

Washington Urges Australia to 'Be Partner' in Confronting Iran in Gulf Standoff

WASHINGTON - The US is seeking to pull Australia into its escalating row with Tehran, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo requesting Canberra's help to secure shipping routes against "unprovoked attacks" in the Strait of Hormuz.

Pompeo and Pentagon chief Mark Esper met with their Australian counterparts, Foreign Minister Marise Payne and Defense Minister Linda Reynolds, in Sydney on Sunday.

The US hopes Australia "will partner" with Washington and "confront the Islamic Republic of Iran's unprovoked attacks on international shipping in the Strait of Hormuz," Pompeo told reporters after the talks.



Minister Reynolds confirmed that the US is seeking Australian help in dealing with Tehran but "no decision has been made" so far. "We will ultimately as we always do, decide

what's in our sovereign interests," Reynolds said.

The US has been trying to assemble an international naval mission to patrol the Strait of Hor-

muz and the Persian Gulf after several incidents, involving Iranian forces and foreign oil tankers, occurred in the waterways.

In late July, Washington formally invited Germany to join the mission in order to help secure maritime traffic and "combat Iranian aggression" in the region. Foreign Minister Heiko Maas declined the request, saying that Berlin wanted to "avoid further escalation in the Strait of Hormuz." Britain, whose tanker 'Stena Impero' was seized by Iran last month, also proposed dispatching an EU-led squadron to the Strait of Hormuz. Germany and several other European nations ...**(More on P4)...(12)**

Johnson's Spending Fuels U.K. Election Talk after Majority Cut

BERLIN - Boris Johnson's recent flurry of spending commitments is fueling speculation the new British prime minister is preparing for an early general election, especially after his working majority in Parliament was cut to just one in a special election last week.

Johnson unveiled 1.8 billion pounds (\$2.2 billion) in additional funding for the state-run National Health Service, delivering on his key pledge made during the 2016 Brexit referen-

dum campaign while continuing a rapid roll-out of domestic policies. His administration has promised to hire 20,000 more police officers and to boost infrastructure spending, including on railways. It's all part of what the government is calling economic "boosterism" as it prepares to take the U.K. out of the European Union -- with or without a deal -- on Oct. 31. But ramping up public spending is also a typical tactic for governments ...**(More on P4)...(16)**

Iran Seizes Foreign Oil Tanker Smuggling Fuel in Persian Gulf - State Media

TEHRAN - Iran has seized a foreign tanker "smuggling" fuel to "some Arab states", Iran's state TV reported. The development is the latest escalation in tension in the Persian Gulf.

The tanker was seized by the Islamic Republic Guard Corps (IRGC), the powerful Iranian paramilitary force. An IRGC commander was cited as saying that the tanker had 700,000 liters of fuel on board. The report said the seven crew members



have been arrested by the Iranian authorities. It is the third foreign tanker seized by Iran in the Gulf of Oman in the past several weeks. One of the ships had links with the United

Arab Emirates while another one was British-flagged. The seizures started after a supertanker carrying Iranian crude was detained by the British authorities over an alleged attempt to deliver its cargo to Syria in violation of EU sanctions. Tehran called the seizure an act of piracy and warned that it would retaliate. **(RT)**

Mexican Oil Company Offers Employees 'Healthy Incentive' Bonus for Weight Loss, Report Says



MEXICO CITY - Mexico's state-run oil company is reportedly offering more money to employees who meet new body

standards. Under a new collective bargaining contract with its union, Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex)

is giving its workers a "health incentive" of \$287 a year if they meet certain body mass index (BMI) thresholds and have a waist size under a specific circumference. To qualify for the health bonus, Pemex employees are required to have a BMI of 25 or less, while having a maximum waist of 35 inches for men and 31 inches for women, according to Bloomberg. Workers who are overweight and decrease their weight by 10 percent annually will also get the bonus.

Doctors argue Pemex's policy could actually cause weight gain instead of weight loss because of the shame it might bring employees who can't meet the required thresholds. "This is an uninformed policy," said Dr. Scott Kahan, director of the National Center for Weight and Wellness, told Bloomberg. "It's inconsistent with the science of what we know about body weight regulation and it's tone-deaf to progress being made in ...**(More on P4)...(13)**

Pope Encourages Priests Disheartened by Sex Abuse Fallout

VATICAN CITY - Pope Francis on Sunday sent a new letter to priests worldwide offering encouragement in light of the global sex abuse scandal that has shaken the Roman Catholic Church. In a nearly 5,000-word letter sent on the feast day of St. John Vianney, patron of parish priests, the pope on Sunday acknowledged the "pain" of priests who "feel themselves attacked and blamed for crimes they did not commit." The pontiff said that

priests have shared with him "their outrage at what happened, and their frustration that 'for all their hard work, they have to face the damage that was one, the suspicion and uncertainty to which it has given rise, and the doubts, fears and disheartenment felt by more than a few.'" Francis said "without denying or dismissing the harm" caused by the scandals, "it would be unfair not to express our gratitude" to ...**(More on P4)...(17)**

Egypt Begins Restoration on King Tut's Golden Coffin

CAIRO - Egypt says it has started the first-ever restoration on a gold-covered sarcophagus of the famed boy pharaoh Tutankhamun, ahead of the country's new museum opening next year. Antiquities Minister Khaled el-Anany told reporters Sunday that work on the outermost coffin, made of wood and gilded with gold, will take at least eight months. He says that's because "the state of conservation is very fragile, as it was never restored" since 1922, when British archaeologist Howard Carter discovered the intact 3,000-year-old tomb and the treasures it held. The coffin remained in the tomb until July, when it was moved to the new Grand Egyptian Museum, being built near the famed pyramids of Giza outside Cairo. **(AP)**

India's Central Bank Imposes Penalty on Eight Banks

NEW DELHI - India's central bank has imposed a penalty on eight public sector banks for violating norms on fraud classification, bill discounting and monitoring of end use of funds, according to a statement issued on Sunday. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) imposed the penalty ranging between one to two crore Indian Rupees (around 142,900 U.S. dollars to 285,700 U.S. dollars) on the banks. The Bank of Baroda, Bank of India, Indian Overseas Bank and Union Bank of India were fined 1.5 crore Indian Rupees (214,300 U.S. dollars) each, while Allahabad Bank and Bank of Maharashtra were penalised two crore Indian Rupees (285,700 U.S. dollars) each. **(Xinhua)**

UN Palestinian Refugee Agency Reels over Allegations of Sexual Misconduct, Nepotism

RAMALLAH - A U.N. Palestinian refugee agency is reeling from allegations of sexual misconduct and abuses of authority involving the agency chief and other senior management figures -- the latest controversy for the embattled agency that the U.S. withdrew funding from last year. The U.N. has launched an investigation via its internal watchdog into the allegations. The report, which was obtained by the Associated Press and was written by the agency's ethics office, alleges that senior management figures including UNRWA's



commissioner-general Pierre Krahenbuhl, "have engaged in sexual misconduct, nepotism, retaliation, discrimination and other abuses of authority." The report alleges that an "inner circle," involving Krahenbuhl, his deputy Sandra Mitchell,

Chief of Staff Hakam Shawan and senior adviser Maria Mohammedi had ignored the usual decision-making processes and sidelined other directors and staff. According to the AP, the report stated that Krahenbuhl had started a ...**(More on P4)...(14)**

Democrats Need to Remember: 2020 Won't be Decided by 2019's Debate Responses

WASHINGTON - It is as inevitable as new temperature records in an era of global warming. Every Democratic debate prompts a wailing wall of pundits and prognosticators lamenting how the party has lurched too far left to defeat Donald Trump. The debate formats accentuate the problem, with TV moderators stoking controversy with their questions and rigid time constraints (CNN in Detroit limited responses to 15 and 30 seconds) making every candidate sound shrill. Trailing candidates, des-

perate to qualify for the next debates, also have incentives to launch ideological attacks in hopes of creating a viral moment. Related: Biden came out to fight - and then the desperate brawlers turned on him | Richard Wolfe Yet the editorial page odes to dynamic moderation have some validity. In an ideal universe, the Democrats would be assembling a broad-based never-Trump alliance ranging from actual socialists to principled libertarians ...**(More on P4)...(15)**

Syrian President's Wife Says She Has Fully Recovered from Breast Cancer

BEIRUT - Asma al-Assad, wife of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, has fully recovered from breast cancer, she told state TV on Saturday, a year after it announced her diagnosis.

FILE PHOTO: Asma al-Assad, wife of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, reacts during the graduation ceremony of professors from Damascus University, who will work at the Syrian Organisation for Persons with Disabilities, in Damascus, Syria December 3, 2018. REUTERS/Omar Sanadiki/File Photo Since Syria plunged into war eight years ago, the 43-year-old former investment banker has taken on a public role of leading charity efforts and meeting families of killed soldiers, but has also become a hate figure for the opposition.

Activists and insurgents accuse Asma al-Assad, born in London to a family from Homs City, of being complicit in atrocities they accuse the Syrian government of committing. Her husband's enemies have dubbed her "the lady of death" while supporters praise her as "the jasmine of Damascus". The war has killed hundreds of thousands of people, uprooted at least 11 million, and created one of the world's worst refugee crises. A year ago, the Syrian presidency published a photo of Asma al-Assad hooked up to a drip, smiling and sitting next to her husband in a hospital room. It ...**(More on P4)...(18)**

Neighbor News

Iran's Zarif Sanctioned after Declining Trump Meet: Officials

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was hit with US sanctions after turning down an invitation to meet President Donald Trump, officials in the Islamic republic said on Sunday.

The New Yorker magazine reported on Friday that Senator Rand Paul met Zarif in the US on July 15 and had Trump's blessing when he extended an invitation to the Iranian minister to go to the White House. Officials in Iran confirmed the report on Sunday, heaping scorn on the Trump administration for claiming to want dialogue with Iran while slapping sanctions on its top diplomat.

"For a government to

constantly claim (to favour) negotiations and afterwards sanction the foreign minister... if this is not ridiculous, then what is it?" said foreign ministry spokesman Ali Rabiei. "In a meeting with a senator, he (Zarif) is invited to come to a meeting and then he is sanctioned," Rabiei said in remarks aired on state television.

"We believe that these sanctions show that the politicians of the White House have to some extent made a personal issue of affairs," he said, describing such behaviour as "childish".

On Wednesday the United States imposed sanctions against Zarif, effectively slamming the door on Iran's top diplomat. **(AFP)**

'Friend of Pakistan': DCM Chinese Embassy Lijian Zhao Leaving

ISLAMABAD - Deputy Chief of Mission Chinese Embassy Islamabad, Lijian Zhao has been transferred and posted in Beijing head office after serving for four years.

DCM and Minister Counsellor Pang Chunxue has replaced him at the embassy. "Thanks a million for your great support during my 4 years," said Zhao.

Lijian Zhao, one of the most active Chinese diplomats on social media, has fought negative propaganda against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor all these years in Pakistan when there was too much criticism in the local media. Termed as 'a true friend

of Pakistan' by his admirers and supporters, he has massive 184.7K followers on Twitter.

"You are a great friend of Pakistan & were an imp member of the team that successfully steered Phase 1 of #CPEC," said former minister Ahsan Iqbal who was the key Pakistani official overseeing CPEC projects.

"It was a great pleasure knowing you & working with you to see CPEC become a reality," Iqbal further added.

He also countered Western media on their 'biased' reporting on Chinese internal affairs especially human rights issues concerning Chinese Muslims in Xinjiang. **(Agencies)**

Tajikistan Embarks on New Search for Roghun Funds

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan is hoisting the white flag over its do-or-die giant hydropower project and admitting it will not be able to finish the job without foreign aid.

Finance Minister Faiziddin Kakhorzoda told Asia-Plus newspaper on August 2 that the government has now created a special commission dedicated to sourcing funds for the construction of the 335-meter-high Roghun dam. Despite the apparent apprehension over money, Kakhorzoda has said that Dushanbe is intent on completing the \$3.9 billion project

within previously announced deadlines. The current target date is 2033.

RFE/RL's Tajik service, Radio Ozodi, has reported that the government has earmarked 1.8 billion somoni (\$191 million) toward work on Roghun this year. Of those, around \$148 million are being taken out of what remains from the funds raised through the \$500 million worth of Eurobonds sold in 2017.

The bond sale was orchestrated by Jamolidin Nuraliyev, the deputy chairman of the National Bank and son-in-law of the president. **(Trend)**

Pakistan PM Imran Khan Convenes NSC Meeting

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan convened a meeting of the National Security Committee on Sunday to discuss issues pertaining to national security in the wake of developments in the region. Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Information and Broadcasting Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan announced this in a series of tweets on Sunday.

Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi on Sunday asked Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Secretary General Dr. Yousuf Ahmed Al-Othaimen to take notice of the situation in Kashmir, state-run Radio Pakistan reported. Secretary General of OIC assured the Foreign Minister for taking notice on situation and to extend full cooperation. Earlier Sunday, chairing an emergency consultative meeting at the Foreign Office in Islamabad, Qureshi alleged that Indian "designs are an attempt to disrupt the regional peace." **(Agencies)**