

Nations Express Solidarity with France after Notre Dame Fire

PARIS - Nations expressed solidarity with France after the fire at the Notre Dame Cathedral and offered their support for the recovery.

Monday's fire collapsed the spire and burned through the roof of the 12th-century building, sparking an outpouring of grief and reminiscing of visits to the Parisian landmark. President Donald Trump called the cathedral "one of the great treasures of the world."

Pope Francis, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė, Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg and Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen all expressed their sadness.



Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri expressed sadness over the fire he described as a "heritage and humanitarian disaster." Hariri added in a tweet late Monday that Lebanon expresses strong solidarity with the

"friendly French people." The Obamas were among people sharing memories of past visits to the cathedral. Former President Barack Obama posted an old photo of himself, his wife Michelle and their two daughters lighting candles there and

expressed his grief. Michelle Obama was in Paris on Monday on a book tour. "The majesty of Notre Dame - the history, artistry, and spirituality - took our breath away, lifting us to a higher understanding of who we are and who we can be," she tweeted.

The French president has said he would seek help from the "greatest talents" in the world to rebuild Notre Dame, and many governments said they were considering contributions to what would be a significant architectural undertaking. Austrian President Van der Bellen raised the French flag over his office in Vienna in a sign of solidarity with France. Van der Bellen wrote on Twitter ...*(More on P4)...(10)*

'Pompeo Lost His Mind': Chinese Diplomat Hits Back at US Attacks on Beijing's Investments in Chile

WASHINGTON - The Chinese ambassador to Santiago called US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo "a hypocrite" after he tried to dissuade the South American nation from dealing with Beijing, as the US and China remain locked in a trade war. "Pompeo has lost his mind and gone too far," Beijing's envoy to Chile, Xu Bu, said, slamming the attacks against Chinese economic activities in the region as "malicious" and "absurd." Mike Pompeo earlier called Chinese in-

vestment projects in the South America "debt deal traps" during a visit to Santiago. Beijing "often injects corrosive capital into the economic bloodstream, giving life to corruption, and eroding good governance," he said. Firing back, Ambassador Xu said that economic ties between Chile and China "brought tangible benefits to the development of the Chilean economy," and the cooperation remains mutually beneficial. ...*(More on P4)...(13)*

Finland's Center Party Head to Step Down after Election Loss

HELSINKI - Finland's outgoing prime minister says he will step down as head of the Center Party, which had one of its worst performances in decades in Sunday parliamentary election.

Juha Sipila tweeted Tuesday "the election result leaves me with no choices," referring to the centrist party's meager 13.8% support and loss of 18 parliamentary seats in Finland's 200-seat legislature. Sipila is due to step down at an extraordinary party congress on Sept. 7. He has chaired the Cent-



er Party, a major political establishment, since 2012, and been the Nordic country's prime minister since 2015. Sipila continued heading a caretaker

government after his three-party coalition resigned in March. The center-left Social Democratic Party emerged as Finland's largest party with a tight win over the populist Finns Party in the election. Only 0.2 percentage points separate them. *(Fox News)*

US Unseals Assange Affidavit, Revealing Probable Cause for Extradition & Arrest for 'Conspiracy'



WASHINGTON - US prosecutors have unsealed an affidavit against Julian Assange that outlines their case against the WikiLeaks

co-founder on a single count of "conspiracy to commit computer intrusion" that may or may not have succeeded. As FBI special agent

Megan Brown admits in the affidavit, "it remains unknown whether Manning and Assange were successful in cracking the password" to the Department of Defense computer they allegedly conspired to hack, meaning the sole charge against Assange remains his alleged attempt to assist Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning in accessing the documents that were eventually leaked in 2010.

The "probable cause" for Assange's extradition to the US is de-

scribed as hundreds of messages sent between Manning and Assange on the Jabber platform. The two "conspirators" should have known that releasing the documents "would cause injury to the United States," Brown declares, since it contained information about US allies in Afghanistan who were assisting coalition forces. The affidavit dramatically refers to "one of the largest compromises of classified information in the history of the ...*(More on P4)...(11)*

Netanyahu Passes Threshold for Nomination as Israel's Premier

JERUSALEM - Israel's president said on Tuesday a majority of parliament members had advised him to have Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu form a government after the April 9 election, effectively ensuring his nomination. In office for the past decade, Netanyahu won a fifth term despite an announcement by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit's in February that he intends to charge the prime minister in three corruption cases. Netanyahu has

denied wrongdoing. Under law, President Reuven Rivlin chooses a party leader whom he judges has the best prospect of putting together a ruling coalition. He will announce his candidate on Wednesday. In broadcast remarks on Tuesday, the second day of Rivlin's public consultations with political parties on their preferences for prime minister, he said Netanyahu "now has a majority of Knesset members" behind him. ...*(More on P4)...(14)*

Comedian Zelenskiy Would Win Second Round of Ukraine Vote, Poll Shows

KIEV - The presidential candidate and comic actor Volodymyr Zelenskiy is likely to win Ukraine's presidential election, according to an opinion poll published on Tuesday.

The poll by the KIIS research firm showed Zelenskiy, a political novice who plays a fictional president in a popular TV series, on 72.2 percent of the vote. Incumbent Petro Poroshenko was on 25.4 percent.

KIIS polled 2,004 voters in all regions, except annexed Crimea, from April 9 to 14.

Last week, a poll by Reiting research agency gave Zelenskiy 61 percent of votes and ...*(More on P4)...(15)*

Halal Ink, Giant Ballots Ready for Indonesian Election

JAKARTA, Indonesia - Nearly 193 million Indonesians are eligible to vote in presidential and legislative elections on Wednesday. President Joko Widodo, the first Indonesian president from outside the Jakarta elite, is competing against Prabowo Subianto, a former special forces general from the era of authoritarian rule under military dictator Suharto. Some election facts and figures: BY THE NUMBERS

The election is a huge logistical exercise costing about 27.6 trillion rupiah (\$1.9 billion). Indonesians are casting votes not only for president but about 20,500 other candidates standing for the Senate and legislatures at the national, provincial and district levels. ...*(More on P4)...(16)*

'How Dare You!' French Ambassador Shames Ukrainian Pundit for Joking about Notre Dame Blaze

KIEV - A Ukrainian political commentator drew the ire of the French ambassador in Kiev after joking that Monday's devastating fire at Notre Dame might be linked to the visit of the frontrunner in the Ukrainian presidential election.

A staunch supporter of the incumbent Ukrainian president and frequent guest on president-friendly political talk shows in Ukraine seemed to cross the line when he tried to score a few political points for his patron amid the Notre Dame Cathedral fire. On Monday, while the world was watching the huge blaze destroy the iconic gothic cathedral in Paris, Taras Berezovets found some tongue-in-cheek words



of encouragement for French President Emmanuel Macron: "Well, Macron is lucky that after Zelenskiy's visit, only Notre Dame de Paris burned down. Elysee Palace could have caught fire too," he tweeted in Russian. The tweet remained for about a day before being taken down by Berezovets.

Zelenskiy is a comedian-turned-politician who

is slated to become the next president of Ukraine, much to the chagrin of the current leader, Petro Poroshenko. Like many other pundits, Berezovets has been busy these last two weeks, desperately trying to undermine Zelenskiy. The tactless joke drew the ire of Isabelle Dumont, France's ambassador in Kiev, ...*(More on P4)...(12)*

Russia Recognizes New Authorities in Sudan: RIA Agency

MOSCOW - Moscow recognizes the new authorities in Sudan after President Omar al-Bashir was ousted, Russia's RIA news agency cited Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov as saying on Tuesday. The Sudanese

group that led protests against the deposed president called on Monday for the transitional military council that has taken power to be disbanded and for a new civilian interim ruling council to be formed. *(Reuters)*

Neighbor News

Iran's Parliament Labels US Troops in Mideast as Terrorist

TEHRAN, Iran - Iran's lawmakers on Tuesday overwhelmingly approved a bill labeling U.S. forces in the Middle East as terrorist, a day after the U.S. terrorism designation for Iran's Revolutionary Guard formally took effect, state TV reported.

Defense Minister Gen. Amir Hatami introduced the bill authorizing the government to act firmly in response to "terrorist actions" by U.S. forces. It demands authorities use "legal, political and diplomatic" measures to neutralize the American move, without elaborating.

The U.S. move aims at "thwarting Iran's influence," and shows that

America's longstanding sanctions against Iran have become ineffective, Hatami told lawmakers. During the debate, some hard-liner lawmakers had demanded listing the entire U.S. army and security forces as terrorist. The TV report said 204 lawmakers approved the bill, out of 207 present at the session in the 290-seat chamber. Two lawmakers voted against the bill and one abstained. However, it remains unclear how the bill's passage in parliament would affect the Gourd's activities in the Persian Gulf, where the U.S. Navy has in the past accused Iranian patrol boats of harassing American warships. *(AP)*

Meeting of High Level Working Group on Caspian Sea Underway in Kazakhstan

ASHGABAT - The second meeting of the High Level Working Group on the Caspian Sea issues has kicked off in Nur-Sultan city, Trend reports with reference to the Kazakh Foreign Ministry.

As part of the meeting, it is planned to continue adjusting a draft agreement on the establishment of direct baselines in the Caspian Sea, as well as discussing issues related to the implementation of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea and the implementation of the agreements and instructions of the heads of state following the Fifth Caspian Summit August 12 last year in Aktau city. Representatives of Azer-

baijan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Russia and Turkmenistan are taking part in the event.

The first meeting of the working group will be held Feb. 19-20 in Baku. The parties adopted the Rules of Procedure of the High Level Working Group on the Caspian Sea issues, exchanged views on the implementation of the agreements reached following the Fifth Caspian Summit, reviewed various aspects of cooperation in the Caspian Sea, and also reported on the progress of the implementation of the internal procedures on signed agreements, in particular, the process of ratifying the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. *(Trend)*

Wall Street Reps to Visit Uzbekistan to Study Investment Potential

TASHKENT - The Uzbek Embassy in the United States organized an extended meeting with representatives of leading American corporations, funds and banks from Wall Street, Trend reports with reference to the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan.

The event was attended by over 50 people representing over 30 major US companies, including such investment funds as Lazard Asset Management, GoldenTree Asset Management, Morgan Stanley Investment Management, Eaton Vance Corp, Callaway Capital Management, VanEck, HIMCO, Jyske Capital, Oppenheimer, TIAA and others, collectively

managing assets in excess of \$100 billion.

The guests were also representatives of The US State Department, The US Treasury, US-AID, OPIC, as well as experts from the Heritage Foundation, the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Diplomat and Washington Diplomat publications.

In his welcoming speech, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to the United States Javlon Vakhobov outlined the current trends in economic development of Uzbekistan, the priority areas for improving fiscal policy, banking, monetary, customs and tax spheres, as well as highlighted the benefits and preferences created for foreign investors. *(Trend)*

Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan Agree to Create International Trade Center at Border

TASHKENT - An international trade and economic center will be created on the border of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Trend reports via Sputnik Uzbekistan.

"The parties agreed to establish an international trade and economic center on the border of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan," President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev said after talks with his Uzbek counterpart Shavkat Mirziyoyev in expanded format. The president of Kazakhstan noted

that the center will help improve the logistics of cross-border economic relations and the living conditions of the population in the border areas of the two countries. Earlier it was reported that following the talks of the presidents of the two countries, the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan signed a memorandum on the creation of an international center for trade and economic cooperation "Central Asia". *(Trend)*