

May Calls for Early Election to Strengthen Brexit Hand

LONDON - British Prime Minister Theresa May called on Tuesday for an early election on June 8, saying she needed to strengthen her hand in divorce talks with the European Union by shoring up support for her Brexit plan. Standing outside her Downing Street office, May said she had been reluctant about asking parliament to back her move to bring forward the poll from 2020, but decided it was necessary to try to prevent opposition parties "jeopardising" her work on Brexit. Some were surprised by her move - she has repeatedly said she does not want to be distracted by time-consuming campaigning - but opinion polls give her a strong



lead, the economy is weathering the Brexit vote and she has faced opposition from her own party for some of her domestic reforms. The pound rose to a two-and-a-half-month high against the U.S. dollar after the announcement, as forex markets bet - initially at least - that May would strengthen her parliamentary majority. Britain's main share index fell to its lowest point in more than seven weeks. "It was with reluctance that I decided the country needs this election, but it is with strong conviction that I say it is necessary to secure the strong and stable leadership the country needs to see us through Brexit and beyond," May said. (Reuters)

Germany Hopes UK Election to Help Brexit Clarity

LONDON - The Latest on British Prime Minister Theresa May calling for a general election on June 8 (all times local): Germany's foreign minister says he hopes Britain's early election will lead to more clarity and predictability in upcoming negotiations on the country's exit from the European Union. Prime Minister Theresa May last month formally triggered Britain's exit talks, nine months after the country voted in a referendum to leave the EU. She plans to seek a stronger

parliamentary mandate in an election June 8. German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said in comments to the Funke newspaper group published Tuesday that "any long uncertainty definitely will not do political and economic relations between Europe and Britain any good." He added: "Hopefully, the new election announced today by Prime Minister May can lead to more clarity and predictability in the negotiations with the European Union." (AP)

U.S. Won't Draw Red Line on Korean Peninsula Nuclear Issue: White House

WASHINGTON - The White House said on Monday that it does not expect U.S. President Donald Trump to draw a red line on the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue and the United States will continue work with China to solve it. "Drawing red lines really hasn't worked in the past," White House spokesman Sean Spicer told a briefing. "He (Trump) holds his cards close to the vest, and I think you are not going to see him telegraphing how

he's going to respond to any military or other situation going forward," he said. Trump does not plan to draw red lines "in the sand", Spicer added. However, Spicer cited the U.S. decision to bomb a Syrian military airfield early this month as an indication that Trump would take action when necessary. "I think the action he took in Syria shows that when appropriate, this president will take decisive action."



Spicer added that the United States is going to work with China on the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue. "We're going to continue to work with China, in particular, to help find a way forward on this." (Xinhua)

White House Reiterates China is not Manipulating its Currency

WASHINGTON - The White House on Monday reiterated that China has not manipulated its currency since U.S. President Donald Trump took office in January. "They haven't been manipulating their currency since he's (Trump) been in office. That's a fact," White House press secretary Sean Spicer told a regular press briefing, in response to a question about U.S. Treasury Department's decision not to label China as a currency manipulator last week. "I think that the president's tweet said clearly



to do so at this time would not be prudent," the White House spokesperson said, adding that labeling China as a currency manipulator now would not be very

productive in addressing the Korean Peninsula situation. U.S. Treasury Department on Friday declared that no major trading partners of the United States, including China, met the standard of manipulating its currency. In an interview with Wall Street Journal last... (More on P4)... (22)

EU's Brexit Plans Unchanged by UK Vote: Spokesman

BRUSSELS - The European Union will stick to a timetable for preparing to launch Brexit negotiations with Britain, despite Theresa May calling for a snap general election on June 8, an EU spokesman said on Tuesday. "The UK elections do not change our EU27 plans," Preben Aamann, a spokesman for European Council President Donald Tusk, said in a statement after Tusk spoke to Prime Minister May. Tusk will chair a summit of the other 27 EU national leaders in Brussels on April 29, where he expects them to agree negotiating guide-

lines he has proposed. On May 22, Aamann added, governments should agree the directives that EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier needs in order to launch the formal talks. Barnier has said he expects full negotiations to start in early June, although it remains unclear what the British position on that will now be, given the electoral timetable. May formally triggered a two-year countdown to Brexit on March 29. Tusk said on Twitter that he had a "good" telephone conversation with May after she called for the election. (Reuters)

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Russia-China Ties Developing Dynamically: Russian Parliament Leader

MOSCOW - Russia-China relations are developing dynamically regardless of the international situation, said Chairman of the Russian State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin in a recent interview with Xinhua. "Today, we are conducting a very productive dialogue with Chinese partners at all levels ... We have developed close inter-parliamentary ties of high intensity and in a variety of formats," the head of the lower house of the Russian parliament told Xinhua, ahead of the upcoming visit of Zhang Dejiang, chairman of the Standing Committee of the Chinese National People's Congress (NPC). According to Volodin, the State Duma and the NPC have exchanged legislative experience on various issues, including non-governmental organizations, religion, national security and many others. Expecting his first meeting with Zhang, China's

top legislator, Volodin said he hopes they will be able to establish a good relationship. "I am sure that Zhang's visit to Russia will be productive and it will contribute to the substantive content of the Russian-Chinese parliamentary dialogue," said Volodin. Zhang's visit is scheduled to start on Tuesday, which is also the final leg of his four-nation tour on April 12-21 which includes trips to Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and Russia. Volodin spoke highly of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, saying that it creates a counterbalance to the current trend towards fragmentation of the world economy. "This initiative is aimed at giving economic growth a comprehensive and indivisible character - just like the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which is a prioritized project for Russia," said Volodin. (Xinhua)

EU Signs Project for Nuclear Safety with Iran

TEHRAN - The European Commission has signed the first ever project for nuclear safety co-operation with Iran, under the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the European Commission reported April 18. The € 2.5-million project aims to enhance the capabilities of the Iranian Nuclear Regulatory Authority (INRA). It will do so by preparing a feasibility study for the Nuclear Safety Centre foreseen in

the JCPOA. It will support the INRA in developing a nuclear regulatory framework, working toward the accession by Iran to several international nuclear conventions, including the Convention on Nuclear Safety, and reviewing the results of the stress test to take place in the Bushehr nuclear power plant. A second project for the stress test at the Bushehr nuclear power plant is going to be signed in the coming weeks. (Trend)

Gen. Bajwa Tells US NSA: 'Pakistan Rejects Allegations of Employing Proxies on its Soil'

ISLAMABAD - A day after United States (US) National Security Adviser Gen H.R. McMaster urged Pakistan to indiscriminately fight all terror groups, the army's media wing issued a statement on a meeting between McMaster and Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa. Before his meetings in Pakistan, McMaster had visited Afghanistan, where he hinted at the US taking a tougher line on Islamabad. In an interview with Afghan news agency TOLO, McMaster said: "As all of us have hoped for many, many years, we have hoped that Pakistani leaders will

understand that it is in their interest to go after these [militant] groups less selectively than they have in the past and the best way to pursue their interest in Afghanistan and elsewhere is through diplomacy not through the use of proxies that engage in violence." Director General (DG) Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Maj Gen Asif Ghafoor on Tuesday tweeted a video of McMaster's subsequent meeting with Gen Bajwa, saying: "Pakistan itself is a victim of state-sponsored terrorism. It strongly rejects allegations of employing proxies from its soil." (Monitoring Desk)

10th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference Opens in Vietnam

HANOI - Vietnam is hosting the 10th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference in its capital Hanoi from April 18-21, according to Vietnam Co-operative Alliance (VCA) on Tuesday. The conference attracted over 500 participants from Vietnamese authorities and agencies as well as international cooperatives and organizations, reported local Nhan Dan (People) newspaper. According to the host's Deputy State President



Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh, Vietnam has more than 150,000 cooperative groups, 20,000 cooperatives and 50 cooperative unions with nearly 30 mil-

lion members working on a wide range of economic sectors such as agriculture, transport, construction and trade. The cooperative ... (More on P4)... (23)

U.S.-Allied Syrian Groups Form Civilian Council to Run Raqqa

BEIRUT - U.S.-allied militias in northern Syria announced on Tuesday the formation of a civilian council to govern Raqqa after their planned capture of the city from Islamic State militants. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which include a large contingent from the powerful Kurdish YPG militia, has advanced toward Raqqa with the help of air strikes and special forces from the U.S.-led coalition. The SDF - made up of both Kurds and Arabs waging a military campaign against Islamic State - said local officials had been setting up the council for six months. Reuters reported last month that the political wing of the SDF was helping to install a civilian council to run the eastern Syrian city, Islamic State's base of operations in Syria. A preparatory committee met "with the ... (More on P4)... (24)

Pentagon Starts U.S. Nuclear Posture Review under President Trump's Order

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Defense Ministry has officially started a review of the country's nuclear posture and will submit a final report to President Donald Trump at the end of this year, the Pentagon announced Monday. "Today, Secretary (James) Mattis directed the commencement of the review, which will be led by the deputy secretary of defense and the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and include interagency partners," Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White said in a statement. "The process will culminate in a final report to the president by the end of the year," said the statement. The nuclear posture review was ordered by President Trump in a January executive action on military readiness, according to a theHill news daily report. The January memo called for a review "to ensure that the United States nuclear deterrent is modern, robust, flexible, resilient, ready and appropriately tailored to deter 21st-century threats and reassure our allies." Democratic lawmaker Adam Smith, a ranking member of the House Armed Services committee, said Monday he hopes the review includes a "thoughtful assessment" to "rethink what the priorities should be for a strong yet affordable nuclear arsenal." "In the past, nuclear posture reviews have considered in depth the crucial role played by efforts to enhance strategic stability and prevent nuclear proliferation," he said in a statement. (Xinhua)

German, Dutch FMs Urge Albanian Opposition to End Parliamentary Boycott

TIRANA - The visiting foreign ministers of Germany and the Netherlands, Sigmar Gabriel and Bert Koenders respectively, called on Albanian opposition on Monday to end the parliamentary boycott and get ready for the June 18 elections. The ministers told a press conference that the current political deadlock risked Albania's European Union (EU) membership bid, which is considered as a top priority of Albania. The German foreign minister said at the joint press conference with his Albanian counterpart Ditmir Bushati that the parliamentary boycott of the opposition is

blocking justice reform and damages Albania's reputation. "If parliament continues to be blocked as well as the reform of the justice system, then your path towards the EU is getting harder," he warned, noting that the opposition could make proposals for free and fair elections but the boycott was not a solution. Albanian opposition parties have unanimously refused to take part in the general elections in June, asking for the prime minister's resignation. They have been boycotting the parliament and continued protests in the main streets of the capital since February 18. (Xinhua)

EU-China Cooperation 'Has Never Been so Important': Mogherini

BRUSSELS - The cooperation between the European Union (EU) and China has never been so important in a moment when multilateral global governance is open to doubt, EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and European Commission Vice President Federica Mogherini told Xinhua in an exclusive written interview ahead of her visit to China. China will be Mogherini's first stop of her seven-day diplomatic trip kicking off from April 18, followed by India and Russia. In China, Mogherini will co-chair the 7th EU-China Strategic Dialogue with Chinese State ... (More on P4)... (25)

EBRD's Return to Uzbekistan Underlines New President's Reformist Goals

TASHKENT - If Shavkat Mirziyoyev's reputation under Uzbekistan's long-serving dictator Islam Karimov had cast doubt on his initial calls for reform, the gradual improvements the new president has made have so far disproved the sceptics. Mirziyoyev has showed willingness to follow-up on his promises by issuing decrees protecting the interests of small and medium-sized businesses, getting rid of child labour at Uzbekistan's cotton fields, and even recognising the existence of the country's significant migrant population. It is under these circum-

stances that Sir Suma Chakrabarti, president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), pledged to restart the multilateral lender's activities in the country during a visit in mid-March. "The pause in that relationship is now over," he said in a speech at Westminster International University in Tashkent on March 17. The EBRD froze its links with Uzbekistan for 10 years because of Karimov's poor human rights record, a split highlighted at a public stand-off between the dictator and ... (More on P4)... (26)