

Britain's EU 'In' Campaign Lead Narrows Sharply: Ipsos MORI Poll

LONDON - The campaign to keep Britain in the European Union saw its lead over the rival 'out' campaign fall sharply in the last month, according to a telephone opinion poll by Ipsos MORI.

The survey showed 49 percent would vote to remain in the EU at a June referendum, 5 percent less than in an equivalent poll in February. The poll said 41 percent of respondents would vote to leave, up from 36 percent last month.

Britons will vote on June 23 on whether to remain



a member of the EU - the country's most important

strategic decision in decades, which will define

its future role in global politics and trade.

The poll of 1,023 adults was conducted between

March 19 and March 22, meaning it does not fully reflect any impact on voting intentions of bombings in Brussels on March 22 which killed 35 people.

The 10 percentage point reduction in the 'In' campaign's lead is the latest polling evidence to show public opinion is moving in favor of an exit from the 28-country trading bloc.

Ipsos MORI said that when those who were unlikely to vote were excluded from the poll results, the 'In' lead was even narrower. (Reuters)

Moscow's Call Not to Discuss Assad's Fate may Halt Syria Peace Talks: Agency

MOSCOW - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's future should be the main topic of Syrian peace talks in Geneva, and Moscow's call not to discuss this aims at undermining the negotiations, Interfax news agency quoted a Syrian opposition figure as saying on Tuesday.

Moscow's position that Assad's future should not be discussed at the moment has found understanding in Washington, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei

Ryabkov has said. "It is obvious that this statement aims to stop the process of negotiations and to deprive the High Negotiating Council of any hope to continue the talks," Riad Nassan Agha, a member of the opposition High Negotiations Committee, told Interfax, commenting on Ryabkov's words. "What else are we going to discuss if we are not going to discuss Assad's fate?" he said. (Reuters)

Turkey 'Detains 20' in Anti-Migrant Smuggling Operation

ISTANBUL - Turkish police on Tuesday detained at least 20 people in a nationwide operation aimed at cracking down on the trafficking of migrants seeking to reach the European Union, reports said. The suspects were detained in morning raids in five regions, from Izmir on the Aegean to Sanliurfa close to the Syrian border and Samsun on the Black Sea following a three-month investigation, the Dogan news agency said.

It said that the suspected traffickers, who are citizens of Turkey, Syria and Iraq, were believed to have smuggled migrants from Turkey's coast across the Aegean Sea in exchange for money. With the operation ongoing, the number of those detained could rise, it added. Materials seized in the raids included lists of migrants, money counting machines and hard currency, Turkish media reports said. Turkey has over the



last year emerged as the major hub for refugees and migrants from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea

and other troubled states trying to reach the European Union via the Greek islands. (AFP)

Israeli Demolitions Leave West Bank Bedouin, U.N. Alarmed

KHIRBET TANA - When in early March Israeli forces came to this Bedouin village, set among steep, rocky hills in the north of the occupied West Bank, overlooking the Jordan valley, they bulldozed the school, leaving 23 children with nowhere to study.

The European Union came and built a temporary classroom and other prefabricated structures, an effort to help a community of around 40 families, some of them still living in caves, that subsists without electricity or mains water in a part of the West Bank

fully under Israeli control, known as "Area C".

Two weeks later, the Israeli army returned and demolished 17 homes, 21 pens for sheep, goats and chickens, and five outhouses, according to B'tselem, an Israeli NGO.

"The Israelis are quicker at destroying than the Europeans are at building," said 61-year-old Wassif Hanani, a father of four who has lived in Khirbet Tana all his life, his wind-beaten face cracking at the eyes as he laughed dryly.

The Israeli army says it is ... (More on P4)... (16)

Egyptair Hijacker Arrested: Cyprus Officials

CAIRO - A hijacker who seized an Egyptian airliner and forced it to land in Cyprus has been detained, Cypriot government spokesman Nicos Christodoulides said on Tuesday.

"The hijacker has just been arrested," Christodoulides said on Twitter, without providing further details.

An EgyptAir passenger plane flying from Cairo to Alexandria was hijacked on Tuesday and diverted to Cyprus, where it landed at Lamaca airport on



the south coast, Cypriot police and Egyptian civil aviation authority officials said.

The suspected hijacker surrendered to authorities

at Lamaca airport in Cyprus on Tuesday, Cypriot authorities said.

A man emerged from the aircraft and then walked across the tarmac with his

hands up to two awaiting counter-terrorism police officers, an AFP correspondent reported. They laid him on the ... (More on P4)... (17)

Army Pressures IS in Central Syria after Palmyra Win

BEIRUT - Regime troops were locked in heavy fighting Tuesday with the Islamic State group in central Syria, where they dealt the jihadists a major blow by seizing the ancient city of Palmyra.

Just two days after seizing Palmyra from IS, pro-government fighters advanced southwest towards the jihadist-held town of Al-Qaryatayn, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Backed by "intense" air strikes by both Syrian and Russian warplanes, they captured a series of strategic hilltops overlooking the town, said the Britain-based monitor.

According to the Observatory, around 500 civilians are still living in Al-Qaryatayn. State news agency SANA said the army, backed by pro-government militia, had also seized rural farmland south of Al-Qaryatayn as they closed in on the town. IS had seized the strategic town in August 2015, kidnapping at least 230 people, including dozens of Christians, and razing its famed Mar Elian monastery. (AFP)

Indian PM to Embark on Official Tour to Belgium, U.S., Saudi Arabia

NEW DELHI - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to embark on a three-nation official tour to Belgium, the United States and Saudi Arabia.

"On March 30, Prime Minister will be departing for a visit to three countries," India's External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Vikas Swarup told media Monday evening. "He will be going to Belgium. From there he will proceed to Washington, DC to participate in the nuclear security summit and on the return he will visit Saudi Arabia." Swarup was flanked



by three senior officials of the foreign ministry, who briefed media about Modi's upcoming visit to the three countries.

According to officials, Modi will first reach Brussels where he will take part in a series of activities. Deadly terror bombings

rocked Brussels last week and reports said Modi will be the first foreign dignitary on the state visit to Belgium after blasts.

From Brussels, the India prime minister will travel to the United States to attend the fourth nuclear ... (More on P4)... (18)

41 IS Militants Killed in Airstrikes, Clashes with Security Forces in Iraq

BAGHDAD - A total of 41 Islamic State (IS) militants were killed on Tuesday in clashes with security forces and airstrikes by Iraqi and U.S.-led coalition aircraft in Iraq, while 14 civilian were killed in suicide bombing and gunfire attack in the day, security sources said. Iraqi security forces killed five IS suicide bombers who attacked the army positions at the village of Khirbirdan in south of the IS-held city of Mosul, some 400 km north of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, ... (More on P4)... (20)

UNHCR Decries More Displacements out of South Sudan

JUBA - The UN refugee agency on Tuesday expressed concern of the rising number of South Sudanese fleeing into Sudan due to widespread food insecurity caused by the ongoing fighting and deteriorating economic conditions.

In a statement received in Juba, UNHCR said it fears the situation could quickly worsen as the nutrition situation in Upper Nile, Warrap, and Northern Bahr Ghazal grows increasingly serious. "Heightened food insecurity and growing unrest ... (More on P4)... (21)

DPRK Fires Short Range Projectile in Show of Force

SEOUL - The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on Tuesday fired a short-range projectile in an apparent show of force toward the ongoing U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises and sanctions on Pyongyang over its nuclear test and long-range rocket launch.

The projectile was launched at about 5:40 p.m. local time (0840 GMT) from the DPRK's eastern coastal city of Wonsan into the northeast region, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said. It was believed

to have been fired from the DPRK's new 300-mm multiple rocket launcher as it flew about 200 km.

Yonhap news agency cited the military authorities as saying that the projectile may have landed in a DPRK soil, not in east waters, as Pyongyang may have test-fired the projectile at a target on the ground to improve its precision strike capability.

South Korea's military said it is closely monitoring the move of DPRK forces while maintaining a defense readiness for ... (More on P4)... (19)

Brussels Airport to Resume Flights with Limited Capacity: CEO

BRUSSELS - Brussels Airport on Tuesday announced a trial reopening of the airport following the double bomb blast on March 22, with a capacity of 800 passengers per hour compared with the normal flow of 5,000 per hour.

"We have set up a temporary prefabricated construction. We must be sure that it runs well technically. If it is not safe for travelers and staff, we will not start," Arnaud Feist, Brussels Airport CEO, told Flemish news-

paper De Standaard. Priority will be given to Schengen-area European flights and flights to Africa where Brussels Airlines, Belgium's national airline, will be allocated a large part of the limited capacity.

The Schengen area is a border-free zone of 26 European countries that have abolished the use of passports or other types of border control at their common borders, mostly functioning as a single country for international ... (More on P4)... (22)

Nieghbor News

Chinese Vice Premier Calls for Better City Planning

BEIJING - Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli on Tuesday urged local authorities to improve the way in which they plan their urban environments.

In a meeting with provincial leaders and officials, Zhang underscored the principles adopted during a national city planning conference and called for improvements to be made across the board. Aimless expansion should be avoided, he said, and cities should be designed with their local characteristics in mind, Zhang said.

The renovation of substandard housing should be accelerated and underground infrastructure should be improved, he said, adding that each urban area needs an efficient secu-

city system able to respond to emergencies. He also urged pushing forward building of sponge cities, which are expected to soak up water to reduce flood risks through things such as permeable roads and rooftop gardens.

The emphasis on urban planning comes against a backdrop of unfettered, rapid urbanization in the past few decades, which has resulted in urban ills such as traffic jams, pollution and compromised public safety.

The urban planning vision was promoted at the Central Urban Work Conference in December, accompanied by pledges to transform urban development patterns and improve city management. (Xinhua)

Tajikistan to Install Surveillance Cameras in Mosques



DUSHANBE - Dushanbe's mosques, according to a city spokesman cited by the AFP, will be made to install surveillance cameras and metal detectors at their expense. This is the latest measure taken by a state which is, on the surface, deeply fearful of terrorist attacks but also seems intent on exerting control over the practice of Islam in ways that human rights advocates call counter-productive. According to the report from the AFP, citing a Dushanbe city spokesman, the city plans to install surveillance cameras and met-

al detectors in the city's mosques to "guarantee security and order while preventing the emergence of undesirable trends." Tajikistan's Muslim community is no stranger to the hand of the state. The State Committee on Religious Affairs and the semi-official Council of Ulema oversees the country's imams—paying their salaries, mandating uniforms, and writing their sermons. Religious activity outside officially registered mosques has been criminalized, regardless of the teachings. (Agencies)

Pakistani Delegation to Visit Iran over Gas Deal: Official



TEHRAN - A senior Iranian official has announced the planned visit by a Pakistani delegation to the country for high-profile natural gas deal.

Managing Director of the National Iranian Gas Exports Company (NIGEC) Alireza Kameli said Monday that the Pakistani delegation's planned visit is aimed at finalizing gas agreements between Tehran and Islamabad.

Kameli said initial agreements were made over negotiations between the Iranian petroleum minister and Pakistani officials during a recent visit by Iran's President Hassan Rouhani and some of his cabinet members to

Islamabad. "In the negotiations, it was decided for the Pakistani delegation to finalize the agreements soon during their trip to Iran, so that the export of Iranian gas to Pakistan begins," IRNA quoted the official as saying.

On Saturday, the Iranian president told reporters in Islamabad that a pipeline which has for long been projected to take gas to Pakistan has already been completed on the Iranian side. Rouhani said this has put the Islamic Republic in a position to provide its southeastern neighbor with natural gas within only a few months. (PressTV)