

France Says Committed to Iran Deal, Will Keep Talking to European, U.S Allies

PARIS - France reaffirmed its commitment to the Iran nuclear deal on Monday, saying it wanted it to be strictly implemented and was continuing talks with its European and U.S. partners on the program. The foreign ministry said France was concerned about Iran's ballistic missile program and its activities in the region, mentioning its support for Houthi rebels in Yemen but making no mention of its role in Syria. Reuters reported on Sunday that the United States is hoping to convince its European allies -- Britain, France and Germany -- to improve the Iran nuclear deal over time in return for U.S. Pres-



ident Donald Trump keeping the pact alive by renewing U.S. sanctions relief in May. Asked about the Reuters report, the foreign ministry responded in an online media briefing: "The French position on the Iran nuclear deal is known. As the President of the Republic (Emmanuel Macron) has said, we reaffirm our full attachment to the global action plan and its strict implementation." Without directly responding to the report, the foreign ministry added: "We will continue to talk about the Iran nuclear program with our European and American partners." (Reuters)

Oxfam Says Staff Intimidated Witnesses in Haiti Sex Scandal

LONDON - Oxfam workers suspected of sexual misconduct in Haiti intimidated and threatened a witness as the charity investigated the original claims, according to the organization's report on the internal inquiry. The findings were part of a previously confidential report released by Oxfam on Monday as the charity responds to newspaper stories suggesting it covered up allegations that seven employees used prostitutes on the charity's property while working in Haiti

after the 2010 earthquake that devastated the country. "We are making this exceptional publication because we want to be as transparent as possible about the decisions we made during this particular investigation and in recognition of the breach of trust that has been caused," the charity said in a statement. "We are also meeting with the government of Haiti to apologize for our mistakes and discuss what more we can do, including for the women affected by these events." (AP)

Catalan Politicians in Spanish Court in Secession Probe

MADRID - Two prominent Catalan politicians are testifying before a Supreme Court judge for their roles in holding a banned independence referendum and making an illegal declaration of independence based on its results. Judicial police have identified left-republican ERC party's secretary-general, Marta Rovira, and conservative PDeCAT's president, Marta Pascal, as key players in the secession bid in October. The Spanish government



responded by disbanding the regional government and calling a new Catalan election. Separatist parties have since been entangled in endless negotiations on how to form a

new government. Judge Pablo Llarena could decide after Monday's hearing whether to send the two politicians to jail while the investigation continues.

Other separatist leaders have been jailed and five former Catalan Cabinet members, including ex-president Carles Puigdemont, have fled to Belgium. (AP)

China to Impose Annual Fishing Ban in Yellow River from 2018



BEIJING - China will ban fishing in the Yellow River, or Huanghe, between April 1 and June 30 every year starting from 2018, state-owned media Xinhua

reported on Monday, citing a statement from the Ministry of Agriculture. The ban aims to protect aquatic organisms in the Yellow River as excessive

fishing threatens fishery resources, and will be effective in the main stream, 13 tributaries and three major lakes linking to the Yellow River. China has introduced annual fishing bans in the Yangtze River since 2002 and in the Pearl River, its

the northwest and flows through the central-north part of the country, including the provinces of Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan and Shandong. In recent years, some regions, such as Ningxia and Gansu, have introduced fishing bans in the Yellow River during certain periods. However, illegal fishing remains rampant due to a lack of collaborated regulatory enforcement across regions. China is also considering imposing annual fishing ban in more rivers. (Reuters)

New Anti-Brexit Party Launches in Britain

LONDON - A new anti-Brexit centrist political party holds its official launch in London Monday, one of several initiatives by pro-European Union campaigners drawing hope from a perceived shift in the British public's mood. "We aim to reverse Brexit and restore our influential position in Europe, allowing us to focus on what really matters in the UK," the party, called Renew, said on its website ahead of the launch in central London. The fledgling political party said it already had more than 300 candidates ready to contest the next general election and

was aiming to recruit a total of 650 to stand in every constituency in Britain. The party was founded by former financier Chris Coghlan ahead of last year's general election. Coghlan stood as an independent candidate in that election, running on an anti-Brexit platform, and came fourth with 1,234 votes in Battersea in south London. The next elections are not due until 2022 but many commentators believe they could come much earlier because of Prime Minister Theresa May's precarious leadership and feuding inside her Conservative party. (AFP)

Turkey warns it May Hit Syrian Troops in Kurdish Enclave

BEIRUT - Turkey threatened on Monday to hit back at Syrian pro-government troops if they deploy in an enclave in northern Syria to protect a Kurdish militia that Ankara is battling there. The warning by the Turkish foreign minister came shortly after Syrian state media said pro-government forces will begin entering the Kurdish-controlled enclave of Afrin in the country's northwest "within hours," after reaching an agreement with the Kurdish militia in control of the region. The official SANA news agency said the forces will deploy in Afrin to "bolster" local forces in confronting Turkish "aggression," suggesting the Syrian government and Kurdish fighters have struck a deal under which the government forces would help repel an ongoing Turkish offensive on the enclave. (AP)

Indonesia Raises Aviation Warnings after Sumatra Volcano Emits Ash Cloud

JAKARTA - Indonesia on Monday raised flight warnings around the Mount Sinabung volcano on Sumatra island to their highest level after it sent a towering plume of ash more than 7 kilometers (4.4 miles) into the air, its biggest eruption this year.

Areas around the crater of the volcano, located about 1,900 km (1,181 miles) northwest of the capital, Jakarta, have been off-limits for several years because of frequent volcanic activity. The Bureau of Meteorology's Volcanic Ash Advisory Centre (VACC), in Australia's northern city of Darwin, issued maps on Monday showing an ash cloud heading in three directions from Sinabung, to the north, northwest and south-southeast. (Reuters)

Singapore to Impose Carbon Tax from 2019

SINGAPORE - Singapore said Monday it would impose a carbon tax from next year to cut its greenhouse gas emissions and make companies more competitive as global agreements on climate change take effect. Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said the tax would be levied on all facilities producing 25,000 tonnes or more of greenhouse gas emissions a year. The tax, to be applied to all sectors, will be Sg\$5.0 (\$3.8) per tonne of greenhouse gas emissions from 2019 to 2023, after which the levy will be reviewed



and possibly raised to between Sg\$10 and Sg\$15 per tonne by 2030. "Singapore produces less carbon emissions per dollar of GDP than most countries," he said, as he unveiled the measure as part of the city-state's 2018 budget. "We intend to fur-

ther reduce our emissions intensity to make a bigger effort to combat climate change." Major economies have been scrambling to cut greenhouse gas emissions amid warnings from scientists about the potentially devastating impacts of climate change. (AFP)

Britain's Dry Slope 'Rocket' Targets Olympic History

PYEONGCHANG (South Korea) - Britain's Dave 'Rocket' Ryding didn't start ski race training on snow until he was 21, honing his technique instead on dry slopes in the north of England and content with the family's annual ski holiday. Ten years on, he has worked his way into contention to possibly win a first Olympic alpine skiing medal for his country in Thursday's men's slalom in Pyeongchang. Alain Baxter won slalom bronze in Salt Lake City Games in 2002, only to be stripped of the medal for failing a drugs

test. Ryding equaled Britain's best-ever World Cup finish in January 2017 when he finished runner-up in the Kitzbuehel slalom, matching Konrad Bartelski's second place in Val Gardena in 1981. But while Bartelski's result came as a surprise, Ryding's did not. Last season he achieved five top-10 slalom finishes and this season has six. "In terms of the guys in the World Cup, I am unique as the only one who wasn't brought up on snow," said Ryding, who placed 17th at the 2014 Sochi Games and 27th in Vancouver four years earlier. (AFP)

Olympic Curling World Stunned By Russian Doping Scandal

GANGNEUNG, South Korea - When word broke on Monday that a Russian Olympic curler was facing a doping charge, the curling world was floored. Not because of the tired cliché that curling isn't a real sport (and therefore, why would a curler need to dope?) But because doping goes against the very essence of what curling is all about. The charge against Alexander Krushelnitsky, who won the curling mixed doubles bronze medal last week with his partner Anastasia Bryzgalova, stands in stark contrast to curling's noteworthy adherence to good sportsmanship, an ethos known as "The Spirit of Curling." The World Curling Federation's rules quite literally state that a true curler would prefer to lose than to win unfairly. On Monday, Krushelnitsky's fellow curlers were trying to make sense of the scandal, with some openly questioning whether Krushelnitsky had been slipped a banned substance without his knowledge. Russian Curling Federation president Dmitry Svishchev said it was possible someone spiked Krushelnitsky's food or drink with meldonin, which was banned in 2016. "You'd never know if it was on purpose or by accident, but obviously that's been banned for a year and a half and I can't imagine that that was something that happened on purpose," said John Shuster, the captain of the U.S. men's curling team. "So it's just unfortunate, because I know them, we've played in the same mixed doubles tournaments of that team and they're good people. ... I hope that he has the spirit of curling in his heart like we all do." (AP)

Neighbor News

Japan and UNDP Partner to Support Youth with Skills in Sindh, Kp

ISLAMABAD - Government of Japan and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Monday signed an agreement to launch a US\$ 3.9 million initiative aiming to empower more than 20,000 youth in Sindh and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provinces. This initiative will help improve employment prospects and promote social cohesion through positive interactions amongst young people in deprived communities, helping them participate actively in the socioeconomic development of Pakistan, said a statement issued here. Speaking at the occasion, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan Takashi Kurai said Pakistan's population is very young and ensuring job opportuni-

ties and income for youth is critical for development of Pakistan. "Japan will continue to support youth and young women so that they can take the lead in development of this country which has bright future with young population", he added. Country Director UNDP Pakistan Ignacio Artaza said challenges posed by the 'youth bulge' in Pakistan are immense. "Almost 1.8 million jobs are required every year to absorb the growing number of young people entering the job market. The youth represent the future of Pakistan, and this is a tremendous opportunity for which we are thankful to the Government of Japan," he added. (Monitoring Desk)

Turkmenistan Approves Structure of Intergov't Commission with Azerbaijan

ASHGABAT - Turkmen president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov approved the structure of Turkmen-Azerbaijan intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation. The corresponding decree has been signed "in order to further develop cooperation between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan". Being neighbors in the Caspian region, both countries support its transformation into a strong link of stability in Eurasia, an arena for long-term mutually beneficial partnership.

Turkmenistan is one of key players in the Caspian energy market and ranks fourth in the world in terms of its gas reserves. Currently, the country delivers gas to China and Iran. The project of laying a 300-kilometer gas pipeline along the bottom of the Caspian Sea to the shores of Azerbaijan, as previously noted by the interested parties, is an optimal way for the delivery of Turkmen resources to the European market. From Azerbaijan, Turkmen gas can reach Turkey, which borders European countries. (Trend)

Iran Decries Daesh Church Shooting Incident in Russia's Dagestan

TEHRAN - On Sunday, a man in Russia's southern province of Dagestan opened fire into a crowd of people leaving a church, killing five and injuring at least five others. "The killing of innocent worshipers in holy places... is the mark of groups who would do anything to spread fear and hatred throughout the world," said Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi early on Monday. The Takfiri Daesh terrorist group claimed responsibility for the attack on the Telegram messaging app. Russian news agencies said the attack occurred as churchgoers celebrated Maslenitsa, a Christian holiday marking the last day before Lent, according to the eastern Orthodox calendar. The assailant was identified as a 22-year-old man

local to the region, the TASS news agency said, citing the investigative committee. He was shot and killed by security services who were on duty nearby, TASS said, adding that a hunting rifle, bullets and a knife were discovered on his person. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, said that he was "stunned" by the attack and called for a thorough investigation to be held over the incident. "The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church considers this terrible crime, committed on the eve of the Great Lent, a provocation aimed at instigating confrontation between Orthodox and Muslims, who have been coexisting peacefully for ages in the Caucasus," said his spokesman. (PressTV)

Turkmenistan Uses Seeds of High-Yield Wheat

ASHGABAT - Wheat crops take up more than 700,000 hectares of agricultural areas in Turkmenistan, local newspaper Vatan reported. The report said vegetational watering was carried out. Additional mineral fertilizing of soil will be done closer to spring. Seeds of high-yield wheat were being used during the sowing. Measures to protect

winter crops against pests and diseases are being taken. About one million tons of wheat was harvested in July 2017 in the country. Earlier, Turkmenistan had been awarded a special prize of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN for achievements in the food security sphere. (Trend)