

Pakistan's Ruling Party to Appoint Sharif Loyalist Abbasi as Interim PM

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's ruling party will appoint Shahid Khaqan Abbasi as interim prime minister after the ouster of Nawaz Sharif, two sources close to the toppled premier said on Saturday, while Sharif's brother has been chosen as his long-term successor.

Abbasi, 58, is a staunch Sharif loyalist and had been the petroleum minister in his cabinet until Friday, when Sharif resigned following a Supreme Court disqualification after a corruption probe.

One senior PML-N official close to Sharif said Abbasi should be appointed "in an hour", while a second source confirmed the appointment and the plan to have Abbasi in place until Shahbaz contests a parliament



tary seat and becomes eligible to take over.

Shahbaz Sharif, 65, the chief minister of the vast Punjab province that accounts for more than half of Pakistan's 190 million people, will also need to resign from his regional post.

Nawaz Sharif's resignation on Friday has plunged the nuclear-armed nation into political turmoil after several years of relative stability. Sharif quit after he was disqualified by the Supreme Court over undeclared assets.

The court has also ordered a criminal investigation into Sharif, 67, and his family.

The ruling PML-N party has a strong majority in parliament so should have no problem appointing its choice as the new prime minister. (Reuters)

Trump Replaces Chief of Staff Priebus with Retired General Kelly

WASHINGTON - President Donald Trump replaced his beleaguered White House chief of staff, Reince Priebus, after only six months on the job on Friday, installing retired General John Kelly in his place in a major shake-up of his top team.

Trump announced the move in a tweet a day after his new communications director, Anthony Scaramucci, accused Priebus of leaking information to reporters in a profanity-laced tirade.



Kelly, 67, a retired four-star Marine Corps general, is currently secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and will assume the chief of staff post on

Monday. He was hired with the goal of bringing more discipline to the White House, a senior White House official said.

Trump issued his deci-

sion just as he landed aboard Air Force One after a visit to Long Island and hours after Republican efforts to repeal Obamacare failed in the Senate. (Reuters)

Indian Gov't Committed to Making Country Free from TB by 2025

NEW DELHI - India's junior federal health minister Fagga Singh Kulaste Saturday said the government remains committed to making the nation free from TB by the year 2025, well ahead of the target year 2030 fixed by the World Health Organization.

Kulaste made the remarks at the inaugural function of the centre-state summit for elimination of TB through effective partnership.

The minister said concerted efforts were being made to reduce the number of deaths due to TB apart

from controlling the drug-resistance and early detection of the HIV-affected TB patients through some effective measures.

"Under the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme, tests have been conducted for more than 1.4 million patients and lives of 320,000 patients have been saved," Kulaste said. "Around 1.8 million more patients have been registered during the process so far."

Experts say TB causes individual suffering, extensive economic losses as

Russia Hosts International Army Games

MOSCOW - Russia's Defense Ministry on Saturday announced the start of the International Army Games 2017 in the country, an event which will be held until Aug. 12.

The two-week long army games will be held simultaneously in four other countries, namely Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan and China. A total of 28 contests will be carried out, with 17 of them taking place in Russia.

Naval competitions will be staged in the Black and Caspian Seas as well as in the Sea of Japan.

More than 150 teams

representing 28 countries from Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America will participate in the annual games, compared with 128 teams from 20 countries last year.

Nine countries will compete in the games for the first time: Bangladesh, Israel, Laos, Morocco, Syria, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Uganda and South Africa.

Nineteen teams will participate in what is traditionally the most popular contest, namely the tank biathlon, which will be held at the Alabino training ground in the Moscow region from July 29 to Aug. 12. (Xinhua)

Syrian Army Reaches Town on Deir Al-Zor Road: Hezbollah Media Unit



BEIRUT - Syria's army and its allies on Saturday reached the edge of al-Sukhna, the last town held by Islamic State in Homs province and a key step in their multi-pronged offensive against the militants, a Hezbollah-run military media unit said.

Sukhna is on the main desert highway between Palmyra and the government's besieged enclave at Deir al-Zor, about 130km (80 miles) to the east. The Hezbollah media unit earlier said the Sukhna gas field and heights above the town were within range of the army and its allies' fire. A war monitor, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, reported that the army had similar fire

control across the whole town and that most Islamic State militants there had fled.

The army and allies including Lebanon's Hezbollah and other Shi'ite militias are pushing through Syria's eastern desert to assault Islamic State's heartland along the Euphrates valley.

Another prong in the offensive is being waged further north, where the army and its allies are advancing along the southern bank of the Euphrates south of Raqqa. Russian jets are supporting the campaign.

U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces have taken swathes of the land north of the Euphrates and are pushing into Raqqa, previously the jihadists' Syrian capital. (Reuters)

EU's Infringement Procedure against Poland "Unjustified": Deputy FM

WARSAW - The European Commission's infringement procedure against Poland was "unjustified", Polish deputy Foreign Minister Konrad Szymanski said on Saturday.

Commenting on the decision by the Commission, Szymanski said Poland's new ordinary courts law contained "all the procedural guarantees and legal remedies". He emphasized that "in all the matters relating to a given legal case, decisions are made by the judges in charge of it", therefore

"all the procedural guarantees and legal remedies are in force ... so we regard the EC's stance as unjustified", according to Polish Press Agency.

Szymanski also said that the law brought the judges' retirement age "into line with the general rules in this matter", and announced that "all of these points would be elaborated upon in Poland's official letter to the EC". The European Commission on Saturday launched infringement procedure against Poland over the law, which it said



falls foul of gender equality in employment and undermines judicial independence. It had sent a "letter of formal notice" to Warsaw, giving the Polish government one month to reply. The key concern the Commission raised in the letter is that the law intro-

duces a different retirement age for female and male judges, violating the gender equality principle. It also frowned on the discretionary power invested in Polish justice minister to dismiss and appoint court presidents. (Xinhua)

Iraqi PM Declares Plan to Liberate Tal Afar From IS Militants

BAGHDAD - Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared on Saturday a new plan to liberate the town of Tal Afar from Islamic State (IS) militants, which will include the participation of the predominantly Shiite paramilitary Hashd Shaabi units and Sunni tribal fighters.

"I have put forward a plan to liberate Tal Afar with the participation of all (kinds of) security services, in addition to the Hashd Shaabi and Asha'iry (tribal units)," Abadi said in a speech broadcast by the Iraqi official television.

Abadi did not say to what extent the Hashd Shaabi would participate in the liberation of the ethnically mixed town of Tal Afar, some 70 km west of Mosul, as

they were forced earlier to participate only in the open land outside Mosul, not inside the Sunni city.

The participation of the predominantly Shiite paramilitary units in the ethnically mixed region in northern Iraq, where Sunni Muslims form a majority, could spark sectarian tension with Sunni Arabs, Turkomans and other minorities.

The neighboring Sunni state of Turkey also has concerns about the participation of the Shiite dominated Hashd Shaabi, because Turkey does not want the Iraqi campaign to drive the IS from Tal Afar to change the ethnic composition of the region, which is predominantly Sunni. (Xinhua)

Trump's Six-Month Stall Sparks a White House Shake-Up

WASHINGTON - Six months into his presidency, Donald Trump is saddled with a stalled agenda, a West Wing that resembles a viper's nest, a pile of investigations and a Republican Party that's starting to break away.

Trump on Friday indirectly acknowledged the troubled state of his unconventional White House when he abruptly replaced his chief of staff with hard-nosed retired Gen. John Kelly, until now the Homeland Security secretary. Kelly will take the desk of Reince Priebus, a Republican operative who was skeptical of Trump's

electoral prospects last year and ultimately came to be viewed by the president as weak and ineffective.

"Trump has spent a lot of his political capital on nothing but defending his own reputation," Alex Conant, a Republican strategist, said of Trump's first six months in office. "There is no sustained strategy. His attention seems to shift with whatever is leading cable news at that moment." Staff shake-ups are a tried-and-true way for struggling presidents to signal that they are ready to shift course. (AP)

Neighbor News

China Focus: Xi's Speech Hailed As Inspirational, Thought-Provoking

BEIJING - President Xi Jinping's speech at a high-level workshop has resonated among central departments, with Party members and officials hailing it "inspirational and thought-provoking." The workshop from Wednesday to Thursday gathered provincial and ministerial-level officials and was a significant meeting in preparation for the 19th Communist Party of China (CPC) National Congress to be held later this year. The congress will elect the leadership for the next five-year term. Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, outlined a blueprint for the undertaking of the Party and the state, and pointed the direction for future development in his speech.

Party members and officials from the central departments pledged to

learn from and act with the spirit of Xi's remarks, as well as contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

After studying the remarks, Party members and officials from the ministries of justice and state security said that Xi raised a series of new thoughts, opinions, judgements and measures that can guide the development of the Party and the nation.

In his speech, Xi called for holding high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics, stressing that socialism with Chinese characteristics had been the theme of all the Party's theories and practices since the reform and opening up in 1978.

Under the leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Xi at the core, China witnessed tremendous achievements in various sectors since the 18th National Congress of the CPC in late 2012. (Xinhua)

'My Conscience is Clear': Nawaz Sharif Addresses Party Workers after Disqualification

ISLAMABAD - Nawaz Sharif, who was ousted from office for the third time on July 28, while addressing his party's leadership on Saturday expressed disbelief over the grounds for his dismissal, but resolved to continue struggling for the supremacy of the Constitution and rule of law in the country.

"I still do not understand the grounds for my dismissal," Nawaz Sharif said during a parliamentary committee meeting. "I am only content that I was not disqualified on the grounds of alleged corruption."

"When I never took a salary, what would I declare?" he asked, referring to the Supreme Court judgement that led to his ouster.

The joint investigation team report examined by the SC during the Panama-gate hearings revealed that Nawaz Sharif had not declared on his nomination papers for the 2013 General Election an income of 10,000 dirhams drawn from a Dubai-based company between Aug 7, 2006 and April 20, 2014.

"I was in exile and getting a visa at that time was difficult. When I went to London for Saudi Arabia, I could not live there for over six months. I had to travel to another country and return... So I would get my visa from Dubai every six months since London was the centre of our politics," he explained. (Dawn)

EU Foreign Policy Chief to Attend Iran President's Inauguration

TEHRAN - EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini plans to travel to Tehran to take part in the inauguration ceremony of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

Mogherini will arrive in Tehran on August 5 in her capacity as the head of the Iran-P5+1 Joint Commission, which oversees the implementation of the landmark nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries in July 2015.

On the sidelines of the inaugural ceremony, the EU foreign policy chief is scheduled to hold bilateral meetings with Iranian dignitaries.

The sides will review the JCPOA implementation and discuss issues of bilateral and regional rel-

evance. Rouhani, who was re-elected Iran's president in May, is to be officially inaugurated for another four years as the country's chief executive on August 5.

Many senior Iranian and foreign dignitaries will attend the swearing-in ceremony for Rouhani at the parliament.

Before the ceremony, a decree by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei will be handed to the Iranian president to officially assign him his duties.

Rouhani, first elected Iran's president in 2013, re-ran for office in the May 2017 election, garnering 57 percent of the popular votes to defeat his main rival Ebrahim Raeisi, the current custodian of the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH). (Presstv)

Turkmenistan Preparing for Cotton Harvesting

ASHGABAT - The upcoming cotton harvesting campaign has been mulled at a meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, the Altyn Asyr TV channel reported July 29.

Reportedly, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov gave instructions to ensure the proper level of cotton har-

vesting in all regions of the country. Turkmenistan is one of the biggest cotton producers in the world. More than one million tons of cotton is grown annually in Turkmenistan, which is the raw material base for the development of textile industry. Up to 70 percent of the raw materials are processed in the country. (Agencies)