

# Kerry Says in Riyadh Syrian Violence Down by 80-90 Pct

RIYADH - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said on Saturday that the Syrian peace talks might begin on Monday, Al Arabiya News reported.

Kerry arrived in Saudi Arabia on Friday to meet with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on the Syrian crisis and Geneva peace talks. He said that the exact date will be set after a phone call he will make with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. He criticized Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government for exploiting the truce period that other parties are committed to.



Meanwhile, he highlighted that the violence in Syria has calmed down by 80-90 percent. The talks, supported by the United Nations, are aimed to end the five-year conflict that killed more than 270,000 people in Syria. (Xinhua)

## Russia Confident about Upcoming Intra-Syrian Talks: Deputy FM

MOSCOW - Russia is confident about the upcoming reconciliation talks between the Syrian government and opposition in Geneva on March 14-24, a Russian deputy foreign minister said on Saturday.

"We have reasons for optimism as there is a common understanding within the International Syrian Support Group (ISSG)," said Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, who is also Russia's presidential envoy to the Middle East and North Africa. The ISSG is co-chaired by the United States and Russia. The group is composed of the Arab League, the European Union, the United Nations and 17 countries including China. Bogdanov called for forming a united group of the Syrian opposition, only with which "direct contact between... (More on P4)...(22)

## Neighbor News

### UAE Begins Polio Vaccination for 10m Children in Pakistan

DUBAI - The UAE has launched a massive campaign to vaccinate 10.673 million children against polio in Pakistan, as part of phase-3 of the Project to Assist Pakistan, UAE PAP. UAE PAP has announced the launch of the programme, under the slogan 'Health for All - Better Future', which is in implementation of the directives of the President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan for providing humanitarian and developmental assistance to the friendly people of Pakistan, and as part of an initiative launched by His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of

Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, to eradicate polio in the world. About 25 million vaccination doses will be administered as part of the programme which seeks to support health awareness in Pakistan, reduce the spread of epidemics, and prevent the suffering of children in affected areas from poor health. The campaign includes the geographical coverage of 66 areas, 15 of them in the region's tribal areas, 25 districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 12 regions in the province of Balochistan, as well as the Karachi district in Sindh province. (Agencies)

## Iraqi Forces Kill 44 IS Militants in Offensive in Anbar

BAGHDAD - A total of 44 Islamic State (IS) militants were killed Saturday in airstrikes and clashes with Iraqi security forces in Anbar, a provincial security source said. The Iraqi security forces have liberated two areas near the city of Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's western province of Anbar. The troops and Sunni tribal fighters, backed by Iraqi and U.S.-led aircraft, drove out IS militants from Abu Teiban and al-Safiriya, just west of Ramadi,

some 110 km west of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, the source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity. The troops raised the Iraqi flag on a building at the scene after killing at least 24 IS militants and destroying six of their vehicles, the source said. The clashes in the two areas also left eight security members dead and five others wounded, the source added. Meanwhile, an IS sniper shot dead Major Zana ... (More on P4)...(23)

## Vote won't Change Migrant Policy: Germany

PARIS - Germany's vice chancellor is making clear that likely gains for a nationalist party in state elections on Sunday won't change his government's stance on migrants. The Alternative for Germany, or AfD, party is expected to win seats in three more German state legislatures in the election amid unease over Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcome last year for large numbers of refugees and her insistence on pursuing a Europe-wide solution to



the migrant crisis.

Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel said after meeting fellow center-left European leaders in Paris on Saturday that a large ma-

majority of voters will choose "democratic parties" and that "we shouldn't start to panic." He added: "There is a clear position that we stand by: humanity and solidarity. We will not change our position now because of 10 percent right-wing radicals." He called for a large turnout in the vote. (AP)

## Iraqi Forces Repel IS Attacks in Salahudin, Kirkuk Provinces

BAGHDAD - Iraqi security forces on Saturday repelled attacks by Islamic State (IS) militants in the two provinces of Salahudin and Kirkuk, provincial security sources said. In Iraq's northern central province of Salahudin, dozens of IS militants carried out attacks at dawn from four routes; three in Zarga area and the oil fields of Allas and Ajil in east of the provincial capital city of Tikrit, which located some 170 km north of Baghdad. While the fourth targeted the security positions in Makhoulmoun-

tain in north of Tikrit, the source said on condition of anonymity. The troops and allied paramilitary units, known as HashShaabi, fought fierce clashes with the attackers while helicopter gunships and reinforcement troops rushed to the battleground, forcing the IS militants to withdraw after killing many of them and destroying several of their vehicles, the source said. The predominated Sunni Arab province of Salahudin has been the scene of a major offensive by Iraqi ... (More on P4)...(24)

## Over 100 Killed as Yemen Gov't Forces Break Rebel Siege on Taiz

SANAA - Fighting raged in Yemen's rebel-besieged city of Taiz over the past 24 hours, as pro-government forces advanced and broke rebel siege on the city and over 100 people were killed in the clashes, officials said on Saturday. "We announce that our forces on Friday night broke the rebel siege on southwestern areas of Taiz after beating the Shiite Houthi rebels and their allies loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh," read a brief statement by the government army and local resistance unit.

The advance of the forces loyal to the internationally recognized President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi was backed by warplanes from the mostly Arab coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia. Medical officials said more than 100 fighters were killed from both sides during the past 24 hours only, mostly from Houthi rebels who were hit by Saudi-led airstrikes. The battles began three days ago, but Hadi forces managed to retake Almirakh and Alakroudh districts on the southwest of Taiz, and controlling



Al-Dehi crossing road and recapturing the old

airport and the 35th military brigade camp during the fighting on Friday and overnight, according to loyal officials. "Now roads were secured and open for humanitarian aids to enter the city," the loyal army statement added. (Xinhua)

## UNESCO Alerts on Heritage Sites Damage in Syria and Iraq

DUBAI - The destruction of Syrian and Iraqi heritage sites by the Islamic state (IS) group have been a wake-up call for nations on how much damage lack of education can cause to the global community, senior UNESCO official said Saturday. Irina Bokova, Director-General of the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) made the remarks at the two-day Global Education and Skills Forum (GESF) 2016. Bokova said "the terrible footages and photographs" of the IS fighter hammering heritage sites in Syria and Iraq have triggered an unprecedented awareness in the global community of how much all nations are connected to the ongoing conflict in Syria and Iraq. "People outside the Middle East have suddenly felt involved in the conflicts. The heritage sites in Syria and Iraq are the birth places, the very roots of human civilization, of our ... (More on P4)...(25)

## U.S., South Korea Stage Assault Drill; North Threatens to Wipe out Enemies

POHANG - U.S. and South Korean troops staged a big amphibious landing exercise on Saturday, storming simulated North Korean beach defenses amid heightened tension and threats by the North to annihilate its enemies. The landing and assault drills on South Korea's east coast were part of eight weeks of joint exercises between the allies which the South has said are the largest ever. The North has denounced the exercises as "nuclear war moves" and threatened to respond with an all-out offensive. Tension on the Korean peninsula has been high since the North conducted its fourth nuclear test in January and followed that



with a long-range rocket launch last month, triggering new U.N. sanctions. About 55 U.S. marine aircraft and 30 U.S. and South Korean ships, including the USS Bonhomme Rich-

ard and USS Boxer, which carry AV-8B Harrier attack jets and V-22 Osprey aircraft, took part in the assault on beaches near Pohang city, the U.S. navy said. (Reuters)

## Damascus Rules out Talks on Presidential Vote

BEIRUT - The Syrian government on Saturday ruled out any discussion of presidential elections at peace talks due to start next week, drawing accusations from the opposition that it was halting the talks before they started. Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualeem, speaking at a Damascus news conference, confirmed his government's participation in U.N.-led talks but said they would fail if the opposition had "delusions that they will take power in Geneva that they failed to take in battle". He also heaped criticism on U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura for presenting an agenda for the talks and saying presidential elections would take place in 18 months time. "The government delegation will reject any attempt to put this on the agenda," he said at the televised news conference. The peace ... (More on P4)...(26)

## Turkish Airstrikes in Iraq Kill 67 PKK Militants

ANKARA - Turkey's state-run news agency says the military has carried out air strikes against Kurdish rebel targets across the border in northern Iraq, killing at least 67 militants. Anadolu Agency, citing unnamed security sources, said Saturday that 14 F-16 and F-4 jets were involved in the March 9 strikes which allegedly destroyed ammunition depots, bunkers and shelters belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. The agency said the offensive targeted five areas in northern Iraq, including the Qandilmountains on the Iraq-Iraq border where the PKK's leadership is based. Turkey's jets have frequently bombed PKK sites in northern Iraq since July, when a fragile peace process between the government and rebels collapsed. The PKK, which is fighting for autonomy for Kurds in Turkey's southeast, is listed as a terrorist organization. (AP)

## OSCE Calls for Strictly Observing Ceasefire in Eastern Ukraine

MINSK - The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has called on all parties to strictly observe ceasefire in order to open a new crossing point on the contact line in southeastern Ukraine. "In order to avoid further delays in opening a new crossing point, it is necessary to strictly observe the ceasefire," OSCE Special Representative Martin Sajdik told journalists after a regular meeting

of the trilateral contact group on Ukraine on Friday in Minsk, capital of Belarus. "We are talking about the area near the village of Zolotoye in Lugansk Oblast," said Sajdik, who represents the OSCE in the contact group which also includes Ukraine and Russia. Sajdik also said that the exchange of prisoners of war will remain on the agenda, adding ... (More on P4)...(27)

## Nigerian Forces Kill 40 Terrorists in Military Operation: Spokesman

LAGOS - Nigerian security forces have killed 40 Boko Haram terrorists in an operation carried out in the northeastern state of Borno, a military spokesman said on Friday. The West African country's Army spokesman Colonel Sanikukashaka Usman said in a statement reaching Xinhua that the terrorists also lost a number of weapons, equipment and

several other assorted ammunition. He added that troops would continue to clear more terrorists camps in the northeastern state of Borno as offensive operations against Boko Haram continued in the region. "The troops are in high spirits because of the success of the operation coupled with the fact that there ... (More on P4)...(28)

## Russia, Tajikistan to Hold Large Antiterrorism Drills

BISHKEK - More than 50,000 troops will engage in anti-terrorism drills in Tajikistan's Khatlon region in the coming week, The Diplomat reports citing Russian and Tajik media. The Tajik ministry of defense, according to TASS, said the joint drills began Thursday and would include armored vehicles and aircraft in addition to 50,000 soldiers. Asia-Plus says the drills are scheduled to take place from March 15-20, but that some events have already begun. The exercises are geared toward repelling "external terrorist threats" as well as practicing "coordination and interaction in combat missions in mountains." Faridun-Makhmalalozoda, a spokesman for the ministry, commented that

this will be the first time "in the history of military cooperation between Tajikistan and Russia" that joint drills have included soldiers from Russia's Central Military District, not just troops from the 201st Motor Rifle Division stationed in Tajikistan. The 201st division, estimated at about 7,000 troops, has been based in Tajikistan (mostly stationed at a facility outside Dushanbe, but also in Qurgontepa and Kulob) since the Soviet era. Although last year Russia stated an intention to increase its troop presence in Tajikistan to 9,000 by 2020, this year began with news that that plan had been shelved. Russian forces in Tajikistan are apparently to be reorganized from a division to a brigade. (AKIpress)

## Iran Sends Medical Team to Help Iraqi Victims of Chemical Attack

TEHRAN - Iran has sent a medical team to help the victims of chemical attacks by the Islamic State (IS) on Kirkuk city of Iraq, official IRNA news agency reported Saturday. Iranian Minister of Health Hassan Qazizadeh Hashemi said Saturday that following an emergency call from the Iraqi Health Ministry, Iran made the decision. The Iranian medical team is to provide the victims with emergency medical services, Qazizadeh Hashemi was quoted

as saying. On Wednesday, Iraqi Health Ministry asked Iran for the dispatch of an emergency medical team to help those hit by the recent chemical attacks in Kirkuk, IRNA said. According to media, the IS mortar shells and rockets filled with "poisonous substances" hit a rural district of the Iraqi Kirkuk city on Tuesday leading to the injury of scores. The injured suffered from choking and skin irritation due to the attack. (Xinhua)

## China, Russia Agree to Cement Cooperation on World Challenges, Bilateral Ties

MOSCOW - China and Russia have reached agreements on several issues of vital importance for both sides, including the resumption of the Six-Party Talks on the Korean nuclear issue and efforts to further their ties during the Chinese foreign minister's visit. Both China and Russia wish for the denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, and support the resumption of Six-Party Talks, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said here Friday. "The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2270 should be fully implemented, which would, on the one hand, block further development of the Demo-

cratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) nuclear program, and on the other, should not have impact on its people and humanitarian needs," Wang said at a press conference after meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. Wang also said that actions should be avoided to intensify tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Commenting on the possible deployment in South Korea of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), a U.S. Army anti-ballistic missile system, the two foreign ministers said it goes far beyond the defense needs of the region ... (More on P4)...(29)