

Turkish, US, Russian Military Chiefs Discuss Syria Tensions

BEIRUT - The top generals from Turkey, the United States and Russia met Tuesday to discuss tensions in northern Syria, where mutually suspicious forces allied with the three countries are fighting the Islamic State group.

The surprise meeting between Turkey's Gen. Hulusi Akar, Marine Corps Gen. Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Gen. Valery Gerasimov, the chief of the Russian General Staff, took place in the Turkish coastal city of Antalya.

The talks, announced by Turkey, come amid rising tensions in northern Syria,



where Turkish troops and allied Syrian fighters, U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces and Russian-allied Syrian troops are fighting their way toward the IS group's de facto capital, Raqqa.

Turkey, a NATO ally, views the Kurdish group that dominates the Syria Democratic Forces as terrorists and has threatened to drive them from the northern town of Manbij, which the alliance captured from the militants last year with the aid of U.S. airstrikes. Turkey and Syria meanwhile support opposite sides in the Syrian civil war. The U.S. has a few hundred special operations forces embedded ...*(More on P4)...(25)*

U.S. Republicans Unveil Bill to Replace Obamacare

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Republican Party (GOP) on Monday unveiled a healthcare bill that it says will replace the Obamacare, or the Affordable Care Act (ACA), taking a step further in trashing what former President Barack Obama hoped would be his biggest legacy. The bill, named the American Healthcare Act, was introduced by the House Committees of Ways and Means and Energy and Commerce. It will "deliver relief from Obamacare's taxes and mandates and lay the groundwork for a 21st century health care system," the GOP said on

its website.

The proposed bill seeks to axe penalties levied on individuals and employers who don't purchase health plans, but instead encourages people to stay insured by allowing insurers to place a 30-percent surcharge on the premiums of those who are not continuously covered by health plans. But the GOP has opted to keep two of the most popular features of the ACA, including letting young adults aged 26 or younger to stay on their parents' healthcare package and forbidding insurers to ...*(More on P4)...(26)*

Trump Signs New Travel Ban, Downsizes Targeted Countries to Six

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday signed an executive order banning nationals of six Muslim countries to enter the United States, excluding Iraq from the list of a previous ban. The new document maintained a 90-day ban on nationals of Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Libya, Iran and Somalia from entering the United States, effective from March 16.

"Each of these countries is a state sponsor of terrorism, has been significantly compromised by terrorist organizations, or contains

active conflict zones," the order said.

Nationals of the six countries who are outside the United States will be banned from entering the country, except those who are lawful permanent U.S. residences or fit other criteria, according to the new rule.

Notably missing from the list is Iraq, which has been subject to a similar ban imposed in January.

"The close cooperative relationship between the United States and the democratically elected Iraqi government, the strong



United States diplomatic presence in Iraq, the significant presence of United States forces in Iraq, and Iraq's commitment to combat ISIS justify different treatment for Iraq," the

document said.

The Iraqi government welcomed Washington's decision not to ban its citizens, saying "the decision is an important step in the right ...*(More on P4)...(27)*

UK Plans for EU Exit Facing more Snags in Parliament

LONDON - The British government is facing more opposition to its plans for leaving the European Union from Parliament's unelected House of Lords.

The Lords are likely Tuesday to pass an amendment to the government's Brexit bill requiring Parliament - not just the government - to approve Britain's exit deal with the EU. The chamber has already voted to promise EU citizens living in Britain that they can

stay after the U.K. leaves the bloc. But the changes may be temporary. Once the bill is passed by the Lords it will go back to the elected House of Commons, where lawmakers may overturn the amendments next week. Prime Minister Theresa May wants to invoke Article 50 of the EU's key treaty, triggering exit negotiations, by March 31. She can't do that until Parliament passes legislation sanctioning the move. (AP)

U.S. Missile System Deployment in S.Korea Violates New START: Russian Senator

MOSCOW - The deployment of a U.S. missile defense system in South Korea violates the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), a top official of the upper house of Russia's Parliament said Tuesday. "The deployment is one of the conditions for Russia's withdrawal from the treaty stipulated by its text," Ozerov, Chairman of the Defense and Security Committee of the Russian Federation Council, was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency. The Defense Ministry of

South Korea said earlier in the day that two mobile launchers and part of the equipment necessary for Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) had arrived in an air base some 70 km south of the capital Seoul, which was seen by opposition parties in the country as a "unilateral" decision by the government without gaining public approval. The New U.S.-Russia START agreement was signed in 2010 and became effective in 2011. It is expected to last until 2021 with a possible extension for another five



years. He said the United States was using ballistic missile tests by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a pretext for - "if not to encircle Russia, then at least besiege it from the west and the

east." The KCNA reported Monday that Kim Jong Un, the supreme leader of the DPRK, had supervised on spot a ballistic rocket launching drill of the Korean People's Army (KPA). (Xinhua)

EU to Host Syria Conference in April

BRUSSELS - The European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini on Monday announced that the bloc will on April 5 host an international conference on Syria's future. The EU will cochair the conference with the United Nations and with the governments of Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar and Britain, Mogherini said at a press conference following a one-day Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels.

"We hope that the Brussels conference on April 5 can support strongly the UN work on the political track,



but also try to establish a regional and international framework for that support, for the humanitarian work, but also for looking at the future, how we can, together, support the future of Syria and the

region," she said. Delegations from the Syrian government and the opposition on Friday wrapped up nine-day talks in Geneva. UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura said ...*(More on P4)...(28)*

EU Court Says Member States don't Have to Issue Humanitarian Visas

BRUSSELS - European Union states do not have to admit people on humanitarian grounds, even if they are at risk of torture or inhuman treatment, the EU's top court ruled on Tuesday, cutting off a possible channel for asylum seekers into the bloc.

The decision by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) goes against advice from its advocate general, who said last month that such visas had to be issued under EU law. It spares EU states a new big headache at a time when they are pushing to stem immigration by cutting off asylum seekers and labor migrants alike after taking in some 1.6 million people arriving across the Mediterranean in 2014-2016. The court ruled on the case of a Syrian family from the city of Aleppo who applied for a visa to ...*(More on P4)...(29)*

Trump Speaks with Japanese, S.Korean Leaders on DPRK's Latest Missile Tests

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday spoke separately over phone with leaders of Japan and South Korea to discuss the latest test-launch of ballistic missiles by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), according to the White House. Trump emphasized U.S. commitment to stand with Japan and South Korea in the face of the "serious threat" posed by the DPRK, said a statement by the White House. The Trump administration is taking steps to further enhance the ability to deter and defend against the DPRK's ballistic missiles using the full range of U.S. military capabilities, said the statement. The phone talks followed the DPRK's test-launch on Monday of four ballistic missiles that flew around 1,000 km toward its eastern waters. Among the four, three reportedly fell into Japan's exclusive economic zone.

The latest missile launch by the DPRK came as the United States and South Korea were conducting their joint military drill. The Chinese Foreign Ministry said on Monday it is opposed to the launch activities of the DPRK that was in violation of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and urged all sides to keep restraint. Citing the ongoing training exercise jointly conducted by the United States and South Korea, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said that under the current circumstances, all relevant parties should keep restraint and avoid provoking each other and intensifying the tense situation in the region. (Xinhua)

Top Turkish Envoy to Visit Germany Despite Rally Ban

ISTANBUL - Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Tuesday that he will visit Germany to hold a rally with the Turkish community there despite cancellation of the event by local authorities. "I am going to meet with our citizens this evening in Hamburg," Cavusoglu told top foreign diplomats in Istanbul prior to his departure for Germany, saying "No one could prevent that." The authorities in northern German city of Hamburg on Monday canceled a scheduled meeting of the top Turkish envoy with local Turkish community, citing poor safety standard of the building. Local authorities in Germany have

also prevented other Turkish ministers from lobbying the Turkish diaspora for "yes" votes in the April 16 referendum on Turkey switching to a presidential system. The episode has sparked a burst of outrage from Ankara and further chilled bilateral ties, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan likening it to Nazi practices and vowing to "stir up the world" until he is allowed to speak in Germany. Some 1.4 million Turks living in Germany can vote in April on whether to grant Erdogan sweeping powers, for which the president has been pushing hard. Another rally ...*(More on P4)...(31)*

AU, UN Launch Report on Women's Rights in Africa

ADDIS ABABA - Daunting challenges remain towards ensuring full realization of women rights in Africa despite significant progresses on the continent, says a new report. Commissioned by the African Union (AU), together with the UN Human Rights Office and the UN Women, the report on Women's Rights in Africa, was launched on Tuesday in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa. The report assesses progress made in advancing women's rights using specific thematic areas where protection gaps persist and action needed, including sexual and reproductive health; women with albinism; sexual and gender based violence; ...*(More on P4)...(30)*

Neighbor News

China, Vietnam to Increase Cooperation for Closer Ties

HANOI - China and Vietnam will this year make joint efforts to enable a continuous and stable development of bilateral relations, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin and his Vietnamese counterpart Le Hoai Trung agreed here lately.

The agreement was made during diplomatic consultation held during Liu's visit to the Southeast Asian country on March 6-7.

During the consultation, the two senior diplomats agreed that their two countries will continue coordination, keep up exchanges at various levels, expand investment in the economic and trade fields, and boost maritime cooperation in the South China Sea, among others, so as to promote the China-Vietnam com-

prehensive strategic cooperative partnership to a new level.

The two vice foreign ministers also reviewed the progress made last year in the development of bilateral ties, citing deepening of exchanges and cooperation in various fields. While China has been for years Vietnam's largest trading partner, Vietnam's trade volume with China has emerged as one of the largest for all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The promotion of bilateral relations of good neighborliness and friendly cooperation has brought tangible benefits to the two countries and the two peoples, contributing to regional peace, stability and prosperity, they noted. (Xinhua)

Pakistani Capital to Have CPEC Business Tower: Minister

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan has decided to build the "CPEC Tower" in Islamabad, which would be the tallest building in the capital city and will serve as a symbol of socioeconomic progress Pakistan is making across all the fronts.

Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms, Ahsan Iqbal, who is also in charge of CPEC, namely a collection of infrastructure projects officially known as China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, noted that the iconic tower will attract investors and would serve as a symbol of branding Pak-China Friendship.

The decision was taken in a high level meeting held in Islamabad on

Monday. Senior officials from the planning and other ministries attended the meeting.

"The initiative will provide facilitation to Chinese and other investors from around the world," the minister said.

He further said that the tallest building would help in image building of Islamabad as a sustainable and vibrant city thriving upon entrepreneurship, science and technology, research and development, finance and culture.

"CPEC tower should be equipped with state of the art hotel, office spaces, commercial spaces and modern facilities," an official statement quoted the minister as saying. (Xinhua)

Rouhani Lashes Out at US for Claims Against Iran Elections

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has dismissed a recent US report criticizing elections in the Islamic Republic, urging American officials to focus on the internal affairs of their own country.

"Elections in Iran are free, clean, competitive and democratic," Rouhani told IRIB on the sidelines of a meeting of the Assembly of Experts in Tehran on Tuesday.

In its 2016 human rights report released on March 3, US Department of State had questioned the electoral process in the Islamic Republic.

"I think those who are criticizing elections in

Iran need to take a look at the recent [presidential] election [in the US] and the problems they had," he added in reference to massive protest rallies held across the US and many other countries against the election of Donald Trump as president.

The Iranian president emphasized that both parties in the US - Democratic and Republican - had protested the results of the recent presidential election in the country.

Rouhani said even the current US president himself was skeptical about the cleanness of the polls before being elected as president. (Presstv)

Uzbekistan to Get Access to Caspian and Black Seas Via Turkmenistan

TASHKENT - Creation of the international transport corridor was named one of the priorities of cooperation between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, reports the news agency "Turkmenistan Today".

Speaking to the reporters following the high-level talks in Ashgabat on March 6, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev stressed their willingness to strengthen relations in transport sphere.

Berdimuhamedov said the countries will continue cooperation on creation of the powerful and modern infrastructure, which will ensure the unified transport system of Central Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The head of state said Turkmenistan is ready for the joint work on creation of the corridor on the route Uzbekistan - Turkmenistan - the Caspian Sea - South Caucasus with the access to the Black Sea ports of Georgia, Turkey, Romania and other countries. (AKI)