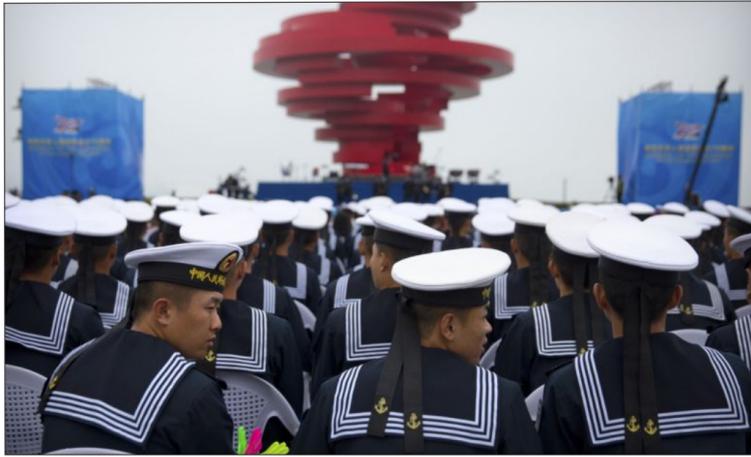


China's Xi Urges Closer Naval Ties amid Regional Tensions

QINGDAO, China — Chinese President Xi Jinping urged closer ties between the world's navies on Tuesday, amid tensions over China's rapid expansion of its naval forces and forceful assertions of territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Xi's remarks came in an address to foreign naval officers attending a fleet review marking the 70th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army Navy, an event Beijing is using to showcase its growing ability to exert force far from its shores.

Following his speech, Xi boarded the destroyer Xining, one of China's most modern and capable warships, at the northern port of Qingdao to preside at the review, which will also feature China's sole commissioned aircraft carrier, numerous other surface ships



and submarines and a display of naval aviation. China's navy will "continue to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with foreign navies,

actively shoulder its international responsibilities, safeguard the security of international waterways and provide more public goods

for maritime security," Xi was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua News Agency.

"Holding high the banner of win-win cooperation, the Chinese military is committed to creating a security environment featuring equality, mutual trust, fairness and justice, joint participation and shared benefits," said Xi, who also heads China's armed forces.

Such rhetoric contrasts starkly with China's aggressive approach to its territorial claims in the South China Sea, where it has built military installations on man-made islands in the crucial waters, which are also claimed by several other nations.

China claims virtually the entire South China Sea as its territory, along with rights to its fisheries and seabed resources. (AP)

Neighbor News

Iran's HR Council Slams UK Crackdown on Climate Protesters

TEHRAN - The top Iranian government watchdog on human rights has issued a statement condemning Britain's ongoing crackdown on people protesting against its environment policies. Iranian Judiciary's Human Right Council said on Tuesday that it was deeply concerned by the way climate activists were being treated by police in the capital city of London, saying UK authorities should respect international rules on protection of civil rights.

It also called on United Nations Human Rights Council to observe its declared mission and duties and study the case which it called a "blatant human rights violation".

More than 1,000 people have been arrested and over 50 formally charged over attending protests in the British capital since earlier last week. The protesters want a drastic change in UK government policies on environment, saying they will not leave the streets until their demands are met. The activists insist the government and parliament should adopt specific legislation to guarantee that UK's greenhouse gas emissions will be cut down to net zero by 2025.

After a week of protests, police announced on Monday that they will no longer tolerate disruptions to public transportation in certain areas of London. (Press TV)

APCEA Intend to Establish Gem Center to Promote Pakistani Gems

ISLAMABAD - All Pakistan commercial Exporters Association (APCEA) in collaboration with Small and medium enterprises (SMEDA) and provincial government intend to establish a Gem center in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

While talking to APP the patron in chief of the APCEA Mamoor Khan told that the gem center is the first of its kind in the country and provincial government has provided a plot of 4.5 Kanal at Kohat road on 30 to 35 year lease to establish gem center. He said the gem centre would provide space not only for showrooms and exhibitions but they also would provide lapidaries, cutting and polishing centers, internationally recog-

nized aggregated labs, certified gems and other related facilities under one roof.

He said foreign investors always shown great interest in Pakistani gems but due to the non-availability of any safe and guaranteed space they hesitate to invest in this sector.

Through this center they would provide an opportunity to foreign investors to see the guaranteed products and interact with the local dealers. He also demanded government to provide funds for the construction of building of this center saying that this centre would not only promote gems of the country but also will create number of jobs in gem stone sector. (Monitoring Desk)

China Welcomes PM Imran Khan's Attendance in 2nd Belt and Road Forum in Beijing

BEIJING - China Tuesday welcomed Prime Minister Imran Khan's attendance in the second Belt and Road Forum scheduled for April 25-27 and termed China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as highly demonstrative project and set a good example for other projects under Belt and Road Initiative.

"We welcome Prime Minister Imran Khan's attendance in the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation," Chinese foreign ministry's spokesperson Geng Shuang said during his routine briefing held here.

He remarked that with concerted efforts of both China and Pakistan, the CPEC, a flagship project of Belt and Road Initiative has delivered many tangible benefits to the people of two countries with concrete outcomes.

"We have every confidence to work with Pakistan to promote greater progress in this project to deliver greater benefits to our people," he added. The spokesperson observed that the CPEC was a highly demonstrative project and it set a good example for other projects under the Belt and Road Initiative. (Monitoring Desk)

Turkmenistan Looks to Digitize Economy with Help from Israeli Company

ASHGABAT - A meeting with representatives of the Israeli company BlackSparc, specializing in IT-technologies, was held at the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan (UIET), Trend reports with reference to the UIET.

Israeli specialists made a presentation of their capabilities and opportunities of partner companies in the implementation of such systems as "smart city" and "digital state", the report says.

In particular, the directions of using digital technologies in banking,

healthcare, distant education, in the work of mobile operators and in the labeling of certain types of goods, in the fight against counterfeit products were considered.

Representatives of the UIET, the companies "Akylyly Tislimat" and "Imdat Elektronika", as well as the leadership of the National Barcode Organization of Turkmenistan took part in the discussion of the prospects for cooperation.

The meeting participants expressed interest in establishing mutually beneficial business contacts, the report said. (Trend)

New IRA Takes Responsibility for Killing N.Ireland Journalist

LONDON - Dissident republican group the New IRA on Tuesday took responsibility for killing Northern Irish journalist Lyra McKee last week as police said they had arrested a 57-year-old woman in connection with the shooting. The New IRA "offer our full and sincere apologies to the partner, family and friends of Lyra McKee for her death," it said in a statement to The Irish News.

The newspaper said the paramilitary group used a recognised codeword

-- an established method of communication during the decades of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland known as "The Troubles". McKee, 29, was shot in the head on Thursday as dissident republicans clashed with police in the Creggan housing estate in Northern Ireland's second city Londonderry, also known as Derry. Police in Northern Ireland said on Tuesday that a 57-year-old woman had been arrested under the Terrorism Act in connection with the killing. (AFP)

Putin & Kim Set to Meet in Vladivostok, Russia on April 25

MOSCOW - Vladimir Putin and his North Korean counterpart Kim Jong-un will meet in the city of Vladivostok, Russia's Far East, on April 25. It will be the first meeting of the two heads of state.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov earlier confirmed that the meeting would take place before the end of the month.

Earlier reports suggested that the leaders will hold talks on the Russky Island near Vladivostok.

A short time ago a video appeared that shows a large motorcade, including two unidentified black limos, arriving through a checkpoint. The footage published on YouTube shows the main entrance to the campus of the Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU) on Russky Island in Russia's Far East.

The official agenda of the upcoming talks has not been revealed but it is expected that the leaders will discuss security and the denuclearization of the Korean Pen-



insula.

The meeting is due to take place amidst the breakdown of Pyongyang's negotiations with Washington. Earlier this

month, North Korean leader gave the US until the end of 2019 to change its "posture" if it wants to make another... (More on P4)... (10)

Japan Looks to Secure Energy Supply as U.S. Ends Import Waivers from Iran



TOKYO - The Japanese government on Tuesday said it would consider steps to avoid the nation's energy supply from being overly dis-

rupted by the United States ending waivers on sanctions on oil imports from Iran by Japan and other countries.

On Monday, the United

States said it would end waivers granted since November on May 2 that have been applicable to certain countries including Japan to import oil from Iran.

Japan said the move by Washington aimed at it exerting more pressure on Tehran to end its nuclear program would be met by measures to ensure Japan's energy supply.

"We will consider necessary steps to make sure that energy supply to Japan is not affected, by exchanging views

with Japanese companies concerned," Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a press briefing on the matter.

Suga, Japan's top government spokesperson, said that he had held talks with the U.S. on the issue to seek ways to protect Japanese firms from being negatively affected by Washington bringing an end to the sanction waivers. Suga said that discussions with oil importers and other related companies... (More on P4)... (11)

Former French PM Fillon to Face Trial over Fake Jobs

PARIS - Former French prime minister Francois Fillon, whose 2017 bid for the presidency was torpedoed by a fake job scandal involving his wife, is to face trial over the allegations, a judicial source told AFP on Tuesday.

Investigating judges have recommended the rightwinger be tried on charges of misusing public money, misuse of corporate assets, conspiracy and failing to fully disclose his financial assets to a French watchdog. His Welsh-born wife Pe-

nelope faces the lesser charges of complicity in the misuse of public money and conspiring to misuse corporate assets, the legal source said.

"It's the normal next step in the process," one of Fillon's political allies told AFP on condition of anonymity. Fillon was widely viewed as being on course to win the French presidency before revelations published by the investigative newspaper Le Canard Enchaîné in January 2017 shattered his credibility. (AFP)

With Energy Exports Depressed, Turkmens Turn to Towel Smuggling

ALMATY - Beset by economic hardship, enterprising Turkmens have found a way to supplement their incomes - smuggling towels and bed linen into neighboring Kazakhstan.

Moving hundreds of items every trip in trademark Chinese plaid bags which at times have clogged airport luggage belts, informal traders - mostly women in their late forties and fifties - hand them over to relatives or local partners to be resold for up to five times the purchase price.

Dressed in traditional Central Asian garb such as headscarves and long skirts, these women arrive on almost every flight from Ashgabat to Almaty, Kazakhstan's biggest city. (Reuters)

On South America's Largest Solar Farm, Chinese Power Radiates

JUJUJUY, Argentina - In an arid, lunar-like landscape in the sunny highlands of northern Argentina, South America's largest solar farm is rising, powered by funding and technology from China.

Local officials said they had sought help at home, the United States and Europe without success. Potential lenders and partners, they said, were spooked by the project's size and the fiscal woes of Jujuy province, one of the poorest in the country.

The Import-Export Bank of China saw it differently. The state-funded institution financed 85 percent of the project's nearly \$400-million pricetag. At 3 percent annual interest over 15 years, it is "cheap money" for Jujuy, a person familiar with the terms said. (Reuters)

Israel Run by Netanyahu's 'Rightwing Racist Government', Bernie Sanders Says

JERUSALEM - Democratic 2020 hopeful Bernie Sanders called the government of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu "racist" during a CNN town hall. Another blue candidate, Beto O'Rourke, used similar wording to blast the Israeli leader.

Speaking on Monday, the popular Vermont senator was asked to comment on how his long-standing criticism of Netanyahu - who this month won a highly contested election and secured his fifth term as prime minister - was compatible with supporting Israel. "I am not anti-Israel



but the fact of the matter is that Netanyahu is a right-wing politician who, I think, is treating the Palestinian people extremely unfairly," Sanders said as the audience burst in applause. "So what I believe is the United States gives billions of dollars in mili-

Syria Accuses Rebels of Preparing Chemical Attack in Idlib

DAMASCUS - The rebels of the al-Qaida-linked groups and the so-called White Helmets are preparing to stage a chemical attack in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib, state news agency SANA reported on Tuesday.

The official news agency said it cited sources in Idlib as confirming that the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the umbrella group of the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front, as well as the

White Helmets group are preparing to launch a chemical attack in Idlib to frame the Syrian army.

It said the groups have evicted the town of Jurjanas in the southern countryside of Idlib as a prelude to launching the attack in order "to justify a pretext for a U.S. aggression on Syria." According to the sources of SANA, the rebels are planning to use chlorine gas in their anticipated attack. (Xinhua)