

# Putin, Trump Express Willingness to Cooperate: Kremlin

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump agreed to stabilize and deepen bilateral cooperation during a phone conversation on Saturday, the Kremlin said.

"The two sides expressed willingness to work actively together to stabilize and develop Russian-American cooperation on a constructive basis, as equals, and to mutual benefit," the Kremlin said in a statement issued after their first phone conversation since Trump's inauguration last week.

Putin and Trump highlighted the priority of joint efforts in the fight against the main threat of international terror-



ism during the call, which was widely scrutinized to see if there will be a thaw in the soured relations during the Obama administration.

"The Presidents called for establishing a real coordination of U.S. and Russian actions to defeat the Islamic State and other terrorist groups in Syria," the statement read.

They also stressed the importance of restoring mutually beneficial trade and economic ties between business communities of the two countries, which could further boost development of bilateral relations. Russian and American people see each other positively, said the two leaders, ...*(More on P4)...(19)*

## Schulz Nominated to Challenge Merkel for German Chancellorship

BERLIN - Former European Parliament president Martin Schulz has been nominated by Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) as the party's candidate for the chancellorship in the coming national elections scheduled for September, Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA) reported on Sunday.

The SPD, or Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, is a major partner of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's ruling coalition. The center-left party made the decision at a conclave in Berlin

on Sunday, a few days after Vice-Chancellor and Economic Minister Sigmar Gabriel announced his resignation from party chairman and proposed Schulz to replace him. The decision will be formalized at a special party conference to be held on March 19 when Schulz, 61, is expected to be officially elected to be SPD chairman, DPA reported quoting sources. Gabriel, a long-time hopeful for SPD candidate to challenge sitting Chancellor Merkel, suddenly announced on ...*(More on P4)...(20)*

## Trump Aims to Enhance U.S. Security Cooperation with France

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump on Saturday expressed his desire to strengthen U.S.-French cooperation on a range of issues, especially on counterterrorism and security.

In a telephone conversation with French President Francois Hollande, Trump reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to NATO and stressed the importance of all NATO allies sharing the burden on defense spending, the White House said in a statement.

Trump and Hollande also discussed military and defense cooperation both within bilateral frameworks and through NATO.

In a recent interview, Trump said NATO was "obsolete because it was not taking care of terror," and he complained that various members of the bloc were not paying their dues, which was "very unfair to the United States."

At a joint press conference with...*(More on P4)...(22)*

## Russia's Draft-Constitution for Syria Receives Fare Criticism

DAMASCUS - The Syrian draft constitution put forward by Russia is seen by many analysts as a reminder of the Paul Bremer constitution for Iraq following the 2003 invasion by the United States.

Russian circulated a draft resolution to the Syrian delegations who were attending the Russia-Turkey sponsored negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan, last week.

The draft constitution wasn't made public during the negotiations, but Russian media outlets leaked parts of it.

Russia Today (RT) said the draft constitution highlights territorial integrity, separation of political powers as well as respect for minority's rights and international treaties.

It said the constitution envisions that the word "Arab" be omitted from the country's official title, in an apparent way to ease the fears of the Kurdish minority in Syria.

Speaking of the Kurds, the proposed constitution says that "state bodies and organizations of the Kurdish cultural autonomy are using Kurdish and



Arabic languages equally" and that the status of the Kurdish autonomy "is defined by law." As for the president's full executives, the draft constitution indicates that the executive

branch of power in the country is represented by the president and his government. The president is elected by a public vote and can serve a maximum of...*(More on P4)...(21)*

## Trump's Refugee Ban Faces Legal Challenges, Sparks Outcry Worldwide

WASHINGTON - Confusion and chaos reigned across the United States and the world as U.S. President Donald Trump's newly-imposed refugee ban met its first legal challenge on Saturday.

A U.S. federal judge issued an emergency stay on Saturday that bars the U.S. government from deporting some of those subject to the executive order Trump signed on Friday.

The ruling presented the first legal challenge against the executive order which slapped a 90-day ban on

travel to the United States by citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries and a four-month suspension of the U.S. refugee program.

U.S. District Judge Ann Donnelly ruled that citizens of seven countries - Iraq, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia and Yemen - who have already arrived in the United States, who are in transit and who hold valid visas cannot be removed from the United States, according to U.S. broadcaster CNN.

The executive order, wide-



ly described as a "Muslim ban," has triggered outrage and chaos across the world.

Chaotic scenes played out at U.S. airports as immigration and customs officials were struggling to grasp the new rules, with some legal residents who were in the air when the order ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

## US, German Leaders Reaffirm Importance of NATO

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump and German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Saturday agreed on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) fundamental importance to the broader transatlantic relationship.

In a telephone conversation, the two leaders also reaffirmed the military bloc's role in ensuring the peace and stability of the North Atlantic community, the White House said in a statement.

"In this vein, the leaders recognized that NATO



must be capable of confronting 21st century threats and that our common defense requires appropriate investment in military capabilities to ensure all allies are con-

tributing their fair share to our collective security," said the statement.

In a recent interview, Trump said NATO was "obsolete because it was not...*(More on P4)...(24)*

## Syrian Army Says Retakes Key Rebel Area near Damascus

DAMASCUS - The Syrian army said on Sunday that it had recaptured a flashpoint area from rebels near Damascus that supplies water to the capital.

Wadi Barada had been the scene of fierce fighting in recent weeks between regime and rebel forces that tested a fragile nation-wide truce and left millions in Damascus facing water shortages. "Our armed forces ... have accomplished their mission by restoring security and stability in the region of Wadi Barada", the army said in a statement carried by state television.

The announcement came a day after the army entered the water pumping station in Wadi Barada for the first time in four years. Under a deal with the authorities, rebels can choose to stay in the area but hand over their weapons, or leave to the northern province ...*(More on P4)...(25)*

## Iraq to Oppose US Travel Curbs, Keen to Preserve Cooperation Against Islamic State

BAGHDAD/MOSUL, Iraq - Iraq plans to lobby against new restrictions on travel to the United States by Iraqis, arguing the two countries need to preserve their alliance against Islamic State (IS), two members of the Iraqi parliament close to the government said on Sunday.

Dependent on U.S. military aid against IS, the Iraqi government has so far declined comment on an executive order signed by new U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday that suspends the entry of travelers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen for at least 90 days. The order stirred angry reactions in Iraq, where more than 5,000 U.S. troops are deployed to help Iraqi and regional Kurdish forces in the war against IS insurgents. Some members of parliament said Iraq should retaliate with similar measures against the United States. "Iraq is in the front line of the war on terrorism (...) and it is unfair that the Iraqis are treated in this way," parliament's foreign affairs committee said in a statement. "We call on the Iraqi government to retaliate for the decision taken by the U.S. administration," it added after a session on Sunday in Baghdad.

Baghdad plans to lobby Washington to review the decision, according to two lawmakers who declined to be identified. One of them told Reuters that the government will "explain that Iraq as a sovereign country will be forced to apply similar treatment, and that would affect negatively cooperation, including military cooperation", in the conflict with IS. (Reuters)

## British PM Does 'Not Agree' with Trump Immigration Policy

LONDON - Two days after a friendship-forging meeting with Donald Trump, British Prime Minister Theresa May on Sunday discreetly distanced herself from the US president as anger over his immigration restrictions mounted.

Downing Street said May does "not agree" with the restrictions and would intervene if they affected British nationals.

May had sparked controversy on Saturday after refusing to condemn Trump's executive order as she was being pressed by journalists during a trip to Turkey.

"Immigration policy in the United States is a matter for the ...*(More on P4)...(26)*

## France's Hamon, Valls Compete for Ticket to Join Presidential Race

PARIS - On Sunday's decisive round of the Left primary, about two million of French voters are expected to turn to polling sites across the country to make a choice between the left winger Benoit Hamon who proposed "desirable future," and pro-liberal market Manuel Valls who pledged to forge "a society of work."

A Harris interactive survey released on Friday showed the traditional Socialist Hamon gaining momentum with his approval rating gain 11 points to 35 percent while ex-premier saw 21 percent of people appreciating his performance, down by two points. Hamon has made an unexpected surge in vote intentions after he

has resurrected more traditional Left via his proposals to establish a monthly basic state income for all adults.

The approach could help him to court voters that had been upset by the Socialist President Francois Hollande's more pro-business five-year ruling.

Hours ahead final results, Valls said he would "respect the voters' choice. But, everything is possible. Nothing is written."

Last Sunday, former education minister Hamon came top out of seven candidates in the first round of Left primary to choose a presidential candidate. He was seen collecting 36.03 percent ...*(More on P4)...(27)*

## Nieghbor News

### US Ban on Muslim Arrivals Greatest Gift to Terrorists: Zarif

TEHRAN - Iran says the US's decision to restrict arrivals from the Islamic Republic shows the baselessness of the Washington's claims of only having issues with the government in Tehran, adding that the move is the greatest gift to terrorists and their supporters.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif made the remarks early on Sunday via a series of posts on his official Twitter account.

"MuslimBan shows baselessness of US claims of friendship with the Iranian people while only having issues with the government," he said. In a move which sparked

widespread censure, US President Donald Trump signed a sweeping executive order on Friday to suspend refugee arrivals and impose tough controls on travelers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

"Collective discrimination aids terrorist recruitment by deepening fault-lines exploited by extremist demagogues to swell their ranks," added Zarif.

He noted that Iran will be taking suitable reciprocal actions to protect its citizens, while respecting US citizens and differentiating between them and Washington's hostile policies. (Presstv)

### ECP Steps up Preparations for Next General Elections

ISLAMABAD - The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has stepped up preparations for the next general elections to avoid any last-minute problems in the gigantic exercise. It plans to start training 700,000 polling staff by June.

According to a paper titled "Road to general election-2018" placed by the ECP on its website, all provincial chief secretaries, secretary of the Establishment Division and heads of federal entities were asked in July 2016 to provide a list of officers who might be available in those departments in January 2018, in order to obtain and train the requisite number of polling staff. They are required to be below 55 years in age, computer literate and have ability to use smartphones and enjoy good reputation. It says names of 50,000 officers had been re-

ceived from provinces and the federal government by Dec 31, 2016. A data-bank has been created indicating the details and status of the officers, who could be utilised as per plan. "The ECP would try to get the requisite number of 700,000 officials and start their training by June 2017 onward," it reads.

Training of 700,000 polling staff to begin by June Preparation of training material and logistic arrangements are under way in consultation with the stakeholders. The Federal Election Academy has started trainings of the regular staff and officers of the ECP in rented premises of Postal Staff College, Islamabad. It has been planned that all the 1,649 officers/officers of the ECP from BPS-8 to BPS-21 would be trained much before the 2018 general elections. (Monitoring Desk)

### CIS Mission Observing Presidential Campaign in Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - The CIS observation mission, which arrived at the invitation of Turkmenistan due to the presidential election to be held Feb. 12 in the country, has started its work, the Turkmen government said in a message.

The mission was headed by First Deputy Chairman of the CIS Executive Committee Viktor Guminsky.

The CIS observation mission will work on the basis of the generally accepted international standards, without interfering in the internal affairs of Turkmenistan, according to the message.

"The task of the mission is to promote holding of free and democratic election," Guminsky said.

The Central Election Commission of Turkmenistan reported that the necessary conditions were created for the international observers to monitor the election campaign, as well as to meet the trustees of the presidential candidates in the country.

It was earlier reported that observers from the European countries, a number of international organizations, including the SCO and the OSCE were also invited, and they will have the opportunity to observe the electoral campaign and the voting on the election day in Turkmenistan.

Nine presidential candidates were officially registered in Turkmenistan. (Trend)

### Tajikistan: Former Mayor, Elite insider Targeted in Corruption Probe

DUSHANBEH - Only days after being fired as mayor Tajikistan's capital city, long-serving and ultimate elite loyalist Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev has found himself potentially becoming a target of corruption investigations.

The deputy head of the state anticorruption agency, Abdukarim Zarifzoda, announced on January 27 that investigators have initiated an audit into the City Hall. Ubaidulloev

ran the office until January 12.

"Even though the activities of the mayor's office are checked every two years, and so the next inspection was to have been in 2018, the mayor of Dushanbe has filed a request with the anticorruption agency for a review. A request was addressed to the mayor's office itself on two occasions by citizens concerning the implementation of the ...*(More on P4)...(28)*