

Kerry and Zarif Meet as Iran Nuclear Deadline Approaches

VIENNA - The top U.S. and Iranian diplomats met for a sixth consecutive day on Sunday to try to resolve obstacles to a nuclear accord, including when Iran would get sanctions relief and what advanced research and development it may pursue. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif are trying to meet a Tuesday deadline for a final deal under which Iran would curb its atomic work for more than a decade in exchange for sanctions relief. Kerry planned to provide an update on the



talks at 4:30 p.m. (1030 EDT) outside the 19th century hotel where the talks were being held, a senior U.S. official said without providing details. While they have made some progress on

the type of bilateral sanctions relief that Iran may receive, the two sides remain divided on such issues as lifting United Nations sanctions and on research and development using advanced centrifuges. "Many of the issues related to sanctions have been resolved, and there are four or five issues that remain including the important topic of ensuring both sides' steps correspond to each other and happen at the same time," Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi was quoted as saying by the ISNA agency. (Reuters)

Neighbour News

Nuclear Deal "Likely" in Due Time: Iranian Negotiator

TEHRAN - Iran and the world powers have made progress in nuclear talks and the agreement to solve Iran's nuclear issue is possible by July 7, Iran's senior nuclear negotiator said on Sunday. "The differences have been narrowed down, although they are not over," Abbas Araqchi was quoted as saying by Iranian Students' News Agency. "The atmosphere of the talks is serious and both sides are determined" to conclude the talks, since elongation of the talks is not in the interest of any side, he said.

When the agreement is finalized, all the western financial and economic sanctions against Iran will be lifted and Iran's measure to implement its commitments will start, he noted. The UN Security Council will endorse the possible agreement, he added. In a video message released on Friday, the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif referred to the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 -- the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China plus Germany, saying the two sides "have never been this close to a lasting outcome." (Xinhua)

Russia Gives Priority to Development of Far East

MOSCOW - Russia has given priority to the development of its Far East region, and it stands ready to boost cooperation with China in this regard, a senior Russian official has said. The Russia government has been working on the creation of special conditions for investment in the Far East, such as simplifying administrative procedures and granting tax exemptions, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Yury Trutnev said in a recent interview with Xinhua. "We have introduced a



'one-stop' principle of administrative procedures. Investors could resolve all related issues at one federal agency without

having to run from one department to another," said Trutnev, who is also Russia's presidential plenipotentiary envoy to the Far Eastern Federal District. Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed the law on regions of priority development, while mechanisms to support investment projects have been established and the construction of infrastructure is underway, he said. "A new investment space is taking shape," he added. In order to attract investment, Trutnev said, Russia studied the experience of Asia-Pacific countries in taxation, administrative regulations, tariffs and infrastructure, and absorbed their essence. (Xinhua)

Australia, U.S. Start Biennial Military Drill

CANBERRA - Australia and its major ally the United States kicked off their biennial joint military exercise "Talisman Sabre" on Sunday in northern areas of Australia. The two-week exercise, involving up to 30,000 Australian and U.S. defense personnel, will be staged in Queensland and Northern Territory. It is the first time that Japan has taken part in this major Australia-U.S. joint military exercise. New Zealand also sent military personnel. Australian Department of

Defense said Talisman Sabre 15 will incorporate force preparation activities, special forces activities, amphibious landings, parachuting, land force maneuver, urban operations, air operations, maritime operations and the coordinated firing of live ammunition and explosive ordnance from small arms, artillery, naval vessels and aircraft. "It is a very, very important alliance. It's a very important relationship and right now we are facing quite significant challenges." (More on P4)...(26)

China Urges Nepal to Play Constructive Role in Trilateral Cooperation

KATHMANDU - Nepal should play a constructive role in the trilateral cooperation among China, India and Nepal, Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Wu Chuntai said here on Sunday. The ambassador said during an event that Nepal is very important for the three-party diplomatic relations. "It's time for Nepal to find the areas of cooperation, models of cooperation and especially projects of cooperation." Recalling Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's meeting with Indian

Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj on the sidelines of the International Conference on Nepal's Reconstruction on June 25 in Kathmandu, Wu said an economic corridor among the three nations may create more opportunities, revenues and benefits. "Reconstruction is an opportunity of social and economic development for the Himalayan nation in which Chinese initiatives like AIB and Belt and Road can be significant," said the Chinese envoy. (Xinhua)

Syrian Forces, Hezbollah Storm Key City Near Lebanon

DAMASCUS - The Syrian army backed by the Lebanese Hezbollah on Sunday stormed the western part of the rebel-held city of Zabadani, close to the Lebanese borders, the pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV reported. The army forces and Hezbollah also captured the entire district of Jamyat in the western part of that key city.

A day earlier, the Syrian forces and Hezbollah launched a major offensive to drive out the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front and likeminded groups from Zabadani. The wide-scale offensive on Zabadani, in the western part of the rugged Qalamoun region north of the capital Damascus, came after the Syrian forces and allied

fighters tightened the siege on the rebels there, the TV said. The battle aimed at clearing the city and the entire region of Qalamoun of the Nusra Front and its allied militants, who used the city as a conduit to smuggle militants and weapons from Lebanon into the western countryside of Damascus. (Xinhua)

Israeli PM Slams Breakthrough in Iran Nuclear Talks

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu slammed the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 countries, saying on Sunday that the reported breakthrough in negotiations is rather a "breakdown." "It seems that the nuclear talks in Iran have yielded a collapse, not a breakthrough," Netanyahu told ministers and media outlets at the beginning of the weekly cabinet meeting, according to a statement from his office. The Israeli prime minister, who reiterates the danger posed by a nuclear Iran to Israel, said that the P5+1 countries (China, U.S., Britain, France, Germany and Russia) are making

more and more concessions as days pass ahead of a final deal on Iran's nuclear capabilities. Netanyahu added that the deal being formulated these days is worse than the framework announced in Lausanne at the beginning of April, and that it would "pave Iran's path to the production of many atomic bombs." (Xinhua)

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Burundi Rejects U.N. Mediator after Critical Report about Elections

BUJUMBURA - Burundi on Sunday rejected a second U.N. diplomat named to help resolve the country's political crisis, saying a critical report about last week's parliamentary elections demonstrated bias. The tiny east African country plunged into turmoil in late April when protests erupted in response to President Pierre Nkurunziza's bid for a third term. The opposition boycotted the June 29 parliamentary election and says it will boycott the July 15 presidential vote. The rejection of Abdoulaye Bathily came in response to a U.N. report saying its mission in Burundi had observed

restrictions on media freedoms, arbitrary detentions and acts of violence around the June 29 vote. Burundi's ruling coalition blamed Bathily for the report. "He has produced a critical report not reflecting reality on the scene, saying that elections of June 29 were not 'free and credible', while (the ruling coalition) believe that these elections were 'transparent, fair, free and credible and were held in peace and security,'" it said in a letter to the U.N. secretary general. The coalition accused Bathily of exhibiting a "lack of neutrality". (Reuters)

IS Targeted in 38 Air Strikes By U.S.-Led Coalition: Statement

WASHINGTON - The United States and its allies stepped up their campaign against Islamic State with 38 air strikes on targets belonging to the group in Iraq and Syria on Saturday, a joint command statement said on Sunday. Eighteen of the strikes were near the Syrian city of Raqqa, capital of the 'caliphate' that Islamic State has declared. The statement from the Combined Joint Task

Force said tactical units and vehicles had been hit and 16 bridges had been destroyed. The attacks in Syria also included five near Hasaka and three near Kobani, in which tactical units, vehicles and fighting positions were hit. In Iraq, Islamic State was targeted in 12 strikes near eight cities. The statement said tactical units, fighting and staging positions, weapons and vehicles had been hit. (Reuters)

Iraqi Forces Foil 6 Suicide Car Bombings on Key Dam in Anbar Province

RAMADI, Iraq - Iraqi security forces and Sunni tribal fighters on Sunday thwarted six suicide car bombings and a multiple attacks by Islamic State (IS) militants on a dam in Iraq's western province of Anbar, while Iraqi helicopter gunships struck the IS positions elsewhere in the province, a provincial security source said. The attack occurred in the morning when dozens of IS militants launched their attacks by sending at least six suicide car bombs followed by heavy clashes with the troops and allied tribal fighters around the dam outside the town of Haditha, some 200 km northwest of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, the source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity. The troops detonated the booby trapped cars by anti-tank guided missiles before reaching their targets and killed some 20 extremist militants in addition to the six suicide bombers, while at least 10 Iraqi soldiers and policemen were killed and 16 others wounded, the source said. The IS militants repeatedly carried out attacks to seize the key dam near Haditha on the Euphrates river but were repelled by the troops and local Jughaiifi Sunni tribesmen. (Xinhua)

Suicide Attacks Kill 9 Soldiers in Iraq

TIKRIT, Iraq - The Islamic State (IS) militants carried out overnight attacks against the security forces in the town of Baiji near the country's largest oil refinery in Salahudin province, killing at least nine soldiers, a provincial security source said on Sunday. The extremist militants attacked late Saturday night with two suicide bombers who drove their explosive-laden cars into the positions of the security forces and allied militias, known as

Hashd Shaabi, or popular mobilization, in the neighborhoods of Asri and Tamim in central Baiji, some 200 km north of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, the source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity. After several hours of heavy clashes, the IS militants seized the central part of the town after the withdrawal of the security forces, leaving at least nine soldiers killed, the source said, without giving further details. (Xinhua)

Saudi-Led Strikes Kill 30 in Northern Yemen: Houthis



SANAA - Air strikes by Saudi-led forces killed 30 civilians in an attack on a market in northern Yemen on Sunday, the Houthi-run news agency Saba said, as U.N. mediators pushed for a humanitarian pause in fighting that has killed nearly 3,000 since March. Saba also said Houthi forces launched rockets against a number of Saudi army positions,

including a military airport in the southern city of Najran, in response to what it described as Saudi aggression against Yemen. An Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia has been pounding the Iran-backed Houthi forces and allied army units loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh since March in a campaign to restore ... (More on P4)...(27)

Suicide Bomber Kills Six at Church in Nigeria

BAUCHI, Nigeria - A suicide bomber killed six people at a church in northeast Nigeria on Sunday at the end of a week in which suspected Boko Haram insurgents killed more than 200 people. The spate of bloodletting prompted renewed international outrage and French President Francois Hollande said he was ready to hold a summit with regional leaders to coordinate the fight against Boko Haram. The blast in Potiskum in Yobe state on Sunday

came after an attack on the capital of neighbouring Borno state on Friday, deadly raids in three towns during the week and suicide bombings along a highway. President Muhammadu Buhari said the murder of up to 150 Kukawa residents near Lake Chad on Wednesday by Boko Haram was a "heinous atrocity". Several people who attended burials there, including a senior government official, said 147 bodies, including 22 children, had been interred. (Reuters)

Head of the UNFPA ends Mission in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan held a meeting with the head of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Carl Kulessa to mark the completion of his mission. There was a brief exchange of views on the state

and prospects of relations between Uzbekistan and UNFPA in the course of the meeting. K. Kulessa sincerely thanked the Uzbek side for their full cooperation in implementing his activities in our country as head of mission. (Monitoring Desk)