

EU Wants Brexit Transition to End December 2020

BRUSSELS - The European Commission said Wednesday that it wanted a post-Brexit transition period, during which Britain must continue to obey EU rules, to finish at the end of 2020.

The EU's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said Britain would have to remain part of the bloc's single market and pay into its budget during that period, despite losing all its voting rights.

British Prime Minister Theresa May had indicated that she wanted a longer transition time of about two years after Britain formally leaves the EU



on March 29, 2019 -- three months longer than the proposed EU deadline. The development comes after EU leaders signed off last week on the first stage of Brexit negotiations, ending more than a year of stalemate over Britain's bill for leaving the bloc, as well as the fate of the Irish border and EU expatriates. "From our point of view the logical end should be December 21, 2020," Barnier said at a press conference in Brussels as he presented the new Brexit negotiating guidelines produced by the commission, the EU's executive arm. (AFP)

Neighbor News

China Says New EU Anti-Dumping Methodology Violates WTO Rules

BEIJING - China's Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said Wednesday the European Union's new anti-dumping methodology violates World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. China hopes the EU will strictly abide by WTO rules and fulfill its duties in a well-intentioned and comprehensive way, the MOC said in a statement.

"Only by safeguarding the authority of multilateral trade systems can the common interests of all countries be served," the statement said. The EU on Tuesday officially released new anti-dumping rules that remove the former distinction between "market and non-market economies" for calculating dumping. Instead, the rules require proving the existence of a "significant market distortion"

between a product's sale price and its production cost.

The notion of "significant market distortion" makes it possible for the EU to take the surrogate country approach, which allows using prices and production costs in a third country or on the international market to calculate the value of products from the exporting country.

The MOC said the new methodology lacks support from WTO rules and weakens the authority of the WTO anti-dumping legal system, noting that there is no such concept of "significant market distortion" in WTO rules.

China reserves its rights under the WTO dispute settlement mechanism and will take necessary measures to protect its legitimate interests, the MOC said. (Xinhua)

Govt to Complete its Term; Elections to be Held in July 2018: PM

FAISALABAD - Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Wednesday categorically stated the PML-N government would complete its term and the general election would be held on July 15, 2018. He was addressing the ground-breaking ceremony of Hyundai car plant here. The car assembly plant is a joint venture of Nishat Mills Limited (NML), one of the largest integrated textiles mills in the country, and Hyundai Motor Corporation (HMC) of South Korea. The NML's joint venture will produce HMC passenger cars and 1-ton range commercial vehicles in Pakistan.

He highlighted the PML-N government's achievements over the last few years particularly in the area of energy and said a number of electricity generation projects were installed, which addressed the issue of electricity shortage. The Prime Minister also mentioned the constructions of roads, highways and motorways across the country as well as the establishment of gas terminals during the last four and a half years and said, the present government did not just utter words but delivered.

(Monitoring Desk)

Iran, Turkey to Expand Anti-Terror Cooperation

TEHRAN - Iranian Deputy Interior Minister Hossein Zolfagari underlined that Tehran and Ankara have many capacities to broaden their mutual cooperation in the security fields. Zolfagari made the remarks after his meetings with Turkish security officials on Tuesday.

Two countries which existed before," he added. He underlined that so far a series of joint issues like terrorist issues, human trafficking, arms trafficking, alcoholic drinks smuggling have been discussed during expert level meetings held in Iran and Turkey. Zolfagari pointed to the important results at the latest meetings, and said, "We reached a mechanism for cooperation regarding the mentioned issues that did not exist before, and the duties of the security commissions of the two countries were clarified and approved." (FNA)

Uzbekistan-Tajikistan Trade Turnover Jumps up

TASHKENT - Tajikistan's foreign trade turnover has increased since early 2017, and the highest growth was recorded in bilateral trade with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Tajik media reported. Since early 2017, the trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan jumped up by 85 percent, exceeding \$110 million. During the 11 months of this year, Tajikistan's foreign trade

turnover amounted to about \$ 3.6 billion. Furthermore, Russia and Kazakhstan remain the main trading partners of Tajikistan. The volume of the Tajik-Russian turnover was \$ 843 million, and the Tajik-Kazakh turnover was \$754 million. In 2016, the total volume of trade turnover between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan increased almost sixfold, to about \$70 million. (Trend)

Syria's FM Accuses U.S. of Supporting Terrorism in Syria

DAMASCUS - Syria's Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem on Tuesday accused the United States of supporting the terror groups in Syria to prolong the crisis and undermine the victories of the Syrian army, according to state news agency SANA. The U.S. is supporting the terror groups in Syria to prolong the crisis and serve the interests and agendas of the Zionist entity, al-Moallem said during a People's Assembly session.

Al-Moallem added that the "Zionist entity," or

Israel, doesn't want to see the Syrian army triumphing in the war on terror, stressing that the U.S. cannot distort the victories of the Syrian army in their battles against the Islamic State (IS). The head of the Syrian diplomacy, meanwhile, made it clear that it's too soon to declare full victory.

"There are people who say that the victory has been achieved with the defeat of IS, but in fact, it's still too soon to speak about victory," al-Moallem said. (Xinhua)

Assad Says West's Economic Siege Worsens Humanitarian Crisis in Syria

DAMASCUS - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said on Tuesday the economic siege imposed on Syria by the West has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Syria, amid an outcry by humanitarian organizations regarding the situation in a rebel-held area east of the capital Damascus.

"The economic siege, as well as the terrorist war, waged on Syria has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the country," Assad said during his meeting with Francesco Rocca, the president of the In-

ternational Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), in the capital Damascus.

The Syrian president stressed that the government with all of its institutions is working to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people as a result of the "crimes and inhuman actions committed by the terrorist groups." Assad also spoke of the importance of boosting the cooperation between the Syrian government and the IFRC during the crisis.

The president's remarks



came amid an international outcry for the situation in the rebel-held Eastern Ghouta region in the eastern countryside of Damascus, where fighting has intensified recently between the government

and the rebels. A day earlier, the ICRC said in a statement that it was alarmed by intensifying fighting in Eastern Ghouta, as it "is taking an unacceptable toll on everyday life in the area. (Xinhua)

U.S. House Passes Final Republican Tax Bill; Senate to Vote Next



WASHINGTON - The U.S. House of Representatives on Tuesday passed the final Republican bill to overhaul the tax system in three decades, which would slash income taxes for corporates and indi-

viduals while widening American budget deficit and income inequality. The Republican-controlled House approved the legislation, called the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, by a vote of 227-203, with all Demo-

crats and 12 Republicans voting against it. Now the bill heads to the Senate, where lawmakers were due to have a final vote Tuesday evening.

While Republicans have a majority of 52 seats in the Senate, they can only afford to lose two votes of senators to pass the tax bill without any support from Democrats. The House and Senate Republicans had separately passed their own versions of tax bill several weeks ago, and they came to an agreement on resolving their differences in the tax bill last week. The final tax

legislation would keep the seven individual income tax brackets, while lowering the top individual income rate to 37 percent from the current 39.6 percent. It would also cut the corporate income tax rate to 21 percent from the current 35 percent and create a 20-percent deduction for income of pass-through businesses such as limited liability companies. Overhauling the tax code is a top priority for the Trump administration and congressional Republicans before next year's mid-term elections. (Xinhua)

Freeing Mosul from Islamic State Left 9,000+ Civilians Dead

SEOUL - South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Monday that his state visit to China last week had set a foundation for a full-scale cooperation and relations between the two countries. Moon told a meeting with his senior secretaries that his four-day visit to China was very fruitful as it set a foundation for the full-scale cooperation and normalized ties between South Korea and China in all areas including politics and security as well as economy. Moon said his China tour

last week had a great meaning as it completed South Korea's urgent assignment of diplomacy before the end of this year.

Through this visit, Moon said, South Korea and China established a firm, mature strategic cooperative partnership that will not be wavered by external factors.

He asked politicians both in the ruling and opposition parties as well as the media and the general public to support the government's position. (Xinhua)

Freeing Mosul from Islamic State Left 9,000+ Civilians Dead

MOSUL, Iraq - Between 9,000 and 11,000 people were killed in the nine-month battle to liberate the Iraqi city of Mosul from the Islamic State group - a civilian casualty rate nearly 10 times higher than has been previously reported, an Associated Press investigation has found.

The deaths are acknowledged neither by the coalition, the Iraqi government nor the IS' self-styled caliphate.

Iraqi or coalition forces are responsible for at least 3,200 civilian deaths from airstrikes, artillery fire or mortar rounds between October 2016 and the fall of IS in July 2017, according to the AP investigation, which cross-referenced morgue lists and multiple databases from non-governmental organizations. Most of those victims are simply described as "crushed" in health ministry reports. The coalition, which did not send anyone into Mosul to investigate, acknowledges responsibility for only 326 of the deaths. "It was the biggest assault on a city in a couple of generations, all told. And thousands died," said Chris Woods, head of Airwars, an independent organization that documents air and artillery strikes in Iraq and Syria and shared its database with AP. "There doesn't seem to be any disagreement about that, except from the federal government and the coalition. And understanding how those civilians died, and obviously ISIS played a big part in that as well, could help save a lot of lives the next time something like this has to happen. And the disinterest in any sort of investigation is very disheartening," Woods said, using an alternative acronym for IS. In addition to the Airwars database, the AP analyzed information from Amnesty International, Iraq Body Count and a United Nations report. (AP)

US Urges UN to Punish Iran, but Russia Says No Sanctions

UNITED NATIONS - U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley urged the Security Council on Tuesday to punish Iran for what the Trump administration calls its "dangerous violations" of U.N. resolutions and "destabilizing behavior," while Russia said dialogue is needed rather than threats or sanctions.



Haley told a council meeting on implementation of the resolution that endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran that in the coming days the U.S. will explore a number of options with council members to pressure the Iranians "to adjust their behavior." Haley said the

council could strengthen the resolution, adopt a new one to prohibit all Iranian ballistic missile activity, explore sanctions "in response to its clear violation of the Yemen arms embargo," and hold the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps accountable for violating numerous

council resolutions. While the United States "continues to uphold its commitments" under the nuclear agreement, she said the international community must take action to address Iranian actions such as its arms sales, ballistic missile launches and support for terrorism. (AP)

White House Says Trump Accepts Invitation to Visit Britain, Defends Trump on Russia

WASHINGTON - White House spokesperson Sarah Sanders said here Tuesday that U.S. President Donald Trump has accepted an invitation by British Prime Minister Theresa May to visit her nation and the president has been "tough" on Moscow. According to the White House, Trump called May earlier on Tuesday, the first since their twitter dispute, and the two leaders "exchanged holiday greetings and warm wishes for Christmas and the New Year." They

also discussed next steps in forging peace in the Middle East. The "special relationship" between Trump and May has been questioned in recent weeks following the U.S. president's retweeting of several videos clips posted by a British far-right group. May said Trump's decision was wrong and Trump responded by asking her to take care of her nation. British parliament members have urged May not to invite Trump for a state visit next year. (Xinhua)

EU Executive Moves to Punish Poland over Court Reforms

BRUSSELS - The EU executive launched an unprecedented process on Wednesday to suspend Poland's voting rights in the European Union after two years of dispute over judicial reforms that Brussels says undermine Polish courts' independence.

The European Commission, the guardian of EU law, will now ask the other EU governments to declare that Poland's changes to the judiciary constitute "a clear risk of a serious breach" of EU values - especially the rule of law. However, it gave Warsaw, where a new prime minister took office only this month, three months to remedy the situation and said it could rescind its decision if it did so. Often referred to as the EU's "nuclear option", the move carries the ultimate threat of sanctions but is in fact unlikely to result in that. "The Commission has today concluded that there is a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law in Poland," the Commission said in a statement.

"Judicial reforms in Poland mean that the country's judiciary is now under the political control of the ruling majority. In the absence of judicial independence, serious questions are raised about the effective application of EU law." The Commission's deputy head, First Vice President Frans Timmermans, who has conducted talks with the Polish government dominated by Law and Justice Party leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski for the past two years, said he was acting "with a heavy heart" but was obliged to take action to protect the Union as a whole. (Reuters)