

# Qatar 'Thousand Times Better Off' without Gulf Allies: Emir

DOHA - Months into a dispute that has seen Doha cut off from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Qatar's emir said Tuesday his country was "a thousand times better off" without them.

In a speech to the Shura Council, the upper house of parliament, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani said his government had nonetheless put in place contingency plans as he expected the bitter political dispute with his neighbours and former allies to drag on. "We do not fear the boycott of these countries against us, we are



a thousand times better off without them," the emir told members of the council and foreign dignitaries in Doha. "But vigilance is required," he added. Sheikh Tamim nonetheless said his government was working on "introducing a number of food security projects" and had "given special attention to water security" as it looked to a future without its former Arab allies. Iran, Turkey and most recently Spain have stepped in to help Qatar secure food imports amid a boycott by four Arab states. (AFP)

## Neighbor News

### China, ASEAN at New Starting Point for Peaceful, Prosperous South China Sea

MANILA - China and Southeast Asian countries are now at a new starting point to jointly build a sea of peace, stability and prosperity, following significant progress in consultations on the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said at the 20th China-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders' meeting here Monday that China and ASEAN will start consultations on the text of the COC.

The COC framework was adopted in August by a meeting of ASEAN and Chinese foreign ministers. It is widely acknowledged that the situation in the South China Sea has

significantly stabilized since last year and is once again on a positive trajectory.

The positive developments include establishing a hotline between the ministries of foreign affairs of China and ASEAN members to manage maritime emergencies, and holding a China-ASEAN maritime rescue drill. All the progress was possible due to the joint efforts of China and ASEAN countries, reflecting a positive momentum and consensus to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea.

The text consultations are the most crucial part of the process, involving many sensitive and complex issues. (Xinhua)

### CPEC to Make Pakistan Hub of Regional Connectivity: Mushahid

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's Chairman Senate Committee on Defence and Parliamentary Committee on China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed Tuesday said Pakistan would become hub of regional connectivity as CPEC would put it on a centre stage due to new energy infrastructure and trade routes.

He was addressing an international conference on "Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia" organised by Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) in collaboration with Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF). He said there was a shift in global economic power from the west to the east as China had emerged as an economic giant and now was not

a regional power but a global power.

"The 21st century was an Asian century and now China fueled 30 percent of the global economic growth," he added.

Mushahid remarked that CPEC would put Pakistan on the centre stage of a greater South Asia which included China, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asian states whose economies would be fueled by new energy transporting pipelines and ports. He said Pakistan had been in the eye of a storm since 1979 when Russia intervened in Afghanistan and Iran went through a revolution. He noted that Pakistan had been hosting the largest refugee population - 3.5 million people - from Afghanistan for the longest period. (Monitoring Desk)

### Iran Deputy FM in Moscow to Discuss Syria, Middle East

MOSCOW - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Jaber Ansari arrived in Moscow on Tuesday for bilateral talks and discussing recent developments in the region and Syria.

Upon arrival at a Moscow airport, Jaber Ansari told the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) correspondent that during his day-long visit to the Russian capital, he is expected to hold talks with his Russian counterpart Mikhail Bogdanov and the country's special presidential envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentiev.

"The negotiations are expected to be intensive," he said. "The parties will examine latest developments in the Middle East, with special focus given to Syria," he said. Jaber Ansari, who is also Iran's senior negotiator in Syria talks in Astana, said that issues like the outcome of the Astana talks on Syria as well as regional cooperation between Tehran and Moscow are among other topics that will be discussed during the meetings.

A meeting with Lieutenant General Alexander Fomin Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation is also on the itinerary, he said. Astana talks was an initiative launched by Iran, Russia and Turkey aimed at establishing a comprehensive ceasefire in Syria. (IRNA)

### Turkmenistan Hosts OSCE-Supported Seminar on Waste Management

ASHGABAT - International standards and best practices in the field of waste management were the focus of an OSCE-supported regional seminar that concluded in Ashgabat on Tuesday.

The seminar was attended by international experts and representatives of relevant governmental authorities in Central Asia, academia, NGOs and the business sector. The seminar was organized by the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, in close cooperation with the State Committee of Turkmeni-

stan for Nature Protection and Land Resources. The two-day event aimed to enhance the awareness of relevant governmental authorities from Central Asia and promote dialogue on effective waste management policies and their implementation. "Good environmental governance is an important prerequisite for addressing environmental and security challenges," said Ambassador Natalya Drozd, Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat. (Agencies)

### 5+5 Defence Initiative Discusses Non-Military Airborne Threats

ALGIERS - The 5+5 Defence Initiative composed of 10 Mediterranean countries on Monday held a meeting in Algiers to discuss multilateral military cooperation mechanisms and the adoption of legal framework to deal with non-military air threat. The expected objective of this meeting is to "craft an approach to regulating the measures to be taken in case of non-military airborne threats, based on efficient and flexible laws to ensure optimal availability for an immediate, effective

intervention when dealing with non-military aircraft threats," said a statement from Algerian Defense Ministry. The source noted the meeting discussed also ways of boosting the performance of 5+5 initiative armed forces in terms of dealing with interventions to address non-military airborne threats. The 5+5 initiative includes Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Spain, Italy, France, Portugal and Malta. (Xinhua)

### Russia Accuses U.S. Coalition of Hampering its Anti-IS Operation in Syria

MOSCOW - The Russian Defense Ministry on Tuesday accused the U.S.-led coalition of interfering with the Russian air force to protect retreating Islamic State (IS) militants. The militants had been forced to retreat from the city of Abu Kamal in the Syrian province of Deir al-Zour, one of the last remaining IS strongholds in Syria, by the advancing government troops. In violation of a previously reached agreement, attack aircraft of the coalition entered the airspace over Abu Kamal to ham-



per the work of the Russian air force, the ministry said in a statement. "Such actions by the coalition show that the rapid advance of the Syrian troops in Abu Kamal have disrupted U.S. plans to create pro-American authorities beyond the control of the Syrian government, and to manage the territories on the eastern bank of the Euphrates," it said. The ministry also said that the U.S. coalition categorically refused to

strike the retreating terrorists in spite of repeated proposals by the Russian military to conduct joint actions. But they did not provide any answer to the query why heavily armed IS militants were regrouping in the zone under the control of the international coalition for new attacks on Syrian troops, the ministry said. (Xinhua)

### US GOP Inching Toward Tax Bill, but Democrats Unlikely to Get on Board



WASHINGTON - U.S. Republicans are hammering out the details of a tax overhaul that could have a major impact on individuals and companies.

But experts doubt Democrats will get on board, and that could present a challenge in passing the bill. U.S. President Donald Trump wants to pass a tax

overhaul, in a bid to make U.S. companies more competitive and boost jobs, at a time when the economy has still not fully recovered from recession. "It's not clear that the Republicans can get any Democrats on board," Alan D. Viard, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, told Xinhua.

"Providing additional tax cuts to the middle class... and scaling back the high-income tax cuts might

get a few Democrats on board, but that's far from certain. There's no hope of attracting a large number of Democrats," Viard said. Democrats say that the middle class will suffer under the bill, seeing taxes increase at a time when, despite an overall economic upturn, many families are still struggling. "There probably will be few if any Democrats who support the GOP tax plan," Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Darrell West told Xinhua. (Xinhua)

### Syria Calls on US to Withdraw its Troops

BEIRUT - Syria has called on the United States to withdraw its forces from the country now that the fight against the Islamic State group is nearly over. The Foreign Ministry statement, carried by state-run media Tuesday, says the presence of the troops will not force a political solution to the conflict. The comments came a day after U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis said "we are not going to just walk away right now" before the U.N.-backed political process yields results. U.S. troops and advisers are supporting the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in their fight against Islamic State militants in northern and eastern Syria. Kurdish officials want the U.S. troops to remain in the country to help prevent clashes with pro-government forces, which are also battling IS. U.S. officials say they are maintaining contacts with their Russian counterparts to ensure no friction occurs between the two forces. Russia is a key ally of President Bashar Assad. A Syrian war monitoring group says the death toll from airstrikes on a market in northern Syria the previous day has climbed to 61. (AP)

### East Asia Summit Discusses Ways to Address Regional 'Complex Challenges'

MANILA - Leaders from the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its dialogue partners met here Tuesday to discuss the "complex challenges" facing the region and chart the course for future development.

In his opening remarks, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, who chaired the 12th East Asia Summit (EAS) forum, stressed the need to assess especially the evolving security situation in the region.

"Our region is facing complex challenges that perhaps only a few have imagined decades ago. Technological developments and a more open economic region have resulted in our societies becoming more interconnected," Duterte said.

"The effects of migration, environmental degradation and armed conflict in one location can have repercussions across the world," he added.

"We have also been made painfully aware that terrorism knows no borders and that violent extremists are becoming more adept at exploiting power vacuums, instability and discontent to spread their narrative hatred and destruction," Duterte said. The president called EAS with ASEAN at the helm a mechanism, by which strategic dialogues in the evolving regional security architecture take place.

In a draft chairman's statement released immediately after the opening of the summit, the EAS leaders reaffirmed that "the East Asia Summit would continue to be an open, inclusive, transparent and outward-looking forum that will strengthen global norms and universally recognized principles, with ASEAN as the driving force." (Xinhua)

### S. Korea Names Top Negotiator for Defense Cost Sharing Deal for U.S. Forces

SEOUL - South Korea's foreign ministry said Tuesday that it has named a top negotiator to discuss the defense cost-sharing deal with the United States for U.S. forces stationed in the country.

Chang Won-sam, South Korean ambassador to Sri Lanka, was appointed to the post to negotiate with the U.S. side about how much South Korea would share to maintain about 28,500 U.S. troops stationed in the country. Seoul's foreign ministry said Chang is a career



diplomat having an ample experience in political affairs and trade.

Under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), South Korea provides land and facilities free of charge for U.S. Forces Korea (USFK), while the

United States pay for costs to maintain U.S. troops stationed in South Korea. From the 1990s, South Korea began to share the costs for U.S. troops here under the Special Measures Agreement (SMA). (Xinhua)

### State's Failure to Help Poor Fueled Extremism: French Leader

PARIS - French President Emmanuel Macron says the French state fueled homegrown extremism by abandoning its poorest neighborhoods, and is promising tough and "sometimes authoritarian" new measures to combat the problem.

The pledge is part of a multibillion-euro plan that Macron is laying out Tuesday focusing on suburban housing projects plagued by crime and joblessness. Macron was unusually harsh in his criticism of previous governments, saying

radicalization took root because the state abdicated its responsibility in impoverished public housing, and extremist preachers filled the void.

He said his government will present about 15 measures to fight radicalization and will close "unacceptable structures" that promote radicalism and "try to fracture us."

Several extremist attackers who have targeted France in recent years were raised in troubled French social housing and radicalized here. (AP)

### Japan's PM Says North Korea Still Developing Missiles despite Launch Pause

TOKYO - Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday said an almost two-month pause in North Korean missile tests was no indication that it had halted its weapons development, insisting it was too early for any talks with the regime.

"I believe that it continues to develop its weapons," Abe told a news conference in Manila after a series of meetings with other Asian leaders at a gathering of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and East Asia Forum. "There is no point for talks for the sake of talks," he said.

Abe's insistence that tough sanctions, including restrictions on oil sales, are necessary to soften up the North Korean regime over the coming winter could put him at loggerheads with other countries such as South Korea that might agree to open talks if approached by the North. After firing missiles at a pace of about two or three a month since April, North Korean missile launches paused in September, after it fired a rocket that passed over Japan's northern Hokkaido island. Abe said he would work closely with other countries in the region including China and Russia to persuade North Korea to halt missile development and give up its nuclear weapon ambitions. Abe, in a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping at an Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vietnam on Saturday, hailed a "fresh start" to the relationship between Asia's two biggest economies and military powers, including cooperation on North Korea. (Reuters)