

Erdogan Accuses West of Destroying Muslim Unity

ISTANBUL - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday accused Western nations of trying to implement a "dirty scenario" to destroy the unity, coexistence and wealth of Islamic countries. "Obviously, the West is trying to guarantee its own future by exporting all kinds of sick elements to the Islamic world," Erdogan said at a meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul. He said terror organizations including the Islamic State, al-Qaeda and Boko Haram have transformed the entire region into a bloodbath while the West remains un-



responsive. "Islamophobia, neo-Nazism and racism have been increasingly replacing democracy, human rights and freedom in the Western world," the president said, urging Islamic nations to take actions to spoil the West's game and not to remain silent in the face of those who use Islamophobia as an instrument. "Who are the true winners of hundreds of billions of dollars of weapons ordered by Islamic countries to the West? Who earns from it?" Erdogan asked at the 33rd meeting of the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the OIC. (Xinhua)

Nieghbor News

Syrian People to Decide Future of Country: Rouhani

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said Wednesday that the imminent summit with his Russian and Turkish counterparts in Sochi of Russia should pave the way for a subsequent Syrian national dialogue congress about the future of the Arab state, Tasnim news agency reported. The summit would be of great significance, given the successful results of a series of Syria peace talks brokered by Iran, Russia and Turkey, which have been in progress in Astana over the past months, Rouhani told reporters before departing for Sochi. The Sochi Summit is taking place between two major events, he said, adding that it follows recent key victories against the so-called Islamic State

(IS) in Syria and Iraq, and precedes a planned congress for talks on the future of Syria. "It is important that consultations would be held in this summit about that congress, which should be in the Syrian people's interests eventually," Rouhani was quoted as saying. He also expressed the hope that the final statement of the Sochi Summit would prepare the ground for a good future in Syria, stressing that the Arab country's fate should be only decided by the Syrian people, not the foreign parties. The summit of Russian, Iranian and Turkish presidents in Sochi on Wednesday follows the three states' ceasefire initiative in war-torn Syria through the Astana process. (Xinhua)

UN Envoy Urges Stronger Syrian Opposition Delegation to Geneva

RIYADH - UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura urged here Wednesday the Syrian opposition to send to Geneva a stronger delegation that represents all Syrians, Al Arabiya local news reported. His remarks came during the opening of the Conference for the Syrian Opposition held in the capital Riyadh, where the UN envoy called on all Syrian politicians to work at a solution to the crisis of their war-torn country.

Meanwhile, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Jubeir highlighted his country's dedication to supporting Syrians and seeking a just solution. Ahmed Ramadan, head of the Information Department at the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, told Al Arabiya that the conference would discuss a political settlement, which includes a term that asks Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to relinquish power. (Xinhua)

EU Lifts Britain out of Deficit Sin Bin

BRUSSELS - The EU said Wednesday it would end its special budget supervision for Britain after almost a decade, saying London had reduced its excessive deficit enough to fall within the bloc's public spending rules. The news from Brussels will come as a boost to finance minister Philip Hammond as he prepares to unveil the government's annual budget against the backdrop of looming Brexit and sluggish growth. The European Commission ended its monitoring regime for non-euro Britain, first imposed in 2008,

saying London had reduced its deficit -- the shortfall between revenue and spending -- in a "timely and durable" way. "On what happens to be the day of Philip Hammond's budget, we have a good news for him -- we are closing the excessive deficit procedure for the UK," EU economic affairs commissioner Pierre Moscovici said. "The country has durably reduced its deficit from a peak of 10 percent



of GDP in 2009-10 to 2.3 percent in 2016-17, in line with the council recommendation of 2015." European Union rules adopted since the 2008 global financial crisis give Brussels increased oversight powers to ensure member states meet the targets and so avoid a repeat of the crash which brought the economy to its knees. (AFP)

Pakistan Welcomes US Commander's Offer to Prevent Cross-Border Shelling

ISLAMABAD - The military of Pakistan has welcomed an offer by the top US commander in Afghanistan to prevent cross-border shelling along the Durand Line which Pakistan continuously sporadically in reaction to the attacks on its forces. General John Nicholson who is also the commander of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in reaction to the latest shelling by the Pakistani military has said that the Pakistani military should share the information regarding the terror groups rather than opting to cross-border shelling. In response to Gen. Nicholson's comments, a spokesman for the Pakistani military Gen. Asif Ghafoor has told VOA that the country welcomes the offer. "Unilaterally Pakistan,

having cleared all areas on Pakistan side, has restored writ if [the] state, including steps like enhancing [troop] presence along the border [with Afghanistan], establishing new forts and posts and has also started to fence the border to deny freedom of movement to illegal crossers and terrorists." Gen. Ghafoor told VOA. The Pakistani military has long been shelling the Afghan provinces located along the Durand Line, claiming that the shelling are made in response to the attacks by the militants using the Afghan soil. The shelling continues amid strained ties between Kabul and Islamabad regarding the circumstances surrounding the fight against terrorism and terror safe havens. (Agencies)

Iran, Tajikistan Urge Boosting Relations

DUSHANBE - Senior Iranian and Tajik parliamentary officials emphasized the necessity for broadening of bilateral relations and mutual cooperation. Ali Larjani who is attending Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) in Istanbul met Khayrinisso Yusufi, deputy speaker of Tajik parliament on Wednesday, also stressed on the utilization of capacities to water transfer between Iran and Tajikistan. "Investment in water transfer and electricity transmission can become a turning-point in raising economic relations between Iran and Tajikistan," he said. Referring to the agreement signed with the Ta-

jik side on the issue, Larjani affirmed that Iranian companies are ready to participate in Tajikistan's economy sector. "The commonalities between Iran and Tajikistan should contribute to enhancement of the bilateral relations," he said. Complicated terrorism issues in Iran and Tajikistan's neighbor, Afghanistan, have caused inconveniences that should be resolved in cooperation with Kabul, he said. The Tajik official, for her part, echoing Larjani's remarks, said that bonds between Iran and Tajikistan are numerous and the two countries should try to boost their ties. (IRNA)

Turkmenistan, France Hold Political Consultations

ASHGABAT - Paris hosted Turkmen-French political consultations on a wide range of topical issues, the Turkmen Foreign Ministry said in a message on Wednesday. The French side was represented by Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, secretary general of France's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and Florence Mangin, director of the Department of Continental Europe of France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development. The sides exchanged views on

topical regional and international issues of mutual interest. A meeting was also held in the France-Turkmenistan Chamber of Commerce, where the issues of business partnership between the two countries were discussed. In general, French companies in Turkmenistan are represented in such areas as construction, transportation, tourism, energy. The two countries are also interested in implementing the project of transporting Turkmen gas to Europe. (Trend)

Russia's Upper House Endorses Bill Listing Int'l Media as Foreign Agents



MOSCOW - The Federation Council, Russia's upper house, on Wednesday endorsed a bill to list foreign media as "foreign agents," shrugging off criticism

by presidential advisors. The bill was passed by 154 votes with one abstention, a live broadcast of the voting showed. It will now be sent to Russian President Vladimir

Putin to be signed into law. The document was proposed in response to the latest situation of the Russian media in the United States, where RT America, the Washington, D.C.-based arm of Russia's state-owned English language news channel RT, was forced to register as a foreign agent. It was interpreted by Moscow as an obstacle to Russian media activities in the United States and a step violating the freedom of speech. In response, the State

Duma, Russia's lower house, last week approved a bill vesting the government with the power to label foreign-funded media outlets as "foreign agents," and sent it to the Federation Council. The Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, Putin's advisory body, criticized the draft law for "numerous shortcomings" and asked the Federation Council to send it back to the Duma for revision. (Xinhua)

U.S. Regulator to Vote to Roll Back Obama's Net Neutrality Rules

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced on Tuesday that it will vote next month to roll back rules adopted in 2015 that require Internet service providers to treat all online traffic equally. Ajit Pai, chairman of the FCC, said in a statement that the so-called net neutrality rules "imposed heavy-handed, utility-style regulations" upon the Internet that have "depressed investment in building and expanding broadband networks." "Today, I have shared with my colleagues a draft order that

would abandon this failed approach and return to the longstanding consensus that served consumers well for decades," Pai said. "Under my proposal, the federal government will stop micromanaging the Internet." The FCC will vote on the proposal, known as Restoring Internet Freedom Order, at its Dec. 14 open meeting. Jessica Rosenworcel, a Democrat FCC Commissioner, blasted Pai's proposal as "ridiculous and offensive to the millions of Americans who use the Internet every day." (Xinhua)

DPRK Calls U.S. Relisting it as "State Sponsor of Terrorism" Serious Provocation: Official

PYONGYANG - The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on Wednesday slammed the United States for relisting it as a "state sponsor of terrorism," calling it a serious provocation and a violent infringement upon the country's dignity. A spokesman for the DPRK's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that since 1979, the United States has been labeling the countries that are not obedient to it as "state sponsors of terrorism" and in 1988, Washington listed the DPRK as a "state sponsor of terrorism" before removing it from the list in October 2008. He said that the label of "state sponsor of terrorism" is just a tool of American-style authoritarianism that can be attached or removed anytime in accordance with the United States' own interests. "This is clearly an absurdity and a mockery of world peace and security," said the spokesman.

He said the DPRK values international justice and peace and consistently stands against all forms of terrorism and any sponsorship of terrorism. "We do not have anything to do with terrorism and we do not care whether the United States puts a cap of terrorism on us or not," he said. The spokesman said that by doing so, the United States "openly revealed to the whole world its intention to destroy our ideology and system by using all kinds of means and methods." U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday designated the DPRK as a state sponsor of terror, vowing to slap sanctions on the Asian nation. (Xinhua)

Pressure Mounts on SPD to Ease German Political Chaos

BERLIN - Pressure mounted Wednesday on Germany's Social Democrat leader Martin Schulz to reconsider an alliance with Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives to stop Europe's biggest economy from sinking into months of paralysis. Schulz has repeatedly said the SPD would not return as the junior coalition partner in a government led by Merkel, after suffering a stinging defeat in September's general election. But after Merkel's bid at forming a coalition with other parties fell apart, plunging Germany into a political crisis, voices



within and outside the SPD have grown louder in questioning Schulz's decision and push for early elections. President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who holds the power to call snap polls and who is himself a senior Social Democrat, has said that this "is the

moment when all participants need to reconsider their attitude". Steinmeier will meet Schulz on Thursday. The president has held talks with the leaders of parties in the failed coalition talks -- the pro-business FDP and the ecologist Greens. (AFP)

British Chancellor Between a Rock and a Hard Place in Latest Budget

LONDON - British economic growth has been held back by the uncertainties of Brexit, but it is a more profound fault with the economy that looks set to make things difficult for the Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond when he delivers his "budget" on Wednesday. Hammond will deliver the annual autumn statement, his second, against a backdrop of moderate growth and Brexit uncertainties. However, it is not Brexit but Britain's continued and prolonged poor productivity performance that will cause a major headache for Hammond. Hammond can owe his position as chancellor of the exchequer to the change of leadership in the British government brought about by the surprise Brexit referendum vote in June last year. While Brexit has brought him a job, it has also brought headaches. It has affected the economy so that it is now the weakest performing of G7 nations.

Annual GDP growth in Britain, according to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) figures released on Monday, was 1.5 percent, the slowest rate of growth in the club of seven rich nations, namely Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain and the United States. Britain has slipped from second highest in the group's growth rankings in 2016 to bottom now. (Xinhua)

Putin Discusses Syrian Issues with Saudi, Egyptian, Israeli Leaders by Phone

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin have discussed recent developments in Syria with Saudi Arabian, Egyptian, Israeli leaders respectively, the Kremlin press service said Tuesday in statements. Putin on Tuesday discussed by phone Syrian conflict settlement with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. They exchanged views on the situation in the Middle East region and the prospects for a long-term settlement of the Syrian conflict, said a statement. During a phone conversation with

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, Putin elaborated on the progress made in Syria and further efforts in political settlement of the Syrian conflict. The two leaders also talked about major joint projects such as in the nuclear energy sector, Kremlin said in a statement. Another Kremlin press service statement said that in a phone conversation on Tuesday, both Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed interest in building up cooperation in various areas, including contacts between security services. (Xinhua)