

Hollande Abandons Constitution Reform to Combat Terrorism

PARIS - French President Francois Hollande on Wednesday announced he would drop the plan to reform the Constitution by including clauses which will make it easier to prolong state of emergency and strip French citizenship from people convicted of terror charges. "I decided, after meeting presidents of the National Assembly and the Senate, to end the constitutional debate (on security bill)," Hollande said in a short speech. "The National Assembly and the Senate have failed to agree on a text and a compromise



seems out of reach even on the definition of revoking nationality for terrorists," he added, deploring

part of the opposition that "has been hostile to a revision of the constitution". After gunmen and suicide

bombers killed 130 people in Paris on November 13 last year, the Socialist head said he wanted to insert

state of emergency rules in the constitution. In addition, he presented a bill allowing the citizenship of

all dual nationals, including those who were born in France and convicted terrorists, be stripped. During month-long heated debate, the constitution reform drew domestic critics of Hollande even from his ruling camp, who say the security bill would be inefficient and undermine the country's values and freedom of expression and gathering. Despite his failure to pass the reform, Hollande pledged to honor "commitments to ensure the country's security and to protect the French against terrorism". (Xinhua)

Syrian Opposition Rejects Assad's Statements About New Syrian Government

BEIRUT - The Syrian opposition said on Wednesday Syria needs a transitional ruling body with full executive powers and not a participatory government under President Bashar al-Assad, responding to comments made by Assad to Russian state media. "The government, whether it's new or old, as long as it is in the presence of Bashar al-Assad, is not part of the political process," said George Sabra, a negotiator for the High Negotiations Committee

(HNC) representing the Syrian opposition at Geneva peace talks. "What Bashar al-Assad is talking about has no relation to the political process," said Sabra. Asaad al-Zoubi, an HNC member, said the Syrian people and the Geneva negotiating team want "a transitional ruling body will full executive powers and authorities, including presidential authority". "Whereas the regime wants a participatory government," he said. (Reuters)

UN Calls for Solidarity to Expand Pathways for Syrian Refugees

GENEVA - High-level UN officials Wednesday called for countries to act with solidarity by pledging new and additional pathways for the admission of Syrian refugees. Speaking at the opening of a high-level meeting on global responsibility sharing for Syrian refugees, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that an exponential increase in global solidarity is needed for the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time. The UN estimates

that at least 10 percent of Syrian refugees, or 480,000 people, need resettlement or another form of admission into a third country. According to Ban, the pathways can include resettlement or humanitarian admission, family reunions, as well as labor or study opportunities. "States have pledged more than 178,000 places so far. I call on you to expand on these commitments and I urge other countries to join," Ban said. UN High Commissioner



for Refugees Filippo Grandi said that the nearly five million Syrian refugees in the region are facing in-

creasing obstacles to find safety after the five-year conflict. "We are here to ... (More on P4)...(24)

Head of UN-Backed Unity Government Arrives in Libyan Capital

TRIPOLI - The head of a U.N.-brokered Libyan unity government arrived in the capital by sea Wednesday with six deputies to set up a temporary seat of power in a naval base despite threats from competing factions. Western nations view the unity government as the best hope for ending Libya's chaos and uniting all factions against an increasingly powerful Islamic State affiliate, which has seized the central city of Sirte. But factions within Libya's two rival governments, one of which is based in Tripoli, are opposed to the U.N.-

backed body. Fayed Serraj sailed in from neighboring Tunisia aboard a Libyan vessel, according to the unity government's website, which denied reports that the officials had been brought in aboard an Italian ship. The six deputies are members of the Presidential Council, which was established based on a U.N.-mediated deal signed by splintered groups from the two governments last year. The council formed the new unity government headed by Serraj. The officials were ... (More on P4)...(25)

Pro-Gov't Forces Seize Key Neighborhoods from Al-Qaida in Yemen

ADEN - Forces loyal to Yemen's internationally recognized government seized key neighborhoods from al-Qaida militants in the southern port city of Aden on Wednesday, a military official told Xinhua. The armed forces backed by armored vehicles took full control of the main entrances and key government institutions in Aden's neighborhood of Mansourah, al-Qaida militants stronghold, the local military official said on condition of anonymity. "After fierce overnight



gunfights with al-Qaida gunmen, the government forces successfully regained full control over the Central Prison and other key facilities in Mansourah and the surrounding areas," the military source said. About 20 gunmen accused of carrying out terrorist attacks and drive-by shoot-

ings in different areas of Aden were captured by government forces during the anti-terror campaign in Mansourah, according to ... (More on P4)...(26)

India, WB Ink \$1.5 Billion Loan Pact for Clean India Campaign

NEW DELHI - India and the World Bank (WB) on Wednesday inked a 1.5 billion U.S. dollars loan pact for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambitious Clean India campaign. Officials said the pact pledges support to India's universal sanitation initiative that aims at ensuring all rural Indians have access to improved sanitation, thus eliminating the practice of open defecation in the next three years. "The project will promote behaviour change among rural communities and help accelerate results in India's states by giving performance-based incentives," Raj Kumar, a senior official of the Department of Economic Affairs, told the media in the national capital. "One in every 10 deaths in India is linked to poor sanitation. This project will result in significant health benefits for the poor and vulnerable, especially those living in rural areas," said OnnoRuhl, World Bank Country Director, India. (Xinhua)

Assad Urges for Int'l Help in Restoration Process of Palmyra Ruins

DAMASCUS - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on Wednesday urged the international organizations to help in the restoration process of the destroyed monuments and temples in the recently-captured city of Palmyra, according to the state news agency SANA. In a letter to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Assad hailed the UN chief's remarks, in which he welcomed the Syrian army's recapture of the ancient city of Palmyra. The president, meanwhile, reaffirmed his government's readiness to cooperate with all "honest



efforts" to counter terrorism, saying that "this moment could be the most appropriate to accelerate the collective war on terrorism." A day earlier, during an interview with Russia's news agency Novosti, Assad said the Russian mili-

tary support and the support of friends provided to Syria and the Syrian military achievements will lead to the acceleration of the political solution. Last May, Palmyra fell to the IS, which destroyed the city's military prison ... (More on P4)...(27)

Ukraine's Independent MPs Boost Chances of Ending Deadlock

KIEV - Several non-aligned Ukrainian lawmakers have agreed to join Ukraine's biggest faction to help end a political crisis that is stalling Western-backed reforms and vital international financial aid, deputies said on Wednesday. Lawmakers are under pressure to end a deadlock that threatens snap parliamentary elections and has delayed disbursement of \$1.7 billion in loans from the International Monetary Fund to help the war-torn economy. Since mid-February, attempts to form a multi-party coalition with smaller populist or re-

formist factions have gone nowhere, prompting President Petro Poroshenko's 'BPP' political bloc to appeal to independent MPs. "Talks are going on at the moment with several non-faction deputies - we've invited them to join our faction," BPP's Oleksiy Goncharenko told journalists. "There are several applications (to sign up) already." "There are lots of deputies who don't want snap elections, because they know nothing good would come of it, because it would risk their seat and therefore they're prepared to help," he said. (Reuters)

Over 31,000 Malian Refugees in Burkina Faso Faced with Hunger

OUAGADOUGOU - More than 31,000 Malian refugees in Burkina Faso are faced with food insecurity due to insufficient financial resources, United Nations agencies warned Tuesday. "In 2015, the World Food Program (WFP) gave food assistance and financial support to over 31,000 Malian refugees. In 2016, WFP has not given any financial support and has

reduced food rations to the same refugees," a joint statement by WFP and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said. The two UN institutions said the situation risks getting worse in the coming three months, because the approaching hunger period is the time when the refugees will be more vulnerable and they will need more support. ... (More on P4)...(30)

Iran Missile Tests did not Breach UN Resolution: Russia

TEHRAN - Russia has once again affirmed that Iran's recent ballistic missile tests were not in breach of a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution adopted last July. Mikhail Ulyanov, the head of the Russian Foreign Ministry's department for non-proliferation and arms control, said on Wednesday that UNSC Resolution 2231 "does not ban (the tests)." The Russian official said that Moscow sees no ... (More on P4)...(28)

US, Three Allies Urge UN Meeting on Iran Missile Tests

TEHRAN - The United States and some of its European allies have reportedly called for a meeting at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Iran's recent missile tests, which they claim were carried out in defiance of a UN resolution. According to a letter reportedly obtained by Western news outlets on Tuesday, the US, Britain, France, and Germany have asked UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Spain's UN Ambassador Roman ... (More on P4)...(29)

Neighbor News

Tajikistan-S. Korea Business Forum Takes Place in Dushanbe

DUSHANBE - A conference of representatives of the business communities of Tajikistan and South Korea took place in Dushanbe on Wednesday. The event that brought together more than 100 entrepreneurs from both countries was reportedly aimed at promoting further expansion of trade and economic cooperation between Tajikistan and South Korea. Speaking at the meeting, Ms. Nigina Anvari, Deputy Chairperson of the State Committee on Investment and State-

owned Property Management of Tajikistan (GosKomInvest), said that a two-way trade between Tajikistan and South Korea last year valued at about 20 million U.S. dollars. She noted that there was still considerable room for further expansion of economic ties between the two countries. Mr. Anvari outlined sectors like industry, agriculture, tourism, and labor migration as areas that could drive the bilateral trade between Tajikistan and South Korea. (Asia-Plus)

Iran's Top Leader Defends Missile Program

TEHRAN - Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, expressed on Wednesday his support for the country's missile program Wednesday. "If Iran only relies on dialogue, technology and science but does not develop its defense capability, even weak nations may threaten the country," Khamenei was quoted as saying on his official website. "Those who argue that the country's future lies in negotiations with world powers rather than developing the missile program, are either ignorant or traitors," Khamenei said, stressing that the country's future requires development in all sec-

tors. "Enemies are constantly developing their military and missile might, thus how can we consider that the need for missiles is over?" he asked. Iran must develop its military might as well as its diplomacy so that it cannot be deceived, he said. Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, also said Wednesday that Iran is determined to develop its defense capability. When Iraq attacked Iran in the 1980s, had the country possessed the missiles, it would not have dared to take that step, Zarif was quoted as saying by official IRNA news agency. (Xinhua)

Britain Urged to Defend Religious Freedom after Pakistan Easter Bombing

LAHORE/LONDON - The persecution watchdog of Britain's largest body of evangelical Christians has condemned the deadly Easter bombing in Pakistan and urged the British government to act immediately to "enshrine freedom of religion or belief" in its foreign policy. The Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) of the Evangelical Alliance UK, which represents two million evangelicals, told BosNewsLife that the sui-

cide attacks in a park in Pakistan's second largest city, Lahore, "deliberately targeted Christians". As this was part of "the many other atrocities carried out around the world against people of faith" the RLC said the government should "greatly increase the status of freedom of religion or belief" across all foreign policy "in recognition of the essential role it plays in underpinning other human rights and civil liberties." (Agencies)

Yandong Presents Proposal to Deepen China-Israel Innovation Cooperation

JERUSALEM - Visiting Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong has presented a four-point proposal to deepen and broaden cooperation between China and Israel on innovation in various fields. Liu made the proposal while addressing the second meeting of the China-Israel Joint Committee on Innovation Cooperation in Jerusalem Tuesday. The meeting was co-chaired by Liu and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In her speech, Liu said that initial achievements have been made in bilateral pragmatic cooperation in such areas as science and technology, education, culture and health, since the joint committee suc-

cessfully held its first meeting in January last year in Beijing. China has made innovation-driven development as a national strategy and such a perception is shared by Israel, which is known for innovation, Liu said, adding that the two countries have great potential in deepening innovation cooperation. China and Israel should further strengthen the joint committee's role in planning holistically and coordinating and constantly expand the scope of bilateral innovation cooperation, she pointed out. The Chinese vice premier, who arrived in Israel Monday evening for a two-day visit, suggested that the ... (More on P4)...(31)