

Putin Visits France, Hopes to Mend Strained Ties with West

VERSAILLES, France - On a visit likely to shape Russia-France ties for years, French President Emmanuel Macron hosted Russian President Vladimir Putin at the sumptuous Palace of Versailles on Monday for what the newly-elected French leader said would be "demanding" talks on Syria, the Ukrainian crisis and other thorny issues driving the rift between Russia and the West.

The leaders' first handshakes - relatively brief and cordial - after Putin climbed out of his limousine at Versailles were far less macho than Macron's now famous who-will-blink-first handshake showdown with President Donald Trump when the two



leaders met for the first time last week.

Monday's visit offered Putin and Macron a chance to reset a relationship that got off on a less-than-ideal foot during Macron's presidential campaign. Macron had strong words for Russia in his race for the presidency, saying France and Russia don't share the same values. Putin bet - wrongly - on Macron's far-right opponent Marine Le Pen, hosting her at the Kremlin in March, before Macron then handily beat her. Macron is the first Western leader to speak to Putin after the Group of Seven summit over the weekend, where relations with Russia were a key topic. (AP)

Kelly Defends Plan for Russia Back Channel as a 'Good Thing'

WASHINGTON - US Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly is defending an alleged effort by top White House adviser Jared Kushner to create back-channel communications with Russia as a "good thing," while the Trump administration sought to quell mounting questions over secret ties to the Kremlin.

Speaking on Sunday's news shows, Kelly said he didn't know whether the reports by The Associated Press and other news outlets involving Kushner,

who is President Donald Trump's son-in-law, were true. But Kelly said such back-channel communications don't bother him and would not be harmful to U.S. security interests.

"It's both normal, in my opinion, and acceptable," Kelly said. "Any way that you can communicate with people, particularly organizations that are maybe not particularly friendly to us, is a good thing." Congressional Democrats demanded to hear directly from Kush-



ner over allegations of the proposed secret back-channel, saying his security clearance may need to be revoked. But Trump

immediately railed against administration leaks in a flurry of tweets Sunday, calling them "fabricated lies." (AP)

Cyprus Still 'Very Close' to Deal Despite Halt in Talks: UN

ATHENS, Greece - Cyprus remains "very, very close" to an agreement to reunite the ethnically-divided island despite a breakdown in talks last week, a U.N. official said Monday.

Espen Barth Eide, the U.N.'s special adviser on Cyprus, called off mediation efforts Friday following a disagreement between Greek Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci on how the talks should proceed. The two leaders

also differ on the future of around 35,000 Turkish troops on the island.

But Eide said in Athens until now had brought the prospect of federal reunification closer than ever since the island's division in 1974.

"We are indeed very, very close - actually more close than most people seem to understand," Eide told reporters after a 90-minute meeting with Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias. "On at ... (More on P4)...(19)

N. Korea Fires Scud-Class Ballistic Missile, Japan Protests

SEOUL - North Korea fired at least one short-range ballistic missile on Monday that landed in the sea off its east coast, the latest in a fast-paced series of missile tests defying world pressure and threats of more sanctions. The missile was believed to be a Scud-class ballistic missile and flew about 450 km (280 miles), South Korean officials said. North Korea has a large stockpile of the short-range missiles, originally developed by the Soviet Union. Monday's launch

followed two successful tests of medium-to-long-range missiles in as many weeks by the North, which has been conducting such tests at an unprecedented pace in an effort to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of hitting the mainland United States. North Korea was likely showing its determination to push ahead in the face of international pressure to rein in its missile program and "to pressure the ... (More on P4)...(20)

'Convinced Atlanticist' Merkel Being Honest with U.S: Spokesman

BERLIN - Chancellor Angela Merkel believes firmly in strong German - U.S. relations and is simply being honest with the United States when she flags up policy differences with Washington, her spokesman said on Monday. Merkel sent shockwaves through Washington and London by saying on Sunday that Europe must take its fate into its own hands, implying that the United States under President Donald Trump and Britain after its Brexit vote were no longer reliable partners. She made the comments

after Trump criticized major NATO allies over their military spending and refused to endorse a global climate change accord at back-to-back summits last week. "The chancellor's words stand on their own - they were clear and comprehensible," her spokesman, Steffen Seibert, told a regular government news conference in Berlin on Monday, adding: "It was a deeply convinced trans-Atlanticist who spoke." After the meetings of NATO and the G7 group of wealthy nations, Merkel told a packed beer



tent in Munich that the days when Europe could completely rely on others were "over to a certain extent". "I have experienced this in the last few days," she said. "And that is why I can only say that we Europeans must really

take our fate into our own hands - of course in friendship with the United States of America, in friendship with Great Britain and as good neighbours wherever that is possible also with other countries, even with Russia." (Reuters)

N. Korea 'Disrespects' China with Latest Missile Test: Trump

WASHINGTON - US President Donald Trump on Monday called North Korea's latest missile test a slap in the face for its main ally China, which the US leader praised for trying to rein in the regime.

"North Korea has shown great disrespect for their neighbor, China, by shooting off yet another ballistic missile... but China is trying hard!" Trump said in a tweet.

North Korea launched its 12th ballistic missile test this year on Monday, this one falling provocatively close to Japan.

South Korea's military said the Scud-type missile travelled for 280 miles (450 kilometers), and Japan said it was estimated to have fallen into its exclusive economic zone, extending 200 nautical miles from the coast. The test was carried out in defiance of UN sanctions warnings, amid fears that Pyongyang may conduct another nuclear test. Trump ... (More on P4)...(21)

Leaders of Spain, Portugal Eye Joint Projects, EU's Future

LISBON, Portugal - The leaders of Spain and Portugal are holding their annual two-day summit, with possible joint energy and infrastructure projects due to be discussed.

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa are also expected to assess European Union issues, such as the bloc's future after the United Kingdom's departure.

About a dozen ministers from each Iberian government are scheduled to attend the meeting, which began Monday in Vega Terron, ... (More on P4)...(24)

Modi Leaves for 4-Nation Tour of Germany, Spain, Russia, France

NEW DELHI - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi Monday embarked on a six-day, four-nation tour of Germany, Spain, Russia and France, a visit aimed at pitching the country as a favorable destination for foreign investors.

"My visits to these nations are aimed at boosting India's economic engagement with them & to invite more investment to India," Modi tweeted before his departure.

His first stop will be Germany, where he will meet



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and discuss various issues of mutual interest. He will also call on German President Frank-

Walter Steinmeier during his visit.

In the second leg of his tour, the Indian prime ... (More on P4)...(22)

Iran Says Ready to Send 'Peace Forces' to Syria

ISTANBUL - Iran said Monday it was ready to send "peace forces" to Syria to observe the ceasefire in the war-torn country. Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said talks between Iran, Turkey and Russia were ongoing with a view to maintaining the ceasefire in the four "de-escalation" zones in Syria.

"In this regard, we are ready to send peace forces to strengthen the ceasefire in the region after the roadmap is determined and necessary agreement is reached," he said in a weekly press conference in Tehran. Syria has been locked in a vicious civil war since early 2011, when the Bashar al-Assad regime cracked down on pro-

democracy protests - which erupted as part of the Arab Spring uprisings - with unexpected ferocity. Since then, more than a 250,000 people have been killed and more than 10 million displaced across the war-torn country, according to the UN.

Iran has been supporting the Assad regime during the war while Russia intervened in Assad's favor in September 2015. Peace talks were launched in Geneva in 2012 for finding a political solution to the conflict. On May 4, Russia, Turkey and Iran signed a deal in the Kazakh capital, Astana, to establish "de-escalation" zones in Syria. (Agencies)

Trump's First Budget 'Wildly Unrealistic': Ex-White House Advisor

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump's first budget was "wildly unrealistic" in its economic assumption and its policy proposals, a former White House economic advisor has said.

In its first full budget sent to U.S. Congress on Tuesday, the Trump administration assumed sustained economic growth of 3 percent and called for 3.6 trillion U.S. dollars in cuts to domestic agencies and social safety net programs for the poor to balance the federal budget within a decade.

"I don't think the United States needs to balance the budget. The United States should have our debt declining as a share of GDP (gross domestic product) and should have a deficit below about 3 percent of GDP," said Jason Furman, former chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers under the Obama administration and senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

"I think the best way to achieve that goal is a combination of spending cuts and revenue increases," with the spending cuts focused on reforming entitlement programs and the revenue increases focused on high-income individuals, Furman told Xinhua in a recent interview.

However, the Trump administration insisted that they would not cut retirement benefits for Social Security or health benefits for Medicare, two of the most expensive parts of the federal budget. They would like making significant cuts to the State Department, the Environmental ... (More on P4)...(23)

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Chinese, French Foreign Ministers Discuss Ties, Cooperation

BEIJING - Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian held a phone conversation on Monday to discuss relations between their two countries, particularly maintenance of the momentum of rapid development of bilateral relations.

In the talk, Wang expressed the hope that the two countries earnestly implement the consensus reached recently between the heads of state of the two countries, and keep the momentum of rapid development of China-France comprehensive strategic partnership.

Wang also congratulated Jean-Yves Le Drian for taking the top job of the French Foreign Ministry. For his part, Le Drian said the France-China strategic cooperation has been fruitful and the two sides are having increasing common interests and common topics.

Le Drian said he looks forward to visiting China at an early date and establishing a good working relationship with Wang.

The two ministers also exchanged views on the implementation of Paris agreement on climate change and the situation on the Korean Peninsula. (Xinhua)

Mamnoon for Provision of Low Cost, Quality Treatment

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain Monday said provision of quality treatment and essential drugs at low cost to the public was fundamental duty of the state and society. Chairing a meeting of monitoring committee on provision of essential drugs and committee for provision of all medicine to inpatients in PIMS at the Presidential palace, Islamabad, he emphasized strict implementation for deserving patients at the leading medical facility of the capital.

Wafaqi Mohtasib Salman Faruqi, Minister of State for CADD Tariq Fazal Chudhary, VC SZ-ABMU, Mayor Islamabad Ansar Aziz, senior officials, representatives from pharmaceutical companies and advisors

from different health departments were also present on the occasion. The president appreciated the office of Federal Ombudsman for devising a strategy to provide 100% medicines to inpatients in Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS).

He noted with satisfaction that 2D bar coding mechanism has been devised to check spurious drugs being sold in the market and has also been approved by the Federal Cabinet.

He was apprised that Federal Medical College presently housed in the laboratory of Drug Regulatory Authority for the last five years will be shifted to Alfarabi Center and the laboratory will be used for WHO approved drug testing. (APP)

Iran Dismisses Trump's Allegations as Improper, Irrelevant

TEHRAN - The Iranian foreign ministry blasted US President Donald Trump's terrorism allegations against Tehran, describing them as "improper and irrelevant".

"These improper, incorrect and irrelevant positions of certain countries are nothing new and they try to project the blame on others and such remarks are unbelievable and unacceptable," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi told reporters in his weekly press conference in Tehran on Monday.

He lashed out at Trump for traveling to Saudi Arabia as Riyadh is the main supporter of violence and terrorism and has been tried in the US courts for 9/11 terrorist attacks, and asked how Iran can be a sponsor of terrorism while the world has witnessed

mass participation of people in its recent presidential and other elections in the past.

In relevant remarks on Sunday, Russian Ambassador to Tehran Levon Jagarian strongly rejected the terrorism allegations raised against Iran in the recent meeting held between Trump and Arab leaders in Riyadh, stressing that Tehran is one of the main pillars of anti-terrorism campaign in the region.

"They raised many allegations against Iran in the Riyadh meeting, but Russia doesn't accept these allegations that accuse Iran of helping the terrorists in the region," Jagarian said.

Noting that Iran itself is a victim of terrorism, he said the country has greatly helped Russia in the war against the terrorist groups in Syria. (FNA)

Turkmenistan, UN Preparing Deal on Emergency Situations

ASHGABAT - Ashgabat hosted a meeting with Head of Regional Office of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Marcel Wassen and National Disaster Response Adviser Ashot Sargsyan, says a message from Turkmenistan's State Customs Service.

The sides discussed emergency preparedness and preparation of an agreement between the Turkmen government and

the United Nations on measures to simplify and accelerate the import, export and transit of relief supplies and property of personnel to provide assistance in the case of disasters and emergencies.

Turkmenistan is located in a seismically dangerous zone. On the night of October 6, 1948, Ashgabat experienced a catastrophic 10-magnitude earthquake, which led to human casualties. (Trend)