

US to Host Coalition Meeting on Countering IS

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will host a multinational meeting in Washington later this month on fighting against the extremist group Islamic State (IS), the State Department announced on Thursday.

Secretary Tillerson will host foreign ministers and senior officials from 68 nations and international organizations which have joined the U.S.-led coalition against the IS on March 22, according to a State Department statement.



The meeting will include a detailed discussion of priorities for the coalition's multiple lines of effort, including military, foreign terrorist fighters, counterterrorist financing, counter-messaging, and stabilization of liberated areas, to increase the momentum of the campaign, said the statement. "Additionally, ministers will discuss the ongoing humanitarian crises in Iraq and Syria that are affecting the region," it added. (Xinhua)

Russia Committed to Nuclear Pact: Kremlin

MOSCOW - Russia is committed to its obligations under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday. His remarks came after the Vice Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Paul Selva told Congress Wednesday that Russia violated the "spirit and intent" of the INF pact by deploying a banned land-based cruise missile. The treaty, signed by American and Soviet leaders in 1987, prohibits both countries from test-

ing, producing and possessing land-based intermediate-range missiles. It was deemed as a cornerstone of global arms control and helped end the Cold War. "Russia fully complies with the INF treaty, although it does not totally meet our interests," Peskov was quoted by RIA Novosti as saying. Also on Thursday, Viktor Ozerov, chairman of the defense committee of Russia's upper house of parliament, said Russia strictly observes the arms control treaty and called the ... (More on P4)... (28)

ASEAN, EU Agree to Lay Groundwork to Resume Free Trade Talks

MANILA, Philippines - Southeast Asian economies and the European Union agreed Friday to work toward resuming stalled free trade agreement talks and counter a trend toward protectionism. In a joint statement, economic ministers of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations and European Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom said the global economic outlook has improved. But they expressed cau-

tion over uncertainties arising from "growing protectionist and inward-looking policy stances" that often blame trade for the loss of jobs because of automation and industrialization. "We do see tendencies of protectionism and anti-globalization across the world," Malmstrom told reporters after a meeting Friday of economic ministers from both regions. "Closing borders and building walls, raising tariffs - that will not ... (More on P4)... (30)

EU Summit Fails to Reach Consensus on Conclusions

BRUSSELS - The European Council on Friday conceded that its member states have failed to reach consensus on summit conclusions for "reasons unrelated to its substance." "The European Council deliberated on the attached document. It was supported by 27 Members of the European Council, but it did not gather consensus, for reasons unrelated to its substance," said the conclusions of the EU spring summit, released in the name of the European Council president, rather than the council as usual.

"References to the European Council in the attached document should not be read as implying a formal endorsement by the European Council acting as an institution," the conclusions added. Recognizing difficult situations between the countries, German Chancellor Angela Merkel still assessed positively about the progress on security and defense policy made in the summit. "We agreed that it's important that the European Union's defense policy should be complementary



to NATO, to strengthen it," Merkel told reporters after the summit. The leaders reportedly discussed how the EU should function in the future and how to maintain unity amid severe political and migration pressures during the two-day summit. It's believed that Poland, disgruntled over Donald Tusk being re-elected the president of the European Council, refused to give its nod ... (More on P4)... (29)

ASEAN Economic Ministers Eye RCEP to Shape Trade and Economic Liberation in Asia

MANILA - Economic ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) ended their meeting on Friday, vowing to deepen and expand trade integration through regional trade partnership. Philippine Trade and Industry Secretary Ramon Lopez, who chaired the meeting, said that the ASEAN ministers agree to "push to achieve considerable progress on the the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to showcase ASEAN's headship in bringing about a regional partnership that integrates major

economic players China, India, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. "The shares optimism on RCEP will mean more foreign investments and more dynamic trade and business alliances," Lopez said. RCEP stands for a mega trade agreement designed to broaden and deepen engagements among the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations and its six dialogue partners including powerhouse China. RCEP will expand the ASEAN market from 600 million to 3.5 billion as it



will include ASEAN's six dialogue partners that account for almost half of the world's population, representing a huge integrated market base. "This expanded economic partnership is seen to shape the future of trade and economic liberation in Asia. At the backdrop of recent economic uncertainties and rising protectionism, RCEP is poised to keep the momentum of trade as an engine for regional and global economic growth," Lopez said. (Xinhua)

Russian Warplanes Launch Hundreds of Strikes on IS in Syria: Russia

MOSCOW - Russian warplanes launched 452 strikes against Islamic State (IS) terrorists in Syria in the past week, as the government troops continued their advance in the north and east of the war-torn country, the Russian military said Friday. "Over 600 militants, 16 infantry fighting vehicles, 41 pickup trucks with large caliber machine-guns and more than 30 other vehicles have been eliminated," Col. Gen. Sergei Rudskoy, chief of the Russian Gen-



eral Staff Main Operational Directorate, said at a news briefing. He said the Syrian troops liberated 92 terrorists' settlements on an area of 479

square km in the eastern part of Aleppo province in the last seven days, reaching the bank of the Euphrates River for the first time in ... (More on P4)... (31)

EU Leaders Confirms Open, Rules-Based Trade Position

BRUSSELS - The European Union leaders on Thursday confirmed the bloc will uphold an open and rules-based trade position against a backdrop of rising protectionism, European Council President Donald Tusk said. "Leaders confirmed the EU's unequivocal position on trade. Europe remains the champion of open, rules-based trade. Not least due to signs of protectionism emerging elsewhere," Tusk told a press conference after a EU summit meeting. Tusk has just won another term as European Council president during the EU's spring summit. He said the EU will "swiftly advance" ongoing negotiations such as with Japan as trade is central to the economic success. "At the same time we will not hesitate to defend ourselves ... (More on P4)... (32)

Trump's Visa Ban May Satisfy Supporters, but Could Hurt him Overall

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump just revised the controversial visa ban of citizens from several predominately Muslim nations. But experts said while this may satisfy his supporters, it may hurt him overall. The new travel ban bars entry of some people from six countries- Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen - for 90 days and suspends entry of some refugees for 120 days. Trump's temporary visa ban sparked much controversy in January, as critics condemned it as poorly planned and executed while supporters say he is only fulfilling a campaign promise. It was later overturned by a federal judge in the state of Washington, whose ruling was upheld by an appeals court. This was the first setback that Trump has suffered since January inauguration. Trump has since modified the executive order, relaxing restrictions on permanent residents and removing Iraq from the list, which now includes Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Syria and Libya. "Trump and his staff continue to present them (the visa laws) as a travel ban and the fulfillment of his campaign pledge of a 'Muslim ban.' They are likely to provoke continued overly aggressive enforcement (of) front-line customs and border agents, above and beyond the specific terms of the current orders," Christopher Galdieri, assistant professor at Saint Anselm College in New Hampshire, told Xinhua. (Xinhua)

Merkel's Conservatives Ahead of Social Democrats in Latest Poll

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative bloc retained its lead over the main center-left SPD in a poll on Friday, six months ahead of federal elections, but its opponents logged their highest support in the survey in almost five years. The conservatives held steady on 34 percent support while the SPD gained 2 percentage points to 32 percent, the poll by Forschungsgruppe Wahlen for broadcaster ZDF showed. Merkel and SPD chancellor candidate Martin Schulz, who has boosted the party's fortunes since being nominated in January, were neck-and-neck in the personal popularity stakes, with both achieving ... (More on P4)... (33)

Syrian Crisis to Top Agenda of Turkish-Russian Cooperation Meeting

ANKARA - The settlement of the Syrian crisis is expected to top the agenda of the sixth High-Level Cooperation Council meeting on Friday in Moscow where Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin will meet in a bid to enhance bilateral ties, said Syrian expert. "Syria case, from time to time, has moved ahead in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia since the two countries have stepped up rapprochement efforts since August 2016," Aydin Sezer, head of the Turkey and Russia Center of Studies, an Ankara-based think tank, told Xinhua ahead of the meeting. Rus-

sia and Turkey prioritized cooperation in fight against Islamic State (IS) in Syria, after strains were eased as the two sides began a reconciliation process in 2016 following Turkey's apology for downing a Russian jet on the Syrian-Turkish border in November, 2015. The normalization process was tested over the assassination of Russian Ambassador to Ankara Andrey Karlov in an armed attack last December. But Putin called the assassination a "provocation" to undermine relations between Turkey and Russia as well as the efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis. Syria issue is likely ... (More on P4)... (34)

Neighbor News

China is Playing Leading Role in Promoting South-South Cooperation: UN Official

UNITED NATIONS - China is playing a leading role in promoting South-South cooperation as the world's largest developing country will host two important diplomatic events this year, a senior UN official has said. The two high-level events - the first international cooperation summit forum on the Belt and Road Initiative and the 9th Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) summit - are closely associated with South-South cooperation, said Jorge Chediek, the UN secretary-general's envoy on South-South cooperation. "China is now one of the main actors in South-South cooperation," he said in a recent interview with Xinhua. Chediek, who is from Argentina, was ap-

pointed as the UN secretary-general's envoy on South-South cooperation in March 2016. Since October 2015, he has been the director of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UN-OSSC) leading United Nations system-wide promotion and coordination of South-South cooperation for development. CHINESE INITIATIVE IS A MODEL FOR WORLD The high-level forum on the Belt and Road initiative is to be held in Beijing, the Chinese capital, in May to brainstorm about interconnected development. "We consider the Belt and Road Initiative, one of the most important, a partnership that has been developed in the world in the last few years," said Chediek. (Xinhua)

Russia, Turkey and Iran to Participate in next Peace Talk over Syria in Astana

ASTANA - The next high-level international meeting on Syria will be held March 14-15 in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, and Russia, Turkey and Iran have confirmed their participation, Kazakh Foreign Ministry announced on Thursday. The peace talks will be attended by high-ranking officials from Russia, Turkey and Iran, the foreign ministry said in a press statement. Invitations are also sent to the representatives of the UN, the U.S. and Jordan.

It is expected that Syrian government delegation and the delegation of Syrian armed opposition will also attend the meeting, the statement added. Two rounds of interna-

tional meeting took place on Jan. 23-24 and Feb. 15-16 in Astana. A technical meeting of experts was held on Feb. 6. Delegations of Russia, Iran and Turkey, representatives of Syrian government and the opposition parties, as well as representatives of the U.N., the U.S. and Jordan took part in the events. The coordination of efforts on monitoring the ceasefire in Syria, which allowed the parties to discuss the issues of the political agenda, has become the main result of these meetings. The Astana peace talks are held in addition to the Geneva Process and in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 in 2015. (Xinhua)

China, Pakistan Working Together to Implement CPEC Programme at Full Speed

BEIJING - China and Pakistan are working together to implement the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) programme at full speed, which provides further impetus for the two nations to extend their cooperation from land to sea. CPEC will become a 3,000-km-long route connecting Kashgar in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region to Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan province. Along the route, the two countries are building a network of extensive roads, railways, ports and other infrastructure. According to "Beijing Review", with Gwadar port

a new option, China's cargo trade routes to the Middle East, Africa and Europe will receive a further boost. The busy shipping course through the Malacca Strait will no longer be the sole passage for Chinese cargo ships bound for these regions. The deep-sea Gwadar Port is adjacent to the key oil routes in and out of the Gulf. It is also the nearest warm-water seaport to the landlocked Central Asian countries rich in oil and gas resources. The CPEC, through making Gwadar Port a new trade hub, will bring China and Pakistan new opportunities for economic and trade growth. (Agencies)

Turkmenistan Discusses Co-Op Program with ICRC

ASHGABAT - Ashgabat hosted a meeting with Head of Regional Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Jean-Jerome Casabianca, the Turkmen Foreign Ministry said in a message. During the meeting, issues of diversification of partnership in line with the cooperation plan between Turkmenistan and ICRC for 2017 were discussed. "The sides also gave attention to the process of implementation of international humanitarian law, as well as cooperation in humanitarian activity on results

of the previous meeting, considering the aspects voiced by the Turkmen side and the ICRC's positions," said the message. Turkmenistan and the ICRC have implemented several programs and projects since the beginning of their cooperation, main goals of which were the dissemination and improvement of knowledge about the norms and principles of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) defined by the 1949 Geneva Convention. Turkmenistan ratified this document in 1992. (Trend)