

Putin Discusses Anti-Terrorism with France's Le Pen

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin urged joint international efforts to fight terrorism on Friday at a meeting in Moscow with French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen.

"We all live in very difficult conditions. We must realize the reality of this danger and unite efforts in the fight against terrorism," Putin told the French right-wing leader, according to an official Kremlin transcript. Putin said Russia has no intention of influencing domestic affairs in France but reserves the right to maintain contacts with representatives of all political forces in that country.

"I know that you represent



a fairly rapidly developing range of European political forces," Putin told the presidential hopeful, adding that Russian officials are interested in exchanging opinions with her on bilateral relations and the situation in Europe.

"I have long advocated that Russia and France should restore cultural, economic and strategic ties, especially at the moment when a serious terrorist threat looms over us," Le Pen said at the meeting. Earlier on Friday, she said that she opposes a European Union blacklist banning several Russian nationals, from entering its member... (More on P4)... (14)

US Sanctions Firms for Transferring Technology to Iran, N. Korea & Syria

WASHINGTON - The United States has imposed sanctions on 30 foreign companies or individuals for transferring sensitive technology to Iran for its missile programme or for violating export controls on Iran, North Korea and Syria, the State Department said on Friday.

Eleven companies or individuals from China, North Korea or the United Arab Emirates were sanctioned for technology transfers that could boost Tehran's ballistic missile programme, the State Department said in a statement.

Nineteen entities or individuals were sanctioned for other violations under the Iran, North Korea and Syria Non-proliferation Act, it said.

They are believed to have transferred or acquired sensitive technology that could contribute to development of weapons of mass destruction. "These determinations underscore that the United States continues to regularly impose sanctions under existing authorities, as warranted, against entities and individuals... (More on P4)... (15)

EU Boosts Support for OSCE Mission in Ukraine

KIEV - The European Union (EU) said on Friday it has allocated an additional 3 million euros (about 3.2 million U.S. dollars) for the mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which monitors the situation in eastern Ukraine.

The funds, which are provided under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), will support the work of the OSCE special monitoring mission (SMM) in Ukraine in the area of satellite imagery, the Euro-

pean Commission said in a press release.

The aid will help the OSCE observers to map inaccessible areas and to report on infrastructure damage as well as on the presence and movement of people and equipment, the press release said.

The OSCE mission that was sent to Ukraine in 2014 at a request of the Ukrainian government has received about 32 million dollars from the EU under the IcSP initiative. Currently, more than 700 unarmed OSCE observers are deployed in Ukraine,



with the majority of them monitoring the ceasefire between government troops and pro-independence insurgents.

The OSCE SMM has repeatedly said it is experi-

encing limited access to some territories in eastern Ukraine, including the storage sites of the withdrawn weapons and the disengagement areas. (Xinhua)

UN Envoy Meets Rival Syria Delegations as Peace Talks Resume

GENEVA - UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura on Friday held bilateral discussions with rival Syrian delegations involved in the latest round of peace talks seeking to broker a political end to the six-year Syrian crisis.

Alessandra Vellucci, the spokesperson of United Nations Office in Geneva, confirmed that de Mistura is slated to convene with the Syrian government delegation and its opposition counterpart as UN-mediated negotiations resumed after a three-week hiatus.

The envoy's deputy held preliminary discussions with the invitees in three Geneva-based hotels Thursday.

All those who participated in the latest round of talks, which ended earlier this month, are carrying forward the conversation which are expected to focus on governance, constitutional issues, elections, as well as counter terrorism, security and confidence building measures.

The special envoy is expected to brief the press later on Friday. (Xinhua)

About 400,000 Civilians Trapped in Mosul with "Worst Yet to Come": UN Agency

UNITED NATIONS - An estimated 400,000 Iraqi civilians are trapped in Mosul's Old City in north Iraq as fighting intensifies and people continue to flee, the UN refugee agency representative warned on Friday.

"The worst is yet to come," said Bruno Geddo, the representative of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Iraq.

Speaking by phone with the UN News Center, Geddo said the fighting in the west has been more intense than in the less

densely populated east of the city, where the battle ended in January.

"People are stuck between a rock and a hard place," he said. "There's fighting shelling, bombing." When people try to flee, extremists shoot them. Some have tried to leave during prayers or under cover of fog at first light, but were killed, Geddo said.

Meanwhile, life in the Old City is becoming impossible with a lack of food, clean water or fuel, Geddo said. Meeting with civilians at the UNHCR tran-



sit and reception centre at Hammam al-Alil, outside of the city centre, Geddo said the number of people moving through has "surged" in recent days

with up to 12,000 people arriving daily. Some 340,000 people have been displaced since the fighting in Mosul started... (More on P4)... (16)

UN Envoy Seeks Incremental Steps from Resumed Syria Peace Talks

GENEVA - The UN Syria envoy said Friday that while he didn't expect a breakthrough in the latest round of Syria peace talks, he would rely on headway made earlier this month to help pave the way towards brokering a political end to the Syrian conflict.

"Regarding our objectives, I will try to be careful about expectations as we were on the fourth round. I'm not expecting miracles, breakthroughs or breakdowns," Staffan de Mistura told press in a stakeout. "What I am expecting is building on the fourth round, with some in-



cremental, constructive steps," he added. The fifth and latest round of UN-mediated political talks resumed Friday in a bid to broker a political end to the six-year Syrian conflict which has killed over 310,000 people and

displaced millions of others. The last time the sides convened in the Swiss city was earlier this month, with invitees agreeing on the agenda going forward after nine days of proximity negotiations.

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EU Needs Turkey for Keeping Balkan Migration Route Closure

BRATISLAVA - Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico said Friday that EU needs Turkey to help maintain the shutdown of the Balkans migration route.

"Looking at the previous period, we can see that only 2 percent of migrants are now getting to Europe via the Balkans route. This is a huge decline," said Fico, admitting that the running of internal affairs in Turkey is far from the ideals of the EU. EU-Turkey relations suffered a sharp decline in recent days, after some EU countries banned rallies of the Turkish politicians in their countries.

But Slovak prime minister believes that there will be no big change in EU-Turkey relations in the future.

"Nothing will happen, we'll keep pelting each other. What matters for Europe is to keep the migration... (More on P4)... (18)

Austrian President Criticizes Britain's Approach to Brexit

VIENNA - Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen sharply criticized Britain's approach to Brexit under Prime Minister Theresa May.

In an interview with the Austria Press Agency published on Friday, Alexander Van der Bellen said, there presently exist "100,000 open questions to clarify."

He pointed out that numerous issues concerning personal profit, such as the pensions of British citizens living in the European Union (EU), have not yet been answered. There has "not one single compromiseable proposal" from the May administration, he said.

The president added the Brexit is nonetheless to be accepted, though it serves as a "wake-up call" to the rest of the EU.

He also referred to the nationalist rhetoric of far-right politicians such as Geert Wilders of the PVV party in Holland and Marine Le Pen, the president of the National Front in France, as "completely unrealistic."

Earlier this month, Britain's EU envoy Tim Barrow informed the office of European Council President Donald Tusk of Britain's intention to invoke Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty on March 29, nine months after the country voted to leave the bloc.

However, except for finally settling on the date to formally start the Brexit negotiations and that Britain wants a "hard Brexit," the British government has so far given little clue about how it will proceed with what could be more than two years of talks. (Xinhua)

UN, Red Cross Deliver Aid to Nearly 25,000 People in Rural Damascus

UNITED NATIONS - A UN-International Committee of the Red Cross-Syrian Arab Red Crescent inter-agency convoy is delivering multi-sectoral assistance to the Wadi Barada area in rural Damascus for 24,500 people in need.

"This is the first ever inter-agency convoy to reach the area, and follows several attempts to reach the area over the last few months that were unsuccessful, due to administrative and security hurdles," deputy UN spokesman Farhan Haq said at daily news briefing here Friday. "The UN continues to call for safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all in need in Syria, particularly... (More on P4)... (19)

Thousands Demonstrate in London against Leaving the EU

LONDON - Thousands of people marched through London on Saturday to protest against Britain leaving the European Union, just four days before Prime Minister Theresa May launches the start of the formal divorce process from the bloc it joined 44 years ago.

The Unite for Europe march was due to end with a rally in Parliament Square, scene of this week's attack by British-born Islam convert Khalid Masood in which four people died. Marchers observed a minute's silence in memory of the victims at the start of the demonstration.

In bright sunshine, they waved EU flags and banners with slogans like "So what's

the Plan" and "Stop Brexit" as they made their way to parliament.

One banner from a marcher in Hastings on the south coast - scene of England's epoch-defining defeat to William, Duke of Normandy - read: "Hastings, in Europe since 1066." Another simply said "Happy Birthday EU" in a reference to this weekend's 60th anniversary of the bloc's founding, currently being commemorated in Rome. Joss Dennis was one of three coach loads of protesters who had traveled from Bristol in western England, which voted 62 percent to stay in the EU in last June's referendum compared with the national 52-48 percent vote to leave. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

President Xi Congratulates Opening of Boao Forum for Asia

BOAO, Hainan - President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the opening ceremony of the 2017 annual conference of the Boao Forum for Asia, held in China's Hainan Province Saturday morning. Since its establishment 16 years ago, the Boao Forum for Asia has played an important role in building Asian consensus, promoting Asian cooperation and upgrading Asian influence, Xi noted. The theme for this year's conference is "Globalization and Free Trade: The Asian Perspectives."

Xi said the theme reflected the attention on economic globalization paid by the international community, especially the Asian countries.

The president called upon attendees of the

conference to pool their wisdom on solving the major problems faced by the world and regional economy, and jointly push forward a more dynamic, inclusive and sustainable economic globalization process.

Talking about economic globalization in a keynote speech at the opening ceremony, Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli asked the Asian countries to join hands in promoting economic globalization and free trade, and forging the community of common destiny for Asia and the mankind.

To achieve that goal, the Asian countries should promote a development mode featuring peace, innovation, openness, sharing and fairness, said Zhang. (Xinhua)

Pakistan Heading Towards Economic Transformation: Aizaz

WASHINGTON - Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry says Pakistan is on the path of economic transformation after overcoming multiple challenges, including terrorism.

Speaking at a reception held at Embassy of Pakistan in Washington in connection with Pakistan Day, the Ambassador expressed his commitment to maintain close cooperation with the host government to further

deepen and broaden historical ties.

Speaking on the occasion, while addressing the event, US Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon appreciated the resilience of Pakistani people who have surpassed all obstacles to achieve progress and prosperity. The event was attended by over five hundred people from the cross-section of American society, including Pakistani-Americans and vice versa. (Daily Times)

Iran's Rouhani to Meet with Putin in Moscow Next Week

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani will lead an Iranian delegation to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin during a two-day summit in Moscow starting Monday.

Mr. Rouhani departed Tehran for Moscow on Friday, where he will hold face-to-face meetings with Mr. Putin and other senior Russian officials, Presidential Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications and Information Parviz Esmaili said in a statement.

During the two-day summit, the world leaders would "discuss leading bilateral, regional and international issues" along with finalizing bilateral agreements "to bolster cooperation in legal and judicial sectors, roads and

urban development, technology and communications, energy and sports," he said in a statement to Iranian state news outlet Press TV.

Aside from mutual economic and development projects, Mr. Rouhani and Mr. Putin also planned to discuss "ways to promote regional stability and security and the fight against terrorism" in Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere across the globe, Mr. Esmaili said.

Monday's meeting will be the eighth time Mr. Rouhani has met with his Russian counterpart over the past four years. It comes as Tehran and Moscow are shepherding peace talks to end the six-year Syrian civil war. (Agencies)

Uzbek President to Visit China in May

TASHKENT - President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev will pay a state visit to China in May. This was announced at a meeting of the subcommittee on trade and economic cooperation of the Uzbek-Chinese intergovernmental committee on cooperation in Tashkent.

Preparations are currently ongoing for the visit, according to the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, Investments and Trade. China is the largest investor in the Uzbek economy - the total volume of Chinese investment currently amounts to \$7.6 billion. (Trend)

Turkmenistan, OSCE Mull Joint Projects

ASHGABAT - Ashgabat hosted discussions on projects to be implemented jointly by the Turkmen government and the local OSCE Center, the Turkmen Foreign Ministry said in a message.

The meeting was attended by representatives of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, including Peter Juel Jensen, Danish MP, head of the Danish delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, who arrived in Ashgabat on

a working visit. The current state and the present prospects of cooperation between Turkmenistan and the OSCE, as well as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, were mullied at the meeting. The sides noted active cooperation between Turkmenistan and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and expressed mutual interest in its further expansion, reads the message. Turkmenistan joined the OSCE on Jan. 30, 1992. (Trend)