's Biggest State

NEW DELHI - India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party won a landslide victory in India's most important battleground state on Saturday, in a personal triumph that will strengthen his claim to a second term as national leader.

Wresting control of Uttar Pradesh is a ringing endorsement of Modi's stewardship of Asia's third-largest economy after his high-risk decision last November to scrap high-value banknotes to rein in corruption. The Election Commission of India said Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had won a clear majority. With the tally of results almost complete, the BJP had collected as many...*(More on P4)...(29)*

China-U.S. Trade War Brings Nothing but Harm: Commerce Minister

BEIJING - A trade war between China and the United States is not in line with the interests of the two countries and will bring nothing but harm, China's Commerce Minister Zhong Shan said Saturday.

Cooperation is the "only right choice," and the two countries should work to enhance cooperation and manage differences, Zhong said, stressing the role of economic and trade cooperation as a "ballast" and "propeller" in bilateral relations. Speaking at a press conference on the sidelines of the annual parliamentary session, Zhong said the two countries, whose interests are closely interwoven, have seen their economic and trade relations on the right path since they forged diplomatic ties.

"Any form of protectionism is not in line with the interests of the two countries," he said. Zhong said he looks forward to meeting his U.S. counterpart Wilbur Ross, who became secretary of commerce under the U.S. new administration late last month. He expressed the belief that the two countries' leaders and governments will make the right judgment on bilateral trade ties, pledging efforts to guide China-U.S. economic and trade ties in the right direction. (Xinhua)



Putin, Erdogan Hail Russia-Turkey Ties, Pledge Cooperation on Syria

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan hailed improved bilateral ties between the two countries on Friday, as they pledged to keep on working together to end the turmoil in Syria. The two leaders held talks at the Kremlin to discuss strategic aspects of the development of Russian-Turkish bilateral relations, as well as cooperation to address pressing global and regional issues, especially conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

"The ceasefire in Syria is generally holding thanks to the well-coordinated efforts of Russia, Turkey and Iran," Putin said. "We agreed with our Turkish colleagues to continue our cooperation in fighting terrorist groups, above all ISIS, working together through our military and special services." Cooperation on the Syria issue between Russia and Turkey marked a sharp turnaround for the two nations, which have supported opposing sides in Syria for years. Both



countries are now pushing forward the Astana talks aimed at addressing the fighting in Syria, with the third round of such talks scheduled in the middle of the month. "As far as security matters in our region are concerned, I believe that it takes joint efforts to end bloodshed in Syria," Erdogan said after the meeting. During the meeting, the two...*(More on P4)...(26)*

Trump to Ask Merkel for Advice on Putin, Ukraine: U.S. Official

WASHINGTON - In his meeting here with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, U.S. President Donald Trump would ask for advice on Russia and Ukrainian crisis, a senior Trump administration official said on Friday.

"The president will be very interested in hearing the chancellor's views on her experience interacting with Putin," said the official here at a briefing. The official spoke on condition of anonymity. Apart from hearing Merkel's "insights into what it's like to deal with the Russians," the official said Trump would also ask for advice on how the United States could help resolve the Ukraine conflict. Also, the two leaders are expected to discuss Germany's level of defense spending for the NATO alliance.

"The message from...*(More on P4)...(28)*

Trump Invites Palestinian President to Visit White House

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday invited Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to visit the White House soon and told the Palestinian leader that he believes the time has come to make a deal on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the White House said. In his first phone call with Abbas since he took office, Trump emphasized his "personal belief that peace is possible," according to a White House statement. "The President noted that such a deal would not only give Israelis and Palestinians the peace and security they deserve, but that it would reverberate positively throughout the region and the world," said the statement.

According to official Palestinian News Agency Wafa, Abbas reiterated to Trump his commitment to peace as a strategic choice to establish the Palestinian state living side by side with the state of Israel.

The White House statement also emphasized the long-lasting U.S. stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that a peace agreement must be negotiated directly between Israel and Palestine. That took an indirect jab at a UN resolution passed last December that demanded Israel stop building settlements on occupied Palestinian territory to preserve the possibility of a two-state solution.

Nieghbor News

EU Summit Stresses Strengthening Trade Ties with China

BRUSSELS - The European Union (EU) will strengthen its trade ties with China in a bid to maintain its economic recovery against a backdrop of rising protectionism, a conclusion document released by the President of the European Council showed on Friday.

"Trade relations with China should be strengthened on the basis of a shared understanding of reciprocal and mutual benefits," the document read. The leaders of EU member states are gathered here for a two-day summit on Thursday and Friday to look at a number of the most pressing issues, with growth, jobs and competitiveness at the top of the agenda.

"Trade remains one of the most powerful engines for growth, supporting millions of jobs and contributing to prosperity," the document stressed,

adding that the bloc would remain strongly committed to a robust trade policy and an open and rules-based multi-lateral trading system with a central role for the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The leaders welcomed the positive vote in the European Parliament on the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), saying it was "a clear signal at a time when protectionist tendencies are re-appearing."

The leaders agreed that the bloc should continue to engage actively with its international trade partners. The single-market bloc said it would resolutely advance on all ongoing negotiations for free trade agreements, including with the regional trade bloc Mercosur, Mexico and Japan. (Xinhua)

Religious Scholars Should Spread Message of Peace and Tolerance: PM Nawaz

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Saturday said it is the responsibility of religious scholars to help the state eradicate terrorism from the country.

He was addressing a seminar at Jamia Naemia, a seminary considered close to the Sharif family. "In Pakistan and in the world, hate is being spread in the name of Islam," he said. "It is the responsibility of religious scholars to free the name of Islam from terrorists." Nawaz also claimed his government had brought the political leadership, the Army and police together, and that the

Pakistan's fight against terrorism had brought peace in the country for the most part. "However, terror incidents continue to happen sporadically. We need religious leaders to come together and help the state eliminate terrorism in this final battle," he added. Speaking about the chaos spread by what he termed incorrect interpretations of Islam, the PM urged the scholars present to disseminate the "real narrative of peace" through religious seminaries and reject the narratives that preach secular hate and the "distorted concept" of jihad. (Monitoring Desk)

JCPOA, Iran's Gateway to Global Market: Finnish Diplomat

SARI, Mazandaran Prov - Finnish Ambassador to Tehran Harri Kamarainen has described the July 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as Iran's gateway to enter the global markets.

In a meeting with the businesspersons in this northern Iranian province on Saturday, Kamarainen said the JCPOA did remove many of the economic problems on Iran's way. In the current conditions, there is no serious problem for Iran's activity in the world markets, said the Finnish diplomat, stressing his country has been among the first European states that started expanding relations with

Iran after the international agreement between Iran and the six major world powers.

He further referred to the exchange of high-ranking delegations between the two countries, describing it as an indication of the two sides' interests to develop trade and economic cooperation.

The Finnish diplomat stressed the importance of getting familiar with each other's capacities, saying the exchange of trade delegations would make the two sides move toward getting familiar with each other. Iran exports different products including handmade carpets, fruit, furniture and glassware to Finland. (IRNA)

Aide of Kazakh President Visits Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - A delegation of Kazakhstan led by aide of the President - Secretary of the Council of Security of Kazakhstan Vladimir Jumakanov paid a visit to Tashkent, Uzdaily reports.

The heads of several law enforcement bodies and state institutions of two states held negotiations to discuss the perspectives of cooperation on combating modern threats and challenges to stability and security, cooperation in fighting with the religious extremism and terrorism, illegal migration and other threats.

The sides affirmed the similarity and coincidence of the positions of the two countries on many issues of international and regional security.

The sides developed the concrete proposals on further developing mutual contacts to joint reaction to modern threats and challenges. The parties underlined mutual interest in further developing multidimensional relations between two states in the spirit of the agreement on strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan from 2013. (AKI)

EU to Take New Steps towards Trade Talks with ASEAN

BRUSSELS - The European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) agreed to take steps forward to resume talks for a region-to-region agreement, the bloc said Friday. The two sides decided to start preparations to re-launch negotiations and committed to taking the lead together on regional and global trade, said a statement from the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm.

Negotiations on an EU-ASEAN trade agreement originally started back in 2007 but were separated into individual talks with ASEAN member states in 2009 as differences emerged in the level

of economic development and openness in the bloc, the Commission said. The EU's announcement came following a meeting between EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom and her ASEAN counterparts in Manila, where an ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) meeting was being held.

ASEAN as a whole stood as the EU's third largest trading partner after the United States and China. EU data showed that trade between the two sides had been 208 billion euros (221 billion U.S. dollars) in 2016 and the EU remained the largest external source of Foreign Direct...*(More on P4)...(30)*