

IMF Official Warns of Youth Unemployment, Social Tensions in Arab World

DUBAI - Arab youth unemployment is the highest in the world, said International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Christine Lagarde here on Saturday, warning of dissatisfaction and a rise in social tensions.

Lagarde made the remarks at the third Arab Fiscal Forum, mentioning the Arab youth unemployment at an average of 25 percent. "This could easily lead to dissatisfaction, a rise in social tensions, and a collapse in social trust," he said.

"Over 27 million hopeful young people will join the workplace over the next five years, anxious to be included," she added. However, "so far their aspirations are unfulfilled, and their



understandable frustration is compounded by perceived unfairness."

The former French Minister of Finance quoted a survey which "found that more than 60 percent of people believe that connections matter far more than qualifications for getting a job," pointing at the Arabic culture of "wasta," which describes the supportive culture of tribal and family relations.

This system "reduces incentives to invest in skills and knowledge," she said. "It can magnify the sense of dissatisfaction, distrust, and resentment -- and it is ultimately self-defeating." (Xinhua)

Russia Scrubs Cargo Ship Launch to Space Station

MOSCOW - Russia has scrubbed the planned launch of an unmanned cargo spacecraft that was to have delivered tons of supplies to the International Space Station. Preparations for the launch of the Progress ship from the Baikonur complex in Kazakhstan appeared to be proceeding smoothly Sunday until less than a minute before the liftoff.

Roscosmos, the Russian space agency, said the launch was halted after an auto-

mated command, but said the reason for the command was under investigation. It said the launch is rescheduled for Tuesday.

The Russian spacecraft carry fuel, food and other supplies to the ISS. This one was to have attempted a new fast route to the station, docking just 3.5 hours after launch after just two Earth orbits.

There are six astronauts aboard the ISS -- two Russians, three Americans and one from Japan. (AP)

UK Economy Continues Stable Growth despite Brexit Uncertainties

LONDON - The British economy continues to show stable growth, with the uncertainties around Brexit failing to blunt GDP expansion, according to a report issued on Friday afternoon.

The British economy grew by 0.5 percent over the three months up to the end of January, according to figures from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR).

The NIESR, an independent London-based economic think-tank,



said in its latest report that British economic activity picked up in the second half of 2017 after a period of subdued

growth in the first half of the year. The recovery was driven by both the manufacturing and the service sectors, sup-

ported by a buoyant global economy, while construction output continued to lag, the report said. (Xinhua)

Turkey, U.S. Discuss Sensitive Issues in Ties in Istanbul



ISTANBUL - Turkish president's security and foreign policy adviser Ibrahim Kalin has met with U.S. National Security Adviser Herbert

Raymond McMaster in Istanbul and discussed in detail issues that are hurting bilateral ties, Turkish media reported on Sunday.

Joint efforts against terrorism, long-term strategic partnership between Turkey and the United States, and the latest developments in the region were among topics under discussion, the Hurriyet daily said.

The meeting came as Turkey

has been fighting for Afrin, a district in northwestern Syria being held by U.S.-backed Kurdish militia known as People's

Protection Units (YPG), since Jan. 20, and Ankara has threatened to move on to target YPG-held Manbij, while Washington has refused to withdraw its troops from the town as demanded by its NATO ally.

As part of efforts to ease tension in bilateral ties and avoid a direct confrontation in Syria, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is expected to visit Ankara in the coming days, while Turkish and U.S. defense ministers are scheduled to meet in Brussels next week. (Xinhua)

Turkey Slams Cyprus for Gas Search, Blocks Rig with Warships

NICOSIA, Cyprus - Turkey's foreign ministry criticized Cyprus again Sunday for a "unilateral" offshore hydrocarbons search after Turkish warships prevented an Italian rig from reaching an area off the east Mediterranean island nation where it was to start exploratory drilling for gas. Turkish warships on Friday stopped a rig belonging to the Italian energy firm ENI as it headed toward an area southeast of Cyprus. Turkey, in a statement Sunday, said Greek Cypriots were

disregarding the "inalienable rights on natural resources" of Turkish Cypriots and jeopardizing the region's stability. Turkey's foreign ministry said the Cyprus government was acting like "the sole owner of the island" and warned it would be responsible for any consequences. It also urged foreign companies not to support the Cyprus' government's activities. Only Turkey recognizes a Turkish Cypriot declaration of independence and keeps more than 35,000 troops in the north. (AP)

Feisal: Fight against Abuse Should Match Anti-Doping Effort

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea - Prince Feisal of Jordan says the fight against harassment and sexual abuse in sports should share equal footing with work to prevent doping.

An IOC member, Feisal leads an effort by the Olympic body to protect athletes, many of whom come from countries that offer few safeguards.

"Yes, it is important," Feisal told a small group of reporters at the Pyeongchang Olympics. "Is it more important than doping? I think it should be equal to doping, but not many people see that right now."

Feisal said the sexual abuse scandal involving former USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar illustrates how little protection athletes have. "The current scandal begs the question: Why aren't we doing more?" he said.

"Maybe you need a tragedy like this for people to use it as a wake-up call. Unfortunately, a few months ago nobody even considered that this was going to be such a major issue." The Jordanian royal said the United States "is a country that should have had everything to prevent this from happening -- and yet it happened. Imagine countries and federations who've got nothing," Feisal said the International Olympic Committee began several years ago supporting federations and national Olympic committees "to make sure they have regulations and procedures in place" to protect athletes.

"In some cultures talking about harassment is taboo," Feisal said. He compared it with talking openly about cancer a few generations ago. "Nobody wanted to talk about it," he added. "Now it's no longer something people are ashamed of."

The IOC has a so-called "safeguarding officer" in Pyeongchang to monitor any abuse, the follow-up to a similar, but quickly prepared program at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics. (AP)

Russian Plane with 71 People Onboard Crashed

MOSCOW - The local emergency services are checking the information about the Russian An-148 that allegedly crashed in Moscow region, a source in emergency services told Sputnik.

"The plane crashed near the village of Argunovo. Passengers as well as the crew could hardly survive," the source said, adding that the plane disappeared from radars two minutes after departure.

"It is in the field in the Ramensky District. Rescuers have not reached the scene yet," the source said, adding that the aircraft was detected



from air. According to a Sputnik source, there were 65 people onboard of the missing plane and six crew members. The plane went down in Ramenskoye District, in the Moscow region, the Russian emergency ministry told CNN.

"The snow is very dense ... the Moscow region has had some of its

heaviest snowfall in decades," CNN's Matthew Chance reported from Moscow. "It's not clear at this stage whether weather was factor in this crash."

While the cause of the crash remains uncertain, the Investigative Committee of Russia said officials have launched a criminal investigation. (Trend)

British PM May to Set Out 'Road to Brexit' in Speech

LONDON - British Prime Minister Theresa May will make two speeches on Brexit in the coming weeks to provide more details setting out the country's path to leaving the European Union.

Britain is hoping to seal a transition deal next month to smooth its exit from the EU, and reach agreement on a long-term trade agreement later this year. However, Brussels said last week a transition deal was not a certainty and that London needed to clarify what it wanted from the EU. May's government will aim to address that in a series of six speeches

by the prime minister and other senior ministers in the next few weeks, which her office dubbed "The Road to Brexit".

"Brexit is a defining moment in the history of our nation," a source in May's office said. "As we move along the road to that future, we will set out more detail so people can see how this new relationship will benefit communities in every part of our country." May's first speech, to be delivered at a conference in Munich next Saturday, will set out the security relationship Britain wants with the EU. (Reuters)

India's Modi in UAE to Boost Ties with Gulf Arab States

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi started the second day of his visit to the United Arab Emirates on Sunday by unveiling a model of the first Hindu temple that will be built in the UAE capital of Abu Dhabi, a testament to the stronger ties that both countries seek.

Standing on stage at the Dubai Opera, Modi spoke before hundreds of diplomats and Indian expatriates about the historical ties linking India with the small, but oil-rich and increasingly influential UAE, where 3.3 million Indians reside - far outnumbering the country's own local population.

Around half of the Indians living in the UAE are lower-wage migrant laborers. Many hold construction jobs, building the UAE's dazzling skyscrapers and shopping centers. The UAE is also home to wealthy Indian investors, some of whom run the country's largest hospitals, schools and supermarkets.

India's cultural and economic influence on the UAE is so great that Dubai's daily English newspaper, Gulfnews, created a video on its website titled: "How Indian is the UAE?" The video explains that, for example, the UAE used to use Indian rupees before the local currency, the dirham, and that many locals still refer to one dirham as a "rubiya".

"Today, whether it's the UAE or other countries in the Arabian Gulf, our relationship is no longer just that of a buyer and seller, it's a partnership that's been built," Modi told the audience in Dubai. (AP)

Neighbor News

Iran Marks Anniversary of Islamic Revolution after Protests

TEHRAN - Hundreds of thousands of Iranians rallied on the streets Sunday to mark the 39th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, just weeks after anti-government protests rocked cities across the country.

Demonstrators burned American and Israeli flags, as well as images of President Donald Trump, whose refusal to re-certify the nuclear deal with world powers has riled Iranians. A few burned a white sheet reading "BARJAM," the Farsi acronym for the 2015 nuclear accord that Tehran signed with world powers.

Such activities commonly mark the anniversary, which commemorates the overthrow of U.S.-backed Iranian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. That began a period of hostilities between Iran and the West, including an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and the

subsequent hostage crisis. However, President Hassan Rouhani made a point to call for unity among Iran's people across its political spectrum, from hard-liners backing the theocratic government to reformists demanding change.

"When the Revolution took place, we pushed some off the revolutionary train that we should have not," Rouhani told a massive crowd at Tehran's central Azadi Square. "Today, we have to let them board the train again." Rouhani didn't specifically name those pushed aside, though the Islamic Revolution and its aftermath saw the Islamists surrounding Ruhollah Khomeini purge liberals, communists and others. More recently, Iran has put leaders of its 2009 Green Movement under house arrest, where they remain even today despite Rouhani's pledges to free them. (AP)

Iranian, Uzbek Fms Mull Prospects of Bilateral Co-Op

Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Abdulaziz-Kamilov met with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry's press service said in a message Feb. 11.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed the current state and prospects of bilateral relations in the political, trade and economic, transport and communication, investment, cultural, humanitarian and other areas.

The two ministers reaffirmed their mutual

interest in strengthening and expanding the Uzbek-Iranian relations in all spheres of mutual interest.

During the exchange of views on regional issues, special attention was paid to the development of the Afghan situation, including the agenda of the forthcoming international conference on Afghanistan, titled "Peace process, cooperation in the field of security and regional cooperation on Afghanistan", to be held in Tashkent. (Trend)

Tajikistan Pardons More Than 100 Citizens Who Returned From Syria and Iraq

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan has pardoned more than 100 of its nationals following their return home from Syria and Iraq, where they had joined radical Islamist groups, the interior minister said Thursday.

Speaking at a news conference in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, Interior Minister Ramazon Rahimzoda said the returnees had been pardoned in line with a 2015 government pledge.

"Regarding the fate of 111 Tajik citizens who returned from Syria and Iraq voluntarily, all of them are free under Tajik law," Rahimzoda said.

Most of the returnees in question had spent time in Syria.

Rahimzoda also told reporters that 250 citizens of Tajikistan, a majority-Muslim country, had died in Iraq and Syria while fighting for radical groups, mostly Islamic State.

The interior ministry has said that at least 1,100 Tajik citizens, including women, had travelled to Iraq and Syria. Most travelled through Russia, where over a million Tajiks are believed to work.

Tajikistan changed the law in 2015 to allow authorities to issue pardons to those who return to the country after joining militant groups abroad and express regret. Authorities say the law only applies to people who have not taken part in violence. (Agencies)

Asma Jahangir Passes Away

LAHORE - Eminent lawyer and human rights activist Asma Jahangir passed away due to cardiac arrest here on Sunday.

According to her personal staff, she was shifted to a local hospital on complaint of cardiac arrest about 12 noon (Sunday), where she passed away.

Asma Jahangir, the former president of Supreme Court Bar Association, was 66 years old. Born in 1952, Jahangir studied at the Convent of Jesus and Mary before receiving her B.A from Kinnaird College and LLB from the Punjab University in 1978.

She was put under house arrest and later imprisoned in 1983 for participating in the movement for the restoration of political and fundamental rights during the military regime.

She was also active in the 2007 Lawyers' Movement, for which she was put under house arrest. She co-founded the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, and the Women's Action Forum.

Asma Jahangir defended cases of minorities, women and children in prisons. She was recipient of several national awards, including Sitara-i-Imtiaz in 1995. (Monitoring desk)