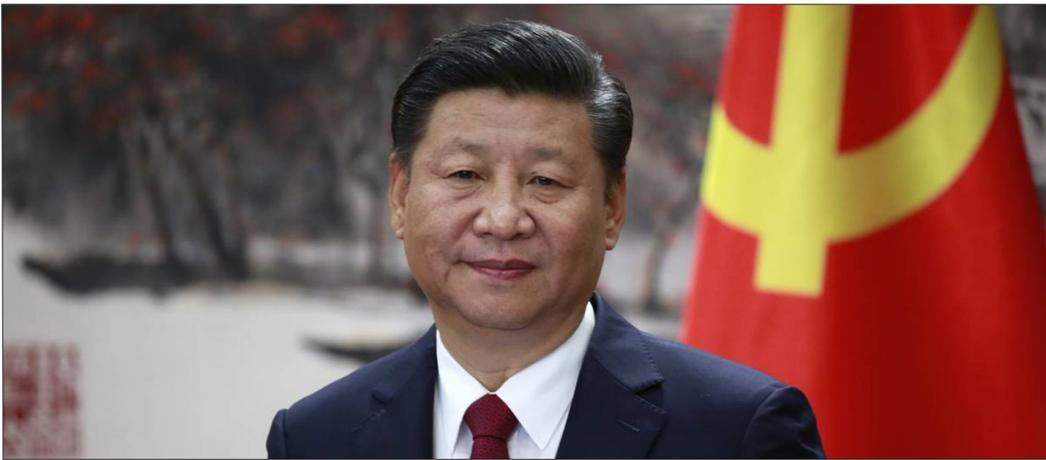


Xi Meets Chinese Diplomatic Envoys to Foreign Countries

BEIJING - President Xi Jinping on Wednesday met with Chinese diplomatic envoys to foreign countries, who are in Beijing to attend a work conference for overseas envoys.

On behalf of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, congratulated on the convening of the work conference and extended sincere greetings to the envoys and all diplomatic personnel for their hard work.

Wang Huning, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and



a member of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee, was also present. At the work conference, the envoys were urged

to fully carry out the plans and arrangements of Diplomacy and to keep on diplomatic work of the CPC Central Committee working with great determination. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

Iran Says US Ending Arms Sales to Middle East Would Open 'Hypothetical' Path Towards Missile Talks

TEHRAN - Tehran has clarified a remark made by its foreign minister, stating that the US ending weapon sales to the Middle East would be a purely hypothetical scenario in which Iran might consider negotiations over its missile program. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif suggested during an interview with NBC that if the US was interested in discussing the Islamic Republic's missile program, "they need first to stop selling all these weapons, including missiles, to our region." Zarif argued in a tweet on Wednesday that Tehran was forced to develop its own missile program after the Islamic Republic was "showered" with foreign-made missiles during the Iran-Iraq war. "We had no choice but

building our own. Now they complain. Instead of skirting the issue, the US must end arms sales to Saddam's reincarnations," the Iranian diplomat wrote. His remarks to NBC interpreted by some as a policy shift, given that Tehran has repeatedly rejected negotiations over its missile program. Iran's mission to the United Nations appeared to dismiss this idea in a follow-up statement, describing Zarif's comments as purely "hypothetical." Also downplaying the comments, foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi tweeted on Tuesday night that Zarif had "[thrown] the ball into the US court while challenging America's arm sales" to its Middle East allies. (RT)

President Calls for Convening Joint Commission Meeting with Belgium

ISLAMABAD - President Dr Arif Alvi Wednesday underscored the need for convening the meeting of a Joint Commission with Belgium to intensify dialogue for strengthening cooperation in economy, trade and tourism. Talking to the outgoing

ambassador of Belgium Frederic Verheyden who paid a farewell call on him at Aiwan-e-Sadr, the President said Pakistan attached high value to its relations with Belgium, both bilaterally and within the context of the European Union. (Monitoring Desk)

German Ambassador Completing Diplomatic Mission in Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - The Turkmen Foreign Ministry hosted a meeting with German Ambassador Margaret Maria Jubber, who is completing her diplomatic mission in Turkmenistan, Trend reports with reference to the Turkmen Foreign Ministry. "For Turkmenistan, Germany is a strategically important partner," the report said. "Also, the countries successfully cooperate within the EU." The parties discussed

the possibilities of expanding trade and economic, investment cooperation between the two countries and the activities of the joint working group on economic cooperation. The German companies make a significant contribution to the implementation of long-term projects in Turkmenistan. Among them are such companies as Siemens, Daimler, Claas, Rohde & Schwarz, Dresser-Rand, MAN, Bosch and others. (Trend)

Uzbekistan's Largest Oil and Gas Company to Become Independent Legal Entity

TASHKENT - Uzbekneftegas (UNG), Uzbekistan's largest state-owned enterprise, the oil and gas company will be restructured to improve its long-term sustainability and credit quality following a decision by the country's government to implement a corporate transformation plan prepared with support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Trend reports with reference to the Bank. The decision was announced in a decree signed by the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, on July 10 and is a part of a series of comprehensive energy sector reforms underway in Uzbekistan to strengthen the country's resilience to external economic shocks and increase economic growth. UNG's financial sustainability is critical to the country's economy and energy sector. The company provides more than 80 percent of Uzbekistan's energy

and electricity, contributes almost 20 percent of the national tax revenues, and accounts for 10 percent of gross domestic product. In 2018, the government requested ADB technical assistance to help UNG develop a corporate transformation plan to improve transparency in its financial reporting and increase financial discipline, efficiency, and production. Under the terms of the transformation plan, UNG will be restructured into a corporate legal entity that is run independently with enhanced governance and financial management structures. Meanwhile, Uztransgaz, a subsidiary of UNG that controls gas transmission in Uzbekistan, will be unbundled from the parent company and function as a standalone entity. The move is expected to remove any conflict of interests between gas producers and suppliers, while improving transparency. (Trend)

Sudanese Military, Protesters Sign Power-Sharing Document

CAIRO - Sudan's pro-democracy movement and the ruling military council signed a document early Wednesday that outlines a power-sharing deal, but the two sides are still at work on a more contentious constitutional agreement that would specify the division of powers. The signing ceremony held in the capital, Khartoum, after marathon overnight talks, marks an important step in the transition to civilian rule following the military

overthrow of long-ruling autocrat Omar al-Bashir amid mass protests in April. But the military appears to have the upper hand, following weeks of negotiations and a deadly crackdown last month in which security forces violently dispersed the protesters' main sit-in. The document signed Wednesday would establish a joint civilian-military sovereign council that would rule Sudan for a little over three years while elections ... (More on P4)... (17)

Pompeo to Take Up Immigration, Iran on Latin America Tour

WASHINGTON - Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will press US efforts to curb immigration and counter Iran during a four-nation tour of Latin America, the State Department said Tuesday. Pompeo on Sunday will stop in both Mexico and El Salvador as President Donald Trump takes controversial measures to deter and remove mostly Central American migrants who are seeking safety in the United States. Under a new policy, the

Trump administration is declaring ineligible for asylum most migrants who cross the US southern border through Mexico. Under threat of US tariffs, Mexico last month agreed to take in migrants from violence-riven Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador as the United States processes their claims. But Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard, who negotiated last month's accord and will meet Pompeo in Mexico City, has voiced



disagreement with the latest US moves, rejecting efforts to limit refugee for people who fear for their lives. A State Department official said that Pompeo would seek to step up efforts with El Salvador to ... (More on P4)... (13)

NATO-Linked Pundits Say Russia Is Set for 'Regional War' in Europe, but Do the Facts Back It Up?



MOSCOW - A pair of nuclear-weapons-wielding Russia, but it was in fact the West that did everything to threaten Moscow, experts told

RT. There's no shortage of expert pieces these days that sound the alarm over Russia's "assertive" policies, with the bulk of the fear-mongering expertise coming from other side of the Atlantic. This time though, two Germans, Joachim Krause, the head of the Institute for Security Policy, and retired three-star general Heinrich Brauss, took over the lead. According to a bizarre Die Welt op-ed they contributed to, Moscow un-

der Putin "is preparing - totally unprovoked - for regional wars in Europe, which they want to end with the help of nuclear weapons threats." And those "war preparations" are happening at a time "when our political attention is shrouded in climate change, the migration crisis, the EU crisis and many other issues." If a war breaks out, Moscow could try a "surprise attack... which would be underpinned by nuclear threats ... (More on P4)... (14)

der Putin "is preparing - totally unprovoked - for regional wars in Europe, which they want to end with the help of nuclear weapons threats." And those "war preparations" are happening at a time "when our political attention is shrouded in climate change, the migration crisis, the EU crisis and many other issues." If a war breaks out, Moscow could try a "surprise attack... which would be underpinned by nuclear threats ... (More on P4)... (14)

New Tariffs Will Create Obstacles for China-U.S. Trade Consultations

BEIJING - China has always advocated resolving economic and trade issues with the United States through dialogue and consultations and has always been sincere in such consultations, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said here Wednesday. "If the United States were to impose new tariffs, it would undoubtedly create obstacles to bilateral trade consultations and make the road to an agreement more lengthy," spokesperson Geng Shuang told a rou-

tine press conference. U.S. President Donald Trump said Tuesday that there was a long way to go with China on trade and threatened to impose tariffs on another 325 billion U.S. dollars of Chinese goods. "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," Geng quoted a Chinese proverb, adding one only needs to take the first step and move forward consistently before he would reach his destination. (Xinhua)

EU Is Preparing for More Venezuela Sanctions



BRUSSELS - The European Union is preparing to impose more sanctions on Venezuela targeting officials who are accused of being involved in torture and other human rights violations. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said in a statement Tuesday that it is working with the U.N. to make sure that human rights are respected in Venezuela following reports of abuses by the security forces. Mogherini said that "the EU is ready to start work towards applying targeted measures for those members of the security forces involved in torture and other serious violations of human rights." The EU has had measures in place since 2017, including an embargo on arms and on equipment for internal repression. It also slapped 18 officials with travel bans and asset freezes. (AP)

BRUSSELS - The European Union is preparing to impose more sanctions on Venezuela targeting officials who are accused of being involved in torture and other human rights violations. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said in a statement Tuesday that it is working with the U.N. to make sure that human rights are respected in Venezuela following reports of abuses by the security forces. Mogherini said that "the EU is ready to start work towards applying targeted measures for those members of the security forces involved in torture and other serious violations of human rights." The EU has had measures in place since 2017, including an embargo on arms and on equipment for internal repression. It also slapped 18 officials with travel bans and asset freezes. (AP)

Gunmen Kill 3 Staff of Turkish Consulate in Iraq's Erbil

BAGHDAD - Unidentified gunmen shot dead three staff of the Turkish consulate on Wednesday in Iraqi city of Erbil, the capital of the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan, a Kurdish security source said. (Xinhua)

Netanyahu Makes History as Israel's Longest-Serving Leader

JERUSALEM - As Benjamin Netanyahu becomes Israel's longest-serving prime minister, he is solidifying his place as the country's greatest political survivor and the most dominant force in Israeli politics in his generation. He has persevered through scandals, crises and conflicts, winning election after election even as the country grows more bitterly polarized. His supporters credit him with keeping Israel safe and prosperous, maintaining its Jewish character and boosting its standing internationally. His opponents, with



equally visceral emotion, claim he has dashed hopes for peace with the Palestinians, torn society apart with vicious attacks on minority Arabs and left-wing opponents, and infused politics with a culture of corruption. But as the longevity of his 13-year rule is set to surpass that of Israel's

founding father David Ben-Gurion on July 20, all agree Netanyahu has left a permanent imprint on Israel. "He thinks that he is the right guy in the right place. That he is the one who will save Israel and lead Israel to a safe haven," said Aviv Bushinsky, a former ... (More on P4)... (15)

Merkel Heir Apparent Joins Cabinet in Risky Bid for Power

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel's heir apparent joined her cabinet Wednesday as defence minister, a high-profile job often called a poisoned chalice in Berlin's fraught political landscape. The surprise appointment of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer late Tuesday came just hours after the current head of the German military, Ursula von der Leyen, was elected as the first woman to lead the European Commission.

The decision by AKK, as she is commonly known, to take charge of a sprawling administration widely seen as unwieldy and scandal-prone was described as a risky gambit to shore up political support. At a naming ceremony at the presidential palace in Berlin in Merkel's presence, the 56-year-old formally accepted the portfolio from von der Leyen. "The men and women of the Bundeswehr ... (More on P4)... (16)

No-Deal Brexit Looms as Race for New British PM Wraps Up

LONDON - The battle to be Britain's next prime minister enters its final straight on Wednesday with both candidates hardening their positions on Brexit, putting the future government on a collision course with Brussels. Ex-London Mayor Boris Johnson, the favourite to replace Theresa May, and foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt, are now both referring to Britain's departure with no overall deal in place as a realistic prospect. The business community and many lawmakers fear dire economic consequences from a no-deal Brexit which would lead to immediate trade tariffs for certain sectors including the automotive industry. Johnson and Hunt are taking part in a final question-and-answer session later on Wednesday before the result of the vote by Conservative Party members is announced on July 23 and the new prime minister is installed on July 24. Britain has twice delayed its scheduled departure from the European Union after 46 years of membership and May's failure to get parliament to vote for her deal with Brussels ultimately forced her to resign. The two candidates have vowed to scrap a "backstop" provision in the draft deal that was insisted on by Brussels to keep the Irish border open. Their latest attacks on the measure during a debate on Monday prompting a plunge in the value of the British pound. ... (More on P4)... (18)