

Trump, Erdogan Stress Commitment to Combatting Terrorism

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed Tuesday their shared commitment to combatting terrorism in all its forms, the White House said.

In a telephone call between the two leaders, Trump reiterated U.S. support for Turkey as a strategic partner and NATO ally, and welcomed Turkey's contributions to the campaign against the Islamic State (IS) group, the White House said in a statement.

The U.S.-Turkish relationship became strained near the end of the Obama Administration due to a row over the extradition of U.S.-based cleric Fetul-



lah Gulen, whom Ankara has accused of being the mastermind of a failed coup attempt last July.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim urged Trump to extradite Gulen when congratulating him on winning the U.S. presidential election last November, noting "a new page" would be opened in bilateral ties if Gulen is extradited to Turkey.

On Tuesday, Trump also spoke by phone with Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to reaffirm the strong bilateral partnership across a range of mutual interests.

Trump and Rajoy discussed shared priorities, including efforts ... (More on P4)...(23)

UK's House of Commons Set to Pass Bill Authorizing Brexit

LONDON - Britain's House of Commons is set to approve a bill authorizing the start of exit talks with the European Union - a major step on the road to Brexit.

The bill sailed through an earlier vote last week 498-114 and is very likely to pass its final Commons test Wednesday evening, keeping the government's March timetable to trigger EU exit talks on track.

The vote comes after three days of debate in which pro-EU lawmakers tried to pass amendments guaranteeing Parliament a bigger role in the divorce

process.

They hope to prevent an economy-shocking "hard Brexit," in which Britain loses full access to the EU's single market and faces restrictions or tariffs on trade.

The amendments were defeated, but the government appeared to bow to opposition pressure Tuesday, promising lawmakers they will get to vote on an exit deal before it is finalized by the bloc. Labour Party Brexit spokesman Keir Starmer said opponents of Brexit "haven't got everything we ... (More on P4)...(24)

Germany Mulling Meeting with Russia, Ukraine, France on Ukraine Crisis

BERLIN - Germany is in talks with its partners about organizing a meeting between Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany on the Ukraine crisis on the sidelines of a meeting of G20 foreign ministers in Bonn next week, a foreign ministry spokesman said on Wednesday.

"We are conducting talks in the Normandy format with our partners in Paris, Moscow, Kiev about the usefulness, political usefulness and logistical fea-

sibility of such a meeting. It is too early for me to confirm it, but it is possible that it could come to that," said the spokesman.

He added that Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel believed it would be a good idea to organize a meeting of the four foreign ministers soon to give new impetus to the implementation of the Minsk ceasefire agreement and to calm down the violence in eastern Ukraine. (Reuters)

Assad Says Possible Russia-U.S. Cooperation Positive for Syria

DAMASCUS - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said a cooperation between Russia and the United States would be positive, not only for Syria, but the entire world as well, state news agency SANA reported on Tuesday.

Speaking to Belgium reporters in Damascus, Assad said the remarks of U.S. President Donald Trump were "promising," as Trump regarded the war on terror, mainly the Islamic State (IS) group, in his presidential campaign, while also noted that it's

still too soon to judge such remarks.

He said that prioritizing fighting terror as mentioned by Trump was what the Syrian government has been calling for since the beginning of the war in Syria six years ago. Assad's remarks came as President Trump has made clear in his campaign that he would cooperate with Russia in the war on terror, but that hasn't been materialized yet, at least publicly.

Russia also seems to favor Trump over his processor,



pertaining to the need to put an end to the growing threat of the terror-designated groups in Syria. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Tuesday that his country believes that the efforts of the Trump administration in fighting terrorism will be more efficient than that of ... (More on P4)...(25)

Polish, German Leaders Discuss Future EU

WARSAW - Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydlo and German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Tuesday discussed respective visions for the future of EU on Tuesday.

"Poland and Germany are two important countries which cooperate with each other. We want to deepen this partnership cooperation," Szydlo said in a press conference following a meeting with Merkel.

Szydlo said a good partnership between Poland and Germany was essential for the success of the European project. Szydlo expressed

gratitude to Germany for its commitment to implementing the resolutions of last year's Warsaw NATO summit. "Reinforcing NATO's eastern flank is extremely important from the point of view of security in our region of Europe, but also from the point of view of global security," Szydlo said. Underling caution when it comes to any changes in the EU treaty, Merkel said she partly shared Szydlo's ideas regarding the internal market, energy union, defense and border protection. "The European Union



needs unity and consistency in relations with the United States. Good transatlantic relations are in the vital interests of Europe," Szydlo said. Both leaders opted for prolongation of sanctions against Russia, claiming that the Minsk agreement has not been fulfilled. Szydlo also said the planned Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline between Russia and Germany was unacceptable to Poland. (Xinhua)

UN Chief "Deeply Regrets" Israeli Adoption of Bill to Retroactively Legalize Settlements in West Bank

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday said that he "deeply regrets" that Israel adopted a bill late Monday that would retroactively legalize Jewish settlements on privately owned Palestinian land.

He stressed that "the bill is in contravention of international law and will have far reaching legal consequences for Israel."

The secretary-general deeply regrets the adoption of the so called "Reg-



ularisation bill" on Feb. 6 by the Knesset -- the Israeli legislature, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said at a daily news brief-

ing here. The spokesman said "it reportedly provides immunity to settlements and ... (More on P4)...(26)

France's Fillon Makes Appeal to Voters, Retains Party Backing

PARIS - Conservative French presidential candidate Francois Fillon appealed to voters on Wednesday via a newspaper column to back his campaign, trying to claw back support after losing his place as front-runner over accusations of fake jobs for his family. Fillon has managed to stem a rebellion within his party, partly for lack of a clear "plan B", but plunging popularity ratings show the 62-year-old, who pegged his campaign on an image of integrity, faces an uphill battle to convince voters.

"I have nothing to hide," Fillon said in his letter to voters. "Everything was legal." "Nothing will divert me from the real aim of my presidential campaign: set France back upright and bring the French together," he said. "It's up to you and only you to decide." Opinion polls show Fillon, a clear favorite until the ... (More on P4)...(27)

Russia-Backed Syrian Troops Advance Against IS

MOSCOW - Syrian government troops supported by Russian warplanes have successfully eliminated Islamic State targets and liberated a large territory, a Russian military official said Tuesday. "Since start of the year, 4,608 terrorist facilities have been destroyed," the chief of the Russian General Staff Main Operational Directorate Lt. Gen. Sergei Rudskoy said at a news briefing in Moscow.

He said Syrian government troops had expelled IS militants from 35 settlements in the northern province of Aleppo and liberated more than 300 square km of territory.

Russia's Tu-22M3 long-range bombers have destroyed 34 terrorist targets near the eastern city of Deir Ezzor, thus "undermining their combat readiness and demoralizing their detachments," Rudskoy said.

Russia has cut the number of airstrikes and withdrawn the majority of its troops since December when it brokered a cessation of hostilities in Syria, but Rudskoy said the country's air force will continue to support anti-terrorist missions.

Earlier on Tuesday, some media said that "what were believed to be Russian jets" killed at least 15 people and wounded many others in an offensive against the terrorist-held Syrian city of Idlib.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. General Igor Konashenkov denied the report, saying that no Russian aircraft has attacked Idlib since the beginning of 2017. (Xinhua)

Turkey Coordinating Troop Movements in Syria with Russia

BEIRUT - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's spokesman says Turkey is in talks with Russia to coordinate troop movements around northern Syria to avoid any encounter with the Syrian military. Syrian government forces and Turkish-backed opposition fighters are in a race to seize the town of al-Bab from the Islamic State group.

Turkish and Syrian forces have so far avoided direct conflict, despite hostile rhetoric between Erdogan and Syrian President Bashar Assad. The twin offensives put the two forces within 3 kilometers (2 miles) of ... (More on P4)...(28)

US Appeals Court Hears Argument, Withholds Immediate Decision on Trump Travel Ban

SAN FRANCISCO - A U.S. federal appeals court heard oral arguments Tuesday about one of President Donald Trump's executive orders but withheld an immediate decision on the travel ban imposed on citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries. A three-judge panel from the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals questioned August E. Flentje, special counsel to the assistant U.S. attorney general on behalf of the Trump administration, and Noah G. Purcell, solicitor general of Washington State, on behalf of the states of Washington and Minnesota. As Flentje reiterated

that it is the president's authority to limit the entry of foreign nationals on national security grounds, the judges asked him to provide evidence connecting those barred from entry with terrorism.

The representative of Washington and Minnesota states was also grilled by judges over the two states' defiance of Trump's travel ban. One judge asked Purcell if the Seattle judge's suspension of Trump's ban was "overbroad."

Purcell alleged the travel ban was unconstitutional because it was motivated to target people with ... (More on P4)...(29)

Neighbor News

China Invites Britain to Attend New Silk Road Summit

BEIJING - China has invited British Prime Minister Theresa May to attend a major summit in May on its "One Belt, One Road" initiative to build a new Silk Road, diplomatic sources told Reuters, as London said she would visit China this year.

"One Belt, One Road" is Chinese President Xi Jinping's landmark programme to invest billions of dollars in infrastructure projects including railways, ports and power grids across Asia, Africa and Europe. China has dedicated \$40 billion to a Silk Road Fund and the idea was the driving force behind the establishment of the \$50b China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China has so far given

few details about who will attend the summit, to be held in Beijing.

The country's top diplomat, State Councillor Yang Jiechi, told the official China Daily last week that leaders from about 20 countries have confirmed their participation, representing Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America, though he did not give names. One Beijing-based diplomatic source with direct knowledge of the invite list told Reuters that May was among the leaders who had been invited.

"China is choosing the countries it sees as friends and who will be most influential in promoting 'One Belt, One Road'," said the source, speaking on condition of anonymity. (Reuters)

UK, ADB Extend Support to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD - The government of Pakistan has kicked-off a two-year project to formulate a "National Transport Policy" which will cover railways, roads, ports and shipping, aviation and logistics services.

The project seeks to create a safe, efficient and sustainable transport system to realise Pakistan's Vision 2025. Pakistan envisages a comprehensive national transport policy and a master plan that will help cut travel time and costs. It will boost the country's economic outlook by positioning Pakistan as a regional hub for trade and business.

The government of the United Kingdom through its Department for International Development

(DFID) is funding this project under its Pakistan Economic Corridors Programme (PECP). The project will be administered by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The National Transport Policy complements co-financing by the DFID and the ADB for roads in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. The DFID and the ADB are also supporting Sindh and Punjab to develop more commercially viable public-private partnerships to meet Pakistan's infrastructure needs.

At the project's inception workshop held in Islamabad, DFID Pakistan Head Joanna Reid and ADB Country Director Werner ... (More on P4)...(30)

Iran Says Ready to Cooperate with Saudi Arabia to Stabilize Oil Market

TEHRAN - Iran expressed its readiness to hold talks with Saudi Arabia to stabilize the oil market, Press TV quoted Iran's Minister of Petroleum Bijan Namdar Zanganeh as saying on Wednesday.

Zanganeh hailed major oil producers' adherence to their oil quota commitments, subject to last year's November agreement, and said that the market's reaction to OPEC and non-OPEC members' production cuts are "positive." "OPEC members' commitment to cutting production has been very good and the trend continues. Non-OPEC mem-

bers have also started decreasing output and we hope they will quickly reach the figures they committed to," he was quoted as saying.

In their meeting last November, OPEC members unanimously agreed on the oil price of 60 U.S. dollars per barrel, hence they agreed to cut output by 1.2 million bpd down to 32.5 million bpd for the first six months of 2017. He added that non-OPEC members including Russia, Oman and Mexico also agreed to cut 558,000 bpd off their production. "If the current trend continues, we predict that the oil ... (More on P4)...(31)

US Launches Program to Support Land Reform Efforts in Tajikistan

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Ambassador Elisabeth Millard attended a launch ceremony for the new \$9.7 million Feed the Future Tajikistan Land

Market Development Activity Project in Tajikistan, reports the U.S. Embassy. The ceremony was also attended by key stakeholders and other counterparts who make significant contributions to promote land use rights, including Rajabzoda, Chairman of State Committee for Land Management and Geodesy of the Republic of Tajikistan, as well as representatives from Parliament and the Govern-

ment of the Republic of Tajikistan, and the U.S. Embassy. The project will continue through August 2020.

In Tajikistan, access to land is a fundamental right, and the productive use of agricultural land is a key economic driver. Advancing growth in the agriculture sector holds the potential to reduce poverty and improve food security in rural areas of the country. However, without a functioning land market, recent gains in land reform may stall as farmers are not able to obtain new land or sell land that they no ... (More on P4)...(32)