

Tony Blair Says Brexit Must be Stopped to Halt Harm to UK

LONDON — There's a chance Britain won't leave the European Union, former Prime Minister Tony Blair said Saturday, arguing that stopping Brexit is "necessary" to avoid severe economic damage.

In an article published by Blair's Institute for Global Change, he wrote that EU leaders might be willing to "reform and meet us half way" to keep the U.K. in the bloc. He said that might include compromise on freedom of movement — a key EU principle that conflicts with Britain's goal of placing limits on immigration. Blair said conditions in Britain and Europe had



changed since the U.K.'s EU membership referendum in June 2016. Europe has some new leaders, including France's centrist President Emmanuel Macron. And in Britain, the Conservative government suffered a setback in last month's election. Blair also told Sky News that "every day is bringing us fresh evidence" of Brexit's harm to Britain, with economic growth slowing and the value of the pound down sharply since the June 2016 EU membership referendum. "This is causing us real damage. That's beyond doubt," he said. "I think it's absolutely necessary that it doesn't happen." (AP)

France Wades into Qatar Row, Urges End to Punitive Measures

DOHA, Qatar — France's foreign minister on Saturday called on Qatar's neighbors to immediately lift measures impacting thousands of people in the Gulf, becoming the latest foreign diplomat to visit the region and attempt to find a resolution to a crisis that has dragged on for more than a month.

In early June, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut ties with Qatar and moved to isolate the small, but wealthy Gulf nation, canceling air routes between their capitals and

Qatar's and closing their airspace to Qatari flights. Saudi Arabia also sealed Qatar's only land border, impacting a key source of food imports in the mostly desert nation.

The four countries also expelled all Qatari nationals, impacting mixed-nationality families in the Gulf, students and people seeking medical treatment abroad, among others.

Prior to the dispute, Qataris could travel visa-free between the Gulf countries. "France is calling for these measures to be lifted, especially ones that



affect the (Qatari) population, specifically measures that impact bi-national families that have been separated," Le Drian said. He was speaking to reporters in Qatar alongside Qatari Foreign Minister

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, who said he welcomed mediation efforts and possible negotiations so long as they are founded on respect for "sovereignty." (AP)

US, EU Shake Hands but Fail to Come Closer

PARIS — While U.S. President Donald Trump describes the friendship between the United States and France as "unbreakable," and the country as a "strategic ally," divergence remains regarding climate issues. "Something could happen with respect to the Paris accord, let's see what happens," said Trump, indicating a possible change in his stance on the Paris Agreement, out of which he pulled the United States in early June. But whether the U.S. returns to the accord remains to be seen, and no one's holding their breath.

The U.S. president is on his third trip to Europe since taking office and second in a week amid a political crisis at home surrounding a meeting between his son and a Russian lawyer during last year's presidential campaign. The trips come at a time when the relationship between the U.S. and the European Union (EU) has soured. SHARED VALUES BUT DIFFERENT PATHS Europe is still adapting to President Trump, although changes are emerging on the continent. (Xinhua)

Macron Vows Merciless Fight Against Terror

NICE, France — French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday vowed to "fight without mercy" inside and outside France to end extremist attacks like the one that killed 86 revelers on Bastille Day in the Riviera city of Nice one year ago. In a speech on the anniversary of the atrocity, Macron said "this is what we owe you." Some of the victims and their families present as well as dignitaries and the corps of first responders, from police to rescue crews and hospital workers, were among those he addressed.

Commemorations followed celebrations on Bastille Day for Macron, who traveled to Nice for a solemn remembrance of the lives lost on July 14, 2016, when a huge truck barreled down a famed beachside promenade, running over revelers awaiting the fireworks display on France's national day. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack, though it remains unclear whether the Tunisian at the wheel of the truck, a longtime Nice resident, had any formal links to the organization. (AP)

Syria Peace Process Moves Ahead

GENEVA — A new round of talks will be convened in early September to end the war that has ravaged Syria since 2011, the UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura told a press conference Friday. "We have just concluded the seventh round of talks. We have made incremental progress, no breakthrough, no breakdowns, no one walked out," the UN envoy told reporters. The peace process to end the six-year Syrian civil war has been long, but so far unfruitful. However, after reconvening for a week, some

small steps were made toward the goal of de Mistura. The Italian-Swedish diplomat, who has headed the UN peace efforts in Syria since July 2014, spelled out that during the week-long talks, he asked all involved parties to discuss substantial issues on four topics: governance, constitution, re-elections and anti-terrorism. The last UN-led talks aimed at brokering a political solution between Syria's warring factions ended on May 19 without going deeper into the scheduled topics.



De Mistura stressed that this week had involved "preparatory work" aimed at getting people "closer to each other" and he had sought to "assist the opposition to start working closely to-

gether." He met and spoke to the Syrian government delegation and opposition members separately, hoping to push them all to finally "sit in the same room." (Xinhua)

EU Calls on Turkey to 'Respect Rule of Law' One Year after Failed Coup

BRUSSELS — The European Union (EU) on Friday reiterated its condemnation of the coup attempt in Turkey one year after the plot was routed, but called on Turkish government to "respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law" when bringing the individual perpetrators to justice. "The EU reiterates its condemnation of the attempted coup, as it did during the very first hours of that dramatic night of July 15 2016, and recalls its full support to the democratically elected institutions of the country. The EU stands in solidarity with Turkey and all the Turkish people," said a joint statement issued by EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini and EU enlargement commissioner Johannes Hahn. (Xinhua)

Merkel's Rival to Meet Macron in Paris on Thursday

BERLIN — Germany's Social Democrats (SPD) leader Martin Schulz will meet French President Emmanuel Macron for talks in Paris on Thursday, a party spokesman said on Saturday. Schulz hopes to unseat Chancellor Angela Merkel in a Sept. 24 election, but the center-left party has lost momentum in the polls after making gains initially following his nomination in January. Schulz will give a speech about the future of Europe at the Institut d'études politiques (Sciences Po) in Paris before being welcomed by Macron in the Elysee palace, the SPD party spokesman said. Macron's presidential office confirmed the meeting with Schulz that is scheduled for 1900 CET (1700 GMT). (Reuters)

Turkey Marks National Holiday of 'Democracy and Unity'

ISTANBUL — Turkey marked its national holiday of "democracy and unity" on Saturday in bid to celebrate the anniversary of foiling the failed coup launched last July.

Turkey has embarked on the major purge in Turkey's history, arresting 50,000 people and sacking over 100,000 more. Erdogan also shored up his position by winning a referendum on enhancing his powers earlier this year. In the recent wave of dismissals ordered just



hours another 7,563 police, soldiers and other state employees were fired under the state of emergency that has been in place since July 20 last year.

The coup bid also frayed ties between the United States and European Union with NATO member Turkey, which accused its allies of failing to show solidarity. (Xinhua)

EU Environment Ministers Stress Cooperation in Climate Action

TALLINN — Environment ministers of European Union (EU) member states on Friday reaffirmed Europe's commitment to the Paris Agreement and stressed the role of cooperation in climate action. On the second day of a two-day informal ministerial meeting, the ministers agreed to keep the promise to reduce EU carbon emissions by 40 percent by 2030, which, in the long run, will benefit not only the environment but also the well-being of people and the competitiveness of the economy, Estonian Environment Minister Siim Kiisler was quoted as saying in a press release. "As the leaders of G20 recently

stated, a strong economy and a healthy planet are mutually reinforcing, and the Paris Agreement is irreversible," he noted. The ministers said that effective climate action would require cooperation, including working with the private sector and local authorities, if the global agreement were to be a success. Kiisler said the EU would continue to demonstrate global solidarity by investing in international cooperation to reduce climate-related risks, noting that the EU and its member states provided a total of 17.6 billion euros (about 20.2 billion U.S. dollars) from public budgets toward the efforts. (Xinhua)

Russia Sees Growing Acceptance of Assad as Key to Syria Talks

GENEVA — U.N.-led Syria talks have a chance of making progress because demands for the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad have receded, Russia's ambassador in Geneva, Alexei Borodavkin, told reporters on Saturday.

The seventh round of talks, which ended on Friday, had produced positive results, especially a "correction" in the approach of the main opposition delegation, the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee, he said. "The essence of this correction is that during this round the opposition never once demanded the immediate resignation of President Bashar al-Assad and the legitimate Syrian government."

The HNC and its backers in Western and Gulf capitals had realized that peace needed to come first, and then political reforms could be negotiated, he said. "Assad must go" was long the mantra of the HNC and its international backers, a call flatly rejected by Russia, which is widely seen as holding the balance of power in Syria because of its military involvement and alliance with Assad.

But over the past year the opposition suffered military defeats at the hands of forces loyal to Assad, and neither U.S. President Donald Trump nor French President Emmanuel Macron is calling for his immediate ouster. Assad's negotiators at the U.N. talks have avoided discussion of any kind of political transition, preferring to focus on the fight against terrorism. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

President Xi Urges Financial Sector to Better Serve Real Economy

BEIJING — Chinese President Xi Jinping urged the financial sector to better serve the real economy at a two-day National Financial Work Conference that ended Saturday. Serving the real economy is the bounden duty and purpose of the financial sector and the fundamental way to guard against financial risks, Xi said.

The financial sector should improve service efficiency and quality and channel more resources into major and weak areas of economic and social development, he said. Developing direct financing will be prioritized while indi-

rect financing structure should be optimized by accelerating strategic transformation of state-owned major banks and developing small and medium-sized banks and private financial institutions, according to Xi. Inclusive financing mechanism will be developed to improve support to small and medium-sized enterprises and rural and remote places.

Green financing is encouraged. Xi also urged financial institutions to reduce operation costs and regulate intermediary services to avoid lifting real economy's financing costs. (Xinhua)

Pakistan Seeks Harmonious, Peaceful Coexistence with all Countries

KARACHI — Pakistan seeks harmonious and peaceful coexistence with all the countries especially its neighbors, said Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJSC), Gen. Zubair Mahmood Hayat.

He was speaking as chief guest at the 107th Midshipmen and 16th Short Service Commissioning Parade, comprising 72 Pakistani and 28 officers from friendly countries, held at Pakistan Naval Academy PNS RAH-BAR. A PN statement on Saturday said that upon his arrival, the Chief Guest was received by Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah. The Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, while addressing the Passing out Parade said that Pakistan

seeks harmonious and peaceful co-existence with all countries, especially our neighbors. However, Pakistan's quest for peace and stability has to be in consonance with our national interest, sovereign rights and national pride. We desire to work with our allies, friends and partners to bring peace, security, stability and prosperity to the region and beyond, he added.

The chief guest further said that Pakistan is fully aware of threats from hostile Intelligence agencies which are operating from Afghanistan and other locations to create unrest in Pakistan in general and Balochistan in particular and their designs to sabotage China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are also well known. (APP)

Iran Urges U.S. to Abide by Nuclear Deal

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Thursday that the U.S. must respect Iran nuclear deal as an international treaty, Tehran Times daily reported on Friday. "We expect all the sides to abide by their commitments, but the U.S. has remained committed to the agreement at the least level," Zarif said upon arrival in New York to participate in the meeting of the High-Level Political Forum 2017 in the UN headquarters.

"The U.S. administration has not respected and supported the spirit of the deal by adopting wrong approaches and policies," he said, adding that the U.S. government "has not let Iran gain benefits from the deal completely." Iran has said Washington should be commit-

ted to its obligations under the nuclear agreement which endorses the removal of sanctions and barriers of banking transactions.

During his campaign, U.S. President Donald Trump repeatedly criticized the Iran nuclear deal, calling it "the worst deal ever negotiated." In July 2015, Iran and six world powers, Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, reached an agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue, which put it on the path of sanctions relief but with more strict limits on its nuclear program. The deal set limits on Iran's nuclear activities as it would take Tehran at least one year to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon, and allowed regular inspections of the facilities inside Iran. (Xinhua)

Tajik President and Turkmen FM Discuss Co-Op

DUSHANBE — Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and Deputy Chairman of Turkmen Cabinet of Ministers — Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov discussed cooperation at the meeting in Dushanbe, Tajik presidential press-service said. Tajik president and Turkmen foreign minister stressed the need to activate partnership within the Tajik-Turkmen intergovernmental commission on trade and economic, scientific and technical cooperation in order to ensure a perma-

nent dialogue of the business community and state companies, and opening of trading houses of both countries. The sides expressed interest for cooperation in economy, trade, energy, including the construction of a regional gas pipeline, implementation of joint projects in road transport, especially ensuring of regular direct flights between the countries, construction of regional railways, greater interaction in science, education, culture and healthcare. (Trend)