

Russia Calls for Continued Efforts for Syrian Reconciliation Talks

MOSCOW - Substantive talks on Syrian reconciliation in Geneva have made some progress and should be sustained, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Monday. UN Special Envoy Staffan De Mistura's statement about continuing the negotiations on April 11 sounds optimistic, Ryabkov said in an interview with Russian newspaper Izvestiya. Future negotiations should ensure equal representation of the Kurds and the Syrian opposition should adopt a more realistic stance and



abandon attempts to set preconditions, he said. On U.S. State Secretary

John Kerry's recent visit to Moscow, Ryabkov said the frequency of Kerry's

visits to Moscow is unprecedented. "It stems from the nature of issues

we are discussing and from the United States' recognition, despite its

own declarations, that a number of major and important international problems cannot be solved without Russia," he said. The latest round of Syrian peace talks, which opened on March 14, was wrapped up in Geneva on Thursday with a paper of 12 points of commonalities delivered to both sides for further consideration. On top of the 12 points list is the principle of respect for sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, and "no part of the national territory shall be ceded." (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

Pakistani Forces Launch Anti-Terror Drive After Bomber Killed 72

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani security forces have launched operations in parts of eastern Punjab province where a suicide bomber killed at least 72 people and injured 315 others at a crowded park, the army said Monday. A Pakistani Taliban splinter group "Jamaat-ul-Ahrar" claimed responsibility for the attack in Lahore Sunday evening and its spokesman said minority Christians were its target. Christians were at the park to celebrate Easter. Police officials, however, said 44 were Muslims among those killed. The security forces conducted operations in some major cities in Punjab hours after the blast. "Intelligence

agencies with Army & paramilitary 'Rangers' carried out 5 operations in Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan in Punjab since last night. Operations continue with more leads coming in," the army spokesman, Lt. Gen. Asim Bajwa said. "A number of suspect terrorists and facilitators arrested and huge cache of arms and ammunition recovered," he said in a statement. The army chief, Gen Raheel Sharif, presided over a high level security meeting to review progress of operation in Punjab to nab terrorists in the aftermath of Lahore blast, the spokesman said. (Xinhua)

Iraqi Parliament Gives Deadline for PM to Present New Cabinet

BAGHDAD - The Iraqi parliament on Monday gave Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi until Thursday to present candidates for a new cabinet lineup, local media reported. The ultimatum is seen part of proposed anti-corruption reforms aimed at confronting the country's economic crisis, the state-run Iraqiya channel said. In a statement, the lawmakers set Thursday, March 31, as the "final deadline" for Abadi to present his cabinet for parliament ap-

proval, Iraqiya said. If Abadi misses the deadline, the statement warned, the parliament will "interpellate" him early next week, according to the channel. The parliament move came a day after the firebrand Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr stepped up pressure on Abadi by starting a sit-in protest inside Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, which houses main government offices and some foreign embassies. (Xinhua)

More Than 5,000 Kurdish Militants Killed Since July: Erdogan

DIYARBAKIR - Turkish security forces have killed more than 5,000 militants belonging to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) since its ceasefire with the Turkish state collapsed last July, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday. The figure would suggest a major blow to an organization that has waged its armed campaign for autonomy in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast region since 1984. Erdogan also told the Turkish armed forces'

War Colleges in a speech that 355 state security forces had been killed in the period, according to the state-run Anadolu Agency. The southeast has been gripped by violence since July, with the security forces battling the PKK and its youth wing, known as the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H), in densely populated urban centers. The fighting has marked the deadliest period in at least two decades of the insurgency. On Monday, a local elect-



ed official in Sarioren, in Sanliurfa province, was shot dead after suspected militants hijacked his car,

security sources said. They were fleeing after detonating an explosive targeting a military vehicle. (Reuters)

Iran Shrugs Off Hostile Threats while Sharpening Missile Efficiency

TEHRAN - Iran declared Monday it will continue enhancing its defense capabilities including missile efficiency, according to Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force Brigadier, General Amir Ali Hajizadeh. Enemies seek to undermine Iran's defense and missile capability, however development of the country's defense power has not stopped for a single day in the last three decades, Hajizadeh was quoted as saying by Tasnim news agency. Enhancing Iran's defense and missile power is an enemy deterrent protecting Iran from any potential attack, he said. The IRGC commander downplayed the recent sanctions by the United States towards some Ira-

nian entities, deeming them "futile." Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hossein Jaber Ansari, said on March 24 that Iran will enhance its missile power despite the new U.S. sanctions targeting to curb its defense capability. Iran's missile program "is entirely geared towards peaceful purposes and no measure can stop Iran from exercising its legitimate and legal right to boost its defense capabilities and safeguard its national security," Jaber Ansari was quoted as saying by Press TV. Two Iranian companies and a few Iranian individuals were blacklisted by the U.S. Treasury Department on Thursday following Iran's ballistic missiles tests. (Xinhua)

Syria's Palmyra Airbase Resumes Operation

DAMASCUS - A military aircraft landed on Monday in the airbase of Palmyra, the first since government troops recaptured the city from Islamic State (IS) militants, Syrian TV reported. The Syrian air force plane landed at the airbase east of Palmyra, one day after the resumption of full control over the ancient city. The seizure of the millennia-old caravan oasis city followed three weeks of fighting against IS militants by government troops backed by Russian air force. Meanwhile, bomb squads were still dismantling the explosive devices

planted by the IS terror group in Palmyra. Russian President Vladimir Putin has offered help in defusing the explosives in Palmyra. A day earlier, Putin congratulated Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on recovering Palmyra, according to the Syrian state news agency, SANA. SANA said Putin, whose air force played a crucial role in supporting the Syrian army, congratulated Assad by phone on liberating Palmyra from the grips of the IS militant group. Putin promised continued Russian support to Syria's army. (Xinhua)

Greece to Employ Loudspeakers at Border After Rumour Chaos

ATHENS - Greece said Monday it would make use of loudspeakers at a migrants' camp on the Macedonia frontier to dispel "irresponsible rumours" that the border is about to reopen. "We are trying to step up efforts to address refugees and migrants in their own language and without an intermediary," said Giorgos Kyritsis, spokesman for the government's coordination panel on the migration. Additional interpreters would be sent to the



camp and a loudspeaker system -- currently operated by the UN refugee agency -- would be employed to make official

announcements, he said. On Sunday, several hundred migrants, including people in wheelchairs or carrying babies, dashed

for the border following rumours it would be opened. Greek police and other migrants helped to calm the situation. (AFP)

India Offers Oil Storage Access to Iran: Report

TEHRAN - Indian Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is likely to discuss Iran's access to oil storage facilities in South India during his visit to Tehran next month, a report says. Pradhan is planned to visit Iran on April 6 for the first trip by an Indian minister since Western sanctions were lifted on the Islamic Republic. A senior Indian Oil Ministry official, quoted by Kolkata-based daily The Telegraph, indicated interest in the arrangement. "West Asia has been a major source of crude for the country and India had friendly ties with Iran even when sanctions were imposed by the Western nations," the unnamed official said. The underground oil storage facilities in South India at Visakhapatnam, Mangalore and Padur in Karnataka have evinced interest from West Asian countries, including the UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the paper said. India, currently using almost four million barrels of oil per day, is expected to consume another million barrels a day by 2021 on the back of strong economic growth, according to the International Energy Agency. (PressTV)

Indonesia Wants Talks on Energy Security at OPEC Meeting

JAKARTA - Indonesia will seek discussions on energy security at a meeting with the world's top oil producers in April in Qatar, a minister said on Monday. Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Sudirman Said told reporters that he expected that the meeting between OPEC and non-OPEC producers scheduled for April 17 in Doha would result in the establishment of a strategic petroleum reserve program. "The meeting with the producer countries is a good time to convey our plan," he said. The minister has said the Indonesian government was planning to use the



country's energy security funds to finance the program. The program has been implemented in Vietnam, Myanmar, Japan, and the United States, according to the energy ministry. Indonesia, a net oil importer country, is among

the 13 OPEC members, which account for 40 percent of global oil production. So far, 15 oil-producing countries, representing 73 percent of global oil output, are confirmed to attend the meeting. (Xinhua)

Fidel Castro to Obama: we don't Need your 'Presents'

HAVANA - Fidel Castro responded Monday to President Barack Obama's historic trip to Cuba with a long, bristling letter recounting the history of U.S. aggression against Cuba, writing that "we don't need the empire to give us any presents." The 1,500-word letter in state media titled "Brother Obama" was Castro's first response to the president's three-day visit last week, in which the American president said he had come to bury the two countries' history of Cold War hostility. Obama did not meet

with the 89-year-old Fidel Castro on the trip but met several times with his 84-year-old brother Raul Castro, the current Cuban president. Obama's visit was intended to build irreversible momentum behind his opening with Cuba and to convince the Cuban people and the Cuban government that a half-century of U.S. attempts to overthrow the Communist government had ended, allowing Cuban to reform its economy and political system without the threat of U.S. interference. (AP)

Security Forces Flush out Al-Shabaab, Kill 115 in Central Somalia

MOGADISHU - At least 115 Al-Shabaab militants have been killed and 110 others arrested in four days of heavy fighting with security forces of Galmudug State of central Somalia, the president said on Monday. President of Galmudug State of Somalia Abdikarim Hussein Guled said the intense fighting ended on Sunday after some of the remaining terrorists fled

into the rural areas of Galmudug. "Galmudug forces after intensive fighting with Al-Shabaab militia for the last 4 days are pleased to see the end of this fighting that killed 115 militias and captured 110 militias that are in custody," Guled said in a statement. The president lauded the security forces' efforts and their swift response to conclude the fighting against terrorists groups. (Xinhua)

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Palestinians Ask UN to Investigate Israel Killings

JERUSALEM - The Palestinian government asked the United Nations on Monday to launch an investigation into alleged extrajudicial killings by Israel following the deadly shooting last week by an Israeli soldier of a wounded Palestinian assailant as he lay on the ground. The Israeli military has detained the soldier while it investigates the shooting, captured on video by a Palestinian activist. Palestinian official Saeb Erekat said that past Israeli investigations have failed to "serve justice," claiming instead that Israel has been "rewarded with impunity." (AP)

25 Militants Killed in NE Nigeria: Military

LAGOS - Nigerian troops has killed 25 suspected Boko Haram fighters during an operation in Iza area of northeast Borno State, an officer said Monday. Spokesperson for the Nigerian Army Colonel Sani Usman made the announcement in a statement reaching Xinhua, saying the troops also cleared remnants of Boko Haram terrorists from three villages in Iza general area and recovered some weapons. The cleared villages were Mballeri, Shuari 1 and Shuari 2, he said, noting that the troops also rescued 18 persons held captive by the terrorists. (Xinhua)

Majlisi Namoyandagon Board Discusses Tajikistan-Pakistan Treaty on Extradition

DUSHANBE - The board of Tajikistan's lower house of Parliament (Majlisi Namoyandagon) discussed the issue of ratification of a treaty between Tajikistan and Pakistan on extradition at Monday's meeting, presided over by its head, Shukurjon Zuhurov. We will recall that Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif witnessed the signing of the treaty at a ceremony held at the PM House in Islamabad on November

12, 2015. The extradition treaty was signed by Tajik Interior Minister Ramazon Rahimzoda and Pakistani Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz. Muhammadato Sul-tonov, a spokesman for the Majlisi Namoyandagon, says the board also discussed a protocol on making changes to a government-to-government agreement between Tajikistan and Kazakhstan on labor activity and protection of rights of labor migrants. (Asia-Plus)

China Plays Vital Role in Int'l Nuclear Security Cooperation: US Nuke Expert

NEW YORK - China has played an important role in international nuclear security cooperation, a U.S. nuclear expert told Xinhua in a recent interview. "China has made significant progress on its nuclear security system and significant contributions to global nuclear security," said Hui Zhang, senior research associate with the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University. Zhang made the remarks shortly before the fourth Nuclear Security Summit (NSS), which is scheduled to take place in Washing-

ton, D.C., from March 31 to April 1. Zhang noted that as active participants of the NSS, Chinese leaders have showed strong awareness of the significance of the nuclear security cooperation between countries. "At the 2014 Nuclear Security Summit, President Xi Jinping stressed that increased cooperation regarding the nuclear security of one country is beneficial to all nations," Zhang said. He said that, as Xi pointed out, "The amount of water a bucket can hold is determined by its shortest plank." (Xinhua)