

Palestinian Government 'Submits Resignation' to Abbas

RAMALLAH (Palestinian Territories) - The Palestinian government officially submitted its resignation to president Mahmud Abbas Tuesday, a statement said, though it will remain in place while a new administration is formed.

Analysts see the change in government as an attempt by Abbas to strengthen his position and further isolate his political rivals Hamas as a decade-long split in Palestinian politics deepens.

"The government of Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah submitted on Tuesday its resignation to President Mahmud Abbas," official news agency Wafa said in English following a cabinet meeting. The government "will con-



continue to serve our people wherever they are and shoulder all its responsibilities until a new government is formed," it added. Hamdallah had offered to resign Monday,

after the central committee of Abbas's Fatah movement recommended the formation of a new government that would comprise members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The Islamist movement Hamas, which runs the Gaza Strip, is not part of the PLO. (AFP)

Neighbor News

New Mideast Shaping Up as Iran, Syria Sign Deals

TEHRAN - Iran and Syria on Monday signed 11 agreements, including a "long-term strategic economic cooperation" deal, in a sign of changing winds in the Middle East which is shaping up to unpredictable results of an atrocious war. Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis said Syria and Iran signed a "unique" and "historic" agreement which includes industry, trade and agriculture, calling it "a message to the world on the reality of Syrian-Iranian cooperation." Iran has played a crucial role in helping Syria overcome more than seven years of foreign-orchestrated war. However, the agreements signed dur-

ing a visit to Damascus by First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri signal Iran's deeper involvement in post-war Syria, notably in the country's reconstruction. President Bashar al-Assad has estimated that Syria's reconstruction will cost between \$250 billion and \$400 billion. He has made it clear that the West "won't be part of reconstruction in Syria, because very simply we won't allow them to be part of it, whether they come with money or not." "We have enough strength to rebuild the country. If we don't have money, we will borrow from our friends, from Syrians living abroad," he said. (Press TV)

World Stocks Mixed Amid Fears for Trade Talks, Brexit Hopes

SINGAPORE - World markets were mixed Tuesday amid concerns that U.S. criminal charges against China's Huawei could complicate trade talks, though European indexes were up on optimism over Brexit. KEEPING SCORE: Germany's DAX was up 0.1 percent to 11,220 and France's CAC 40 added 0.7 percent to 4,920. Britain's FTSE 100 rebounded 1.3 percent to 6,834. Wall Street was set for small losses. The future contract for the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 0.2

percent and S&P 500 futures lost 0.1 percent. ASIA'S DAY: Hong Kong's Hang Seng index dropped 0.2 percent to 27,531.68 and the Shanghai Composite index fell 0.1 percent to 2,594.25. Japan's Nikkei 225 index closed 0.1 percent higher at 20,664.64 after tumbling earlier in the day. The KOSPI in South Korea gained 0.3 percent to 2,183.36. Australia's S&P ASX 200, reopening after a holiday, eased 0.5 percent to 5,874.20. Stocks fell in Taiwan and throughout Southeast Asia. (AP)

US Announces Sanctions against Venezuela's State Oil Company PDVSA

WASHINGTON - Washington has imposed sanctions against the Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA, seizing \$7 billion in assets, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said. The US is trying to force recognition of Juan Guaido as president in Caracas. Mnuchin said that the move is to "to help prevent the further diversion" of assets by "former president Maduro." Sanctions will be lifted upon the "expeditious transfer of control to the interim

president, or the subsequently democratically elected interim government," he added. "We know what the legitimate government of Venezuela is, and it is our mission to make reality what the people of Venezuela want," National Security Adviser John Bolton chimed in, standing next to Mnuchin during the briefing at the White House on Monday. In addition to \$7 billion in PDVSA assets in the US, the sanctions will affect \$11 billion



worth of exports over the coming year, Bolton said. The US buys a significant amount of Venezuelan oil, but Mnuchin said the sanctions would have "modest effect" on American refineries. (RT)

Uzbekneftegaz Proposes SOCAR and BP Joint Studies of Investment Blocks

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan offered Azerbaijan state-owned company SOCAR and BP to explore the possibilities of joint geological study of investment blocks in Ustyurt region of Uzbekistan, Trend reports via Uzbekneftegaz. The proposition was made at the meeting of Uzbekneftegaz JSC, SOCAR and BP representatives with the Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Alisher Sultanov. Moreover, it was also noted that partnership with SOCAR and BP is a priority for the oil and gas industry of Uzbekistan. "Attracting foreign direct investment without the participation of

third parties was among the topical issues. On this base, representatives of foreign companies were invited to explore the possibilities of joint geological exploration of the Aralomorsk, Sam-Kosbulak and Bayterek investment blocks of the Ustyurt region," the message says. Representatives of delegations expressed their interest and spoke about the meetings held on this issue in the joint-stock companies IGIRNIGM, Uzbekgeofizika and "O'ZLITINEFTGAZ". As a result of meeting, parties agreed to continue the dialogue in the designated areas. (Trend)

Macron Calls for Inter-Religious Dialogue at End of Egypt Visit



CAIRO - French President Emmanuel Macron met Tuesday with Egypt's top clerics and called for inter-religious dialogue at the

end of a three-day visit aimed at boosting ties while raising human rights concerns. Macron and Pope Tawadros II stressed the

need for "dialogue between religions" as he met with Pope Tawadros II at St. Mark's Cathedral, seat of Egypt's ancient Coptic Orthodox Church. "I decided that a new conference will be held in Paris to see how to act more effectively," he said, without giving details. A diplomatic source said the French capital would host a forum on religious minorities in the Middle East, but without giving a date. Macron visited the

church adjacent to the cathedral that was the site of a December 2016 jihadist attack which killed 29 people. He also met in Cairo with Ahmed al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, the most prestigious seat of Sunni Islamic learning in Egypt. Their talks centred on "the training of imams (prayer leaders) in France and the fight against the misguided vision of religion", the French presidency said. (AFP)

British Jews Apply for German Nationality as Brexit Looms

BERLIN - Simon Wallfisch grew up in London as the grandson of an Auschwitz survivor, who had sworn to never return to the country that murdered her parents and 6 million other Jews. But more than 70 years after the Holocaust, Brexit has prompted Wallfisch and thousands of other Jews in Britain to apply for German citizenship, which was stripped from their ancestors by the Nazis during the Third Reich. "This disaster that we

call Brexit has led to me just finding a way to secure my future and my children's future," said Wallfisch, 36, a well-known classical singer and cellist who received his German passport in October. "In order to remain European I've taken the European citizenship." Britons holding dual citizenship from an EU country like Germany will retain the privilege of free movement and work across the soon-to-be 27-nation bloc. (AP)

China Tells US to Stop 'Unreasonable Crackdown' on Huawei

BEIJING - China called on Washington on Tuesday to "stop the unreasonable crackdown" on Huawei after the United States stepped up pressure on the tech giant by indicting it on charges of stealing technology and violating sanctions on Iran. Beijing will "firmly defend" its companies, a foreign ministry statement said. It gave no indication whether Beijing might retaliate for the charges against Huawei, China's first global tech brand and the biggest maker of switching gear for phone and internet companies. Huawei Technologies Ltd., which has spent a decade battling U.S. accusations it is a front for Chinese spying, denied committing any of the violations cited in Monday's indictment. (AP)

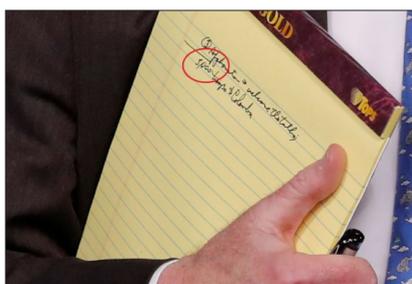
UK's May Seeks Changes to Brexit Deal as EU Stands Firm

LONDON - The British Parliament was set to vote on competing Brexit plans Tuesday, with Prime Minister Theresa May desperately seeking a mandate from lawmakers to help secure concessions from the European Union. But amid political gridlock in London and with Brexit day just two months away, the EU shows few, if any, signs of renegotiating the divorce deal it struck with May late last year. British legislators were delivering verdicts on proposals that have been submitted by both pro-Brexit and pro-EU legislators since Parliament rejected May's divorce deal with the bloc two weeks ago, leaving Britain lurching toward a cliff-edge "no-deal" departure on March 29. (AP)

Bogota Says It Has No Clue about Bolton's Puzzling '5,000 Troops to Colombia' Note

BOGOTÁ - Colombia has dismissed speculation regarding a puzzling memo from John Bolton, which mentioned 5,000 US troops being sent to the Latin American nation, affirming that it will rely on politics and diplomacy in the Venezuela crisis.

Colombian Foreign Minister Carlos Holmes said he is unaware of the "importance and reason" behind John Bolton's memo, noting that his country will only act "politically and diplomatically" in dealing with Venezuela. The South American nation shares a 2,200km



land border with Venezuela and has sided with the US in piling pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government. Recently, Bogota backed Juan Guaido, the opposition leader who proclaimed himself to be the interim president of

Venezuela. The tight-lipped remark came in response to news from the White House on Monday, when US National Security Advisor John Bolton was spotted holding up a yellow legal notebook during a press briefing on Venezuela. (RT)

Syrian Arab Fighters Battle IS for Revenge

BAGHOUS (Syria) - Near the front line in eastern Syria, Amer Khalifa plays with a sword he found. To "avenge" his family, he has joined a Kurdish-led alliance fighting the Islamic State group.

The 22-year-old is one of numerous members of the Shaytat tribe who have joined the fight to flush out the jihadists from a shrinking enclave near the Iraqi border. Backed by US-led coalition air strikes, they have confined the extremists to a final pocket spanning just four square kilometres (one and a half square miles) on the Euphrates River in Deir Ezzor province. "I want to avenge my brother and my relatives," Khalifa says. "I will fight to the bitter end of the battle, and then I'll hunt down their sleeper cells," says the Deir Ezzor native.

IS swept across large swathes of Syria and neighbouring Iraq in 2014 and proclaimed an "caliphate" that at its peak reached the size of Britain. As they rampaged across Deir Ezzor, IS fighters massacred more than 900 members of the Arab Shaytat tribe. That summer, Khalifa's 26-year-old brother, his maternal uncles, and a cousin on his father's side all went missing. The young fighter believes IS killed them. He joined the Kurdish-led SDF in the neighbouring northeastern province of Hasakeh in late 2016, after escaping his IS-controlled home village of Abu Hamam. (AFP)

Emirati Banks Say Their Merger Brings Total Assets of \$114B

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates - Three banks in the United Arab Emirates say they will merge into one institution with assets of \$114 billion. Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, Union National Bank and Al Hilal Bank made the announcement Tuesday after markets closed in the UAE. Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank and Union National Bank plan to operate under the name of Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank. Al Hilal Bank will retain

its name and operate as a separate Islamic bank within the group. The merger would create the third-largest bank in the UAE by value and the fifth-largest in the wider Gulf Cooperation Council. The merger comes amid other mergers in the UAE as the oil-rich country's economy has slowed down over lower energy prices, a sluggish real estate market and its ongoing military campaign in Yemen. (AP)

Turkmenistan Mulls Water Issues at Regional Level in Tashkent

ASHGABAT - The 6th EU-Central Asia high-level conference on environment and water cooperation was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Trend reports referring to the Turkmen Foreign Ministry on Jan. 29. The representatives of the corresponding organizations and specialists in the field of environment, climate change and water resources of the Central Asian countries and the EU countries attended the conference. The conference participants discussed the progress made by the Central Asian countries since 2015 in the field of environment, climate

change and water resources. The conference was organized within the EU-Central Asia platform for environment and water cooperation, which covers the priority areas, namely, environmental management, closed-loop economics, sustainable production and consumption, climate change and water resource management. Earlier, Turkmenistan proposed to open a regional center for technologies in Ashgabat related to climate change in Central Asia and develop the UN Aral Sea Program and the UN Water Strategy. (Trend)

Another round of talks between Pakistan, IMF ends 'fruitless'

ISLAMABAD - Another round of talks between Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ended "fruitless" on Tuesday, as both the sides failed to reach consensus for a fresh bailout package, a local media outlet reported. According to the sources, during the talks held in Islamabad, the officials negotiating from the IMF side demanded further devaluation of rupee against the greenback, an increase in tax collection as well as interest rate. On these demands, the Pakistani officials stated that an increase in the interest rate would simultaneously increase the expenses on the government side, while achievement of tax col-

lection of Rs4,435 billion would also be difficult, the sources said. Sources within the finance ministry said the rupee had already been devalued, while demands of the IMF were "not acceptable to us". However, Pakistan and the IMF agreed to continue talks in the future, while dates in this regard would be decided later with the mutual consent of both the parties. Earlier on November 20, 2018, Pakistan had extended talks with the IMF after the two sides failed to agree on the terms of a bailout package. Finance ministry spokesman Noor Ahmed had said there were still some issues to be ironed out. (Agencies)