

Russia must Choose Between Assad and the US: Tillerson

LUCCA - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson issued an ultimatum to Russia on Tuesday: Side with the U.S. and likeminded countries on Syria, or embrace Iran, militant group Hezbollah and embattled Syrian leader Bashar Assad.

As he embarked on a trip to Moscow following urgent meetings in Italy with top diplomats, Tillerson said it was unclear whether Russia had failed to take seriously its obligation to rid Syria of chemical weapons, or had merely been incompetent. But he said the distinction "doesn't much matter to the dead."

"We cannot let this happen again," the secretary of state



said. "We want to relieve the suffering of the Syrian people."

Russia can be a part of that future and play an important role," Tillerson added

in remarks to reporters. "Or we believe is not going to serve Russia's interests longer term." (AP)

Putin Says Expects 'Fake' Gas Attacks to Discredit Syria's Assad

MOSCOW - President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday that Russia had information that the United States was planning to launch new missile strikes on Syria, and that there were plans to fake chemical weapons attacks there.

Putin, standing alongside Italian President Sergio Mattarella who was in Moscow for talks, said Russia would tolerate Western criticism of its role in Syria but hoped

that attitudes would eventually soften. When asked whether he expected more U.S. missile strikes on Syria, he said: "We have information that a similar provocation is being prepared ... in other parts of Syria including in the southern Damascus suburbs where they are planning to again plant some substance and accuse the Syrian authorities of using (chemical weapons)." (Reuters)

France's Fillon Rejects New Revelations

PARIS - French presidential candidate Francois Fillon responded angrily Tuesday to a new report alleging that he put his wife on the public payroll in 1982, four years earlier than he claimed.

"I won't say another word about these things," the conservative contender said on French television, condemning "successive revelations, carefully disseminated by state services." he revelation comes as French voters prepare to cast their first ballots in the two-stage presidential race on April 23. Fillon, once the race's frontrunner and who denies any wrongdoing, was charged with abuse of

public funds last month in a scandal that he has blamed on the outgoing Socialist government. The 63-year-old is accused of giving fake jobs to his Welsh-born wife Penelope that earned her 680,000 euros (\$725,000) in salary payments between 1986 and 2013. Mediapart said late Monday that "Penelope Fillon in fact benefited from public funds from the first parliamentary mandate of her husband through contracts for studies or projects that he commissioned." Fillon, first elected to represent the central Sarthe region in 1981, went on to become ... (More on P4)...(24)

G7 Ministers end Energy Summit without Agreement on Climate

ROME - Energy ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) countries finished their energy-related talks in the Italian capital without reaching consensus on a joint statement on climate change, due mostly to reservation from the United States.

G7 energy ministers on Monday did reach agreement in a few other areas, including the need to protect the world's energy supply from possible cyber attacks, to seek ways to open up international gas markets, and recognizing the value of developing

renewable energy sources. But an agreement on joint language on climate change eluded the ministers, after the U.S. delegation, led by Secretary of Energy Rick Perry, "reserved its opinion" on a proposed text. According to Carlo Calenda, Italy's minister for economic development and the host of the two-day G7 energy summit in Rome, U.S. delegates said the newly installed administration of President Donald J. Trump did not yet have a formal position on the international climate change process.

G7 FMs, Middle East Allies Discuss Syria in Extraordinary Meeting

ROME - Foreign ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) industrialized countries and key allies from the Middle East discussed the Syria issue in an extraordinary meeting held in the Tuscan city of Lucca, central Italy, on Tuesday. The meeting happened on the sidelines of the G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting taking place in the same city on April 10-11, and included diplomats from Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Qatar, the Ital-

ian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

At the press conference after the meeting, Italian Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano described the U.S. intervention as a window of opportunity. "After the American intervention, a window of opportunity has opened up to create a new positive framework for a political process in Syria, which we believe is the only solution," said Alfano.

He also voiced against isolation of Russia in the



political process in Syria. "Russia should not be isolated, but rather involved -- within the bounds of possibility -- in the process of political transition in Syrian," said the Italian minister. On this perspective, the G7 ... (More on P4)...(23)

BASIC Countries Make "Important Contribution" to Paris Agreement

BEIJING - The BASIC countries, including Brazil, South Africa, India and China, have made "important contributions" to the Paris Agreement, China's chief climate negotiator said Tuesday.

The cooperative mechanism of BASIC countries, established in 2009, has made "important contributions to the successful signing of the Paris Agreement and its early implementation," said Xie Zhenhua, Special Representative for Climate Change of China, at

a press conference at the close of the two-day 24th BASIC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change held in Beijing. The meeting was hosted by Xie and attended by relevant officials from India, Brazil and South Africa. Representatives from Ecuador, Fiji and Egypt were also invited to attend the meeting. Xie commended the role of BASIC in strengthening "internal communications" within the Group of 77, and in gaining support from developing countries.

A joint statement was issued at the close of the meeting, focusing on follow-up negotiations following the signing of the Paris Agreement, pragmatic cooperation and ways to intensify action before 2020, according to Xie. The attendees reiterated the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" in mitigation actions of developed and developing countries. They agreed that the Paris Agreement was a hard-earned achievement in the global campaign in climate-

governance, which has ushered in a new stage of global endeavors in seeking green and low-carbon development.

Xie said that China, as a responsible developing country, will continue to take efforts to deal with climate change and be resolute in fulfilling its responsibilities. The BASIC countries are helping developing countries in improving global climate change responses through channels including South-South cooperation, Xie said. (Xinhua)

IS Now Controls Less than Seven Percent of Iraq: Army

BAGHDAD - The Islamic State group now controls less than seven percent of Iraq, down from the 40 percent it held nearly three years ago, a military spokesman said Tuesday. "Daesh controlled 40 percent of Iraqi land" in 2014, Brigadier General Yahya Rasool, the spokesman of the Joint Operations Command coordinating the anti-IS effort, told reporters. "As of March 31 (this year), they only held 6.8 percent of Iraqi territory," he said. (AFP)



"The U.S. government is in the process of reviewing many of its policies, including policies related to climate change and to the Paris Agreement," Calenda said, referring to the 2015 deal in which nearly 200 countries agreed to take steps to limit climate change. The G7 groups major industrialized economies Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain, and the United States. Italy holds this year's G7 presidency. Analysts said the developments in Rome were a sign ... (More on P4)...(25)

Russian FSB Warns of Possible IS Terrorist Attacks

MOSCOW - The Islamic State (IS) terrorist group may carry out terrorist attacks on the territory of Russia, Director of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) Alexander Bortnikov said Tuesday.

"Currently, a large amount of operational information is arriving, indicating that leaders of terrorist groups operating in the Middle East as part of the so-called IS plot terrorist attacks in various regions of the world, including in Russia," RIA Novosti news agency quoted Bortnikov as saying at a meeting of the National Anti-Terrorist Committee (NAC). To prevent militants' attempts to penetrate into Russia, the country's security services need to take additional measures to strengthen the border regime and impose tougher controls on passenger flows, he said.

According to Bortnikov, who is also the NAC chairman, law enforcement agencies prevented 16 terrorist attacks in nine Russian cities in 2016 and eliminated 46 international terrorist group cells formed by citizens of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) of the former Soviet Union.

He said the investigation into a recent terrorist attack in Russia's second largest city of St. Petersburg, which killed 14 people and injured dozens of others, showed the need to improve work aimed at preventing such incidents. Eight suspected of participating in terrorist cells, all of which were natives of Central Asian republics, were detained in the course of the investigation of the St. Petersburg attack and a large number of arms and explosives were seized, Bortnikov said. (Xinhua)

Kenya, Qatar Ink 3 Deals to Boost Bilateral Ties

NAIROBI - Kenyan and Qatari governments on Tuesday signed agreements of cooperation on tourism, education and culture as part of efforts to enhance bilateral ties.

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and visiting His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani held bilateral talks in Nairobi where Nairobi also presented proposals on new opportunities for investment to their Qatari counterparts. "Kenya will therefore appreciate your country's support for development projects in infrastructure, education, energy, tourism and hospitality sectors among others," Kenyatta said during the bilateral meeting. ... (More on P4)...(26)

Palestinians Vow to Disband Islamist Group in Volatile Lebanese Camp

AIN EL-HILWEH - Palestinian leaders said on Tuesday they would break up an armed Islamist group involved in clashes with security forces inside the volatile Ain el-Hilweh refugee camp in southern Lebanon. At least seven people have been killed since Friday as combatants have exchanged machine gun, rocket and mortar fire in the crowded camp near the coastal city of Sidon.

The situation was calmer on Tuesday though gunfire could still be heard in the camp, witnesses said. The battles have pitted a joint security force including the Fatah party of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and allied factions

against the Sunni Islamist Badr group. Fighting broke out after the security force sought to deploy throughout the camp and met resistance from the Badr group. Fatah's head in Lebanon said the security force would deploy in all areas of the camp with the aim of disbanding the Badr group and arresting its leader, Bilal Badr. "Wherever the security find him, they must arrest him, present him to justice and hand him over to the Lebanese state," Fathi Abu al-Aradat told a televised press conference in Sidon. The incident has raised fears of spiraling violence in Ain el-Hilweh, which has seen intermittent clashes in recent ... (More on P4)...(27)

Neighbor News

G7 FMs Declare Support for Iran's Nuclear Deal

ROME - The G7 Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the final declaration of their meeting in Lucca, Italy have expressed support for the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers, known also as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"We support the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as an important contribution to the non-proliferation regime," the Group of 7 (G7) Industrialized nations, including Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, said in Italy.

"Continued and full implementation of the JCPOA is essential to build confidence that

Iran's nuclear program is exclusively peaceful in nature," the declaration further read.

The G7 foreign ministers also called for full commitment by all parties involved in the nuclear deal.

"We value the JCPOA's comprehensive structure and the commitment by all parties to its solid verification mechanism," they said.

"We commend and continue supporting the IAEA in its crucial work in Iran, including monitoring and verification to help ensure compliance with Iran's JCPOA commitments and safeguard obligations, thus playing a key role in fostering mutual trust," they said. (RNA)

Uzbekistan Reforming Internal Affairs

TASHKENT - An integrated action program was approved in Uzbekistan to reform the country's internal affairs agencies under the President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's decree "On measures to radically increase the efficiency of the internal affairs bodies' activity, strengthening their responsibility for ensuring public order, protection of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of citizens." The decree states that the work of internal affairs agencies should be aimed at rendering timely and qualitative assistance

to the population. Under the decree, tasks and functions of subdivisions of internal affairs bodies should be clearly defined and organizational structure should be optimized. Another priority will be to improve the legal culture of all segments of the population, instill respect for the law and intolerance to any manifestations of violations of the law.

The system of training, re-training and professional advancement of employees of internal affairs bodies will also be revised and improved. (Agencies)

Malala Receives Highest UN Honour to Promote Girls' Education

UNITED NATIONS - General Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres appointed Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai a UN Messenger of Peace on Monday to promote girls education.

At 19, Ms Yousafzai is the youngest Messenger of Peace, the highest honour given by the UN for an initial period of two years. She was also the youngest person to win the Nobel peace prize in 2014 when she was 17.

"You are not only a hero, but you are a very committed and generous per-

son," Mr Guterres told her.

Other current Messengers of Peace include actor Leonardo di Caprio, for climate change, actor Charlize Theron, whose focus is prevention of HIV and elimination of violence against women, and actor Michael Douglas, for disarmament.

Ms Yousafzai has become a regular speaker on the global stage and visited camps in Rwanda and Kenya last July to highlight the plight of refugee girls from Burundi and ... (More on P4)...(28)

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan Resume Flights after 25 Years

DUSHANBE - After a 25-year break, fractious Central Asian neighbours Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have re-established regular connecting flights, a spokeswoman at Tajikistan's international airport told AFP Tuesday, paving the way for improved relations.

"An Uzbekistan airways flight (from Tashkent) landed at Dushanbe in-

ternational airport at 8.03 am," the airport spokeswoman told AFP by telephone. "The plane and the passengers were very well met." Doubts were cast over an apparent rapprochement between the two countries that have a traditionally fraught relationship when a long-awaited flight from Dushanbe to ... (More on P4)...(29)

Chinese Official Urges Legislation on Antarctic Activities

SHANGHAI - China should speed up domestic legislation related to its increasing Antarctic activities, a senior Chinese official said Tuesday.

Currently, besides expeditions, trips to Antarctica from China are increasing, said Lin Shanjing, deputy head of the State Oceanic Administration, at a press conference about the country's 33rd Antarctic expedition. Management should be

strengthened for these activities, he said.

Only three out of the 29 consultative parties of the Antarctic Treaty have no domestic legislation yet on Antarctica. China is one, said Lin. China will continue to strengthen environmental protection in Antarctica, said the official.

The Antarctic Treaty was signed in 1959 and took effect in 1961, establishing Antarctica as the first global space free of any ... (More on P4)...(30)