

Syria Calls on New UN Envoy to Avoid Predecessor's 'Methods'

DAMASCUS, Syria — Syria said Sunday it will cooperate with new U.N. envoy Geir Pedersen if he avoids the "methods" of his predecessor. Pedersen succeeds Staffan de Misutra, who steps down this month after four years of peace efforts that led nowhere. Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad told the pro-government daily Al-Watan that Syria would cooperate with Pedersen if he commits to the country's territorial integrity and stops supporting "terrorists, as his predecessor did." The government regularly refers to the opposition as "terrorists." The conflict, now in its eighth year, has killed more than 400,000 people, displaced half of the country's population and left entire neighborhoods and



towns in ruins. It has also drawn in international powers, with Russia and Iran backing the Syrian government and a U.S.-led coalition and Turkey also sending in troops.

Beginning in July 2014, de Mistura convened several rounds of indirect peace talks between the government and the opposition, with little success. Russia started a separate process that resulted in local cease-fires but failed to kick-start a political process. De Mistura's latest efforts focused on negotiating a joint government-opposition committee to draft a new Syrian constitution. The government largely rejected those efforts, saying they amounted to meddling in its internal affairs. Pedersen previously served as U.N. special coordinator for Lebanon in 2007 and 2008, and was a member of Norway's team that negotiated the 1993 Oslo accords between Israel and the Palestinians. (AP)

After Years in the Dark, Gaza's Power Woes Ease

GAZA CITY - The lights are going back on in the Gaza Strip, in a rare piece of positive news from the blockaded Palestinian enclave. In recent days, residents say they have received up to 16 hours of mains electricity a day, compared with as little as four previously. UN humanitarian officials report an average of between nine and 11 hours per day since October 25. It is the result of a landmark six-month deal, part of efforts to end

unrest along the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip that has raised fears of a fourth war since 2008. The deal emerged amid ongoing indirect negotiations between the strip's Islamist rulers Hamas and Israel, mediated by the UN and Egypt, in hopes of reaching a long-term truce. The fuel agreement, whose first deliveries arrived on October 9, has provided the most power to Gaza residents in years. (AFP)

MOSCOW - A newly-bought Egyptian Air Force MiG-29 jet has crashed during a training flight, prompting both Cairo and the Russian manufacturer to investigate. The Egyptian military says a flight control system error is to blame. The pilot had to eject and is alive, the Egyptian defense ministry said in a statement. "The fighter jet has crashed during a practice flight in one of the training areas because of a technical fault in the aircraft control system," the ministry's spokesper-

Russian-Made Mig Fighter Jet Crashes in Egypt, Triggering Joint Probe

son said. An Egyptian Air Force commission is already investigating the crash while Russia's United Aircraft Corporation - the company that produced the aircraft - also said it would send its specialist to assist the investigation. The jet was supplied to Egypt earlier this year as part of a contract between Moscow and Cairo worth \$2.5 billion. Russia is expected to supply 46 MiG-29M/M2 fighter jets to Egypt in total by 2020. First deliveries were made back in 2017, ac-



ording to Alerksandr Mikheev, the head of the Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport. At the same time, the Egyptian pilots started learning to fly the new aircraft, he added. The MiG-29M/M2 is a fourth-generation fighter jet, which is an advanced variant of the classic Soviet MiG-29 fighter. The new model has extended flight range as well as new avionics. (Russia Today)

New Giant Dinosaur Species Unearthed in Argentina



NEUQUÉN - Three well-preserved specimens of a new gigantic dinosaur species, named Lavocatisaurus agrioensis, have been discovered by a

multinational team of scientists in the Argentine province of Neuquén. The remains an adult and two juveniles reptiles which roamed the Earth

some 110 million years ago, were unearthed by a team of Argentine and Spanish paleontologists. The new species, which the discoverers named Lavocatisaurus agrioensis were herbivorous and belonged to Sauropods saurischian clade of dinosaurs with very long necks, long tails, and a small head. In addition to parts of the neck, tail and back, the team found "most" of the cranial bones, including the snout, the jaws, and teeth, making it possible to create an "almost com-

plete reconstruction," noted Jose Luis Carballido, a researcher at the Egidio Feruglio museum and the national council of scientific investigations. The fossils showed the adult dinosaur to be 12 meters in length, while the young lizards, scientists believed, measured between six and seven meters long. The scientist believes that the species has moved around and died together in a group from circumstances yet known to the scientific community. (Russia Today)

Bahrain Opposition Leader Sentenced to Life by High Court

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A Shiite cleric who was a central figure in Bahrain's 2011 Arab Spring protests was sentenced to life in prison Sunday on spying charges. The ruling by the Supreme Court of Appeals came after Sheikh Ali Salman was acquitted of the charges by a lower court in June. Human rights groups and activists say the charges against him are politically-motivated and related to his work as a leading opposition figure. The verdict was issued just weeks before parli-

mentary elections are set to take place without the Al-Wefaq political group Salman once led. Al-Wefaq, which was the tiny Gulf nation's largest Shiite opposition bloc, was ordered dissolved in 2016 as part of a crackdown on dissent in the kingdom, which has a Shiite majority but is ruled by a Sunni monarchy. The state-run Bahrain News Agency reported the appellate court's decision Sunday without naming the defendants, saying three individuals were found guilty of the spying charges. (AP)

Merkel's Conservatives Quarrel over Party's Course Once She Steps Down

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) argued on Sunday over whether they should return to a more conservative agenda once she steps down as party chair as contenders to succeed her gear up for the leadership race. Support for their Social Democrats (SPD) coalition partner meanwhile hit a record low, according to a poll published hours before senior members of both the CDU and the SPD were due to discuss the parties' future courses on Sunday in closed-door meetings. Merkel announced last week that she would step down as CDU party leader in December, ending an era of nearly two decades in which she shifted the party gradually from the right to the center. (Reuters)

N. Korea Warns of Returning to Nuclear Policy

SEOUL - North Korea has warned the United States it will "seriously" consider returning to a state policy aimed at building nuclear weapons if Washington does not end tough economic sanctions against the impoverished regime. For years, the North had pursued a "byungjin" policy of simultaneously developing its nuclear capabilities alongside the economy. In April, citing a "fresh climate of detente and peace" on the peninsula, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un declared the nuclear quest complete and said his country would focus on "socialist economic construction". But a statement issued by the North's foreign ministry said Pyongyang could revert to its former policy if the US did not change its stance over sanctions. (AFP)

UK, EU Close to Brexit Deal over Irish Border: Report

LONDON - Britain would remain in a temporary customs union with the EU, avoiding a hard Irish border, as part of a new deal being thrashed out between London and Brussels, according to a Sunday Times report. Senior sources told the newspaper that Prime Minister Theresa May has secured concessions from Brussels, with the EU agreeing to write an "all-UK" customs union into the divorce deal. This would avoid the EU's "backstop" solution that would have treated Northern Ireland differently from the rest of Britain. There will also be an



"exit clause" from the customs union in a bid to convince Brexiters that it is not a permanent arrangement as May looks to secure enough votes to get the deal through parliament, it added. Downing Street refused to confirm the report, telling AFP it was "all speculation", but that negotia-

tions were "going well". The Irish border has proved the biggest obstacle to a deal, with both sides vowing not to reinstate a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland for fear of destabilising the peace accord that ended decades of deadly sectarian violence. (AFP)

Qatar Reshuffles Cabinet, Boards of Qatar Petroleum and Qatar Investment Authority

DOHA - Qatar appointed the heads of its biggest bank and state-run oil firm to two key ministerial posts in a cabinet reshuffle on Sunday which comes amid a protracted dispute with Arab states. The country's ruler issued decrees restructuring the boards of state-run Qatar Petroleum (QP) and Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), the world's

ninth largest sovereign wealth fund with about \$300 billion in assets. It was the first government reshuffle in Qatar, the world's top liquefied natural gas producer, since early 2016. The tiny but wealthy country has been facing a diplomatic and economic boycott by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt since June 2017. (Reuters)

Chinese E-Crackers a Solution to Delhi's Air Pollution ahead of Diwali Festival

NEW DELHI - Following Indian apex court's recent order banning the polluting fire-crackers, the Made-in-China electronic crackers, or e-crackers, have indeed created a buzz in the markets in Indian capital. The Chinese e-crackers are as per the norms set by the court, as they do not emit smoke and also produce light and sound, thereby suitably dubbed as environment-friendly. Bursting fire-crackers is an integral part of celebrations during the festival of lights or Diwali, one of the major festivals celebrated across India with much pomp and show. Diwali falls on Nov. 7 this year. Considering the rising air pollution levels in Delhi, the Supreme Court of India last month banned bursting polluting fire-crackers on the Diwali night. Over the past couple of weeks, the air quality in Delhi has been getting worse with each passing day, even a thick blanket of smoke has engulfed Delhi and its surrounding areas. One of the major causes of Delhi's polluted air is the burning of crops-residue (stubble) by farmers in the neighbouring states of Punjab and Haryana. In the prevailing circumstances, the China-made e-crackers being sold in Delhi's Chandichowk area, which has a traditional wholesale market of fire-crackers, has caught everyone's attention. The crackers are ignited by a remote control, and create sounds below the standards set by the government. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

Iran Guardian Council Rejects Terror Financing Bill

TEHRAN - Iran's powerful Guardian Council on Sunday rejected a bill on joining the UN convention against terrorist financing seen as crucial to maintaining trade and banking ties with the world. The conservative-dominated council, which oversees legislation passed by the parliament, said aspects of the bill were against Islamic law and the constitution and sent it back to lawmakers for revision. "The Guardian Council has in several sessions reviewed the bill... and it has considered it to have flaws and ambiguities," wrote spokesman Abbas

Ali Kadkhodaie on Twitter. The bill, narrowly passed by parliament on October 7, is one of four put forward by the government of President Hassan Rouhani in order to meet demands set by the international Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which monitors countries' efforts to tackle money-laundering and terrorist financing. Many hawks in Iran say the laws would limit the country's ability to support "resistance groups" such as Lebanon's Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas by bringing greater transparency to its accounts. (AFP)

Pakistan to Get out of Present Crisis Owing to Cooperation, Opportunities: PM

BEIJING - Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday said that owing to cooperation and opportunities offered by the Chinese government and companies Pakistan would be able to get out of the present crisis. Speaking at Central Party School here, the prime minister said "Pakistan needs investment due to its Current Account Deficit and China through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project has given us foreign investment. They have given us an opportunity to attract investment, adding his meeting with President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang and cooperation offered by the Chinese government. The multi-national Chinese companies has encouraged us to get out of the present economic crisis.

What China has offered to Pakistan is a great opportunity, the prime minister said, adding that CPEC was a great blessing that connected Pakistan with China and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) also contributed to the economy. "We need investment in Pakistan more than ever because of mismanagement and corruption in the last 15 years we have also suffered owing to war on terrorism," he said. The prime minister said Pakistan's relationships with China were not specifically in one area, they were multi-dimensional and Pakistan would learn from China's urbanization, environment, waste management with special focus on fighting against corruption and poverty alleviation. (Monitoring Desk)

Uzbekistan, Ukraine Exchange Import Ban Threats amid Trade Row

TASHKENT - Talk is afoot in Uzbekistan about the adoption of tit-for-tat protective measures against goods imported from Ukraine - the latest salvo in a row over alleged anti-competitive practices. Officials in Tashkent say this would be a response to Kiev's threat to limit the number of low-cost Uzbek-made cars being brought into the country, but there is also murmuring of possible Russian involvement in fanning the trade dispute. Lawmakers in Uzbekistan's parliament - a largely token institution in which positions are as a rule aligned with those of the government - have suggested that a ban on Ukrainian sugar

and pharmaceuticals, among other products, should be put on the table. The row began in early October, when Ukraine's government initiated an investigation into whether Uzbekistan was giving its carmakers an unfair advantage by providing them with subsidies and other forms of support. The investigation is being pursued at the request of Ukrainian auto manufacturers. The last few years has seen something of a boom in the fortunes of Uzbek carmakers in Ukraine. According to Ukrainian government figures for 2015-17, the volume of imports of the vehicles has risen by 760 percent in absolute terms. (Agencies)

Turkmenistan Takes Part in Int'l Agricultural Exhibition in UAE

ASHGABAT - A delegation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources of Turkmenistan has recently taken part in the Agriscap-2018 exhibition and conference in Abu Dhabi, the Turkmen Foreign Ministry said in a message. The event is dedicated to the attraction of investments in agriculture and food safety issues. The organizer was the Abu Dhabi Food Security Center. Turkmenistan is working to ensure food security in the country, to expand exports of products manufactured

in Turkmenistan, to ensure the sufficiency of goods, to support entrepreneurship and to attract foreign investments, the message said. Earlier it was reported that 760,000 hectares of land are planned to be used for winter crops and 1.6 million tons of grain are planned to be harvested in Turkmenistan in 2019. Earlier, Turkmenistan received a special award by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for achievements in the field of food security. (Trend)