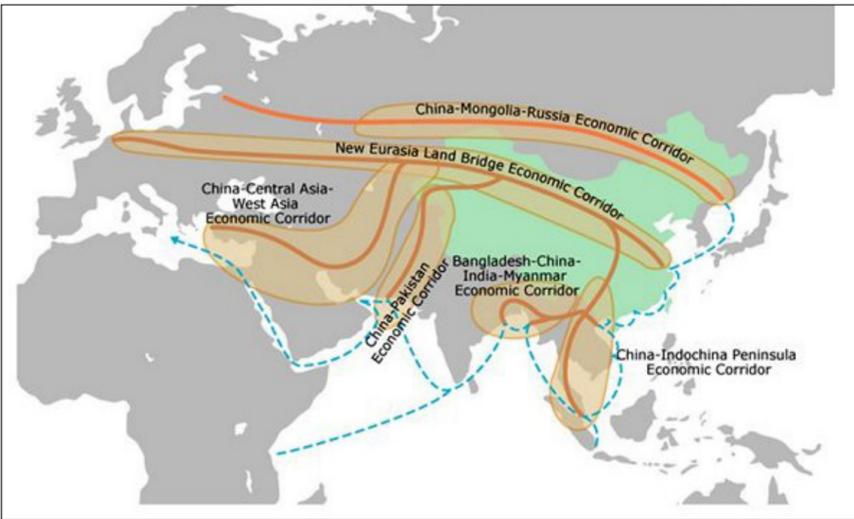


Belt and Road Initiative Beneficial for Regional Prosperity: IMF Official

YOKOHAMA, Japan - The Belt and Road Initiative is very important and will certainly have a good impact on regional growth and prosperity, said Mitsuhiro Furusawa, deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), on Saturday. Proposed by China in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, aiming at building a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa along the ancient trade routes of Silk Road. The initiative is very important to foster regional cooperation in areas of trade, investment and finance and to provide much needed infrastructure for the region, Furusawa said in an ex-



clusive interview with Xinhua here on the sidelines of the 50th annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank. Furusawa said, "Global growth is picking up, and also in China ... We see the growth momentum," he said. Last month, the IMF upgraded its forecast for China's economic growth in 2017 to 6.6 percent, and global economic growth to 3.5 percent, both up 0.1 percentage points from its January projections. As for the ongoing process of the Chinese RMB's internationalization, he said that it is both beneficial for China and for other countries. "The Chinese currency's internationalization goes hand in hand with Chinese economic growth. (Xinhua)

India Successfully Launches South Asia Satellite

NEW DELHI - In its biggest space diplomacy push, India launched a South Asia communication satellite on Friday from the spaceport of Sriharikota in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. The State-owned Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) rocket, Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV), carrying the 2,230 kg satellite GSAT-9, lifted off from the launch pad at Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota at 4:57 p.m. local time (11:27 GMT). ISRO, which has built the

satellite for use by countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region, said GSAT-9 has been launched with an objective to provide different communication applications in Ku-band with coverage over South Asia. The satellite was originally named SAARC satellite, but was later changed to South Asia satellite after Pakistan opted out of the project, stating "it has its own space program." Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the... (More on P4)... (23)

U.S., Russian Top Diplomats Discuss Efforts to Reduce Syria Violence

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Friday discussed with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov about efforts to reduce the conflict in Syria, the U.S. State Department said. "The Secretary of State spoke by phone with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov today about the efforts to de-escalate the ongoing conflict in Syria," according to a State Department statement. "The secretary looks forward to further meetings

with the foreign minister to discuss the respective roles of the United States and Russia in de-escalating the conflict and supporting the talks in Geneva to move the political solution forward," the statement added. The exchange occurred one day after Russia, Iran and Turkey signed a memorandum in Kazakhstan's capital Astana on the creation of four safe zones in



war-torn Syria. In another statement on Thursday, the U.S. State Department voiced concerns about Iran's role as a guarantor of the new memorandum to reduce violence in certain areas of Syria. (Xinhua)

European Leaders Say EU Must Change to Defeat Populism

ROME - The European Union must mend its ways or risk losing out to a rising tide of populist and anti-EU sentiment, European chiefs said in Florence on Friday. Leaders, policymakers and experts gathered at the 7th annual "State of the Union" conference - titled "Building a People's Europe" - to thrash out how to make the EU a better place to live for its discontented citizens. Italy had a moment of glory when European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said it saves the honor of Europe by rescuing migrants and refugees

at sea. "From the very first day of the migration crisis, Italy has done everything possible - in the absence of a sufficient European presence, Italy has saved and continues to save Europe's honor," Juncker said. Also at the Florence gathering was European Parliament President Antonio Tajani, who is Italian. Tajani said what European citizens want first and foremost is for the EU to manage migration, guarantee greater security, and offer prospects and employment to the young. (Xinhua)

ASEAN+3 Finance Chiefs Discuss Economy, Cooperation in Japan

YOKOHAMA, Japan - Finance chiefs from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as Japan, China and South Korea discussed global and regional economy and financial cooperation here Friday at the 20th ASEAN+3 Finance Ministers' and Central Bank Governors' Meeting. The ASEAN+3 finance leaders agreed that the regional economy, while growing relatively fast, still faces downside risks caused by factors, such as protectionism and financial condition tightening.

They agreed to promote sustainable, balanced and inclusive economic growth by deploying all necessary policy tools independently or jointly, including monetary, fiscal policies as well as structural reform. They reaffirmed support for open and rules-based multilateral trade and investment systems, and agreed to enhance monitoring of capital flows and pay close attention to and address possible risks in the region. The leaders also reaffirmed strengthening the role of the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM) as part of the regional financial safety net and welcomed the fruits achieved in the first joint test run of the CMIM and the International Monetary Fund.



Shi Yaobin, China's deputy finance minister, said China's economy got off to a good start in 2017, with economic growth reaching 6.9 percent, 3.34 million new jobs created in... (More on P4)... (24)

French Voters Brace for Decisive Round of Presidential Election

PARIS - French voters are preparing to return to the polling stations on Sunday to decide which of the two candidates will take the country's presidency for the next five years. Unlike the neck-and-neck race in the first round of votes on April 23, the margin between centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron and far-rightist Marine Le Pen in the runoff vote is estimated to be quite large, according to opinion polls. Various polls released on Friday, the last campaigning day, estimate that Macron will win with 61 to



62 percent of votes, while only 38 to 40 percent will go to Le Pen. A Harris Interactive survey for French television network LCP indicates Macron will garner 62 percent, and Le Pen 38

percent. The same figures were given by an Odax-Dentsu Consulting poll for Le Point magazine and an Elabe survey for BFMTV and newspaper L'Express. Meanwhile, an Ipsos-Sopra... (More on P4)... (25)

White House Fires its First Female Chief Usher

WASHINGTON - White House Chief Usher Angella Reid, the first woman and second African-American to hold this job, has been fired, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders confirmed Friday without giving any reasons. "We left on very good terms and wish her the very best and certainly hope for great things for her in the future," Sanders said at the daily press briefing. "However, it's not uncommon that you might have a transition when a new administration comes in and it's simply nothing more than that," Sanders said, adding that the deputy chief usher would step into an acting role for now. Reid joined the White House in 2011 under President Barack Obama. She was previously the general manager at the Ritz Carlton in Pentagon... (More on P4)... (26)

Trump Anti-Climate Ghost Hangs over UN Meeting

PARIS - For the first time since Donald Trump's ascent to the White House, UN negotiators gather next week to draft rules to take forward the climate-rescue Paris Agreement he has threatened to abandon. The mid-year round of haggling in Bonn is meant to begin work on a crucial rulebook for signatories of the pact. But it risks being sidetracked by mounting uncertainty over the world's number two carbon polluter, with Trump at its helm. "This was supposed to be a highly technical and uneventful meeting to flesh out some of the details in the Paris Agreement. But, obviously, the speculation coming out of Washington is now at the top of our minds," the Maldives environment and energy minister, Thor-ik Ibrahim, told AFP. He chairs the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a key negotiating bloc in the UN climate forum which will meet from May 8-18. The deal was sealed at the 21st so-called "Conference of Parties" (COP 21) in the French capital in December 2015, after years of haggling. A diplomatic push led by Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, and China's Xi Jinping, saw 195 countries and the EU bloc - 196 parties in total - OK the deal to the popping of champagne corks. Palestine has also since joined. The agreement sets the goal of limiting average global warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-Industrial Revolution levels - and 1.5 C if possible. (AFP)

French Candidate Macron Claims Massive Hack as Emails Leaked

FRANKFURT/PARIS - Leading French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron's campaign said on Friday it had been the target of a "massive" computer hack that dumped its campaign emails online 1-1/2 days before voters choose between the centrist and his far-right rival, Marine Le Pen. Macron, who is seen as the frontrunner in an election billed as the most important in France in decades, extended his lead over Le Pen in polls on Friday. As much as 9 gigabytes of data were posted on a profile called EMLEAKS to Pastebin, a site that allows anonymous document sharing. It... (More on P4)... (27)

UN Chief Updates Member States on Progress on UN Reform Initiatives

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has written to Member States to update them on his various reform initiatives, a UN spokesperson said Friday. "The Secretary-General intends to advance meaningful reform to adapt the United Nations to the complex world in which we operate today and to make sure that this Organization can effectively serve all of its member states in achieving that future and managing shared challenges and opportunities along the way," said Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for Guterres, at the daily news briefing. The letter "provides a timeline of progress" on a number of reform issues, including

gender parity, the reform of the development system, the reform of the peace and security architecture, management of the Organisation, the new Counter Terrorism Office, whistle-blower protection, combating sexual exploitation and abuse, among others, said Dujarric. The Secretary-General has established an Internal Review Team on peace and security in January and one on management reform in April. Guterres also shared his vision for prevention. "For him, prevention means doing everything we can to help countries to avert the outbreak of crises that take a high toll on humanity... (More on P4)... (28)

Nieghbor News

Japan, China to Boost Financial Ties

YOKOHAMA, Japan - Japan and China agreed to bolster economic and financial cooperation, Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso said on Saturday. Chinese Finance Minister Xiao Jie, who missed a trilateral meeting with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts on Friday for an emergency domestic meeting, had flown in for the talks with Aso, seeking to dispel speculation his absence had any diplomatic implications. "We actively exchanged views on economic and financial situations in Japan and China and our cooperation in the financial field," Aso told reporters after the meeting, which included senior finance ministry and central bank officials. "It was significant that we reconfirmed the need of financial cooperation between the two countries

while sharing our experiences in dealing with economic policies and structural issues," he added. The two countries agreed to launch joint research on issues of mutual interest - without elaborating - and to report the outcomes at the next talks, which will be held in 2018 in China. They did not discuss issues such as currencies and geopolitical risks from North Korea's nuclear and missile program during the dialogue, held on the sidelines of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) annual meeting in Yokohama, eastern Japan, Aso said. Relations between Japan and China have been strained over territorial rows and Japan's occupation of parts of China in World War Two, though leaders have recently sought to mend ties through dialogue. (Reuters)

Iran's Rouhani Hits back against 'Nuclear Deal Saboteurs'

TEHRAN - Iran's president blasted conservative opponents during a critical presidential debate on Friday, accusing them of attempting to sabotage the nuclear deal with world powers. Hassan Rouhani slammed the decision to write anti-Israel messages on ballistic missiles before testing them, in what is seen as rare criticism of the elite Revolutionary Guards, and also spoke of his commitment to human rights. "We saw how they wrote slogans on missiles and showed underground (missile) cities to disrupt the JCPOA (nuclear deal)," he said during

the debate, which comes ahead of the 19 May election. "Our nation got through these issues because the majority of society chose morality and Islam from day one," he added. Iran argues that missile tests are not banned under the 2015 deal, which curbed its nuclear programme in exchange for a lifting of certain sanctions, but they have heightened tensions with the US and Israel. Rouhani said his conservative opponents in the election were linked to those trying to scupper the deal and broader outreach to the West. (Agencies)

Sharif, Bajwa Hold Meeting

KARACHI - Five days after a military spokesman "rejected" government directives related to an inquiry report, Pakistan's Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif held a meeting on Thursday night and discussed the issue for its amicable settlement, private news channels claimed on Friday night. On April 29, the Pakistani Prime Minister Office had issued directives for the removal of Special Assistant on Foreign Affairs Tariq Fatemi and Principal Information Officer Rao Tehseen in line with the recommendations of the committee set up to hold the inquiry into a Dawn report published

in October last year. A few hours later, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) chief Maj Gen Asif Ghafoor, through a Twitter posting, termed the notification "incomplete" and "rejected" it. On Friday night, almost every news channel, quoting their unnamed sources, reported that a meeting between the army chief and the prime minister was held on Thursday night in a pleasant atmosphere and issues relating to the news report, border and security situation came under discussion. During the meeting both sides agreed to resolve the issue of the inquiry in an amicable manner, the channels added. (Monitoring Desk)

Turkmenistan Discovers Potentially Large Gas Field near Caspian

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan has discovered a potentially large natural gas field close to its Caspian coast, the Central Asian nation's state news agency reported on Saturday. Gas exports are the main source of hard currency for the former Soviet republic which is in talks with the European Union about building a pipeline across the Caspian to link its fields to European markets. The new discovery was made onshore in the Uzunada area, at the depth of about 7 kilometers, state news agency TDH said. The test well produced

500,000 cubic meters of gas and 150 tonnes of condensate per day, it said. Turkmenistan, whose reserves include the world's second-largest gas field, Galkynysh, has faced foreign currency shortages after Russia, one of the biggest customers, stopped buying Turkmen gas last year, leaving China as the main buyer. The Ashgabat government is trying to diversify exports by discussing the Trans-Caspian link to Europe as well as investing in a pipeline through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. (Reuters)