

South Africa Starts Voting amid Corruption, Unemployment

JOHANNESBURG - South Africans have started voting in presidential and parliamentary elections amid issues of corruption and unemployment.

Wednesday's vote comes 25 years after the end of apartheid, but despite the demise of the system of racial discrimination the country remains divided by economic inequality.

The party of Nelson Mandela that has been in power since 1994, The African National Congress, is likely to win a majority but it will face a difficult challenge to do as well as five years ago.

The party has been tarnished by widespread corruption scandals and a national unemployment rate of 27% that



has left many voters disillusioned. ANC head President Cyril Ramaphosa has cam-

paigned on promises to clean up his party, an acknowledgment of the problems that

forced his predecessor to resign last year. (Fox News)

European-Led Group Seeks to Help End Venezuelan Crisis

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica - A mostly European group of nations said Tuesday it will send a high-level delegation to Venezuela to propose solutions to that country's protracted crisis. European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said in Costa Rica that the delegation will travel in the coming days. The International Contact Group, consisting of eight European countries, the European Union and four Latin American countries, concluded its meeting

in San Jose on Tuesday. The group formed after Juan Guaidó, the leader of Venezuela's opposition-controlled congress declared himself early this year interim president in a direct challenge to Nicolás Maduro's rule. It reiterated its goal of a peaceful resolution through the holding of free and fair elections as soon as possible. It also expressed concern for Venezuela's humanitarian situation and called for unrestricted access for aid. (AP)

US Lifts Sanctions for Venezuelan General Who Defied Maduro

CARACAS, Venezuela - The U.S. has lifted sanctions on a top Venezuelan general who broke ranks with President Nicolás Maduro, trying to help the opposition regain momentum in the face of a government crackdown following last week's failed uprising. Vice President Mike Pence said in a speech Tuesday that the immediate lifting of financial sanctions for Gen. Manuel Figuera, who was Venezuela's spy chief, is intended to encourage

others in the military to abandon their support for Maduro. The move was a display of "good faith" designed to elicit "concrete and meaningful actions to restore democratic order" by dozens of other sanctioned Venezuelan insiders, the Treasury Department said in a statement. Figuera was the sole regime insider to defy Maduro during the uprising, although the White House contends several others, including Defense Minister Vladimir



Padrino, had had been in talks for weeks with the opposition to oust Maduro but backed away from the plan at the last minute. As the U.S. looked to lure the Venezuelan military, which is the ... (More on P4)...(14)

Iran Tells Foreign Envoys It Will 'Stop Implementation' Of Some Nuclear Deal Commitments



TEHRAN - Iran told ambassadors from the UK, France, Germany, China and Russia that it will renege on "some commitments" under the 2015 nuclear deal,

but will not quit the pact completely. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani appeared Wednesday on national TV to announce the decision to scale down im-

plementation of the 2015 deal, which is officially called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). He said the Iranian move was reciprocal action to US complete withdrawal from it under President Donald Trump. Rouhani announced that Tehran will be gradually suspending its commitments under the deal, giving other parties subsequent periods of 60 days to negotiate a reversal of those actions. He blamed European signatories of failing to

compensate to Iran the damage done by US unilateral sanctions after Washington broke its part of the bargain. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif earlier told reporters Tehran would be backing out of some "voluntary commitments" under the 2015 agreement as a response to the EU's inability to stand up to the pressure of Washington's attempts to isolate Iran. The JCPOA was signed under Barack Obama and offered Iran lifting of ... (More on P4)...(15)

China's April Exports Fall amid US Tariff War; Imports Rise

BEIJING - China's exports fell unexpectedly in April, adding to pressure on Beijing ahead of negotiations on ending a tariff war with Washington over Chinese technology ambitions. Wednesday's announcement of trade data came after President Donald Trump sent global financial markets plunging with a surprise threat of more penalties on Chinese imports. April exports sank 2.7% from a year ago to \$193.5 billion, a reverse from March's 14.2% growth, customs data showed.

That was well below private sector forecasts of growth in low single digits. Imports rose 4% to \$179.6 billion, rebounding from the previous month's 7.6% decline. That added to signs government efforts to reverse an economic downturn might be gaining traction. Imports of American goods fell 26% from a year earlier to \$10.3 billion. Exports to the United States, China's biggest foreign market, were down 13% at \$31.4 billion. (AP)

Boxing Chief Criticizes IOC Comments on Olympic Competition

GOLD COAST, Australia - The head of the international boxing federation has criticized IOC president Thomas Bach's comments that Olympic officials could organize the Tokyo 2020 boxing tournament if the sport's federation can't get its affairs in order. Bach said last weekend that the IOC wants the sport at next year's Tokyo Games and is prepared to organize both the qualification and the competition if boxing's troubled international governing body, the AIBA, loses its Olympic status over leadership and financial problems. "Organizing a sports event is also not rocket science," Bach told a meeting in Sydney on Saturday. (AP)

Trump Puts Deal Making Credentials to Test with China Talks

WASHINGTON - As he cranks up the pressure on China in pursuit of a new trade accord, President Donald Trump is putting his deal-making persona on the line and injecting new risk into his bid for another four years in the White House.

Trump has raised the already high stakes of this week's talks between U.S. and Chinese negotiators as he seeks to seal an agreement he can brandish on the campaign trail. The push to bring the talks with China to a conclusion comes as his administration gears up for a difficult fight in Congress over its new North American trade deal. Progress or failure on the twin agenda items stands to be a key selling point for his reelection or a sobering verdict on his unpredictable stylings. (AP)

Tomorrow's Guard of Indian Borders: Behind the Armor of Russian-Designed T-90

NEW DELHI - The Indian Armed Forces are to be reinforced by more than 460 cutting-edge Russian-designed T-90 tanks in the near future. RT takes a closer look at what the advanced war machine has in store. The Indian Army is expected to purchase 464 upgraded T-90 'Bhishma' main battle tanks between 2022 and 2026, the Times of India reporter citing sources within the Defense Ministry. The military hardware acquired under the \$1.93 billion contract will be deployed to India's border with Pakistan to enhance its



"shock and awe" capabilities. Indian Army's T-90 Bhishma tanks (front) are driving during the Republic Day parade in New Delhi, India, January 26, 2016. © Reuters / Altaf Hussain

The tanks will be assembled at the Avadi Heavy Vehicle Factory (HVF) from prefabricated parts supplied by Russia. Moscow has extended the manufacturing license for New Delhi in early April. The Indian Army already has ... (More on P4)...(16)

Pompeo Briefs Iraqi Leaders on U.S. Security Concerns over Iran

BAGHDAD - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made an unannounced visit to Baghdad on Tuesday and met Iraq's prime minister and other top officials to discuss the safety of Americans in Iraq and explain U.S. security concerns amid rising Iranian activity.

The visit came two days after U.S. national security adviser John Bolton said the United States was deploying the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and a bomber task force to the region because of a "credible threat

by Iranian regime forces". Washington has ramped up sanctions on Tehran over its nuclear program in recent months and designated the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist group.

"We talked to them about the importance of Iraq ensuring that it's able to adequately protect Americans in their country," Pompeo told reporters after meeting Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi. Abdul Mahdi said the United States was an ... (More on P4)...(17)

Suicide Bombing Outside Pakistan Shrine Kills 10

LAHORE, Pakistan - A suicide bomber attacked security forces guarding a famous Sufi shrine in Pakistan's eastern city of Lahore on Wednesday, killing at least 10 people and wounding 20 others, police said. Hizbul Ahrar, an offshoot of the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for the attack, saying their target was the police. Hundreds of pilgrims were inside and outside the shrine, where a local Sufi saint is buried, when the blast took place.

Sufism is a mystical strain of Islam that often involves reverence for local holy figures and shrines. Sunni extremists view Sufism with hostility and have carried out attacks on Sufi celebrations and shrines across the Muslim world. In Pakistan, militants carry out near-daily attacks targeting security forces.

Lahore police chief Ghazanfar Ali said five police and five passers-by were killed in the attack, adding that the toll could rise as some of the wounded were in critical condition. Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar, the governor of Punjab province, told reporters that those who carried out Wednesday's attack were the "enemy of Islam and humanity."

"God willing, the security forces with the cooperation of whole nation will defeat these terrorists," he added. Prime Minister Imran Khan also condemned the bombing.

Pakistanis in large numbers visit the shrine, where a pair of suicide attacks in 2010 killed and wounded dozens of people. (AP)

Neighbor News

Pakistan Keen to Complete Iran Gas Pipeline: PM Khan

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan says his country is keen to complete the construction of a much-delayed pipeline designed for receiving Iran's natural gas, weeks after he paid a visit to the neighboring state.

Local media reported on Tuesday that Khan had issued fresh directives to relevant Pakistani authorities on the completion of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, also known as the peace pipeline.

He has also urged Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to adopt the necessary measures and work to solve all issues with Iran

pertaining to the project through mutual understanding and reconciliation.

The prime minister said Tehran and Islamabad should work jointly and review the agreed price of the gas and also complete the project.

Khan further described the sanctions against Iran as the biggest hurdle for the implementation of the mega project. While Iran has completed its part of the gas pipeline project with a total investment of above \$2 billion of investment, Pakistan has fallen behind the target to take delivery of gas, initially scheduled for 2014. (Press TV)

China Regrets US Pressure on Iran, Calls for Full Implementation of Nuclear Deal

TEHRAN - Beijing wants the nuclear deal with Iran to be preserved after Tehran announced its partial suspension. China said US pressure on Iran was regrettable and said it will protect its companies from the threat of American sanctions.

China, one of the signatories of the 2015 agreement on Iran's nuclear program, said the deal needs to be saved and fully implemented.

"Defending and implementing the JCPOA is a joint responsibility of all parties," Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang said during a daily briefing, using the acronym for the full name of the agreement. "We call on all relevant parties to do everything

to prevent the situation from escalating."

The official criticized US pressure on Iran, saying such measures only raise tensions over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program. Geng said China will protect companies dealing with Tehran from the threat of American sanctions.

Beijing is one of the leading buyers of Iranian crude, while Washington threatens to punish purchasers with secondary sanctions.

Tehran announced on Wednesday that it was partially suspending its commitments under the deal, calling for European signatories to deliver on their promise to stand up to American pressure and protect Iran. (RT)

Turkmenistan Starts Developing Area Around Artificial Lake

ASHGABAT - Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the new social-industrial complex in the area around the Altyn Asyr lake, Trend reports with reference to the Turkmenistan State News Agency.

The area is located in the Balkan region of Turkmenistan. The concept for the development of the area around the artificial lake "Altyn Asyr" in 2019-2025 has been approved.

The project includes construction of social infrastructure, production facilities, livestock, fish breeding and agricultural complexes. This unique structure, located in the center of

the Karakum desert, besides its ecological and national economic mission, is of tremendous social importance, the whole extent of which is difficult to be assessed, since this mega-project implies a long-term multiplicative effect.

This project is estimated at several billion US dollars. This cave is located in the territory of the Balkan region, and it holds about 580 million cubic meters of accumulated water there.

The water can also be used on lands that are resistant to salinization, and the work can be intensified to develop fisheries, animal breeding in particular, camel breeding in areas adjacent to the lake. (Trend)

Samsung, Uzbekistan Sign Agreement on Postal Infrastructure Modernization

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan Pochtasi JSC and the South Korean corporation Samsung Electronics signed a memorandum of cooperation, Trend reports with reference to the official website of the Uzbekistan Post.

The parties approved the provisions that formed the basis for the signed memorandum during a meeting held back in April 2019.

Samsung highly appreciates the initiative of Uzbekistan Pochtasi JSC Evgeny Birger and Vice-President of Samsung Electronics for Central Asia Sang Kim stressed the importance of such initiatives for both countries. (Trend)

provide its own products for this project. The corporation will begin deliveries of mobile jobs for employees and postmen. This will be an important step in streamlining workflows and structure upgrades. Moreover, Samsung will train employees of the post service in management of the equipment.

At the signing ceremony, Director General of Uzbekistan Pochtasi JSC Evgeny Birger and Vice-President of Samsung Electronics for Central Asia Sang Kim stressed the importance of such initiatives for both countries. (Trend)