

From Israel, Pompeo Arrives in Beirut for Two-Day Meetings

BEIRUT - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has arrived in Lebanon, the last leg of a Middle East tour that took him to Kuwait and Israel.

Pompeo is scheduled to meet with a host of Lebanese officials, including allies of the Iran-backed Hezbollah during the two-day visit, his first as secretary of state.

Pompeo hopes to step up pressure on the Shiite militant group, but could face resistance even from America's local allies, who fear that pushing too hard could spark a backlash and endanger the tiny country's fragile peace. Pompeo's plane arrived on Friday travelling through the Cypriot airspace, as Lebanon, which is technically in a state of war with Israel, bans direct flights from Israel. (Fox News)



Stocks Fall on Growth Worries, Brexit Doubts

SINGAPORE - Stocks fell sharply in Europe on Friday after surveys showed manufacturing in the region slowed in March and amid news that the European Union offered only a brief extension to the Brexit deadline. U.S. markets also appeared headed for a lower open. Britain's FTSE 100 led the decline, trading down 1.3 percent at 7,260, while the CAC 40 in France slid 1.2 percent to 5,315. Germany's DAX lost 0.7 percent to 11,467.

The future contract for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was 0.7 percent lower at 25,828. That for the broad S&P 500 index also lost 0.7 percent, to 2,844. Brexit uncertainty continued to weigh on sentiment after European Union leaders agreed to delay Brexit until May 22, the eve of the EU elections, instead of next Friday as previously planned. There's a catch: British Prime Minister Theresa May will have to persuade ... (More on P4)...(17)

Scientists Deploy Robot 'Translators' for Interspecies Communication & Behavioral Control

Fish and bees have been able to communicate for the first time, courtesy of a few talented robots mimicking and controlling their actions, in an unusual experiment that translated behavioral cues across species lines. "The robots acted as if they were negotiators and interpreters in an international conference. Through the various information exchanges, the two groups of animals gradually came to a shared decision," said Francesco Mondada of the Ecole Polytechnique



Federale de Lausanne, one of the researchers on the cleverly-named AS-SISIBf experiment.



The Austrian bees synced up their behavior with Swiss fish by communicating through robot

"translators," which allowed the two species to understand each other's ... (More on P4)...(14)

Washington Targets Chinese Firms in New Round of North Korea-Related Sanctions



WASHINGTON - The US has slapped a fresh batch of sanctions on China over an alleged violation of the US embargo against North Korea. It happened less than

a month after Trump hailed Beijing for being "very helpful" in dealing with DRPK. Two Chinese shipping companies - Dalian Haibo and Liaoning Danx-

ing - were added to the US Treasury's blacklist on Thursday, over what was called using "deceptive practices" to help Pyongyang procure certain goods. The Treasury's statement did not provide any details on the nature of the goods in question but said that one company had cooperated with a North Korean trading firm while another was operating in the DRPK's transportation industry. Washington also issued an updated "shipping advisory," which pro-

vided guidance to other nations and businesses on how to "avoid illicit North Korean maritime trade." The document in particular urged states and companies to exercise caution while dealing with certain vessels, which the US believes are involved in what it considers illegal trade with North Korea. The lists of such vessels particularly included two Russian ships, apart from dozens of vessels from North Korea and several African countries. ... (More on P4)...(15)

EU Shows United Front on Brexit, Loss of Confidence in May

BRUSSELS - European Union leaders took back control of the Brexit process from British Prime Minister Theresa May, saying Friday they believe the risks were too great and that action was needed to protect the smooth running of the world's biggest trading bloc. May's mantra since the Brexit referendum in 2016 has always been about "taking back control" of U.K. affairs from the EU. But leaders from the bloc showed at a Brussels summit that they too have a big say

in how Brexit ends up, as the political tussle resumes in the British Parliament over how to proceed. In a move that underlined their loss of confidence in May as she battles for her political survival, the leaders set two deadlines for Britain to leave or to take an entirely new path in considering its EU future. At marathon late night talks in Brussels, they rejected May's request to extend the Brexit deadline from March 29 - just one ... (More on P4)...(18)

Italian Soccer Federation to Explore More Ties with China

ROME - Playing a Serie A match in China will be among the proposals discussed when a delegation linked to the visit of President Xi Jinping meets with the Italian football federation on Sunday.

The ANSA news agency says the meeting with China Media Group chief Shen Haixiong will also focus on TV content, collaboration over developing young Chinese players in Italy, and instruction for using the video assistant referee.

The Italian federation (FIGC) confirmed to The Associated Press the meeting with take place at the FIGC.

There are already soccer ties between the countries, with former Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro recently succeeding former Italy coach Marcello Lippi as coach of China. Also, the Italian Super Cup has been played in China four times over the last 10 years. (AP)

Boeing Makes Safety Change, Indonesian Airline Cancels Order

JAKARTA/WASHINGTON - Indonesian airline Garuda said on Friday it would cancel a \$6 billion order for Boeing 737 MAX jets, citing concerns over passenger confidence, as Boeing tried to quell safety worries by making a previously optional cockpit warning light compulsory.

National carrier Garuda is the first airline to publicly announce plans to scrap an order since a total of 346 people were killed in 737 MAX crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia, leading the world's entire fleet of the aircraft to be grounded. Southeast Asia faces a glut of narrow-body aircraft like the 737 MAX and rival Airbus A320neo ... (More on P4)...(19)

Exiled Thai Leader Is Father of the Bride Ahead of Election

HONG KONG - Thailand's exiled former prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, won't know until Sunday whether people in his homeland are still fans of his politics, but he was happy as he hosted a wedding reception in Hong Kong for his youngest daughter.

Though ostensibly a family affair with a raft of VIP guests, the ceremony's timing Friday seemed to carry an implicit message to Thaksin's countrymen: Don't forget me and my political



allies at Sunday's general election. Thai Princess Ubolratana Mahidol, who made an abortive attempt last month to be a prime ministerial candidate for a political party allied to

Thaksin, was a special guest. Although Thaksin was ousted by a 2006 military coup, the Pheu Thai Party of his loyalists is expected to capture the most seats in Sunday's polls. (AP)

New Zealand Defends Mosque Attack Response at Muslim Meeting in Turkey

ISTANBUL - New Zealand on Friday defended its reaction to its worst mass shooting, telling Muslim countries meeting in Turkey that the police response to the killing of 50 people was "instantaneous" and the perpetrator would spend life in prison.

Speaking to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters was responding to Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan who has said Turkey would make the suspected attacker pay if New Zealand did not. Erdogan's comments at a series of election campaign rallies - including calling on New Zealand to restore the

death penalty and repeatedly showing video footage of the shootings that the alleged gunman had broadcast on Facebook - triggered a diplomatic dispute between the nations.

"This person will face the full force of New Zealand law, and will spend the rest of his life in isolation in a New Zealand prison," Peters told the OIC, meeting in emergency session to discuss Islamophobia and the March 15 shootings in Christchurch. "Our police have started the largest investigation in our history," said Peters, who had earlier condemned Erdogan's airing of the footage as risking endangering New Zealanders abroad. ... (More on P4)...(16)

Syria Vows to Recover Golan as Trump Policy Shift Draws Criticism

BEIRUT - The Syrian government vowed to recover the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights as its allies and enemies alike condemned U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday for moving to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the territory seized in war.

Trump's statement on Thursday marked a dramatic shift in U.S. policy over the status of a disputed area that Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Middle East conflict and annexed in 1981 - a move not recognized internationally. Against this backdrop of hostility toward the U.S. move, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo landed in Beirut on Friday after visiting Israel. He is expected to raise pressure on the government to curb the influence of the Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Trump's declaration is the latest U.S. step to fuel anger in the region, both in states that are hostile to Israel and others that have relations with it and are allied to the United States.

It follows the U.S. recognition in December 2017 of Jerusalem as Israel's capital - a decision that also drew international criticism as the city's disputed status remains at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Russia, an ally of President Bashar al-Assad with forces in Syria, said Trump's comments risked seriously destabilizing the region, and it voiced hope the statement was just declaratory. Iran, Assad's main regional ally and which ... (More on P4)...(20)

Neighbor News

Chinese Court Jails Company Head Over Massive Fraud

KUNMING - A Chinese court on Friday handed down penalties from fines to jail terms to 21 people for their roles in a high-profile case of illegally absorbing public deposits. Shan Jiuliang, board chairman and president of Kunming Fanya Metal Exchange, was sentenced to 18 years in jail for illegally raising funds from the public and embezzlement, according to the verdict issued by the Kunming Intermediate People's Court in southwest China's Yunnan Province. Fanya Metal Exchange got a fine of 1 billion yuan (149 million U.S. dollars), while Shan

will have 50 million yuan confiscated from his personal assets, apart from a 500,000-yuan fine. Twenty other defendants also received penalties ranging from prison terms to fines. Three other companies were also fined 500 million yuan, 50 million yuan and 5 million yuan, respectively. The court said the defendants in violation of China's financial laws, solicited huge amounts of funds from the public by promising them a fixed rate of profits from rare metal trading, causing huge economic losses to the participants. (Monitoring Desk)

Mahathir Offers Cooperation to Imran Khan to Pursue Anti-Corruption Agenda

ISLAMABAD - Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Friday offered Pakistan cooperation in combating corruption to avert losses to national economy and also called for extending its scope to other Muslim countries. Addressing a joint press stake-out along with Prime Minister Imran Khan at the PM House, the Malaysian Prime Minister said Malaysia was much concerned about the negative impact of corruption and believed that it hampered the socio-economic development of masses. Dr Mahathir said money stolen by public office bearers, must be extracted and diverted towards the development budget with an objective of their uplift.

He seconded the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan that corruption affected a country by making its people poor. "We can exchange information with each other to combat corruption and share a mechanism with other Muslim states so as to help them ensure development," Mahathir said, who earlier presented a book to Prime Minister Imran Khan on the subject of fighting corruption. Imran Khan said Dr Mahathir as a statesman was a role model for the Muslim world who brought about improvement in the living standard of his countrymen, adding that his comeback in politics was a remarkable step towards ending corruption. (Monitoring Desk)

Turkmenistan Introduces Internal Money Transfer System

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan's Turkmenpochta (Turkmen Post) national company is expanding the range of services provided to the public, Trend reports referring to the Neutral Turkmenistan newspaper.

It is possible now to make internal electronic money transfers in post offices. For express sending / receiving money, it is enough to present an ID at the post office and indicate the full name and address of the recipient. Two tariffs are in place: regular and student. The list of services also includes accepting payments for utilities, as well as an expedited postage to 190 countries within the Universal Postal Union.

In addition, it is possible to purchase railway tickets in post offices, along with making an electronic purchase, cashless payment, and benefiting from home delivery services. (Trend)

Muslims Urge Fight on Islamophobia, Slam West after Carnage

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says certain countries in the West must be held accountable for an attack on two mosques in New Zealand, which left at least 50 worshippers dead.

"The terrorist attack in New Zealand represents a very dangerous tide in the West that is Islamophobia," he said in Istanbul where the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held an emergency meeting Friday.

Certain Western officials and institutions, he said, are aiding and abetting crimes against Muslims with their silence.

Zarif criticized "those who prevent citizens of Muslim countries from entering their countries," referring to

US President Donald Trump and "those who prevent the use of Islamic symbols in their countries," meaning Europeans.

"Unfortunately those who claim to be promoting freedom of speech are both suppressing the freedom of expression of Muslims and allowing all forms of insult against Muslims in the name of the freedom of expression," he said.

"And we are seeing the consequences of this in various parts of the West," Zarif added. The minister said the OIC emergency meeting in Istanbul came on Iran's request during his phone conversation with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu last week after the New Zealand massacre. (Press TV)