

EU Officials Seek Sense of Urgency as Brexit Bargaining Begins

BRUSSELS - EU officials hope the British government shows more urgency about a Brexit deal when its negotiators come to Brussels on Monday for a first full round of talks aimed at smoothing Britain's departure. "The hard work starts now," European Union chief negotiator Michel Barnier said on Wednesday, again sounding a note of alarm that London has yet to provide detailed proposals on a range of key issues, with barely a year left for bargaining. A year after the referendum vote to leave, Prime Minister Theresa May still faces a complex task in finding consensus at home on what kind of Brexit Britain wants. That job was



made all the harder by losing her parliamentary majority last month. Her Brexit minister, veteran anti-EU campaigner David Davis, will meet Barnier, a French former cabinet minister, at the European Commission's Berlaymont headquarters at 9:15 a.m. (0715 GMT) on Monday for a brief public handshake before formal business begins. Their teams will spend most of the next four days in smaller working groups, trying to identify areas of accord and discord on a set of issues agreed on during an initial day of talks on June 19. On Thursday afternoon, Davis and Barnier should hold a news conference, to fix publicly what has been agreed so far. (Reuters)

Macron Calls for New Israeli-Palestinian Talks

PARIS - French President Emmanuel Macron has called for new Israeli-Palestinian peace talks to create two independent states. After meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Paris, Macron said that "everything should be done so that negotiations restart" with the aim of reaching a two-state solution, as the international community has long sought. Macron also condemned an attack last week that killed two Israeli police officers at a Jerusalem

shrine revered by Jews and Muslims. Macron's office said he is concerned about Israel's security but also about growing Jewish settlement building, and worried that Netanyahu is backing away from commitment to a two-state solution. The two leaders also discussed fighting extremism in Syria and elsewhere, and improving economic cooperation. French President Emmanuel Macron has denounced his country's collaboration in the Holo-



caust, lashing out at those who still downplay the French role in sending tens of thousands of Jews to death. Commemorating 75 years since a mass roundup of French Jews outside

of Paris, Macron insisted that "it was indeed France that organized this." He said "not a single German" was directly involved, but French police collaborating with the Nazis. (AP)

French Foreign Minister Arrives in Saudi Arabia for Qatar Diplomatic Crisis

RIYADH - French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian arrived Saturday in Jeddah, a major coastal city in western Saudi Arabia to help address the Qatar diplomatic crisis. "France calls for the lifting, as soon as possible, of the measures that affect the populations in particular, bi-national families that have been separated and students," Le Drian said at a joint press conference with Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir. Le Drian urged the four countries that severed diplomatic

ties with Qatar -- Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Egypt -- to resolve the ongoing crisis through dialogues. After his visit to Riyadh, Le Drian will go to Kuwait and the UAE to attempt mediation. Al-Jubeir claimed he could provide evidence that Qatar violated the 2013 Riyadh Agreement and the 2014 Riyadh Supplementary Agreement, both of which aim to enhance cooperation between Gulf nations and avoid interference in each other's internal affairs. (Xinhua)

Trump Losing Public Support: Poll

WASHINGTON - Public support for President Donald Trump is dropping, a poll showed Sunday, as he faces multiple setbacks over his stalled agenda and efforts to repeal and replace Obamacare. Nearly six months since he took office, Trump is facing a declining approval rating that has dropped from 42 percent in April to 36 percent, according to a Washington Post-ABC News poll of 1,001 adults. Similarly, his disapproval rating has jumped five points to 58 percent. A total of 48 percent of respondents said they "dis-

approve strongly" of the president's performance in office -- a low threshold never reached by ex-presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, both Democrats, and only reached once by George W. Bush, during his second term. And 48 percent also see American global leadership weakening since Trump entered the White House, while 27 percent said it is stronger. Most respondents (66 percent) said they do not or only somewhat trust Trump in negotiating with foreign leaders, especially with Russian President Vladimir Putin (also



66 percent). Of those, 48 percent said they do not trust Trump "at all" in negotiations with Putin. Opinions over Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election and whether the Trump campaign colluded with

Moscow -- a subject of multiple investigations -- divided sharply along partisan lines. Only 33 percent of Republicans polled said Russia tried to influence the election, compared with 80 percent of Democrats. (AFP)

U.S.-Backed Forces Control over 42,000 Sq. Km of Syria after Battles with IS

DAMASCUS - The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have taken control of more than 42,000 square km of Syria, a monitor group said Saturday. The SDF, an alliance of Kurdish, Arab and Assyrian fighters led by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), have expanded their control in several northern Syrian areas following battles with the Islamic State (IS) group. Their recent notable gain was in the northern city of Raqqa, the main stronghold of the IS in Syria. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said despite the progress made by the SDF, the battles haven't reached the central part of Raqqa. The London-based watchdog also said the battle of Raqqa is not easy, given the IS counter-offensives against the SDF. (Xinhua)

India's Modi Urges States to Curb Violence by Cow Protection Groups

NEW DELHI - India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi called on states to do more to prevent attacks on people accused of eating beef or slaughtering cows, an animal sacred to majority Hindus. Modi's comments follow the stabbing to death in June of a 16-year-old boy accused of possessing beef on a train, the latest of an estimated 28 people killed in cow-related violence since 2010. Most of the victims were killed after Modi and his Hindu nationalist party won elections three years ago. "The state governments should take stern action such anti-social elements," Modi tweeted after meeting representatives of political parties ahead of the monsoon session of parliament starting on Monday. (Reuters)

Macron: My Charm Offensive may Soften Trump's Climate Stance

PARIS - French President Emmanuel Macron says his glamorous Paris charm offensive on Donald Trump was carefully calculated -- and may have changed the U.S. president's mind about climate change. Macron defended his outreach to Trump, whose "America first" policies have elicited worry and disdain in Europe. "Our countries are friends, so we should be too," Macron said in an interview Sunday in the Journal du dimanche newspaper. After



a tense, white-knuckle handshake at their first meeting in May, Macron said they gained "better, intimate knowledge of each other" during Trump's visit to Paris last week. On their main point of contention -- Trump's withdrawal from the landmark Paris climate agreement -- Macron is quoted as saying that "Donald Trump listened to me." (AP)

Iraq Denies Intention to Militarily Intervene in Syria to Fight IS

RIYADH - Iraqi Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ahmad Jamal on Sunday denied Baghdad's intention to militarily intervene in Syria to fight the terror group Islamic State (IS). In an exclusive interview with the Saudi television channel Al Arabiya, Jamal said that the Iraqi Constitution prohibits it from intervening in the affairs of another country. Jamal made the remarks after Iraq's Ambassador to Iran Rajih Al-Mousawi was quoted by the Iranian News Agency Tasnim as saying that Iraq does not mind in militarily intervening in Syria to fight IS, adding "Iraq has

friends like Iran to help it." But Iraqi officials immediately denied that Iraq would intervene in Syria, while others accused Iran of twisting the envoy's remarks, Al Arabiya reported. In response to Mousawi's statements, Iraqi Vice President Osama Nujaiifi said that they only represented "his own personal opinion." Iraq just achieved a milestone in defeating IS with its victory in liberating Mosul from IS earlier the week. IS is still holding some remote parts of Iraq and major Syrian cities, such as Raqqa, its de facto capital in Syria. (Xinhua)

U.S. Senate to Delay Votes on Republican Health-Care Bill

WASHINGTON - U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell late Saturday night announced a delay to vote on a Republican bill to repeal and replace the country's existing health-care program. The announcement came after a statement said that Republican Senator John McCain would stay home recovering from surgery on a blood clot, which would leave Republicans short of the votes required to move forward the legislation. The Republican's health-care bill -- the Better

Care Reconciliation Act (BCRA) -- is designed to replace former President Barack Obama's signature health-care law, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as the Obamacare. McCain had a two-inch blood clot removed from above his left eye by surgeons in Phoenix Friday. "On the advice of his doctors, Senator McCain will be recovering in Arizona next week," a spokesperson for the 80-year-old senator said in a statement Saturday. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

US-China Rifts Widen despite Economic Headway

WASHINGTON - Three months after US President Donald Trump hosted a lavish welcome for his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping at his Florida resort, the powers have made headway on an ambitious economic plan even as diplomatic rifts between them have widened. Speaking in Paris on Thursday, the American leader was full of praise for Xi, proclaiming him a "friend" for whom he has "great respect", a "great leader" and a "very talented man." The expressions of admiration have gone both ways -- a day earlier Beijing's foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang had hailed "positive advances" in China-US economic cooperation based on a spirit of "consensus" between the two leaders. Both sides see moderate progress on a wide-ranging 100-day economic action plan, first unveiled at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in April that covers such areas as financial services, investment, energy and trade -- a topic close to the US president's heart. Jake Parker, vice president of the US-China Business Council in Beijing, largely agreed: "Overall, the 100-day outcomes are positive first steps addressing lingering issues in the US-China commercial relationship," he said, while adding that more needed to be done to address structural issues such as foreign investment restrictions. (AFP)

Pakistan Launches 'Major' Military Operation against Daesh in Tribal Areas

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Army on Sunday announced to have launched a major anti-terrorist operation in tribal areas of Rajgal and Shawwal to flush out Daesh militants attempting to take hold in the Khyber Agency. Replying to a question, DG ISPR Major General Asif Ghafoor said there is no organized infrastructure of Daesh in Pakistan and we shall not allow them to take foothold here. He, however, added that Daesh is gaining strength in Afghanistan, while some splinters groups of Taiban and other militant groups are using its name here. The DG ISPR said a follow-up operation, Khyber-4, has been launched in tribal areas. A division-plus size force will take part in the operation, he informed, hoping they plan to unilaterally secure the international border, eliminate hideouts, and complete physical hold on Khyber Agency. The army spokesperson also gave a country-wide breakdown of the operations taken as part of Operation Raddul Fasaad. The military spokesperson was repeatedly asked to comment on the rumours that some elements of military establishment are trying to derail the government. He categorically stated that this question does not even merit an answer. He went on to say that the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) was constituted by the Supreme Court and the representatives of military institutions i.e. Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Military Intelligence (MI) worked honestly under the apex court's orders. The JIT has no direct link with the army, he said. (Monitoring Desk)

Iran, Russia Hold Joint Naval Drills in Caspian Sea

TEHRAN - Russian and Iran's navy forces attended a joint exercise in the Caspian Sea on Saturday, Tasnim news agency reported. The Russian fleet, including Russia's Makhachkala battleship from the country's Caspian Sea Marine Brigade, took part in the drills. The fleet had berthed at Iran's northern port city of Anzali on Wednesday as part of programs intended to boost military cooperation between the two countries. It was the fifth Russian naval flotilla visiting the Iranian Caspian port in the past decade as parts of their naval vessels making regular "friendly" port calls. Iran has also dispatched fleets to the Russian ports on similar missions. In October 2016, a Russian naval flotilla arrived in Anzali in response to the dispatch of Iran's naval fleets to Astrakhan in southern Russia in September. The visits aimed to convey messages of peace and to help improve bilateral ties. More fleets from Caspian littoral states would arrive in Iran's northern ports in the future, said Iran's Rear Admiral Afshin Rezaei Haddad. He added that the navies of five Caspian littoral countries are cooperating to secure it as the sea for peace, mutual respect and good-neighborliness. Iran has sent several fleets with the same mission from the country's northern and southern waters to the high seas. (Xinhua)

Turkmenistan Continues Exploring Uzynada Gas Field

ASHGABAT - A new gas field - Uzynada - has recently appeared on the geological map of Turkmenistan, the Neutral Turkmenistan newspaper reports. Currently, two more deep wells are being drilled at the field, as well as the construction of roads, engineering, communication, production and technical facilities is underway. The field belongs to the fields' zone of Kyzylkum depression, which is located not more than 200 meters above the sea level. The Chinese-made ZJ-70DB drilling rig, designed for deep drilling is used at the field. The design depth of exploratory well #7 is 7,150 meters and has no analogues in the region. The daily production rate of the new well is 500,000 cubic meters of natural gas and 150 tons of gas condensate. (Trend)