

# Rance Votes in Unpredictable Presidential Election under Tight Security

PARIS - Millions of French voters began casting their ballots in the first round of the presidential election Sunday morning amid an atmosphere of uncertainty. Polling stations at France's European continent opened at 8 a.m. (0600 GMT) and will run for a maximum of 12 hours. Those in the largest cities will close at 8 p.m. (1800 GMT). In France's overseas territories, the voting was held on Saturday. The voting will winnow down a list of 11 candidates to two finalists for a runoff vote scheduled for May 7, if no one wins by at least 50 percent in the first round. Out of the 11 candidates, four remain frontrunners



in previous polls, namely the centrist former Minister of economy Emmanuel Macron, the far-rightist Marine Le Pen, the right-wing conservative Francois Fillon and the far-leftist Jean-Luc Melancon. At the No. 17 polling station in the 17th arrondissement of Paris, a voter, Marine, who runs a magazine, told Xinhua that she has just voted for Macron. "It's been five years since the left came in power and the result is disappointing. Why not give Macron a chance? France is facing a number of problems, including security and economy. I expect a united France," she said. (Xinhua)

## Japan Destroyers to Start Joint Drill with U.S. Carrier Group from Sunday

TOKYO - Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) destroyers are to begin a joint drill with the U.S. aircraft carrier Carl Vinson Strike Group in the western Pacific Ocean from Sunday, Japan's defense ministry said. The two Japanese destroyers, "Samidare" and "Ashigara," which departed from Sasebo in Nagasaki Prefecture on Friday, will join the U.S. carrier strike group for trainings on tactics and

communications, according to the defense ministry. The Carl Vinson Strike Group, led by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, will head to waters off the Korean Peninsula after the joint drill which is to last for several days, according to local reports. U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said in Australia on Saturday that the strike group will arrive in the Sea of Japan by the end of this month. (Xinhua)

## Saudi King Names Son as US Envoy as Ties Boosted with Trump

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia's King Salman issued a decree late Saturday naming one of his sons, an air force pilot who has taken part in coalition strikes against the Islamic State group, as the kingdom's new ambassador to the U.S. The appointment of Prince Khaled bin Salman to Washington signals the kingdom's eagerness to strengthen bilateral ties under President Donald Trump. As the king's son, the prince has a direct line to the Saudi monarch. Saudi Arabia is the world's third largest defense spender. Prince Khaled's

appointment positions him as an influential broker in deals with U.S. manufacturers. Saudi-U.S. relations had cooled under the Obama administration after Washington pursued a nuclear accord with Shi'ite-ruled Iran that the Sunni-ruled kingdom strongly opposed. Saudi Arabia and Iran are regional rivals, and back opposing sides in the wars in Syria and Yemen. Relations with the Riyadh have improved since Trump took office. King Salman dispatched his most powerful son, Deputy ... (More on P4)... (19)

## Britain Labour Leader Corbyn Says Could Suspend Syria Air Strikes if Elected

LONDON - The leader of Britain's main opposition Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn said on Sunday he could suspend British involvement in air strikes against Syria if he was elected prime minister at a June 8 election. The veteran peace campaigner, whose Labour Party is around 20 points behind the ruling Conservatives in opinion polls, set out his position on a range of security and foreign policies, saying he would look again at Britain's nuclear deterrent

and was against using nuclear weapons. His comments were pounced upon by the Conservatives, who said that Corbyn posed a threat to British security and was the best reason "for sticking with the strong leadership of (Prime Minister) Theresa May". Corbyn told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show that he believed that "the only solution in Syria is going to be a political one". "I want us to say 'Listen, let's get people around the table quickly' and a



way of achieving that - in his party, also said he suspending the strikes, would have to consider possibly." The leftist leader, whose views on foreign policy have often been at odds with those held by other lawmakers (Reuters)

## Pence Tries Hand at Koala Diplomacy Down under

SYDNEY - U.S. Vice President Mike Pence crouched down in the shade of a eucalyptus tree on Sunday at Sydney's Taronga Zoo where Penny, a red kangaroo, dozed in the midday heat, scratching her behind the ears before she lazily rolled onto her back. "That's my usual position on a Sunday afternoon," Pence said as a bank of cameras clicked, capturing yet another picture-perfect moment for his family in Australia. Pence, his wife Karen, and their two adult daughters, Charlotte and Audrey, saw some of the sights of

Sydney, investing time in soft diplomacy on the last leg of a 10-day Asia tour that has been rich with symbolism about shoring up American economic ties and security cooperation. Karen Pence - who earlier charmed a meet-and-greet with embassy families with her pronunciation of "G'day" - held out a handful of chicory to Widji, an emu who boldly pecked at the bunch. "OK, OK," she said as Widji's beak came closer to her fingers. The emu declined to indulge Audrey Pence, 22,



who wanted to take a selfie - but Penny the kangaroo obliged. Pence is the first senior member of President Donald Trump's administration to travel to Australia. The visit took on new emphasis after an acrimonious phone call early in Trump's term with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull about refugees. Pence sought to put any sense of lingering tension to rest during ... (More on P4)... (20)

## Germany's Anti-Immigrant Party Announces September Election Line-Up

COLOGNE, Germany - The anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party on Sunday voted for 76-year-old publicist Alexander Gauland and 38-year-old economist Alice Weidel to jointly lead its campaign for the country's September national election. A majority of AfD delegates backed the two candidates at a congress in Cologne. The right-wing AfD is seeking to win seats in the national parliament for the first time. The vote followed a surprise announcement on Wednesday by co-leader



Frauke Petry, the party's public face, that she would not lead the AfD's election campaign. This could boost mainstream parties and lessen the threat the right-wing AfD poses to Chancellor Angela Merkel's bid for a fourth term.

The latest polls put the AfD on 8 to 10 percent - around a third lower than at the end of last year but still above the 5 percent threshold for entering the Bundestag lower house of parliament. But the party, ... (More on P4)... (21)

## OSCE Observer Killed in Ukraine: Austrian FM

VIENNA - A monitor of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) died when his vehicle drove on a mine in Ukraine, Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz said on his twitter on Sunday. Kurz, who holds the OSCE's Chairperson-in-Office for 2017, said another monitor was injured in the tragedy, which occurred in a patrolling mission. Austrian media say the vehicle was patrolling close to Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, when it drove on a mine. The person killed is said to be an American, and the injured is a German. The Austrian foreign minister has demanded full information of the tragedy. More than 600 OSCE monitors are deployed in the conflict region in Ukraine. (Xinhua)

## Mattis Visits Strategic Djibouti

DJIBOUTI - US Defense Secretary James Mattis arrived Sunday for a short visit to Djibouti, a strategic Horn of Africa nation which hosts Washington's only permanent military base on the continent. Camp Lemonnier, home to some 4,000 US soldiers and contractors, is vital to US military operations in Somalia against militant groups like Al-Shabaab, and also provides support for US operations in Yemen, where special forces regularly carry out drone strikes against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. China is also in the process of establishing its first overseas military base in the small port country just a few miles from the US camp, which has raised concern in Washington. Mattis is scheduled to meet with Djibouti's president, Ismael Omar Guelleh as well as with General Thomas Waldhauser, commander of US troops in Africa. For (the defense department) Camp Lemonnier and Chabelley are critical in terms of logistics. They support multiple US combat command", a senior defense official said, referring to an airfield close to the camp, from which the US military operates drones. Another senior defense official, also speaking on condition of anonymity, also played down any concerns about China's base construction. "At this point I don't see why we should not be able to comfortably coexist with the Chinese presence, the way we do with the Japanese, the French..." the official told reporters last week. Critics say China is trying to construct a so-called "pearl necklace" in the Indian Ocean - a reference to various ports in which China has direct interest in operations including Gwadar in Pakistan and the Colombo Port City in Sri Lanka. (AFP)

## North Korea Detains Third U.S. Citizen

SEOUL - North Korea detained a U.S. citizen on Friday as he attempted to leave the isolated country, bringing the total number of Americans held by the isolated country to three. Korean-American Tony Kim had spent a month teaching an accounting course at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST), the university's chancellor, Chan-Mo Park, told Reuters on Sunday. Kim, who also goes by his Korean name Kim Sang-duk and is in his fifties, was detained by North Korean officials at Pyongyang International Airport as he attempted to leave the country, Park said. "The cause of his arrest is not known but some officials at ... (More on P4)... (22)

## U.S. Pursues 3 Pct Growth Via Tax Reforms, Regulatory Relief: Treasury Secretary

WASHINGTON - U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin reiterated on Saturday that the Trump administration is pursuing over 3percent economic growth with the support of tax reforms and regulatory relief. "The U.S. economy is well positioned," Mnuchin said during a conversation with Christine Lagarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He called the IMF's forecast for U.S. growth "a little conservative," saying that the U.S. economy could grow by 3 percent or higher with the support of tax reforms and regulatory relief. The IMF forecast the U.S. economy to grow by 2.3 percent this year and 2.5 per-

cent next year. Mnuchin reiterated that the Trump administration is planning to bring the high corporate tax rates down and simplify tax codes for individuals. U.S. President Donald Trump said on Friday that the administration is going to release its tax plan next week. Mnuchin suggested that the tax plan would not be revenue-neutral. "We're looking for reforms that will pay for themselves with growth," Mnuchin said. He skipped questions about whether regulatory relief could affect financial stability, saying that the administration is trying to reduce conflicting regulations that hurt economic growth. (Xinhua)

## Nieghbor News

### China Wants Nuclear Weapons Eliminated in Korea: FM

ATHENS, Greece - China's foreign minister says China insists on the elimination of nuclear weapons in the Korean peninsula and will continue to pursue the resumption of talks among the involved parties. Wang Yi, who is visiting Greece to take part in an international forum on ancient civilizations, made the comments when asked about North

Korea's nuclear arsenal. He said: "We need voices of peace and reason. China will not be swayed by words and will continue to play its role." Wang was meeting his Greek counterpart, Nikos Kotzias, Sunday. China and Greece want to strengthen cooperation, and Greek premier Alexis Tsipras will make his second trip to China next month. future. (AP)

### China, Iran Sign Contract on Redesign of Arak Heavy Water Reactor

VIENNA - China and Iran signed the first commercial contract to redesign Iran's Arak heavy water reactor in Vienna on Sunday. The commercial contract signed between the two sides is seen as an important step towards modification of the Arak heavy water reactor. Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran agreed to minimize its plutonium production and avoid production of weapons-grade plutonium. Redesigning the Arak heavy water reactor is a core aspect of the JCPOA on Iran's nuclear pro-

gram. The JCPOA was reached in Vienna in July 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 group, namely Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States and Germany. The P5+1 countries have created a working group led by China and the United States to work with Iran to redesign the reactor. Iranian ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Reza Najafi told Xinhua the signing of the contract is important and Iran has very good cooperation with China. He said it's the example cooperation which the other sides should learn from. (Xinhua)

### Pakistan Has Nuclear Arsenal under Control: Govt.

ISLAMABAD - In the middle of the war triggered against extremist groups, the Pakistani Government has stated that its nuclear arsenal is secured, following the West concerns on the smuggling or robbery of nuclear weapons in this country. 'Pakistan's command and control system, as well as the nuclear safety regime, goes along with the international standards,' said today Finance Minister Ishaq Dar. 'In fact, we are providing

nuclear safety training to countries in the region,' he said. Last month, prime minister's foreign affairs adviser Sartaj Aziz, expressed his support for the use of nuclear technology for the development of human kind. Referring to UN Security Council resolution 1540, Aziz said that Pakistan is a responsible nuclear country while stating that it will never hand over its nuclear weapons to non-State parties. (Monitoring Desk)

### Turkmenistan Inviting Consulting Companies to Join TAPI

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan's Turkmen State Concern is inviting consulting companies to partake in the construction project of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, said the country's Oil and Gas Complex in a message Apr. 22. Construction of the Turkmen section of TAPI was launched on Dec. 13, 2015. The pipeline's annual capacity will be 33 billion cubic meters. TAPI's total length will be 1,814 kilometers. The Turkmen State Concern is recalling that previously, the Turkmen government earlier applied for loans of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in order to pay the cost of construction of

TAPI's Turkmen section (214 km) and auxiliary facilities, and intends to use a part of these funds to make payments under the contract for consulting services. The services include construction supervision and professional technical supervision over the construction of facilities during the entire period of construction of the TAPI gas pipeline's Turkmen section. Bidders must submit a package of information about the company, the main type of its activities and seniority in business, financial opportunities and reserve capacities, organizational structure, general qualifications and the number of key personnel. (Trend)

### Tajikistan Opposed to Iran's Full SCO Membership

DUSHANBEH - While Russia has repeatedly backed Iran's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), some other members, particularly Tajikistan, seem to be opposed to the accession. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Friday he hoped Iran's SCO membership process would start in June. "Next in

line, many have said this today, is Iran, which as you know has settled the issues related with Security Council sanctions. It now fully meets the criteria for SCO membership," Sputnik quoted Lavrov as saying. "We hope that in Astana in June, the heads of state will consider the issue of how to launch the process of including ... (More on P4)... (23)