

## Tillerson Says Up to North Korea to Decide When Ready to Engage in Talks

CAIRO - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Monday any possible negotiations with North Korea over its nuclear and ballistic missile programs can only happen if North Korea shows it is ready to engage in meaningful talks.

"I think it's too early to judge," Tillerson said during a visit to Egypt. "As we've said for some time, it's really up to the North Koreans to decide when they're ready to engage with us in a sincere way, a meaningful way. They know what has to be on the table for conversations." Tillerson spoke at a joint news conference with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry after the two diplomats dis-



cussed regional security issues such as Libya and Syria, as well as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Tillerson said the Egyptian people should be confident in the continuing U.S. commitment to supporting Egypt in fighting terrorism. "Our joint commitment to defeat ISIS is steadfast and there has been no gap between Egypt and the United States in our joint efforts to confront terrorists and extremism in the region, but most specifically here in Egypt as well," he said, using an acronym for the Islamic State group. (VOA News)

### IS Calls on Fighters to Disrupt Egypt's Vote with Attacks

CAIRO - A video purportedly by the Islamic State's affiliate in Egypt is calling on its fighters to stage attacks during next month's presidential elections and warning Egyptians to stay away from polling centers. The authenticity of the 23-minute video posted late Sunday on websites known to be sympathetic to the group could not be independently verified, but appeared similar to past releases by the group.

It makes a brief mention of an ongoing offensive by security forces against IS, suggesting it was made after the campaign began Friday. The video showed what appeared to be footage of past IS attacks in Sinai and the killings of unarmed off-duty soldiers or men suspected of collaborating with security forces. President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi's reelection is virtually assured in the March 26-28 vote. (AP)

### Turkey Assails US over Ties with Syrian Kurdish Militia

ANKARA, Turkey - Turkey's foreign minister assailed the United States on Monday, claiming that American forces in Syria are intentionally stalling the fight against Islamic State militants as an excuse not to cut ties with Syrian Kurdish militiamen as Ankara has demanded. Mevlut Cavusoglu told reporters in Istanbul that U.S. forces are leaving "pockets" with IS militants intact to justify continued cooperation with the Kurdish militia. Speaking ahead of a



visit by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson later this week, Cavusoglu said Turkey's ties with the U.S. are at a make-

or-break stage and that Washington needs to take "concrete steps" to regain Turkey's trust. "Our relations are at a

very critical stage," Cavusoglu said. "Either we will improve ties or these ties will totally break down." (AP)

### France FM Visits Iraq to Discuss Reconstruction



BAGHDAD - France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian visited Iraq on Monday to discuss the war-torn country's reconstruction after Baghdad

declared victory against the Islamic State jihadist group. "I have come to tell you of France's support and to accompany you. We will

always be there. We were there to participate in the coalition. We will also be there in the reconstruction phase," Le Drian said. France has been a key member of the US-led military coalition fighting IS after the jihadist group seized large swathes of Iraq and neighboring Syria in 2014. Baghdad is looking to drum up funds at a re-

construction conference in neighbouring Kuwait from Monday to Wednesday after announcing the defeat of IS nationwide at the end of last year. "We hope French expertise will be used for the reconstruction," Iraq's Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari replied. Le Drian, who previously visited Baghdad in August last year, is also to meet Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, President Fuad Massum and parliament speaker Salim al-Juburi. (AFP)

### London City Airport Shut after WW2 Bomb Found in Thames

LONDON - All flights to and from London's City Airport were cancelled on Monday after an unexploded World War Two bomb was found in the River Thames at George V Dock, the airport said. Police said the ordnance was found during work at the airport on Sunday and they set up a 200-metre exclusion zone. The Metropolitan Police said its flights within the exclusion zone had been evacuated and a number of roads were cordoned off. Robert Sinclair, CEO of London

City Airport, the city's fifth biggest and the most central, said: "The airport is cooperating fully with the Met Police and Royal Navy and working hard to safely remove the device and resolve the situation as quickly as possible." Regional airline CityJet said its flights from the airport had been rescheduled to land and take off from London South end airport. Italy's Alitalia [CAITLA.UL] said it would operate flights from London Stansted airport. (Reuters)

### Boris Johnson Discusses Rohingya, Elections in Thailand

BANGKOK - British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson met Monday with Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and other Thai officials and discussed neighboring Myanmar's persecution of ethnic Rohingya Muslims and plans for elections in Thailand to end military rule.

A statement from Britain's Foreign & Commonwealth Office said their discussions also covered "cooperation on education, the digital economy, science and innovation, financial technology, and trade and investment, as well as further co-operation to tackle the Illegal Wildlife Trade." (AP)

### Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Wins Africa Leadership Prize

DAKAR, Senegal - Former Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has been awarded a \$5 million African Leadership prize by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation which honors role models on a continent where many leaders have stayed in power for decades, the foundation said Monday. Sirleaf, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Africa's first female president, is also the first female and only the fifth person to receive the Ibrahim leadership award since it was established in 2006.

The prize committee on Monday praised Sirleaf's "exceptional and transformative leadership, in the face of unprecedented and renewed challenges" in leading Liberia's recovery following years of civil war. Sirleaf, who was Liberia's president from 2006 through 2017, stepped down in January, handing power to President George Weah. She lifted Liberia from the destruction of back-to-back civil wars and saw it through an Ebola outbreak that killed nearly 5,000 Liberians in 2014-2015. (AP)

### Dutch Foreign Minister Admits Lying About Meeting with Putin

THE HAGUE, Netherlands - In a potentially damaging admission on the eve of his first visit to Russia as a member of the Dutch government, Foreign Minister Halbe Zijlstra on Monday acknowledged lying about attending a meeting with President Vladimir Putin in 2006. Zijlstra issued a statement confirming the admission he made in an interview published in Monday's edition of respected Dutch daily De Volkskrant.

Zijlstra has in the past said he was present as an employee of energy giant Shell at Putin's



country retreat when the Russian president said he considered Belarus, Ukraine and the Baltic states as part of a "Greater Russia." In a written statement, Zijlstra said that he was not present at the meeting in 2006 but heard the story from somebody who was there. He said he considered Putin's state-

ments so geopolitically important that he spoke about them publicly and took credit for hearing the comments as a way of protecting his source. "The manner in which I wanted to protect my source and underscore my message about Russia was not sensible, that is crystal clear," Zijlstra said. (AP)

### France Wants to Fix 'Catastrophic' Math Scores, Conquer Fear

PARIS - France's government is worried about how many of its schoolchildren consider themselves "stupid at math."

The education minister released a report Monday commissioned by renowned mathematician and legislator Cedric Villani describing "catastrophic" scores and recommending 21 steps to turn things around. France's math scores have been sinking on international rankings for most of this century. The report warns that the current system

is leading to "a lasting loss of self-esteem" that continues into adulthood, and greater inequality between those strong in math and the rest.

The report urges better math training for primary school teachers, most of whom come from literary or social studies backgrounds. It recommends more hands-on activities, efforts to teach children early to calculate in their heads, and support for high-schoolers struggling with abstract math. (AP)

### U.S. Secretary Of State Says Washington Backs Egypt in Fight against Terrorism

CAIRO - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on Monday the United States supports Egypt's fight against Islamic State but reiterated that it advocated free and fair elections in the Arab country.

Speaking at a joint news conference with his Egyptian counterpart, Tillerson also said that Washington remained committed to achieving a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians, despite President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Tillerson arrived in Egypt at the start of a regional tour amid heightened tensions between Israel and Syria after an Israeli F-16 aircraft was shot down. It also follows a major security operation by the Egyptian military to crush Islamist militants who have killed hundreds of people since 2013.

"We agreed we would continue our close cooperation on counterterrorism measures," Tillerson said.

"The Egyptian people should be confident that the U.S. commitment to continue to support Egypt in fight against terrorism and bringing security to Egyptian people is steadfast." The Egyptian military campaign comes ahead of presidential election in March, in which President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is seeking a second term in office.

Asked about the Tillerson said the United States supports a credible, transparent election in Egypt and Libya. (Reuters)

## Neighbor News

### President Rouhani in India Thursday for 3-Day Visit

President Hassan Rouhani is to travel to India on a three-day visit, with regional and international developments as well as trade posing to form major talking points between the two sides.

The Iranian president will be traveling to the subcontinent on Thursday at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The invitation was submitted to Rouhani last year by India's Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, who had traveled to Tehran to attend the president's inauguration ceremony.

This picture taken on May 23, 2016 shows Iran's President Hassan Rouhani (R) holding a press conference with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Tehran. (president.ir)

Non-oil trade between the countries reached \$4.74 billion in the 12

months that followed March 2016, up by 4.17% compared to the same period in the previous year.

Iran is India's third oil supplier. The country imported 12.5 million tonnes of crude from the Islamic Republic in the period running from April 2017 to October 2018.

India, Iran and Afghanistan have signed an agreement to give Indian goods, heading toward Central Asia and Afghanistan, preferential treatment and tariff reductions at the Chabahar port city in southern Iran.

Chabahar provides India with an easier land-sea route to Afghanistan. The Indian government has committed \$500 million to developing the port, with an aim to join an increasingly important transport corridor to resource-rich regional countries. (Presstv)

### Turkmenistan Aims At UNESCO World Heritage List with National Carpet-Weaving Art

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan is taking appropriate steps to include Turkmen carpet-weaving art to the UNESCO World Heritage list, local newspaper Neutral Turkmenistan reported on Feb. 12.

Unique historic-cultural monuments of Turkmenistan such as Ancient Merv, Kunya Urgench and Ancient Nisa were included to the list earlier. Kusst Depdi, a Turkmen national art of signing and dancing, was included to

the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in Dec. 2017.

Work is in progress to include the Akhal-Teke horse breeding to the list as well, and Koytendag ecosystem and Badkhyz State Nature Reserve - to the UNESCO Natural Heritage list.

Turkmen carpets became a national brand and it is an important part of income for the country. (Trend)

### Tajik President Expressed Condolences to Russian Counterpart

DUSHANBE - Tajik President Emomali Rahmon expressed condolences to Russian President Vladimir Putin over the recent plane crash near Moscow, local news agency Sputnik Tajikistan reported referring to the president's press-office.

"We share the pain of bereavement and express our sincere condolences to the families and friends of the deceased," the message said. The An-148 passenger

plane of the Saratov Airlines [flight 730 from Moscow to Orsk] took off from the Domodedovo airport at 14:21 Moscow time.

According to preliminary data, there were 65 passengers and six crew members aboard the plane. Radio contact with the plane was lost several minutes after the takeoff and the plane went out of the radars. As reported by TASS, as a result of the plane crash there are no survivors. (Trend)

### British High Commissioner Visits Multan to See Work Supporting Women

ISLAMABAD - The British High Commissioner Thomas Drew visited Multan to see first-hand how the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) is helping women and girls. Drew visited DfID-supported initiatives, including a Government Girls School, the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), a DAFPAK family planning centre, and the Violence Against Women Centre, said a press release issued here.

The UK is a strong supporter of women and girls in Pakistan. The UK's Department for International Development (DfID) is working to ensure that girls stay in school longer and learn more. Since 2011, DfID's work has helped 2.4 million girls complete their primary school education. While addressing the beneficiaries at the BISP

centre, the High Commissioner expressed his pride for the UK's support to BISP, which empowers the very poorest women to feed their families and access basic services like health and education.

He was also pleased to see the services being provided at the DAFPAK family planning centre, and committed to continuing UK support for safer childbirth, women's nutrition and family planning. He also visited the Violence Against Women Centre which is part of the UK's effort to empower women and minority groups by strengthening their political voice. Through this programme, since 2011, more than 3300 female youth leaders have been empowered to challenge discriminatory norms in their communities across 4500 villages in 45 districts of KP and Punjab. (Monitoring desk)