

UN Chief Urges Cooperation to Tackle Security Challenges in Mediterranean

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday urged the international community to step up cooperation to tackle security challenges in the Mediterranean region.

"The Mediterranean is a global junction of mutually enriching cultures, societies and economies. Yet violence and hatred are threatening that dynamism, to the detriment of the entire world," Guterres told a meeting of the UN Security Council chaired by Angelino Alfano, the foreign minister of Italy, which holds the 15-member body's presidency this month.

Challenges facing the region include illicit trade in narcot-



ics, weapons and petroleum products, large movements of refugees and migrants, regrettably managed by human smugglers and traffickers, and maritime piracy.

"The Mediterranean Sea provides immense economic resources, such as hydrocarbons and fish stocks, and invaluable trade routes. However, its benefits depend on stability and cooperation," Guterres stressed.

The UN chief went on to highlight difficulties in various parts of the region.

Libya's stability is vital for the region, but after years of a prolonged transition, the country's institutions are deeply divided. (Xinhua)

Russian Strategic Bombers Strike IS Terrorists in Syria

MOSCOW - Six Tu-22M3 long-range bombers took off from Russia and struck Islamic State (IS) targets near the town of Albu Kamal in Syria's Deir al-Zour province Friday, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

The warplanes destroyed IS strong points, manpower accumulations and armored vehicles, it said in a statement.

Russia's Su-30SM fighters from Syria's Hmeimim airbase covered the bombers during the airstrike.

After completing the mission, all the Russian aircraft returned to their base

airfields.

Earlier this week, Russian bombers launched a similar attack near Albu Kamal, one of the last IS strongholds in Syria.

The Russian air force is providing support to the advancing Syrian government troops in the east of the country against IS terrorists.

Russian warplanes flew over 500 sorties in the last seven days, destroying more than 1,250 terrorist facilities in Syria, the Russian Defense Ministry said on its website. (Xinhua)

BRUSSELS - An EU 2018 budget deal was announced Saturday that cuts funds destined to Turkey, citing doubts about Ankara's commitment to democracy and human rights.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel had led calls for a cut to the funds, which are linked to Turkey's stalled bid to join the bloc, following mass-scale arrests in the country since the failed July 2016 coup.

MEPs and member states have agreed to reduce the "pre-ascension funds"

EU Cuts Funding to Turkey in 2018 Budget

by 105 million euros (\$124 million) and froze an additional 70 million euros of previously announced spending.

In a statement, lawmakers said "they consider the deteriorating situation in relation to democracy, rule of law and human rights worrying". Turkey has dismissed more than 140,000 officials since the coup attempt, and



arrested another 50,000, including opposition politicians, academics, journalists, activists and EU citizens.

The German government has warned its citizens against travelling to Turkey as they risk "arbitrary" arrest. (AFP)

Russia Vetoes Japan-Drafted UN Resolution on Chemical Attacks Probe in Syria



UNITED NATIONS - Russia on Friday vetoed a Japanese-drafted UN security council resolution on renewing a joint mechanism to investigate

who is behind chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Friday's vote was Russia's 11th veto on Security Council resolutions concerning Syria and the

third concerning Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) of the United Nations and the Organization of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

The mandate of JIM, which the Security Council unanimously approved in 2015, expires on Friday. Bolivia also voted against Friday's draft resolution. China abstained.

Russia on Thursday vetoed a U.S.-drafted resolution that would have extended JIM's mandate for a year.

Wu Haitao, the charge

d'affaires at China's Permanent Mission to the United Nations, said after Friday's vote that any Security Council action must focus on the overall political process in Syria, which faces important opportunities at the moment.

It is imperative for parties to keep calm and exercise restraint and find an appropriate solution acceptable to all through patient consultation, he said, noting that there are still significant differences among members over JIM. (Xinhua)

German Parties Seek Compromise on Migrants, Climate Change

BERLIN - Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative bloc and two smaller parties are pushing hard to reach an agreement on climate change and immigration, two key issues where compromises are needed if they are to move ahead with coalition talks.

Merkel's conservative Christian Democrats and sister Bavarian-only Christian Social Union parties were meeting Saturday with the pro-business Free Demo-

crats and the traditionally left-leaning Greens. They'd hoped to agree Thursday whether to start formal coalition negotiations but now they are now aiming for a resolution by Monday.

The Greens have run into opposition with their demands for Germany to end its use of coal and combustion engines, as well as a proposal to allow more categories of recent migrants to bring their closest relatives to join them in Germany. (AP)

Saudi Arabia Recalls Ambassador to Germany over Gabriel Comments

CAIRO - Saudi Arabia has summoned its ambassador in Germany home for consultations over comments by German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel about the political crisis in Lebanon.

The Saudi foreign ministry said the government would deliver a protest note to Germany's ambassador in Riyadh over what it said were "outrageous and unjustified" comments Gabriel made after a meeting with his Lebanese counterpart.

After a meeting in Berlin with Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, Gabriel told reporters that Europe "could not tolerate the adventurism that has spread there". It was not clear from a Reuters television recording that the remark was targeted at Saudi Arabia.

Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri resigned while in Saudi Arabia on Nov. 4. "Such remarks provoke the surprise and disapproval of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which considers them as aimless and based on false information that would not help bring about stability in the region," the Saudi ministry said.

Hariri's abrupt resignation has raised concern over Lebanon's stability. He was due to meet French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on Saturday. Lebanon's President Michel Aoun said on Twitter Hariri had told him in a phone call from Paris he would be in Lebanon on Wednesday for Independence Day celebrations.

The German foreign ministry welcomed Hariri's departure from Saudi Arabia for Paris and impending return to Lebanon. "We are very concerned about regional stability and call on sides to reduce tensions," the statement read. "We aim this message at all actors in the region." (Reuters)

Qatar Says it has U.S. Backing to Resolve Gulf Crisis

DOHA - Qatar said it has U.S. backing to resolve the Gulf crisis with the four Arab countries and is well prepared to face any military move, Qatar News Agency (QNA) reported on Saturday.

Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said that Qatar is well prepared in case of the Gulf Arab neighbours making any military moves against his country, QNA reported.

The country is "well-prepared" and can count on its defence partners, including France, Turkey, the UK and the U.S., which has a base in Qatar, he said.

Thani mentioned that Qatar is the only country to respond to the U.S. initiative to hold talks between the Gulf countries at the camp David.

"The Trump administration is encouraging all sides to end the dispute and has offered to host talks at the Camp David presidential retreat, but



only Qatar has agreed to the dialogue," Thani said. Thani is scheduled to meet with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson next week. Camp David is the site of many historic discussions and private meetings between U.S. presidents and foreign dignitaries, and the retreat is also an active military installation. (Xinhua)

Morocco, U.S. Launch Global Initiative to Address Homegrown Terrorism

RABAT - The United States and Morocco has officially launched the "Initiative to Address Homegrown Terrorism," local media reported on Saturday.

The Moroccan daily Al Ahdath Al Maghribia said the initiative was launched on Nov. 16 in Malta under the auspices of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and in partnership with the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law. The initiative aims to address the growing threat posed by Islamic State (IS)-inspired and linked homegrown violent extremists, explor-

Climate Change Increases Plants' Release of Carbon Dioxide into Atmosphere: Study

CANBERRA - A new study has found that plants release more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere through respiration as global warming exacerbates, The Australian National University (ANU) said in a report on Saturday.

Professor Owen Atkin from ANU said the study revealed that the release of carbon dioxide by plant respiration around the world is up to 30 percent higher than previously predicted and the problem will worsen with climate change. He said the carbon dioxide released by plants every year was now estimated to be about 10 to 11 times the emissions from human activities, rather than the previous estimate of five to eight times. "The study shows that as global temperatures increase, the amount of carbon dioxide released through plant respiration will increase significantly," said Professor Atkin from the Research School of Biology and the ARC Centre of Excellence in Plant Energy Biology at ANU.

ANU collaborated with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in the United Kingdom, Western Sydney University and several other leading institutions from the United Kingdom, United States and New Zealand.

The ANU team led the study's data collection, which comprises measurements of carbon dioxide release by plant respiration from about 1,000 plant species. Plants use photosynthesis to capture carbon dioxide and then release half of it into the atmosphere through respiration. (Xinhua)

Nieghbor News

China Says Will Work with North Korea to Boost Ties as Envoy Visits

BEIJING/SEOUL - Traditional friendship between China and North Korea represents "valuable wealth" for their people, China said after its special envoy met a high-ranking North Korean official, but there was no mention of the crisis over North Korea's weapons.

Song Tao, who heads the ruling Chinese Communist Party's international department, is visiting Pyongyang to discuss the outcome of the recently concluded Communist Party Congress in China, at which President Xi Jinping cemented his power.

In a brief statement dated Friday but reported by Chinese media on Saturday, the international department said Song, who is there representing Xi, reported to North Korean official Choe Ryong Hae the outcome of the congress.

Song and Choe also talked about relations between their parties and countries, the department said.

"They said that the traditional friendship between China and North Korea was founded and cultivated by both countries former old leaders, and is valuable wealth for the two peoples," it said. (Reuters)

France Should Not Interfere in Iran's Missile Program: Velayati

BEIRUT - France should not interfere in Iran's missile program, Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior adviser to Iran's supreme leader, said on Saturday according to state media.

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday that Tehran should be less aggressive in the region and should clarify the strategy around its ballistic missile program.

"It does not benefit Mr. Macron and France to interfere on the missile issue and the strategic affairs of the Islamic Republic, which we have great sensitivities about," Velayati said.

"What does this issue have to do with Mr. Macron? Who is he at all to interfere? If he wants relations between Iran and France to grow then he should try not to interfere in these issues."

U.S. President Donald Trump has said Iranian missile activity should be curbed. Iranian officials have repeatedly said the Islamic Republic's missile program is for defense purposes and is not up for negotiation.

The program was not part of the 2015 nuclear deal with Western powers under which Iran agreed to curb its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of some sanctions.

France said on Wednesday it wanted an "uncompromising" dialogue with Iran about its ballistic missile program and a possible negotiation over the issue separate from Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. (Reuters)

Iran, Pakistan Boost Transportation Relations

ISLAMABAD - Iran and Pakistan will conduct a pilot project of intermodal transportation under cover of TIR carnets (TIR Convention) within three months as per a memorandum of understanding signed by the commerce chambers of the two countries, Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture's news portal reported. The initiative will cut the cost and time of transportation between the two countries, the report noted without mentioning the date of signing the MoU.

The Convention on International Transport of Goods Under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention) is a multilateral treaty concluded in Geneva, Switzerland, on Nov. 14, 1975, to simplify and harmonize the administrative formalities of international road transport. TIR stands for "Transports Internationaux Routiers" or "International Road Transports".

As of June 2017, there are 71 parties to the convention, including 70 states and the European Union. TIR not only covers customs transit by road but a combination is possible with other modes of transport (e.g., rail, inland waterway and even maritime transport), as long as at least one part of the total transport is made by road. (Mintoring Desk)

Tariffs for Gas and Electricity to be Raised in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - Tariffs for gas and electricity will rise in Uzbekistan, since April 2018, in accordance with the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers "On additional measures for the timely provision of fuel and energy resources".

Since April 1, natural gas tariffs will be increased by 1.1 times, for electricity - by 1.12 times, i.e. by 10 percent and 12 percent, respectively. Also from January 1, 2018, prices for cold water services may rise.

In particular, the decree of the head of state refers to "Ensuring the introduction from January 1, 2018 of updated tariffs for water supply and sanitation services."

The change in tariffs is associated with an increase in prices for fuel and energy resources. Last time, tariffs increased in July 2017. Then the tariffs grew by 7 percent. Since July 15, the cost of 1 kWh of electricity increased from 191 soums to 204.3 soums.

The cost of 1 cubic meter of natural gas released to the population increased to 263.4 soums compared to 246.12 soums (for customers with gas meter). The price of 1 cubic meter of natural gas from 422.59 soums to 455.9 soums (for customers without gas meter), and for heating - from 197.37 to 211.245 soums. (Trend)