

Brexit Takes Center Stage as Britain's Election Battle Continues

LONDON - Britain's future in Europe dominated campaigning Tuesday with the main opposition Labour Party setting out its own vision of Brexit.

Keir Starmer, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, set out Labour's approach to Brexit, saying British voters facing a general election on June 8 have a choice of two visions.

Starmer said: "We accept that outside the EU our relationship with Europe must change. But we do not accept that Brexit has to mean whatever (Prime Minister) Theresa May says it means. We do not accept that there has to be a reckless Conserv-



ative Brexit." Starmer said if Britain elected a Labour government it would reset the "Conservatives failing approach to Brexit".

"We will scrap the Government's Brexit White Paper and replace it with fresh negotiating priorities that reflect Labour values and our six tests.

"Labour's White Paper will have a strong emphasis on retaining the benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union as we know that is vital to protecting jobs and the economy," he said. Starmer said the Labour Party believes in building a new relationship with the EU, not as members but as partners. (Xinhua)

Japan PM to Visit Russia, Britain Amid North Korean Tension

TOKYO - Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visits Moscow on Thursday to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin and pursue talks on joint economic projects aimed at a possible breakthrough in their decades-old island dispute.

Japanese officials said Wednesday that North Korea is also likely to be discussed given the timing of Abe's trip, though the leaders' approaches remain different.

Japan recently held talks with key allies the U.S., South Korea and Australia, agreeing that China and Russia are crucial in

pressuring North Korea to end its nuclear and missile programs. While China is seen as more cooperative, U.S.-Russia ties have deteriorated over Syria.

Japan and Russia both claim four islands north of Japan's northern main island of Hokkaido which came under Russian control at the end of World War II.

They remain at odds over the territorial dispute, but are now discussing joint development of fisheries, tourism and other areas that might help bridge the gap. Abe is to visit Britain next for talks with Prime

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Russia Detains Two IS Supporters in its Far East Region

MOSCOW - Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said Wednesday that it has detained two supporters of the Islamic State (IS) in the country's Far East region. The suspects were plotting a terrorist attack on a mass of people on the Far Eastern island of Sakhalin, the FSB said.

One of the detainees is a Central Asian citizen and the other is a Russian national. "During searches of their

residences, improvised explosive devices, components for their manufacture, IS propaganda materials and other banned extremist literature were seized," it said.

The FSB has launched criminal proceedings against the detainees, establishing the circumstances of their illegal activities and conducting necessary operational and investigative procedures. (Xinhua)

U.S. Deeply Concerned about Turkey's Airstrikes in Syria, Iraq

WASHINGTON - The United States said Tuesday it is "deeply concerned" that Turkey conducted airstrikes in Syria and Iraq without "proper coordination" with Washington or the coalition forces.

"We have expressed those concerns to the government of Turkey directly," State Department spokesman Mark Toner told a regular news briefing.

"These air strikes were not approved by the coalition and led to the unfortunate loss of life of our partner

forces in the fight against ISIS (the Islamic State) that includes members of the Kurdish Peshmerga."

The Turkish warplanes on Tuesday conducted airstrikes targeting the positions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Iraq, killing at least five Iraqi Kurdish fighters and wounding ten others, local Kurdish media reports said.

The Turkish jets, in the early hours of the day, hit the PKK positions in different areas in northwestern Iraq, but the Iraqi



Kurdish fighters who were close to the PKK positions apparently were killed by mistake.

Meanwhile, the Turkish military said it has carried out airstrikes against sus-

pected Kurdish rebel positions in northern Iraq and in northeastern Syria, in a bid to prevent militants from smuggling fighters and weapons into Turkey. ...*(More on P4)...*(25)

Germany Backs Belt and Road Initiative, Wishes China's Forum Success : Merkel

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Tuesday that her country supports the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and wishes success for the Belt and Road Forum on International Cooperation to be held in Beijing next month.

Merkel made the remarks while meeting with visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who came here to attend the Chinese-German Strategic Dialogue on Diplomatic and Security Affairs, as the two countries are marking the 45th anniversary of the ambassador-level diplo-

matic relations.

Merkel spoke highly of the recent development in bilateral ties, saying she wished the two nations' comprehensive strategic partnership could be enhanced through a trove of important high-level exchanges this year.

Due to the schedule conflict, the chancellor will send Minister of Economic Affairs Brigitte Zypries to attend the Belt and Road forum in the middle of May.

The Group of 20 (G20) summit, to be held in Hamburg in July, will achieve positive results



with the support of China, she added.

For his part, Wang said he hoped both sides will take the anniversary celebration to advance the bilateral exchanges to a new high. In the coming high-level ex-

changes of visits, the two countries are expected to deliver their explicit endorsement for multilateralism, the UN Charter and the peaceful settlement of international conflicts, said Wang. (Xinhua)

S. Korean Presidential Frontrunner Widens Gap with Runner-Up in Opinion Polls

SEOUL - The South Korean presidential frontrunner has widened a gap with his runner-up in recent opinion polls just two weeks before a presidential election to replace impeached President Park Geun-hye.

According to a poll released Wednesday, Moon Jae-in of the biggest Minjoo Party won 40.4 percent in approval scores, higher than 26.4 percent tallied by Ahn Cheol-soo of the center-right People's Party. The result was based on



a survey of 1,000 voters conducted by local pollster Hankook Research from Monday to Tuesday.

Around two weeks earlier, the gap between Moon and Ahn narrowed to less than 1 percent, but support

for Ahn tumbled amid controversy over his attitude in recent TV debates.

Hong Joon-pyo of the former ruling Liberty Korea Party ranked third with 10.8 percent, trailed by Sim ...*(More on P4)...*(26)

Philippines Deploys 40,000 Soldiers, Police for ASEAN Summit

MANILA - More than 40,000 soldiers, policemen and uniformed personnel have been deployed in Manila as the city hosts a summit of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on Saturday.

Preparatory meetings, involving ASEAN ministers and senior officials kicked off on Wednesday.

Philippine Ambassador to ASEAN Elizabeth Buensuceso chaired the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to ASEAN, starting a series of official meetings that will culminate with the 30th ASEAN summit. A government statement said the CPR discussed their work plan for 2017, reports and recommendations to the ASEAN senior officials and ASEAN ministers, commemorative ...*(More on P4)...*(27)

Australian PM to Visit U.S. President in New York

CANBERRA - Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull will travel to New York next week to meet U.S. President Donald Trump in what will be the first meeting between the pair in official capacities.

The meeting comes just three months after the pair's phone call, during which Trump reportedly hung up on the Australian prime minister, who was discussing a refugee deal previously struck between the two nations.

In a statement released early on Wednesday, Turnbull said he was "delighted" to confirm the visit, which would coincide with the 75th anniversary of Battle of the Coral Sea, during which Australian and U.S. forces battled the Imperial Japanese Navy for wartime supremacy in the Pacific.

The prime minister said the series of meetings would provide a good opportunity for Australia and the United States to "reaffirm our alliance and the United States' engagement with the Asia-Pacific".

"Australia and the United States share the values of democracy, the rule of law and a commitment to peace, prosperity and security," Turnbull said.

"Our forces continue to serve together in defence of those values in the Middle East where I have visited our troops and discussed the future of the region with U.S. commanders and Defence Secretary James Mattis."

The visit was officially announced by White House spokesperson Sean Spicer in the United States' capital on Tuesday (the U.S. time). (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

Xi Stresses Financial Security

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping has called for concrete efforts to maintain China's financial security.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks Tuesday afternoon at a group study attended by members of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee.

Financial security is an important part of national security and a key foundation for the stable and healthy development of the economy, according to Xi.

Financial vitality will lead to economic vitality, and financial stability is of vital importance to economic stability, Xi said. Maintaining financial stability should be treated as a big event in governing a state, and work in this respect must

be done well with concrete efforts. "Finance is the core of a modern economy," said Xi. "We must do a good job in the financial sector in order to ensure stable and healthy economic development."

After years of financial reforms and development, China has become an important global financial power, Xi said.

China's overall financial condition is good, and financial risks are controllable, according to Xi.

However, China's financial development is still facing risks and challenges, including external shocks leaking from the monetary and fiscal policy adjustment of some countries. "Accurate judgement of potential financial risks serves as a precondition for maintaining financial security," Xi said. (Xinhua)

Pakistan Looking to Reset Relationship with US: Dar

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Finance Minister Ishaq Dar in an interview with the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday said Pakistan seeks to reset its relationship with the United States (US). "There seems to be a little bit of a stalemate in the last couple of years," Dar pointed out in conversation with WSJ correspondent Ian Talley.

Dar, who spoke to the newspaper ahead of his meeting with National Security Adviser Lt Gen H.R. McMaster, said, "We need to remove any ambiguities that we have between each other as

friends." The WSJ, noting that the Pak-US relationship was "complicated", reported that Washington still sees Islamabad as critical to its efforts in Afghanistan as the Trump administration intensifies its attacks on the militant Islamic State (IS) group and the Taliban.

In a move signalling a shift in US policy in the region under US President Donald Trump, the American military earlier this month dropped one of its largest non-nuclear bombs on an IS complex in eastern Afghanistan. (APP)

Iran, Russia Call for United Front Against Terror

TEHRAN - Iran and Russia have once again decried a recent US missile attack against a Syrian army airbase, stressing that such acts block the formation of a united front against terrorism. Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov both commented on the attack during their speeches made at the Conference on International Security, which opened in Moscow on Wednesday.

The US attack in early April saw a barrage of 59 Tomahawk missiles launched against the Shayrat Airfield in the western Syrian province

of Homs, causing some 15 fatalities, including civilians. Washington staged the offensive under the pretext of responding to an earlier purported gas attack against a northwestern Syrian village. The attack, which the US blames on Damascus, was carried out without a UN approval or a fact-finding probe. Dehqan said the missile raid was against all international regulations. He further highlighted Washington's unconstructive role in the Middle East, saying the US is trying to stage a new form of "international fascism" by implementing a new doctrine and by "commercializing security." (Presstv)

Uzbek President Sidelines Member of Ruling Triumvirate: Sources

ALMATY - Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the new president of Uzbekistan, has moved to consolidate his power by sidelining a member of the triumvirate that has ruled the ex-Soviet state since last year, two sources familiar with the government told Reuters.

Uzbekistan, a major cotton exporter which sits on transit routes for natural gas shipped to China and Russia and has considerable hydrocarbon reserves of its own, has been in flux since Islam Karimov died last year after ruling for 27 years.

Mirziyoyev became president but effectively shared power with two other men - Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov and Rustam Inoyatov, head of the SNB state security service. But Azimov, a man long

seen in the West as the standard-bearer for reform in Uzbekistan, has now been sidelined, said the two sources. The reform baton has been taken up instead by the president, who has decided to personally oversee a program of cautious economic change.

That effectively leaves Mirziyoyev and security boss Inoyatov as the two men sharing power in Uzbekistan, Central Asia's most populous nation, potentially reducing the complexity of decision-making.

That could reassure foreign governments worried about the threat of instability in the mainly Muslim country, which borders Afghanistan. But there are tensions between the two remaining men in power. (Reuters)

EU Ponders Stronger Social Protection as Populist Wave Rises

BRUSSELS - The European Commission proposed on Wednesday to strengthen social protection across the bloc as the European Union struggles with a wave of populism triggered by globalization and a migration crisis.

Its most concrete proposals focused on creating a better work-life balance with new EU-wide standards for more generous parental and paternity leave rules, guaranteed carers' leave to tend to ailing family members and flexible working arrangements. The proposals came less than two weeks before the second round of presidential elections in socially-minded France, whose vote ...*(More on P4)...*(28)

UN Eyes New Yemen Peace Talks by End of May

GENEVA - A new round of peace talks between Yemen's warring sides should begin by the end of May, the UN mediator said Wednesday, as alarm grows over the country's humanitarian crisis.

UN special envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed told AFP that negotiations were underway to stave off a feared military attack on the vital Red Sea port of Hodeida, in what he hoped would be a first step towards a ceasefire.

Averting an attack on Hodeida - the main entry point for desperately needed aid to Yemen - could allow "a real cessation of hostilities and to go back to the talks," he said. "We are at the preliminary stage,

but time is also a real constraint for us, because my aim is to finish all of this before Ramadan," he said, adding that he hoped "to enter into a new round of talks before Ramadan." The Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan is set to begin around May 27 this year. Even if Ould Cheikh Ahmed manages to get the parties to the table, any success will be hard-won: since Yemen's conflict escalated two years ago, all UN mediation attempts and seven declared ceasefires have failed. Yemen's war has pitted pro-government forces against Iran-backed Huthi rebels and their allies, renegade troops loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. (AFP)