

Turkey, US to 'Work Together' in Syria after Crisis

ANKARA - Turkey and United States on Friday agreed to work together in Syria after weeks of tensions over Ankara's latest cross-border operation that raised fears of a military confrontation between the two NATO allies.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu said after talks in Ankara that the two sides would set up working groups to solve key issues that have bedeviled relations.

They gave few details on how this could be achieved, but indicated that solving a dispute over the control of the flashpoint town of Manbij was a priority.

"We are not going to act alone any longer, not US doing one thing,



Turkey doing another," Tillerson said after the talks.

"We will work together... we have good mechanisms on how we can achieve this, there is a lot of work to be done," he added. Cavusoglu said Turkey and the US were agreed on the need to normalise relations. He said that ties were at a "critical phase" and vowed to create "mechanisms" to discuss the issues that were causing problems. A prime task of Tillerson on his trip to Ankara is to allay Turkish anger over US policy in Syria, a dispute which has ignited the biggest crisis in bilateral ties since the 2003 Iraq war. (AFP)

UK to Push EU for City of London's Favored Brexit Plan

LONDON - Britain's government is ready to push for the kind of Brexit plan for financial services that the City of London has long favored, but which has already run into opposition in Brussels, two government officials said on Friday.

London is expected to signal in the next few weeks that it wants a mutual recognition system to regulate financial services after Brexit, in the hope of preventing a hit to the City of London's access to the bloc, they said. "It is obviously in everyone's interest to

not just totally turn on its head the pan-European banking system," one of the officials said. "Everyone has a lot to lose from this if we can't get a deal." Bank of England Governor Mark Carney has previously said Britain and the EU should adopt a system of mutual recognition or run the risk of a hit to financial services across Europe. With little more than a year to go before Brexit, many banks have begun activating contingency plans to move some operations out of the country. (Reuters)

SOFIA - The European Union on Friday told six Western Balkan nations seeking membership that they would have to implement difficult reforms before they can be allowed to join the wealthy bloc. Worried about growing Russian and Chinese influence in the Balkans, the EU has launched a new integration campaign, giving Serbia and Montenegro a tentative accession date of 2025.

But many EU members

Western Balkan Nations Told to Work Harder to Join EU



remain wary of letting in a region still scarred by wars fought along ethnic lines in the 1990s and dogged by a repu-

tation for lawlessness. They say the candidates - which also include Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia -

must improve their democratic credentials and root out graft and organized crime. (Reuters)

Huskova Wins Olympic Gold in Breezy Women's Aerials Final



PYEONGCHANG, South Korea - Hanna Huskova survived the tricky wind at Phoenix Snow Park to give Belarus a second straight Olympic gold medal in

women's aerials. The 25-year-old Huskova narrowly edged Zhang Xin in tricky conditions that wreaked havoc with much of the 12-woman

field. Huskova nailed her final jump, a double-twisting back layout, and posted a score of 96.14, just ahead of Zhang's 95.52. Kong Fanyu took bronze on a sloppy night, giving China two medals in Friday's event. Huskova and Zhang were the only two women in the finals to land all three of their jumps cleanly. Alla Tsuper, who won gold for Belarus at the 2014

Sochi Games, was fourth in her sixth Olympic appearance. The 38-year-old mother-of-two attempted the most difficult jump of the night, a triple-twisting back flip, but she tumbled forward on the landing and slid face-first down the hill with just one ski attached. Laura Peel of Australia was fifth and American rival Madison Olsen was sixth. Olsen's attempt at giving the U.S. women their first Olympic medal in the event in 20 years ended when her back slid into the hill while landing her final jump. (AP)

Mexico Foreign Minister Heads to Caribbean to Win Over Venezuelan Allies

MEXICO CITY - Mexico's foreign minister will travel to Jamaica, Grenada and Saint Lucia in March, a Mexican official said on Thursday, as part of efforts to erode Venezuela's oil-based influence in the Caribbean. Meanwhile, Cuban diplomats will visit Mexico in March to discuss the regional impact of the crisis in Venezuela, the official said. The Cuban embassy in Mexico City said the trip was not yet confirmed but that the two countries have regular bilateral meetings. Still, there are no signs that Cuba, a steadfast ally of Caracas, is ready to turn its back on Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray's planned trip follows a visit to Latin America and the Caribbean earlier this month by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who announced plans to study how possible oil sanctions against Venezuela could be mitigated in the Caribbean. The Mexican foreign minister's trip represents the latest development in U.S.-led pressure on Maduro, who retains loyalty from some Caribbean nations that have long benefited from Caracas' oil largess and have been unwilling to shun the country in regional diplomatic efforts. (Reuters)

Turkish Court Sentences Six Journalists to Life, Including Altan Brothers: TRT Haber

ANKARA - A Turkish court on Friday sentenced three prominent journalists to life in jail on charges of aiding the network blamed for a failed coup in 2016. TRT Haber television said, even after Turkey's highest court had ordered the release of one of them. Mehmet Altan, an economics professor and journalist, and his journalist brother Ahmet, were charged with giving coded messages in a television talk show a day before the abortive July 15 military coup. Nazlilicak, another veteran journalist, was also handed life imprisonment. Three other defendants were also sentenced to life for trying to abolish the constitution and overthrow the government. (Reuters)

U.N. Urges Iran to Stop Executions of Juveniles on Death Row

GENEVA - The top United Nations human rights official called on Iran on Friday to halt executions of young people convicted of carrying out crimes when they were under the age of 18. In a "surge" in January, three people were executed for murders committed at 15 or 16, while some of the 80 juvenile offenders on death row are in danger of "imminent execution", U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini said. "The execution of juvenile offenders is unequivocally prohibited under international law, regardless of the circumstances and nature of the crime committed," Zeid said in a statement. There was no immediate reaction from authorities in Iran, which has signed an international treaty strictly banning the execution of people who commit crimes under the age of 18. In 2017, Iran is known to have executed five juvenile offenders, the U.N. statement said. "I am sad to say that Iran violates this absolute prohibition under international human rights law far more often than any other state," Zeid said, decriing the practice that has gone on for decades. (Reuters)

Poland's PM Discusses EU Future, Economy in Berlin



WARSAW, Poland - Poland's prime minister is meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin for talks on the European Union's future, energy projects and on intensifying bilateral ties.

Mateusz Morawiecki was greeted Friday in Berlin by Merkel. They were to hold a joint news confer-

ence following talks, and later Morawiecki is to give a speech at the Koerber Foundation think tank on future directions for Europe.

Morawiecki has said that his talks with Merkel will probably include Poland's refusal to accept migrants within an EU mandatory relocation plan and also

Poland's opposition to the planned Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which Poland considers increases Europe's dependence on Russian gas and threatens Ukraine's security. He is also to lay flowers at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. (AP)

Polish PM Seeks to Thaw Ties with Berlin Trip

WARSAW - Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki will visit Berlin on Friday in a bid to thaw frosty ties after the relationship between the two neighbors was strained by issues including refugee quotas and Warsaw's judicial reforms.

"I'd like this visit to boost both our economic and political cooperation," Morawiecki told the Polish news agency PAP this week, ahead of talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Morawiecki said that on the economic front things were "thriving, with Po-

land one of Germany's most important partners", but more delicate matters are likely to be discussed when the two leaders meet.

Germany and Poland have clashed on a range of issues since the nationalist Law and Justice party came to power - including its attempts to reform the judiciary and its rejection of EU refugee quotas.

In her weekly podcast on Saturday, Merkel said she considers Polish-German ties to be stable despite "divergent views on some issues". (AFP)

Youth Beats Experience as Visser Gets Another Dutch Gold

GANGNEUNG, South Korea - In a battle of youth against experience, rookie Esmee Visser came out on top and gave the Netherlands yet another gold medal in Olympic speedskating. The 22-year-old Visser won the 5,000 meters on Friday while 45-year-old Claudia Pechstein faded and fell short of a fourth gold over the distance. "It was a fun skate," Visser said, undaunted but the multiple Olympic champions she faced.

Two-time defending champion Martina Sablikova, who has been troubled by a bad back, gave Visser the toughest challenge until the final lap, settling for silver ahead of Russian skater Natalia Voronina.

Visser was hardly a factor in international skating until she qualified for the Dutch squad over Christmas. But on Friday, she gave the Netherlands a sixth gold medal out of seven races at the Olympic Oval and the first Dutch title in the event in 30 years. Pechstein, who had won three titles over the distance and was still in great form this season, was seeking to become the oldest woman to win a Winter Olympic title. But she faded to eighth place, 15.20 seconds behind Visser.

At the Pyeongchang Games, Visser's attitude was as lighthearted as her frame is slight. Although powerful legs usually drive long-distance skaters, Visser weighs only 51 kilograms (112 pounds), the lightest of all favorites in the race.

Visser had a slow start but found her groove and clawed back into contention halfway through. Then she kept her flowing movement going, seemingly floating over the ice while some others ploughed through it.

Turning red with effort, Visser won in 6 minutes, 50.23 seconds, holding off the charging Sablikova by 1.62 seconds. (AP)

Neighbor News

Pakistan Could Face Economic Pain from Return to Terrorist Financing 'Gray List'

ISLAMABAD - The prospect of Pakistan being placed back on a global terrorist financing watchlist could endanger its handful of remaining banking links to the outside world, causing real financial pain to the economy just as a general election looms. Washington and its European allies have co-sponsored a motion calling for the nuclear-armed nation to be placed on a "gray list" of countries deemed to be doing too little to comply with anti-terrorist financing and anti-money laundering regulations, with a decision expected next week when member states of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meet in Paris.

The move is part of a broader U.S. strategy to pressure Pakistan to cut its alleged links to Islamist militants waging cha-

os in Afghanistan. Pakistan, which denies such links, last month shrugged off a U.S. aid suspension worth \$2 billion. But inclusion on the FATF watchlist could inflict real damage, bankers and government officials say.

Islamabad has sought to head off the motion by amending its anti-terrorism laws and by taking over organizations controlled by Hafiz Saeed, a Pakistan-based Islamist whom Washington blames for the 2008 Mumbai attacks that killed 166 people.

But there are concerns Pakistan's nearly \$300 billion economy, expanding at its fastest rate in a decade at above 5 percent, could lose steam if it ends up on the FATF watchlist, from which it was removed in 2015 after three years.

EU Seeking Ways to Connect Turkmenistan to SGC: Sefcovic

ASHGABAT - The EU continues to seek ways to connect Turkmenistan to the Southern Gas Corridor project, European Commission Vice-President for Energy Union Maros Sefcovic said. Sefcovic made the remarks at a press conference in Baku Feb. 15 following the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council. European side maintains regular contacts and holds meetings with the Turkmen side in connection with the implementation of the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline Project, through which it will be possible to supply Turkmen gas to

Europe, he said. Reminding that a few years ago the EU received a mandate to hold talks with Turkmenistan on the issue, Sefcovic said Turkmenistan expressed interest in joining the Southern Gas Corridor. Sefcovic voiced appreciation of Azerbaijan's role in studying the ways of connecting Turkmenistan to the Southern Gas Corridor. The Southern Gas Corridor is one of the priority projects for the EU and provides for the transportation of 10 billion cubic meters of Azerbaijani gas from the Caspian region through Georgia and Turkey to Europe. (Trend)

Uzbekistan, General Electric Consider Energy Projects

TASHKENT - President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Vice President of General Electric Company Ronald James Pollett, who is on a visit to Uzbekistan, discussed issues of interaction in the sphere of training highly qualified national personnel, including involving leading foreign specialists and experts, the presidential press service reported. Mirziyoyev emphasized the importance of further strengthening mutually beneficial technological partnership in the energy sector, as well as expanding cooperation in the sphere of production cooperation. Ronald James Pollett confirmed readiness of General Electric Company in development of long-

term and full-scale cooperation with enterprises and organizations of Uzbekistan. In March 2017, GE and the Uzbek Economy Ministry signed a memorandum of understanding, which provides for the implementation of 13 projects worth \$388 million. In particular, the American company intends to master the production of oil and gas equipment in Chirchik (Tashkent region) in three years, to create an engineering center based on the Shurtan gas chemical complex (Kashkadarya region), as well as a service center for repair and maintenance of oil and gas, energy and chemical equipment at the Bukhara Mechanical Repair Plant. (Trend)

Iran Develops Missile Program as Part of Defensive Doctrine: Leader's Adviser

TEHRAN - A senior adviser to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says Iran's development of missiles does not concern any countries as it is totally a matter of domestic policy. Iran, like any other country, acts according to its conditions, and the manufacturing and development of missiles do not concern foreigners, Ali Akbar Velayati told reporters on Wednesday, after a meeting with European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman David McAllister in Tehran.

Emphasizing that each country chooses its own defense system in proportion to its needs, Velayati said missiles are "defensive means" in Iran's doctrine. "To defend our country, we take measures to develop missiles in line with our national interests, and this is no business of foreigners and we do not allow others to interfere [in this issue],"

Iranian officials have repeatedly warned that the country's missile program is not open to any negotiations amid efforts by the US specifically to link the Islamic Republic's missile program to the Iran nuclear deal that was reached between Tehran and the P5+1 group of countries in July 2015.

Washington has insisted that Iran's missile program be put under international surveillance. Tehran says it will not negotiate over the issue under any circumstances.

During his meeting with the EU official, Velayati also talked about Iran's policies in the Middle East and North Africa, saying the Islamic Republic sought cooperation with all regional countries to help establish stability, security and peace, and stressed that Tehran was opposed to any foreign meddling in the region. (PressTV)