

Iran, US End Deputy-Level Talks

Deputy foreign ministers of Iran and the US under secretary of state have held a meeting after the end of a plenary meeting among top representatives of the Islamic Republic and the P5+1 group on Tehran's nuclear program.

TEHRAN - Abbas Araqchi and Majid Takht-e Ravanchi, the two Iranian deputy foreign ministers, sat with US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman in the Swiss city on Monday as a Tuesday deadline looms.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held a meeting earlier with US Secretary of State John Kerry, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Russian Foreign

Minister Sergei Lavrov, British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini. Following the plenary session of the foreign ministers of Iran and the P5+1, the Russian Foreign Ministry published a statement saying Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has called on all participants in the nuclear negotiations to be ready for compromise.

"During the plenary session, Lavrov confirmed Russia's adherence to



prompt achievement of a comprehensive agreement. The minister reiterated the importance for all parties to be ready for compromise in the interests of finding mutually

acceptable solutions," the statement said. According to the statement, the plenary session "focused on the search for a political and technical compromise" on issues

preventing the achievement of a mutual understanding. "All participants stated considerable progress reached in the negotiation process and confirmed the

general wish to achieve a comprehensive solution to the situation regarding the Iranian nuclear program within the next few days," the Russian Foreign Ministry added. (Press TV)

UN Warns of 'Horrifying' Syria Situation, Asking for More Funds



DEMASCUS - The United Nations has warned about the potential of a "horrifying" humanitarian situation in Syria unless an amount of USD 8.4 billion is procured to address the country's crisis.

The world body has launched an appeal to raise the financial aid for Syria this year with Abdullah al-Maatuq, UN special envoy for humanitarian affairs, telling a meeting of NGOs in Kuwait City on Monday that "failing to meet the required funds risks resulting in a horrifying and dangerous humanitarian catastrophe"

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is to chair the Third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in the city on Tuesday.

At the first and second conferences, also hosted by Kuwait, pledges of USD 1.5 billion and USD 2.4 billion were made. However, the United Nations has complained that not all pledges were honored.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos said the donor response at Tuesday's conference "needs to be comprehensive." With the conflict now in its fifth year, almost half of all Syrians have been forced to flee their homes, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said.

Last year was the deadliest yet in the conflict that has plagued Syria since March 2011, with at least 76,000 people killed out of a total of more than 215,000 since the turmoil began.

In a report released last week, Ban said devastation from the fighting had left around 7.6 million people internally displaced. Another 3.9 million have sought refuge in neighboring countries.

"Every day brings more death, displacement and destruction," the UN report said. (Press TV)

Yemen Conflict: Iran Asks Turkish Envoy to Explain Erdogan Comments

TEHRAN - Iran has asked Turkey's top diplomat in Tehran to explain remarks by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan heavily critical of Iran's role in Yemen and the region.

In the absence of its ambassador, Turkey's charge d'affaires has been "invited" to respond to "the Islamic republic's objection and regret over Erdogan's inappropriate and unusual comments," foreign ministry spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham said in a statement.

"We demand a clear and convincing response," Afkham added amid calls for Erdogan's planned visit to Tehran next month to be cancelled. Turkey has expressed support for a Saudi-led coalition that is conducting air strikes against Shia Houthi rebels in Yemen. The coalition has vowed to keep up the raids until the rebels abandon their insurrection against President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, who has fled to Riyadh. Hadi and his backers charge that the rebels, who overran the capital last year and have since advanced across much of the country, have support from Iran. (Press TV)

Saudi Air Raid on Camp for Displaced in Yemen Kills 45

SANAA - At least 45 people have been killed and 65 others wounded in an airstrike by Saudi warplanes targeting a camp for displaced people in northwest Yemen, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said Monday.

"IOM is reporting 45 dead among internally displaced persons, 65 injured [and counting]," spokesman Joel Millman told AFP on Monday.

The humanitarian agency, Doctors Without Borders, also known as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), earlier said the airstrike killed at least 15 people. The manager of the

MSF program in the Middle East, Pablo Marco, said the bodies of the victims and those injured in the airstrike were taken to Haradh Hospital near the al-Mazrak camp in Yemen's province of Hajja.

"It was an airstrike," Marco said, adding that it was expected that "more dead are at al-Mazrak camp." The al-Mazrak camp has been housing the Yemeni people displaced by the conflict between Houthi fighters and the central government since 2009. According to the MSF official, 500 new families have arrived at the camp over the past two days. Meanwhile, the UN Office

for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) confirmed that the camp had been targeted by the air raid. Riyadh says it has launched the airstrikes, the first round of which was carried out on March 26, to defend the "legitimate government" of Yemen's fugitive president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who fled to the Saudi capital on the same day. Riyadh has vowed to press ahead with the bombing until Hadi is reinstated. The Saudi airstrikes have been launched without a United Nations mandate. Dozens of people have fallen victim to the attacks so far. (Press TV)

Turkish Cypriots Halt Gas Search for Peace Talks Restart

NICOSIA - Hopes of a restart to talks to reunify the small Mediterranean island nation of Cyprus swelled Monday after breakthrough Turkish Cypriots said they will halt their own search for gas off Cyprus' coast.

Ozdil Nami, Turkish Cypriot foreign minister, told The Associated Press that a Turkish vessel that has been searching for gas the last few months will be sent back to Turkey. Nami also said that a notice alerting shipping traffic to an ongoing gas search won't be renewed if Greek Cypriots don't renew

their own. The decision to send the research ship back follows the departure of an Italian-South Korean consortium that had been carrying out exploratory drilling off Cyprus on the authorization of the Cypriot government.

Cyprus was divided in 1974 when Turkey invaded after a coup aimed at union with Greece. A Turkish Cypriot declaration of independence in the island's northern third is recognized only by Turkey which keeps 35,000 troops there. Cyprus is a European Union member, but only the

Greek Cypriot southern part enjoys full membership benefits.

Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades suspended peace talks last October after Turkey announced its own quest for gas in waters where the Cypriot government licensed companies to drill.

Anastasiades called the move a serious breach of Cyprus' sovereign rights. Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots though said a unilateral Greek Cypriot search for gas ignores the rights of Turkish Cypriots to any potential hydrocarbon bonanza. (AP)

Greece Must Flesh out Reforms to Unlock Aid

BERLIN - Greece's biggest creditor Germany said on Monday that the euro zone would give Athens no further financial aid until it has a more detailed list of reforms and some are enacted into law, adding to scepticism over plans presented last week.

A senior official in Brussels on Sunday had dismissed the list as "ideas" rather than a plan that Greece could submit to EU and IMF lenders to secure new funds before it runs out of cash next month.

German finance ministry spokesman, Martin Jaeger, said on Monday: "We need to wait for the Greek side to present us with a comprehensive list of reform measures which is suitable for discussion with the institutions and then later in the Eurogroup." "The ball is in Greece's court," he said, noting that the talks were "complicated, very technical talks" that needed time. "It depends on the quality of the Greek list and how far they cover the elements that are already mentioned in the memorandum," he said. "We're not just dealing with a process in Brussels but measures will also have to be passed by parliament in Athens." (Reuters)

Obama Brings New Leadership at WH for South Asia

WASHINGTON - US President Barack Obama has roped in a well-known defence expert to head the South Asia desk at the National Security Council as his government wants to be India's best partner, withdraw troops from Afghanistan and wean away Pakistan from its policy of backing non-State actors.

Peter Lavoy, who earlier served in various key positions in Pentagon and intelligence agencies on South Asia, has been appointed to serve as Senior Director for South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council.

In his new role, Mr Lavoy will advise the President and National Security Advisor Susan Rice on national security and foreign policy matters related to India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives and coordinate US policies toward South Asia across the departments and agencies of the US Government. Along with Mr Lavoy, the



White House has also appointed Joshua T White from the Stimson Center - a Washington-based think-tank - as Senior Advisor and Director for South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council.

The White House did not respond to questions on when Mr Lavoy and Mr White would formally start their work.

Mr Lavoy previously served as Acting Assistant Secretary of Defence for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs and before that as Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis, Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, and National Intelligence Officer for South Asia. "It has been a tremendous

honor to work with Michael and the entire Stimson team," said Mr White. "I consider it a privilege to take up these issues at the NSC at a time when US engagement in South Asia is as important as it has ever been," he said in a statement.

Mr Lavoy and Mr White last month penned a joint article for the Foreign Policy magazine. "The US can and should continue to help to broker India's distinct global role, even as it presses New Delhi to resolve difficult issues such as intellectual property rights, foreign direct investment caps and trade restrictions that might limit India's own economic ambitions over the long-run," they wrote. (ndTV)

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Pakistan Calls on International Community to Resolve Yemen Crisis

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan called upon the United Nations, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the international community to play a constructive role in finding a political solution to the crisis in Yemen.

The appeal was made in a high-level civil-military meeting on Monday, presided by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to review the situation in Yemen.

The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Asif, Advisor to PM on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, Chief of the Army Staff Gen Raheel Sharif, Air Chief Marshal Sohail Aman and secretary for-

eign affairs among other senior officials.

An official statement from the PM House said the meeting concluded that Pakistan remains firmly committed to supporting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia in accordance with the aspirations of the people of Pakistan.

It was also emphasised in the meeting that Pakistan is committed to playing a meaningful role in resolving the deteriorating situation in the Middle East.

To achieve that objective and to promote peace and unity in the Muslim Ummah, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will be contacting leaders of 'brotherly countries.'

Uzbekistan's Election Sees Turnout at 91 Percent

MOSCOW - Uzbekistan's election commission said 91 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in Sunday's presidential election, where victory by longtime authoritarian leader Islam Karimov is a foregone conclusion.

The 77-year-old Karimov has led the former Soviet republic in Central Asia since the late 1980s and ruthlessly quashed all opposition to his rule.

While Uzbekistan is untroubled by any immediate signs of unrest, the future of the country of 30 million people is colored with uncertainty amid a troubled security situation in neighboring Afghanistan and the lack of a clear succession plan should Karimov suddenly leave office.

Economic woes could also be in store as a knock-on effect of the looming recession in Russia, where around 3 million Uzbeks

live and work. Russian news agencies, citing the Uzbek Central Election Commission, said turnout was 91 percent. Results will be released Monday.

Karimov faced three purely nominal rivals. In the previous election in 2007, he won 91 percent of the vote.

A Russian parliament member who served as an election observer, Ilyas Umakhanov, said the citizens of Uzbekistan were voting for "further guarantees of stability and the social-economic development of the country," the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported. Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has pursued a policy of economic self-reliance and sought to balance its diplomatic relations with the West and Russia, playing them against each other. (AP)

UNRCCA Head to Pay Visit to Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Miroslav Jenca, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary general and Head of the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), will pay visit to Tajikistan from April 1-2, according to the Tajik MFA information department.

We will recall that Miroslav Jenca was invited to attend a meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Foreign Ministers' Council that will take here on April 2. The United Nations Regional Center for Pre-

ventive Diplomacy for Central Asia was inaugurated in December 2007 to help the region's countries respond more proactively to cross-border challenges and threats before they can become costlier and more difficult to control. The Center is tasked with assisting the governments of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in building capacities to peacefully prevent conflict, in facilitating dialogue, and in catalyzing international support behind projects and initiatives. (Asia-Plus)

US Backs China-Led AIIB Ahead of Joining Deadline



BEIJING - The US on Monday hinted at joining the China-sponsored Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) before the deadline today (Tuesday) saying it is looking forward to cooperating with the new bank which most US allies have joined disregarding its objections.

US can cooperate with the bank as it welcomes and supports proposals that are helpful to infrastructure construction, US Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew said. Lew is here for talks with Chinese officials. The cooperation can be carried

out through the China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue (SED), the World Bank and the AIIB, and any other mechanisms accepted by the two countries, Lew said in his talks with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang earlier on, Chinese Vice Minister of Finance Zhu Guangyao quoted him as Lew's "surprise" visit here ahead of the last date for joining the bank has sparked speculation that the US is negotiating with China to join the bank which it opposed earlier stating that it lacked transparency. (Agencies)