

G7 Finance Meeting Kicks off with Focus on Inclusive Growth

ROME - Inclusive growth will be on top of the agenda of finance ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) members, who gathered on Thursday in the southern city of Bari for a three-day meeting. Italian Finance Minister Pier Carlo Padoan and U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin met behind closed doors in the afternoon, while an official ceremony to welcome the other participants was scheduled at the Petruzzelli theatre in the evening.

In the bilateral talks, Padoan assured his U.S. counterpart the stock of non-performing loans (NPLs) burdening Italy's banking system would return to more "physiological levels" in short time, Ansa



news agency quoted sources from the Italian G7 presidency as saying.

Italy's bad loans, a pressing issue encompassing the country's stability within the eurozone, amounted to about 170 billion euros (184.7 billion U.S. dollars) net, senior deputy governor of Bank of Italy Salvatore Rossi said in April.

The G7 meeting would run from May 11 to May 13 amid tight security measures. Some 1,500 police officers and 600 surveillance cameras were deployed within and around Bari, according to authorities.

Besides the finance ministers, central bank governors from the world's seven most developed economies will engage in the talks in Bari. (Xinhua)

EU Chief Brexit Negotiator Says Regretting Ongoing Brexit

DUBLIN - EU Chief Brexit Negotiator Michel Barnier said on Thursday he regrets that Brexit is happening now. "I would have liked to have seen the UK staying in Europe, with Ireland and all the 26 other Member States," said Barnier, while delivering a speech to a joint sitting of the upper and lower houses of Irish parliament.

"But we are where we are," he said. Barnier said that being part of a common project and identity does not prevent a country from keeping its own identity and making a name for

itself in the world. "Some, in large countries with imperial pasts, like my own, seem to think that the EU makes them smaller. This is simply not true," the former French foreign minister said. Barnier said pooling member states' national sovereignty will increase European sovereignty as a whole. "Being together makes us all stronger," he said. Barnier listed the benefits and conveniences which an EU member state has enjoyed, such as the free movement of people, capital and goods within the EU. (AP)

China, Russia, Turkey to Hold Trilateral Summit

ANKARA - The Presidents of Turkey, Russia, and China will hold a trilateral meeting this weekend in Beijing, where they will discuss the progress of the Astana peace talks to resolve the Syrian crisis, Hürriyet Turkish daily reported.

The three leaders will participate at a international conference in Beijing, May 14-15, aimed at reviving the economic and commercial potential of the historic silk road through improving transport, infrastructures, energy and other forms of cooperation.

The meeting organized to promote the Chinese

Belt and Road initiative will also be attended by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, International Monetary Fund Director Christian Lagarde, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim as well as heads of state from 28 countries and more than 250 ministers.

According to diplomatic sources, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is traveling to Beijing, where he will meet with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping before the announced trilateral summit, which will be the first of its kind. (AP)

Erdogan to Discuss U.S. Decision to Arm YPG with Trump

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday that he would discuss the U.S. decision to arm the Kurdish militia People's Protection Units (YPG) with heavy weapons with President Donald Trump in his upcoming visit to Washington.

Speaking at a press conference at Ankara airport before starting trips to China and the United States, Erdogan said terrorist organizations in Syria are only threatening Turkey and its people, not the U.S. or Russia.



He also said the discussion would be more cautious and sensitive, considering that the U.S. is still undergoing a changing phase following elections. Erdogan reiterated

Belt and Road Initiative May Help Tackle AIDS: UNAIDS Chief

BEIJING - The chief of the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) said Friday the Belt and Road Initiative may help tackle some of the difficult issues the world faces.

Michel Sidibe, UN under-secretary-general and UNAIDS executive director, told Xinhua in Beijing that the initiative may deal with issues such as sustainable growth, distribution of opportunities and inequality.

The initiative is a new

way to think about policy coordination, improving connectivity and building a better financial system, Sidibe said.

Sidibe will attend the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation from May 14 to 15 in Beijing.

Sidibe said ending the AIDS epidemic is closely connected with the defeat of poverty. Innovation, connectivity and new partnerships may help UNAIDS realize that goal.

"The initiative can im-



prove innovation in terms of medicine, making sure that scientific discovery is available to more people," he said.

Sidibe said the initiative

could help quicken the pace of the UNAIDS 2016-2021 strategy, with the goal of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. (Xinhua)

Trump Creates Advisory Body to Look into Possible Voter Fraud in Elections

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday ordered the creation of an advisory body to determine whether there was any voter fraud in the federal elections.

In an executive order titled "Establishment of presidential advisory commission on election integrity," Trump said the move was aimed at promoting "fair and honest federal elections."

The commission, chaired by the vice president, will "study the registration and voting processes used in federal elections," the

document said.

The commission will also identify "vulnerabilities in voting systems and practices used for federal elections that could lead to improper voter registration and improper voting," it said.

The directive tasked the commission to formulate a report for the president by 2018.

The commission will dissolve 30 days after it submits the report.

The executive action fol-



lowed Trump's remarks that voter fraud was found in the presidential election last year and that "3 million" had cast illegal votes

for his opponent, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, a statement yet to be backed by evidence. (Xinhua)

Britain Blocking EU Military HQ

BRUSSELS - Brexit-bound Britain is blocking the launch of an EU military headquarters because it opposes any suggestion that the unit would have an active operational role, EU diplomatic sources said Friday.

After months of tough negotiations, all 28 member states approved plans in March for a small grouping in Brussels to coordinate three of the bloc's overseas training operations.

Turning the agreement into a legal text however has run into trouble, with proposals to call it an "Operational Headquarters" being a "red flag" for Britain ahead of its June 8 election and the start of the Brexit talks, the diplomatic sources said. (AFP)

U.S. Senate Confirms Trump's Pick for Chief Trade Negotiator

WASHINGTON - U.S. Senate on Thursday confirmed Robert Lighthizer as the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), paving the way for the Trump administration to start the renegotiation of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico.

The vote was 82-14 despite frustration among some Republicans with the administration on trade. Lighthizer is the last of the Trump administration's cabinet-level appointments to win Senate confirmation.

"Mr. Lighthizer's years of experience in public service, including as staff director for the Senate Finance Committee, as deputy USTR during the Reagan admin-

istration, and in private practice make him extremely well qualified to serve as our nation's trade representative," said Orrin Hatch, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, on Thursday.

Lighthizer was deputy U.S. trade representative under President Ronald Reagan and has worked on trade issues as a lawyer representing various manufacturers and high-tech companies.

He will play a key role in delivering Trump's campaign promise to crack down on alleged unfair trading practices by other trading partners and renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). (Xinhua)

Refugee Food Festival to be Observed in Europe in June: UN

UNITED NATIONS - The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on Thursday announced that a Refugee Food Festival will be observed in June in some parts of Europe to showcase refugees' cooking talents and facilitate their integration into new communities.

"Our colleagues at UNHCR today announced that a Refugee Food Festival will be taking place in 13 major European cities this summer," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said at a daily news briefing here.

"The festival seeks to showcase refugees' cooking talents and facilitate integration into their new countries."

On June 15-30, some 50 restaurants will be opening their kitchens to refugee chefs from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Somalia, Syria and Ukraine, to name a few, the spokesman said. (Xinhua)

Putin Says Ready to Help Resolve North Korea Nuclear Issue: South Korea

SEOUL - Russia's President Vladimir Putin told his newly elected South Korean counterpart, Moon Jae-in, in a phone call on Friday that he is ready to play a "constructive role" in resolving North Korea's nuclear threat, the South's presidential office said.

Putin made the comment after Moon said the foremost task to boost cooperation between the two countries was to strengthen strategic bilateral communication to find a solution to curb North Korea's nuclear threat, the Blue House said in a statement.

"We hope for Russia to play a constructive role in order for North Korea to stop with its nuclear provocations and go the way of denuclearization," Moon was citing as saying to Putin in the 20-minute conversation.

"I, too, aim to find a way to begin talks quickly between North and South Korea as well as the six-party talks," Moon said, referring to talks aimed at denuclearizing North Korea involving the United States, China, Japan, Russia and the two Koreas.

The talks collapsed in 2008 after North Korea launched a rocket.

Tension has been high for months on the Korean peninsula over North Korea's nuclear and missile development and fears it will conduct a sixth nuclear test or test another ballistic missile in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions. Moon is a liberal who advocates a more conciliatory approach to North Korea compared with his conservative predecessor. (Reuters)

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China Confirms Representatives from U.S., ROK, Others to Attend BRF

BEIJING - A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman confirmed Friday representatives from the European Union, France, Germany, Britain, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States will attend the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing.

According to spokesperson Geng Shuang, the Washington delegation will be led by Matt Pottinger, special assistant to the president and senior director for Asia at the National Security Council.

Park Byeong-suk, former deputy speaker of National Assembly of the

ROK, will also attend, along with Toshihiro Nikai, secretary-general of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, Geng said.

As a special envoy of British Prime Minister Theresa May, Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond, will attend the forum; and German Chancellor Angela Merkel will send Minister of Economic Affairs Brigitte Zypries. Former French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin will lead the French delegation, Geng said.

European Commission Vice President Jyrki Katainen will also attend, Geng said. (Xinhua)

Belt & Road Initiative Good for Iran, Middle East and World: Iranian UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS - Iranian envoy to the United Nations Gholamali Khoshroo, a seasoned diplomat, on Wednesday warmly praised the Belt and Road Initiative, saying it is good for Iran, the Middle East and the rest of the world.

The Initiative would also dramatically boost the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), said Khoshroo, the Iranian permanent representative to the United Nations, in an exclusive interview with Xinhua while citing the initiative's characteristic of connectivity.

CONNECTIVITY BENEFITS ALL

"China is a great power, but this initiative is not based on interference, and not based on colonialism," said the am-

bassador, "it is based on mutual benefit."

Having visited China for many times, Khoshroo said he loves China, and believes the Belt and Road Initiative would benefit all the countries involved.

"If we look in a comprehensive manner, it should be science and technology, investment, trade and people-to-people relationship - all these benefit all countries in one way or another," he said.

"We are living in a world that is so interconnected, so we need this connectivity" offered by the Belt and Road Initiative, said the Iranian ambassador.

"Because in the era of globalization, no country is isolated, and no country can have walls around itself," he explained. (Xinhua)

Pakistan's Ties with Azerbaijan, Central Asia Face no Challenges

ISLAMABAD - A seminar entitled "Pakistan Relations with Central Asian Republics and Azerbaijan: Prospects and Challenges", organized by the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) was held in Islamabad, Pakistani media reported.

It was noted at the seminar that Pakistan's relations with Azerbaijan and Central Asian republics do not face any challenges. The seminar was held to commemorate the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Pakistan, Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan.

Present at the seminar Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Pakistan Ali Alizadeh told the participants that Azerbaijan re-gained its independence 25 years

ago, and also was subjected to genocide, committed by Armenians in Khojaly town of Azerbaijan.

The ambassador also said that Pakistan was one of the first countries that recognized Azerbaijan's independence and provided financial aid to the country. Azerbaijan supports Pakistan in the Kashmir issue and says it should be resolved as per the resolution of the United Nations, he said, adding there is a strategic partnership between Pakistan and Azerbaijan.

Alizadeh noted that there are many opportunities to develop these relations further. He added that Pakistani citizens can now online obtain visas for visiting Azerbaijan. (Trend)

Turkmenistan Expected to Join OPEC-Led Oil Supply Cut

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan is likely to join an OPEC-led cut in oil supply aimed at supporting prices, sources in OPEC and the industry said Thursday, potentially enlarging the output reduction slightly. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other producers agreed last year to curb production by 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) for six months from Jan. 1. Oil prices have since gained support but global inventories remain high, pulling crude back towards \$50 a barrel and putting pressure on OPEC to extend or possi-

bly add to the cuts at least until the end of 2017.

OPEC has been urging other producers to join the supply pact and, together with participating non-member countries, meets to set policy on May 25 in Vienna. Turkmenistan, along with Egypt, are also due to attend. "Egypt and Turkmenistan are expected to attend the conference for the first time," said one of the sources, declining to be identified. Last month, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said there was consensus with Central Asia over oil markets and sticking to production cut levels. (Reuters)