

Brexit Talks Begin in Earnest with Citizens' Rights in Focus

BRUSSELS — Talks to extricate Britain from the European Union began in earnest Monday with both sides still seemingly far apart on citizens' rights after Brexit officially takes place in less than two years. After an initial meeting last month where the structure of the talks was determined, Britain's Brexit minister, David Davis, met up with the EU's chief Brexit negotiator in Brussels ahead of four-days of discussions. Progress on citizens' rights is one of the three main issues that have to be resolved before the two sides can start talking about a wide-ranging free trade



deal, the others being the bill Britain has to pay to meet existing commitments and the border issue in Ireland.

The British proposal offers EU nationals who have lived in Britain for at least five years — as of an unspecified cutoff date — the right to live, work and access benefits.

The estimated 3 million EU nationals in Britain would all have to apply individually for permission to stay, and it's unclear what the plan would mean for those who have been in the U.K. for a shorter time or what rights family members will have. (AP)

IMF Hails 'Ambitious' French Reforms under Macron

PARIS — The IMF on Monday hailed French President Emmanuel Macron's "ambitious" reform programme, saying his spending cuts and tax overhaul could "go a long way in addressing... long-standing economic challenges". The International Monetary Fund raised its 2017 growth prediction for France by 0.1 points to 1.5 percent and said it could "further accelerate" next year. "The new government is pushing ahead with an ambitious economic programme to make France's

economy more dynamic and its public finances sustainable," the IMF said after its annual analysis of the French economy.

"The envisaged labour and tax reforms are aimed at boosting growth, employment, and competitiveness," it added.

It also said the centrist government under 39-year-old former banker Macron "has rightly emphasized" the need to decrease public spending. The IMF said such a move "would help gradually reduce the budget deficit and debt". The govern-



ment has pledged to meet the EU deficit limit of 3.0 percent of GDP in 2017, a target France has missed for the past decade.

The government said last week it had identified 4.5 billion euros (\$5.1 billion) in savings in order to

meet the goal. Local governments will also have to tighten their belts, Budget Minister Gerald Darmanin said Monday, announcing 13 billion euros in funding cuts for towns, departments and regions by 2022. (AFP)

Lavrov Calls U.S. Preconditions to Return Russian Property 'Robbery': RIA

MOSCOW — U.S. attempts to set preconditions for the return of Russian diplomatic property seized in New York and Maryland are "daylight robbery", Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Monday, the RIA news agency reported.

Barack Obama, then U.S. president, ordered the seizure of two Russian diplomatic compounds and the expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats in December over what he said was their involvement in hacking the 2016 U.S. presidential election cam-

paign, something Russia flatly denies. Moscow has said a lot will depend on the outcome of a meeting in Washington later on Monday between Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and U.S. Undersecretary of State Thomas Shannon who will discuss the continued diplomatic row. Lavrov, on a visit to Belarus, was also cited as saying that "anti-Russian feeling" in the United States meant it was not certain that Moscow and Washington could agree on key global issues. (Reuters)

Denmark to Train NATO Soldiers to Combat Russian Misinformation

COPENHAGEN — Danish troops will get training in how to deal with Russian misinformation before being sent to join a NATO military buildup in Estonia in January, Defense Minister Claus Hjort Frederiksen said on Monday.

"It is a whole new world. The Danish soldiers need to be extremely aware of that. Therefore I have arranged with the armed forces that the soldiers being sent out in January are informed and educated in how to protect themselves," Frederiksen told

Danish broadcaster DR. "It is easy to imagine they will become exposed to intimidation and fake rumors," he said of the 200 Danish soldiers being deployed.

In February, Lithuanian prosecutors opened a criminal investigation into a false report of a 15-year-old girl being raped by German NATO soldiers which spread quickly on social media. NATO accused Russia of being behind the false report and said it expected more propaganda of this sort in the future. (Reuters)

EU Weighs new North Korea Sanctions after Missile Test

BRUSSELS — The European Union is considering tougher sanctions on North Korea over its first intercontinental ballistic missile test to prevent the isolated country from funding further nuclear weapons development. In a statement Monday, the EU's executive arm condemned the test earlier this month as a "serious threat to international peace and security" and urged an end to such actions.

In addition to existing sanctions, the statement said, the EU "will con-



sider further appropriate responses" in coordination with allies and U.N. efforts.

The EU also offered European support for South

Korean efforts to negotiate with North Korea. The missile launch has stoked international security fears. North Korean leader Kim Jong

Un said he would never negotiate his weapons programs unless the United States abandons its hostile policy toward his country. (AP)

South Korea's New Government Proposes Military Talks with North Korea

SEOUL — South Korea proposed military talks with North Korea, the first formal overture to Pyongyang by the government of President Moon Jae-in, to discuss ways to avoid hostile acts near the heavily militarized border.

There was no immediate response by the North to the proposal for talks later this week. The two sides technically remain at war but Moon, who came to power in May, has pledged to engage the North in dialogue as well as bring pressure to impede its nuclear and missile programs.

The offer comes after the North claimed to have conducted the first test of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) earlier this month, and said it had mastered the technology to mount a nuclear warhead on the missile. South Korea and the United States, its main ally, dispute the claim.

"Talks and cooperation between the two Koreas to ease tension and bring about peace on the Korean peninsula will be instrumental for pushing forth a mutual, virtuous cycle for inter-Korea relations and North Korea's nuclear problem," the South's Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon told a news briefing.

The South Korean defense ministry proposed talks with the North on July 21 at Tongilgak to stop all activities that fuel tension at the military demarcation line.

Cho also urged the restoration of military and government hotlines across the border, which had been cut by the North last year in response to the South imposing economic sanctions after a nuclear test by Pyongyang. In all, the North has conducted five nuclear tests and numerous missile tests. (Reuters)

Presidential Election Begins in India

NEW DELHI — India's presidential election began Monday, with parliamentarians and state legislators voting to select between ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's contender Ram Nath Kovind and opposition nominee Meira Kumar.

Voting began at 10:00 a.m. local time and will end at 5:00 p.m. local time. A total of 4,896 lawmakers across the country — parliamentarians and legislators — are eligible to vote in the poll, the results of which will be announced on July 20. The winner of



the election will be sworn into office for a five-year term on July 27 and will replace incumbent President Pranab Mukherjee, a political veteran who has held the post since 2012. On the eve of the presidential election, Indian

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Kovind "in advance" and assured him of his government's support — given that his BJP and its allies have over 60 percent of the vote above the 17 opposition parties. (Xinhua)

Trump Denounces Poll as being Shown with Record Low Approval Rating

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Donald Trump denounced a new poll Sunday that indicates he has a lower approval rating than any of his predecessors at the six-month mark in 70 years. The ABC News/Washington Post poll, released earlier Sunday, showed only 36 percent of Americans approve Trump's performance in office, marking a six-point drop from 42 percent in April, while his disapproval rating has risen five points since then to 58 percent.

"The ABC/Washington Post Poll, even though almost 40 percent is not

bad at his time, was just about the most inaccurate poll around election time!" Trump tweeted to defend himself.

The poll said Trump's job approval is the lowest rating of any of his predecessors after their first six months into U.S. presidency.

Besides, it also showed that 48 percent of the respondents see the U.S. leadership in the world as weaker since Trump's inauguration, with only 27 percent believing it to be stronger.

Two thirds said they do not trust Trump to negotiate with other world leaders on the U.S. behalf. (Xinhua)

National President of Australia's Governing Liberal Party Calls for Unity Amid Infighting

CANBERRA — The national president of Australia's Liberal Party on Monday urged for party unity, saying the Liberal National Party (LNP) coalition government will not be re-elected if infighting, which has plagued the party for weeks, continues. Nick Greiner, who was also a Liberal Premier of New South Wales from 1988 until 1992, has described the disunity fueled by current Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, who was ousted by Turnbull in September 2015, as a "big problem" which will only continue to harm the party's chances of re-election.

"There is a big problem which needs to be resolved if the Liberal Party is to be fully competitive at the next election, and that's stating the bleeding obvious," Greiner said in comments published in The Australian newspaper on Monday. "We fundamentally need to stop talking about ourselves. I will talk to Tony, I will go and talk to Malcolm. At the end of the day they need to resolve this between themselves."

The party's national president said infighting between the liberal and conservative factions was taking the gloss off serious issues in the Parliament, something he said was a cause of disenchantment for voters and something that was reflected in the results of recent public opinion polls. "All of this is not just about strong personalities, people who've lost jobs, got jobs, this is actually very bad for the country because what it's doing is sucking the energy out of really difficult, complicated, long-term issues," Greiner said. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

China Applauds Proposal for Military, Red Cross Talks between ROK, DPRK

BEIJING — China on Monday responded to a proposal by the Republic of Korea (ROK) to hold inter-Korean military and Red Cross talks with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), urging the two sides to work together to break the stalemate.

"China believes it is in the fundamental interests of both sides to improve ties through dialogue, and promote reconciliation and cooperation," said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lu Kang at a press briefing. "It also helps to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula and boost the peace, stability and secu-

urity of the region."

The ROK on Monday proposed holding inter-Korean military talks on Friday at Tongilgak, a building on the DPRK side of the truce village of Panmunjom, to ease military tensions along the border. Separately, the South Korean Red Cross suggested holding dialogue on the reunion of families separated by the 1950-1953 Korean War, on Aug. 1 in Peace House, a building on the ROK side of Panmunjom. China hopes the two sides would work together towards a positive direction and pave the way for resuming dialogue, Lu said. (Xinhua)

Pakistan's Supreme Court Starts Hearings to Decide PM's Future

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's Supreme Court on Monday began hearings that will decide the fate of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who is fighting for his job as he contests the damning conclusions of a corruption investigation into his family's wealth.

The Supreme Court could put Sharif on trial on corruption charges or disqualify him from office, but few expect the judges to dismiss the case after an investigation team submitted a 254-page report into his family wealth last week.

Sharif has denied any wrongdoing. The investigators alleged his family's wealth was beyond its means, and accused his children, including his daughter and presumed heir Maryam, of signing forged documents to obscure ownership of posh London flats.

Speaking outside the Supreme Court, Informa-

tion Minister Maryam Aurangzeb said Sharif's family lawyers had challenged the legality of the investigators' findings, including allegations falsified evidence was submitted.

"The JIT has gone beyond the mandate it was assigned," she said, referring to the Joint Investigation Team, made up of finance and law enforcement officials including military intelligence officers. "The language the JIT has used shows its malafide."

Sharif's troubles have shone a spotlight on two issues that have bedeviled Pakistan since its creation in 1947 — corruption and the struggle for power between civilian politicians and the powerful military.

Sharif, 67, the son of an industrialist serving his third term as prime minister, has had a fractious relationship with the army. (Reuters)

Iran Warns US of 'Big Risk' if it Blacklists IRGC

TEHRAN — Iran's top military official has warned the US of the repercussions which Washington's possible branding of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization would have.

Last month, US senators passed a bill of sanctions that target Iranian individuals and entities after they called on the State Department to designate IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization.

"Tagging the Guards along with terrorist groups and imposing similar sanctions is a big risk for the Americans, their bases and their forces in the region," Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri said Monday.

The bipartisan US Senate vote, which is now to go to the House, is demanding major action from the Trump administration against the IRGC, Iran's key arm to protect the Islamic Republic.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson recently stated that Washington would support a "peaceful" regime change in Iran, and that the overall Iran policy was under development.

Baqeri warned the United States against "wrong calculations" regarding the Islamic Republic, including its planned sanctions and possible blacklisting of the IRGC. (Presstv)

EU, Uzbekistan Meet Amid Some Signs of Change

BRUSSELS — The European Union and Uzbekistan are to hold the highest-level political meeting in Brussels since the death of longtime Uzbek autocrat Islam Karimov in 2016.

EU representatives are expected to raise political issues, including human rights in the tightly controlled Central Asian country, during the meeting in the evening of July 17.

Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov will represent Tashkent at the first meeting of the EU-Uzbekistan council

since 2015.

EU officials have told RFE/RL of their hope for "renewed engagement" with Uzbekistan and have been encouraged by some liberal steps taken by President Shavkat Mirziyayev, who came to power after Karimov's death was announced in September.

Estonian Foreign Minister Sven Mikser, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, will chair the meeting and is expected to bring up issues including reforms, human rights, and the rule of law. (Agencies)