

France's Fillon Says Russia Sanctions Pointless, Dialogue Needed

BERLIN - European Union sanctions on Russia are pointless, the frontrunner in France's presidential election Francois Fillon said on Monday during a visit to Berlin, warning of a risk that Russia and the United States forge links that exclude the EU.

Fillon said a gesture from Russia would be needed before sanctions could be lifted, adding that Ukraine was also not doing what it needed to do to ensure peace.

"I am convinced that the economic sanctions are totally ineffective," Fillon told reporters after meeting Merkel in Berlin. "We must find another way to talk." He added: "I do not want (U.S. President Donald) Trump to talk with Russia at our expense."

It would be damaging for Europe if Trump went above our heads, which is not inconceivable." (Reuters)



UK Missile Test Failure "Covered Up" by Government: Media Report

LONDON - The government "covered up" a malfunctioned unarmed test of Britain's Trident missile system, The Sunday Times reported.

The Trident II D5 ballistic missiles are carried by Britain's four Vanguard-class submarines, and they are able to deliver thermonuclear warheads from multiple independently-targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs).

In a front page article, the newspaper says that the failed test took place shortly before Theresa May became prime minister, "but

she omitted any mention of the failed test when she persuaded parliament to spend 40 billion pounds on new Trident submarines in her first big Commons speech on July 18." During the test, the unarmed missile "may have veered off in the wrong direction towards America" after being launched from a British submarine off the coast of Florida in June last year, according to the article. However, Sky News quoted its Defence Correspondent Alistair Bunkall as saying that he had been told... (More on P4)... (15)

UK to Actively Help Industry as Country Leaves EU

LONDON - Britain's prime minister has pledged to help U.K. industry grow and compete as the country prepares to leave the European Union.

Prime Minister Theresa May plans to unveil her "modern industrial strategy" during a Cabinet meeting Monday in northwestern England, one of the areas she hopes will benefit from the plans. According to a statement released before the meeting, May says the government must provide an environment that

will create well-paying jobs throughout Britain if the country is to thrive after Brexit.

"It will be underpinned by a new approach to government, not just stepping back but stepping up to a new, active role that backs business and ensures more people in all corners of the country share in the benefits of its success," she said. The initiative is the latest attempt by policymakers to address the economic divide separating... (More on P4)... (16)

Trump, Netanyahu Hold "Very Warm" First Phone Talk

JERUSALEM - U.S. President Donald Trump invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to visit him at the White House in February, as the two leaders held their first phone talk on Sunday.

A statement released by Israel's Prime Minister's Office characterized the talk as "very warm."

"The two leaders discussed the deal with Iran, the peace process with the Palestinians and other issues," the statement read. Netanyahu told Trump he wishes "to work to advance peace and security



in the region" in a full collaboration with the new administration.

Ahead of the talk, White House Spokesman Sean Spicer said that Trump's team has started deliberations over moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv

Turkish Army Says 65 IS Killed in Northern Syria

ANKARA - Turkish General Staff stated on Monday 65 Islamic State (IS) terrorists were killed by Turkish army in Al-Bab of northern Syria in last 24 hours.

According to the Turkish army, 194 targets belonging to the terrorists have been shelled, including hideouts, defense positions, command centers, weapons and vehicles. Coalition jets also hit IS targets in Tadiif, Abu Jabbar and Uwayshiyah regions and destroyed a tank, an arms-laden vehicle, three other vehicles and a mortar. A total of 3113 improvised explosive devices and 55 mines have been destroyed since the beginning of the operation, the military added. The Turkish Armed Forces launched the Euphrates Shield Operation last August against both IS and the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the military wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD).

Turkey regards... (More on P4)... (18)

Hamon, Valls Qualify to France's Left Primary Run-Off

PARIS - Ex-education minister Benoit Hamon on Sunday came top out of seven candidates in the first round of French Left primary to choose a presidential election, partial results showed.

First results based on 3,090 polling stations out of a total 7,534, Hamon was seen collecting 35.21 percent of the vote, making a lead to former French prime minister Manuel Valls's 31.56 percent.

Ex-economy minister Arnaud Montebourg is out of the race with 18.78 percent of the vote. "By placing me in the lead, you sent a clear message of hope and renewal. You have expressed... (More on P4)... (19)

Ex-Opposition Party Head in S.Korea Widens Lead in Presidential Poll over Ex-UN Chief

SEOUL - Former head of the main opposition party in South Korea widened his lead in a recent presidential poll over former UN chief who returned back to his home country about 10 days ago.

Moon Jae-in, former Minjoo Party chief, gained 29.1 percent in approval rating as next president, according to a Realmeter survey released on Monday. It was up 3.0 percentage points from the previous week. Support for Moon came closer to 30 percent, strengthening his lead over former UN chief Ban Ki-moon who won 19.8 percent last week, down 2.4 percent-

age points from a week ago. Ban, who arrived in South Korea on Jan. 12 after his second five-year term in the top UN post ended at the end of last year, saw public support for him improved in the first week of his return.

The career diplomat has never officially declared his run for presidency, but he has been viewed as the best hope in the conservative camp as the impeachment of President Park pulled down support for conservative politicians. However, his so-called "people-friendly" moves raised doubts... (More on P4)... (20)

Syria Rebels Vow to Keep Fighting if Talks Fail

ATANA - Syrian rebels vowed Monday to keep fighting if the peace talks fail with the war-torn country's government in Kazakhstan, as the two sides opened indirect negotiations.

The talks had been billed as the first time armed rebel groups would negotiate directly with President Bashar al-Assad's regime since the conflict erupted in 2011.

"If the negotiations succeed, then we are with the negotiations," rebel spokesman Osama Abu Zeid told AFP. "If they

don't succeed, unfortunately we'll have no choice but to continue fighting."

The rebels' announcement came as Russia's defence ministry said its warplanes had bombed the Islamic State group in the area around Deir Ezzor in eastern Syria, where regime forces have been fighting the jihadists.

Rebel spokesman Yehya al-Aridi told AFP the opposition backed out of the first round of direct talks in Astana because of the regime's continued bombardment and attacks on a flashpoint area near Da-



ascus. A session of indirect negotiations began after 1200 GMT following a short break in the talks. A Turkish official told journalists that "it is necessary to focus on reinforcing the ceasefire" agreed last month, hoping that "confidence building steps that could be obtained from Astana talks will contribute to the political process in Geneva." (AFP)

OPEC Committee Agrees on Measures to Monitor Output Cuts

VIENNA - Representatives from five OPEC and non-OPEC countries on Sunday held their inaugural joint meeting in Vienna and agreed measures to monitor output cuts.

The attendees at the Joint OPEC-Non-OPEC Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) discussed the implementation of the Declaration of Cooperation signed by the 13 OPEC and 11 non-OPEC member countries in December, that subsequently came into effect on Jan. 1, OPEC said in a statement.

Among the issues on the agenda were the discussion of voluntary production adjustments, which targets a combined oil production of 1.8 million barrels a day, it said.

The JMMC further agreed on a number of stipulations, such as a production data report to be presented at the OPEC secretariat in Vienna each month, as well as the issuance of a monthly press release on the progress of the implementation of the production adjustment, OPEC said.



The JMMC is comprised of three OPEC member countries of Algeria, Kuwait, and Venezuela, as well as the two non-OPEC countries of Russia and Oman. The Declaration of Cooperation is to run for six months, with the option of a further six-month extension also possible. (Xinhua)

Iraqi Forces Recapture Last Central Areas in Eastern Mosul

MOSUL, Iraq - Iraqi security forces recaptured on Sunday the last areas in the central part of the eastern side of Mosul, while the troops continued fighting the Islamic State (IS) group to drive them out from their last stronghold on the northern outskirts of the city, the Iraqi military said.

The Iraqi forces retook control of the small neighborhood of Malayeen and al-Binaa al-Jahiz area in central Mosul and raised the Iraqi flag on some of their buildings, Lieutenant General Abdul-Amir Yarallah from the Joint Operations Command (JOC) said in a statement.

"These are the last areas of the center part of Mosul's left bank to be freed," said Yarallah, referring to the eastern side of Mosul, which is locally known as the left bank of the Tigris River which bisects the city.

The troops also took control of a main road linking Iraq's northern city of Mosul to Dohuk Province, which is part of the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan, he added.

The latest progress makes the Iraqi forces completely in control of the eastern bank of Mosul, with only the northern outskirts of Rashidiyah left under control of IS militants.

Experts say once the troops recapture the whole eastern side of Mosul, they will begin a new phase of the anti-IS major offensive on the western part of the city. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

Pakistani Army Chief Visits Tribal Town after Blast Kills 22

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited a tribal town one day after a Taliban bomb killed 22 people and injured nearly 50 others there, the military said.

The army chief traveled to Parachinar, capital of Kurram Agency, and met the injured of the blast in hospital.

He also met with tribal elders to express solidarity with the bereaved families.

"Expressing his grief on the incident, General Qamar Javed Bajwa lauded the support of

tribal brethren in combating terrorism and acknowledged their sacrifices for peace," an army statement said.

He said that with their support, the army, the paramilitary Frontier Corps and other law enforcement agencies have done a great job in stabilizing the area.

In the wake of the blast, main local tribes - Turi and Bangash tribes - have announced a three-day mourning period. Special gatherings were organized to offer prayers for those died in the... (More on P4)... (21)

Iran Welcomes Russia's Participation in Gas Transfer Project to Europe

TEHRAN - Iran welcomes Russia's participation in its gas pipeline project which is planned to transfer the country's natural gas to Europe, an Iranian deputy oil minister said on Monday, according to Press TV.

"We are welcoming Russians' participation in the project to build Iran's IGAT-9 with 2.5 billion U.S. dollars of investment," Deputy Minister of Petroleum Hamid Reza Araqi said.

"Russians can participate in the construction of this pipeline, but Iran's prior-

ity is to hold international tenders for the project," he said.

IGAT-9 is an Iranian pipeline with 35-billion cubic meter capacity per year that Iran plans to send gas from its South Pars field to Europe via Turkey.

Over the past year, Iran has raised gas production to about 700 million cubic meters per day, Araqi said, adding that this capacity is expected to exceed one billion cubic meters next year when new South Pars phases... (More on P4)... (22)

Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan Jolted by Quake

TASHKENT - An earthquake with the epicenter in Kyrgyzstan was felt in Uzbekistan at 6:52 (GMT +5, Uzbek time) Jan. 23, 2017, the press service of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Uzbekistan said in a message.

The epicenter of the earthquake was 274 km away from the city of Tashkent in eastern direction, according to the Tashkent seismic station. The earthquake magnitude at the epicenter was 4.9.

The power of the quake in Ferghana city was equal to 4 points, Andijan city - 3 points, Namangan city - 3 points and Tashkent

city - 1 point. The tremors were not felt in other regions of Uzbekistan, according to the country's ministry. There is no information on destruction and casualties, the ministry said.

Meanwhile, the residents of the Kadamjay district of the Batken region in the south of Kyrgyzstan felt the tremors, the power of which was equal to 2-3 points, the press service of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kyrgyzstan said. There were no destructions and casualties, either, according to the preliminary data. (Trend)

Turkmenistan Appoints Rep in Joint Commission with Uzbekistan

ASHGABAT - Turkmen Deputy Prime Minister Bayram Annamedov has been appointed co-chairman of the Joint Uzbek-Turkmen Commission on trade-economic, scientific-technical and cultural cooperation, according to the document released by the Turkmen president. Energy sphere is one of the strategic directions of the Uzbek-Turkmen partnership.

Turkmenistan has been supplying natural gas to China through Uzbekistan since 2009. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are currently discussing the project to create Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman transport route. This will make it possible to greatly increase international transit cargo flows and create a new communication corridor to the global markets. (Trend)

President Rahmon May Appear on Banknote in Tajikistan

DUSHANBEH - Tajik government is considering the initiative of releasing a new banknote of 1,000 somoni with portrait of the country's President Emomali Rahmon.

A special working group has been created at the country's Ministry of Economic Development and Trade to study the issue, Asia-Plus news agency quoted chairman of Tajikistan's National Bank Jamshed Nurmah-

madzoda as saying during the press conference in Dushanbe Jan. 23.

He pointed out that the government will take the final decision on this issue based on the conclusion of the working group. Earlier, Sharif Karim, head of local branch of Tajiksugurt state unitary enterprise in the town of Shahrinav put forward an initiative to release a banknote of 1,000 somoni with Rahmon's portrait. (Trend)