

Syria's Ruling Party Wins Majority of Parliament Seats

DAMASCUS - Syria's ruling al-Baath Party and an allied group have won a majority of the parliament's seats in the recent elections, according to a list of names published by state news agency SANA on Sunday.

All of the candidates who were on the al-Baath party list and that of the National Unity Coalition won, securing 200 out of 250 seats of the parliament.

On Saturday evening, Syria's Higher Electoral Committee announced the results of the elections, which were held on April



13. The turnout was estimated at 57.56 percent. Out of 8,834,994 eligible voters, 5,085,444 have voted, said the committee.

Some 3,500 candidates competed for the 250 seats in the legislature amid a boycott by the opposition groups.

In February, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad issued a decree to hold the elections on April 13. The vote is held every four years. The previous elections were held in 2012, just months after the adoption of a new constitution in the war-torn country. (Xinhua)

France's Hollande Arrives in Egypt for Two-Day Visit

CAIRO - French President Francois Hollande arrived in Egypt Sunday afternoon where he was received by his Egyptian counterpart Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo airport, the Egyptian state TV reported.

Hollande's two-day visit to Egypt is seen as a sign of support for the Egyptian leadership amid some Western concerns over human rights concerns and security conditions in the Arab country.

The visit is expected to boost economic cooperation between Egypt and France, especially that the two countries have ongoing military deals.

Egypt has already received six Rafale fighter jets and FREMM frigate from France as part of a deal signed in mid-February 2015, which is worth 5.6 billion U.S. dollars and includes handing Egypt 24 Rafale warplanes in total, besides the frigate.

Hollande came to Cairo from Beirut during a regional tour that includes Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan. (Xinhua)

Russia Refutes "Aggressive" Encounter with U.S. Military Aircraft

MOSCOW - The Russian Defense Ministry on Sunday refuted media reports of a dangerous encounter of Russian and U.S. aircraft over the Baltic.

"The reports of foreign media are not true, which said a Russian Su-27 allegedly flew in dangerously close proximity to a U.S. RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft in the skies over the Baltic Sea on April 14," the ministry's spokesman Igor Konashenkov told reporters.

The Russian air defense



unit on duty on Thursday found over the Baltic Sea an unknown aerial target, which was heading for the Russian border in high speed, Konashenkov said.

One Su-27 multi-role fighter was sent and identified the target as a reconnaissance plane RC-135U of the U.S. Air Force, the spokesman added.

"After visual contact with the Russian Su-27, the U.S. reconnaissance plane changed its course to the opposite of the Russian border," Konashenkov said.

Earlier on Sunday, the CNN reported Russia's interception, quoting a spokesman for U.S. European Command, who said the Russian jet "performed erratic and aggressive maneuvers." Moreover, the U.S. side said Russian Su-24 tactical ... (More on P4)...(21)

Yemeni Secessionists Demonstrate for Independence Ahead of Peace Talks

ADEN, Yemen - Thousands of pro-secession southern Yemenis protested in Aden Sunday demanding "independence and right of self-determination" on the eve of the UN-facilitated peace talks in Kuwait.

The new round of UN-facilitated peace talks are due to begin on April 18th in Kuwait and will focus on five main points in an effort to end Yemen's year-long civil war between the internationally recognized government and the Shiite

Houthi group. The anti-unity demonstrations were organized by the pro-secession Southern Movement, youth activists, and politicians of the former Southern Yemeni state.

"The southern people demand right of self-determination and other political projects are unacceptable," the pro-secession rallies' slogan reads.

The Parades Square in Aden's neighborhood of Khor Maksar and surrounding streets were

packed with separation supporters from Yemen's north amid heavy security measures and deployment of armored vehicles in the area.

The crowds waved flags of what used to be Southern Yemen and hoisted posters of secessionist leaders, shouting slogans such as "We swore never to unite with northerners," whilst others carried banners.

Southern Yemenis have been demonstrating in the streets demanding their right to self-determination

for several years without a response from the international community, Hussein Hanshy, a political expert based in Aden, told Xinhua.

Ali Naif, a student at Aden University, told Xinhua during the event that "We came here out of love for our southern regions and to renew our independence because uniting with northern provinces caused us a lot of suffering and disasters." "Three of my brothers were killed during ... (More on P4)...(22)

India Expresses Concern Over Explosion at Sikh Temple in Germany

NEW DELHI - India on Sunday expressed concern over an explosion at a Sikh temple in the German city of Essen late Saturday evening, in which three persons suffered injuries.

"Distressed to hear of an explosion in a Gurudwara in Essen in Germany. Our Mission is following up with local authorities on ground situation," Indian External Affairs Ministry spokes-

person Vikas Swarup tweeted.

Police in Germany have ruled out that the explosion as a terrorist attack and said it was caused deliberately, and the injured were guests at a wedding which took place earlier in the day. A masked person was spotted fleeing the scene shortly after the blast at 7 p.m. (German time) Saturday, the police said. (Xinhua)

Russia to Defend Regional Security Jointly with China: Deputy DM

MOSCOW - Russia will work together with China to safeguard regional peace and international security, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov has said.

The direction and form of Russia-China military cooperation have been determined by the two countries' heads of state, Antonov said Friday during a joint interview with Xinhua and China Central Television (CCTV).

"The cooperation between China and Russia in the military sphere is not directed against someone," he said.

"Our interaction is aimed

at strengthening the security of our countries, taking into account the international obligations of China and Russia, and the fact that both countries are permanent U.N. Security Council members," he added.

Antonov went on praising the two countries' joint military activities, including various kinds of drills, which "secure the best compatibility and mutual understanding of our armed forces."

Moreover, he said, multilateral military cooperation has improved markedly in the past three years within such frameworks



as the U.N. Security Council, the U.N. Conference on Disarmament, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS, a thriving cooperation mechanism that groups the world's five leading emerging economies - Brazil, Russia, India, Chi-

na and South Africa.

"A more tight interaction between the military departments corresponds to the national interests of all the SCO member countries, and we expect this interaction to proceed," Antonov said. With more and ... (More on P4)...(24)

16 IS Militants Killed in Clashes, Air Strikes in Iraq

RAMADI, Iraq - A total of 16 Islamic State (IS) militants were killed on Sunday in clashes and air strikes in Iraq's largest province of Anbar, a provincial security source said.

The security forces and allied Sunni paramilitary tribal units clashed with IS militants who tried to attack a military base at Jeraishi area in north of the provincial capital city of Ramadi, some 110 km west of Baghdad, leaving six IS militants killed, including two suicide bombers, the source told

Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

Separately, the army artillery shelled IS positions in Jubba area near the town of al-Baghdadi, some 190 km northwest of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, killing four IS operatives, the source said.

Meanwhile, a suicide car bomber tried to strike a position of the security forces in Khasfa area near the town of Hadiitha, some 200 km northwest of Baghdad, but a U.S.-led coalition warplane destroyed the car bomb and killed the ... (More on P4)...(25)

France Stresses Support for Lebanon to Handle Syrian Refugee Crisis

BEIRUT - French President Francois Hollande stressed on Sunday his country's commitment to supporting Lebanon and the humanitarian agencies to handle the Syrian refugee crisis, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said.

Hollande made the pledge during his visit to Syrian refugees at the Dalhamieh camp in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley before he left for Egypt, the second leg of his Middle East tour that also includes Jordan. Hollande said Lebanon had shown "solidarity

and made an "exceptional effort in hosting refugees," according to a UNHCR statement.

France and the international community would stand behind the country, he added.

He also said the future of Syrian refugees ultimately lies in returning to their own country once conditions permit.

The French leader announced 100 million euros (113 million U.S. dollars) in aid for Lebanon over the coming three years. The overall package represents ... (More on P4)...(26)

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China Arrests 1.15 Mln in Drug-Related Crimes Since 2005

BEIJING - Chinese police have arrested some 1.15 million suspects linked to over one million drug-related crimes since 2005, the National Narcotics Control Commission (NNCC) said Sunday.

Over 751 tonnes of drugs were seized in the period, it said.

In 2015 alone, some 38,900 suspects were arrested for trafficking illegal drugs to overseas, the NNCC said.

China has witnessed ballooning drug problems for years. Earlier reports said China had

3.23 million registered drug users as of July 2015, of which almost 60 percent were aged 35 or younger.

According to the NNCC, to counter the problem, China has signed 24 inter-governmental documents with over 20 countries in recent years to step up drug control cooperation.

It added that Chinese authorities have basically eliminated opium planting in the country by deploying remote sensing satellites to spot small opium plantations. (Xinhua)

Iran Showcases Russian S-300 Defense System in Parade

TEHRAN - Iran showcased parts of the newly imported Russian S-300 air defense system in the parade on Sunday held to mark the army day in the country.

Iran needs a powerful army to defend its geographical frontiers, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said addressing the celebration.

"The powerful army inspired by religious and Islamic insights safeguards the interests of the country and defends the geographical, political and cultural borders of the country," Rouhani said.

He hailed the achievements and "might" of the Armed Forces, saying that "if, today, the

arrogant powers and their mercenaries in the region dare not to threaten the country and the nation, that is because of the might of the Armed Forces," he said. Strong army and efficient diplomacy are, side by side, the means to defend the interests of the Iranian nation, he added.

The powerful Iranian army belongs to the Islamic world and will assist any Islamic state in the face of threats and terrorism if they ask for help, he stressed.

Different units of Iranian army staged parades in Friday ceremony to show the latest Iranian military achievements. A ... (More on P4)...(23)

Terms of Reference Finalised for Panama Inquiry Commission

ISLAMABAD - A Pakistani government team, headed by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, on Saturday finalised the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the proposed inquiry commission being formed to investigate the Panama Papers leaks.

Apart from finalising the ToRs, the government also decided to include banking and investigative experts in the commission, which will be headed by a retired judge - as announced by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in his address to the nation on April 5.

The meeting, presided over by Mr Dar, was attended by Law Minister Zahid Hamid, Minister

of State for Information Technology Anusha Rehman, Attorney General Ashtar Ausaf Ali, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Law Barrister Zafarullah Khan and Secretary to the Prime Minister Fawad Hassan Fawad. "The meeting discussed and finalised ToRs of the inquiry commission being set up in pursuance of the announcement made by the prime minister to this effect. The meeting also short-listed names of professionals for inclusion in the inquiry commission," said a brief official announcement after a meeting of what it referred to as the 'Laws Review Committee'. Monitoring Desk)

Turkmenistan to Become Major Exporter of Chemicals

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan - Turkmenistan can become a mighty industrial power and a major exporter of chemical products, the 'Neutral Turkmenistan' newspaper reported. The implementation of the project for constructing a gas chemical complex in Kiyarly village of Turkmenistan's Balkan province can pave way for this, according to the report. The gas chemical complex is expected to process 5 billion cubic meters of natural gas for producing 386,000 tons of polyethylene and 81,000 tons of polypropylene per year. The project is being implemented jointly with Japan's TOYO consortium, LG

and the Hyundai (South Korea). The total cost of construction is \$3.4 billion. The technologies of the world's leading companies in chemistry and gas processing, such as Japan's TOYO, the UK INEOS, the US LUMMUS and GRACE are used in the project's implementation.

The largest enterprise of the country's gas chemical industry will be commissioned in late 2018.

The contractors plan to complete the major part of the construction work (up to 80 percent of the total volume) in 2016.

Around 1,000 jobs will be created here after completing the construction of the gas chemical complex. (Trend News)

Iran Backs Oil Producers' Output Freeze: Minister

TEHRAN - Iran's oil minister said Sunday that his country supports other oil producing countries' oil output freeze, Iran's Petro-Energy Information Network (SHANA) reported on Sunday.

Bijan Namdar Zanganeh hailed the oil producers' collaboration in stabilizing and balancing the global market, saying that based on the plan "for the first time in many years, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and non-OPEC producers have come together to form a serious and effective cooperation."

However, the Iranian minister said that Tehran will not give up on restoring its share in the global oil market with its historic production quota.

"We have told other OPEC members and some non-OPEC oil producers like Russia that they must understand Iran's return to the market, because if Iran freezes its oil output at January 2016 levels, then nothing would change regarding the removal of oil sanctions for the country." Oil sanctions were the most important sanctions imposed on Iran by the West over its nuclear disputes, and almost all OPEC members have welcomed Iran's return to the market following last year's nuclear deal and the removal of sanctions. The world's leading oil producing countries, except Iran, gathered in Doha, Qatar, on Sunday to discuss potential crude production freeze in a bid to buttress the floundering global oil market with its feeble prices.

Altogether, 23 countries, both within and outside OPEC, have sent their delegates to Doha for the "Oil-Producing Countries Ministerial Meeting" mainly to discuss the proposal of freezing output at January levels according to an agreement reached in February.

Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Venezuela agreed on February 16 to freeze, but not cut, oil output at the levels reported in January.

However, the agreement depended on other major producers joining it.

Iran has been trying to raise its oil production to the levels before Western powers imposed economic sanctions on it over its nuclear program. (Xinhua)