

Arab Leaders Agree on Joint Military Force

CAIRO - The Arab states said on Sunday that they had agreed to form a joint military force to counter both Iranian influence and Islamist extremism, a gesture many analysts attributed in large part to their drive for more independence from Washington. The agreement came as American and other Western diplomats in Lausanne, Switzerland, were racing to beat a self-imposed deadline of Tuesday to reach a deal with Iran that would restrict its nuclear program in exchange for the removal of economic sanctions. In

response, Saudi Arabia and other American allies in the region have made clear that they are seeking to bolster independent regional security measures because they see the proposed accord as a betrayal of Washington's commitment to their security. Regardless of Iran's nuclear program, they complain, the deal would do nothing to stop Iran from seeking to extend its influence around the region by backing favored factions, as it has done in Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen. Many of the Arab states, including Egypt, Jordan



and most of the Gulf monarchies, have thrown their support behind a Saudi Arabia-led campaign of airstrikes to counter advances by an Iranian-backed Houthi move-

ment in Yemen; Washington is providing only intelligence and logistical support, but Saudi Arabia is leading the bombing while Egypt, with the largest Arab army, has

pledged to send ground troops "if necessary." How the agreement, announced at a meeting of the League of Arab States in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, will be implemented re-

mains to be seen. Arab military chiefs are expected to work out more of the details. Officials of the Arab League said the leadership of the joint force, ...*(More on P4)...(18)*

Bill Gates Eyes China's Innovation to Benefit World



BOAO, Hainan - Bill Gates is eyeing the creative potential that China has to offer, ranging from super rice to convenient vaccine storage facilities for remote areas.

The former president of Microsoft told Xinhua that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which he co-chairs with his wife, is cooperating with Chinese innovators, during an exclusive interview at the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia.

He said the foundation, which was established in 2000, was working with high-tech companies in China on research in areas such as productive rice and vaccine freezing.

"We are investing more and more money and have a lot of specific partnerships growing," Gates said, identifying agriculture as a particular area that offered many opportunities.

"We were partner on the Green Super Rice [project], which is valuable not only here but also in Africa," he said. He mentioned another project with the Chinese fridge maker Aucma that was looking into portable storage for vaccines, and another research project on how to limit pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in the energy sector.

These are projects that the entire world needs solving, Gates said.

"China's capacity for biological and IT breakthroughs is growing very rapidly, and China is in many ways the world agriculture leader. There are many areas that we are not funding that have the potential to help other countries," he said.

After leaving the corporate business world more than a decade ago, the richest man in the world threw himself into charity work.

The Seattle-based foundation focuses on health and poverty in developing countries.

Last year, it distributed 3.9 billion U.S. dollars in grants.

Without disclosing how much the foundation would channel into China, Gates said the foundation was increasing its presence in the country where the government is stimulating innovation with no efforts spared.

In addition, the foundation's talent incubator, Grand Challenges, will hold its annual conference in China for the first time later this year.

"We are challenging scientists in China to help find solutions for the poor," Gates said.

Since the competition began 11 years ago, 21 Chinese innovators have had their ideas funded by the foundation. "We would like to see that number increase," Gates said. "So far China only accounts for 5 percent of submissions."

In 2014, two Chinese projects, one on rapid detection of tuberculosis and another on thinner condoms, won the challenges.

China has identified innovation as a new driver of the economy. The central government earlier this week published a plan outlining how mass innovation would be stimulated.

It is great that the government is backing research and creating a framework for entrepreneurs, as this is exactly what it needs, Gates said. (Xinhua)

Iran, US FMs Wrap up Fifth Day of Nuclear Talks

Senior negotiators from Iran and the United States have wrapped up another day of negotiations on outstanding issues pertaining to Tehran's nuclear program in the Swiss city of Lausanne.

TEHRAN - The meeting between Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and US Secretary of State John Kerry ended on Sunday as Iran and the P5+1 countries are holding sensitive negotiations aimed at reaching a general understanding on sticking points ahead of a looming end-of-March deadline.

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Ali Akbar Salehi, Iranian deputy foreign ministers Abbas Araqchi and

Majid Takht-e Ravanchi, Hossein Fereydoon, the special aide to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani as well as US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz and US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman were also present in the talks.

The Iranian foreign minister on Sunday held talks with his Chinese and German counterparts Wang Yi and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, respectively, about the latest developments in the

nuclear talks, solutions to the outstanding issues and the remaining differences. He held a separate meeting with EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini.

Wang rushed to meet with his Iranian counterpart immediately after his arrival in Lausanne on Sunday. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond are expected to join the talks in Lausanne later on Sunday. (Press TV)

Yemen FM Says Fighting isn't Sectarian

CAIRO - Despite ongoing fighting between Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who are Shia, and Saudi Arabian-backed loyalist forces, who are Sunni, Yemen's foreign minister on Sunday insisted that his country is not in the grips of a sectarian war.

"There is no war between Sunnis and Shiites," said Foreign Minister Riyadh Yaseen. "We use the same mosques. There is no Sunni mosque or Shiite mosque."

He also dismissed calls by Russia for negotiation between the two sides, saying, "We can talk about dialogue if the Houthis drop their weapons."

A Saudi-led coalition of Gulf states began bombing Yemen on Thursday - targeting the

Houthis and their allies, which include forces loyal to Yemen's former leader, Ali Abdullah Saleh. Yaseen spoke after an meeting the Arab League summit in Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh came amid an escalating crisis in Yemen. A multinational coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched



airstrikes there this week to weaken Shiite Houthi rebels who have been making a play for power - an advance that has forced Yemen's president to flee the country. (nbcNews)

Ex-German Leader Schroeder Raps Merkel's Russia Policy

BERLIN - Former German chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, has lashed out at his successor, Angela Merkel over her policies towards Russia, saying he understands Moscow's foreign policy concerns.

Schroeder made the remarks in an interview with the German daily Der Spiegel published on Saturday. The former chancellor who ruled Germany from 1998-2005 said he fully recognizes Moscow's concerns as since the Eastern European defense alliance, the Warsaw Pact, ceased to exist with the end of the Soviet Union, the Western military alliance "NATO not only survived, but also has extensively expanded to the East."

Schroeder added that he sees no grounds to fear a possible Russian threat in Eastern Europe and Russia would not "consider placing in question the territorial integrity of Poland or the Baltic states."

In addition, Schroeder insisted that attempts by the United States and the European Union (EU) to internationally isolate Russia over the crisis in Ukraine are "wrong," arguing, "It is during a crisis that dialogue should be maintained."

Western governments, including Germany have imposed sanctions on Russia, accusing Moscow of interfering in neighboring Ukraine. However, the Kremlin denies the accusation. According...*(More on P4)...(20)*

Mogherini Expresses Optimism about Potential Nuke Framework Deal

LAUSANNE - A senior official of the European Union said on Saturday that a framework deal on Iran nuclear issue is close at hand despite the fact some difficult points need to be ironed out in the final stage of talks.

Federica Mogherini, EU foreign policy chief, made the remarks before foreign ministers from P5+1 (namely the U. St., Britain, China, France, Russia and Germany) and Iran join the Iranian nuclear talks on Sunday in a bid

to hammer out a framework agreement before the March 31 deadline.

"We are always optimistic, otherwise we won't be here," the EU foreign policy chief told reporters on her arrival in Lausanne.

"I think we have made substantial progress, the words from last week has been very positive, but still there are some points which we have to work hard to find solutions," she added.

She said: "We can find solutions which are

good for all, which can guarantee that Iran has no nuclear weapons but can still develop civil nuclear program, I think this is the common ground uniting all in the negotiation, not only tonight or tomorrow, but also in the last month".

She said all parties can make a deal that is good for nonproliferation, for security in the region and the world, also for the sake of regional stability. (Xinhua)

Israel Premier Expresses 'Deep Concern' on Pending Iran Deal

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that he has "deep concern" over a pending nuclear deal the West appears close to signing with Israel's arch-enemy Iran.

Netanyahu said that he conveyed those fears to visiting American lawmakers, warning that the looming deal appears to

"corroborate all our concerns and then some."

Netanyahu has been a fierce critic of American-led efforts to reach a nuclear deal with Iran and publicly has clashed with the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama over the issue.

Negotiators in the Swiss town of Lausanne are working on an initial agreement just three days

before their self-imposed deadline.

"The Iran-Lausanne-Yemen axis is very dangerous for humanity and must be stopped," the Israeli premier said, referring to Iran's backing of Shiite rebels who have conquered most of Yemen.

The West fears Iran's nuclear program will allow ...*(More on P4)...(21)*

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China's Futures Market Makes Headways toward Globalization

BOAO, Hainan - The Shanghai International Energy Exchange (INE), slated to begin trading later this year, will open the country's futures market to foreign participation.

China's major futures markets are internal and isolated, and have been held back by a lack of foreign participation, Leo Melamed, Chairman Emeritus, Chicago Mercantile Exchange, said at the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) Annual Conference 2015 in Boao, Hainan province.

The new exchange has the potential to become a hugely successful global market, said Melamed.

The INE, which is based in the Shanghai Free Trade Zone (FTZ), will

open crude oil futures to foreign investment, according to a decision by the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC).

Melamed said that China's futures market had passed its preliminary development stage and the opening up "had to happen" as it was "the next stage of development".

Since the first futures exchange was established two decades ago, China's futures trading has boomed. About 40 commodity futures and two financial futures are currently traded on the six major futures markets, covering agriculture, energy, chemical and metal sectors. The annual

...*(More on P4)...(19)*

Raheel Sharif Vows Terror-Free Pakistan for Next Generation



LAHORE - Pakistani Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Raheel Sharif, has called for making collective efforts to give the next generation a terrorism-free and prosperous Pakistan and to provide them a conducive environment which could help them apply their knowledge and creativity to achieve optimum effects for national growth.

"Our young and upcoming generation is our future. And it can only be saved if we make joint efforts for giving them a

terror-free and prosperous Pakistan," the COAS said while addressing the third convocation of CMH Lahore Medical College on Saturday.

"We are taking menace of terrorism head on and will go anywhere in the country to eliminate it completely," he pledged. He said Pakistan Army besides performing its role as custodian of national frontiers had always been a forerunner in terms of its contribution to national development. (Monitoring Desk)

Presidential Election in Uzbekistan, Karimov Expected to Win Again

TASHKENT - Voting took place in Uzbekistan on Sunday in a presidential election widely expected to be won by Islam Karimov, who has ruled Central Asia's most populous country for more than 20 years.

Karimov, 77, is one of four presidential hopefuls. However, his three competitors have portrayed the incumbent as the best candidate.

Election observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have said that the campaign lacked competition and that Karimov's candidacy might violate the constitution, which allows the president only two consecutive terms in office.

Authorities argue this does not apply because the length of the presidential term has been

changed over the years, which means the consecutive terms were not of the same kind.

Karimov was re-elected for seven-year terms in 2000 and 2007, each time with an official result of more than 90 percent. This time, the term has been reduced to five years.

The president has groomed no apparent successor. His daughter Gulnara, long described as his political heir, was placed under house arrest in the capital Tashkent in February 2014.

The region's most populous country, with more than 30 million inhabitants, Uzbekistan has been isolated internationally since a bloody crackdown on opposition protesters in 2005.

However, relations with Russia improved last year. (dpa)

Military Operations in Yemen Must be Halted: Iran

BAKU, Azerbaijan - While Iranian officials, including Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif warned about any military intervention against Houthi (a Shia group) in Yemen, Mohsen Pak Ayeen, Iran's Ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan, expressing his concern over gravity of situation in Yemen and loss of lives of innocent ordinary people, urged that world community and regional countries to take action for immediate stop of military action against Yemen.

Iran's Embassy released a report Mar.26 quoted Pak Ayeen as saying that military operation against an independent state, contradicts sovereignty of the state, breaches international norms and will only result in killing of innocent people, destruction and displacement." Saudi Arabia launched air strikes against the Yemeni Houthi rebels, who are supported by Iran and has taken the control of Yemeni capital, Sanaa since last September. (Trend News)