

Saudi Arabia Kicks Off Islamic Counter-Terrorism Summit

RIYADH - Saudi Arabia gathered officials from 40 Muslim countries on Sunday in the first meeting of an Islamic counter-terrorism alliance, a move Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman declared a "clear signal" to extremism.

"In past years, terrorism has been functioning in all of our countries... with no coordination" among them, he said in his keynote speech.

"This ends today, with this alliance." Prince Mohammed said the 40 countries were sending a "clear signal" that they would "work together to support the military, financial, intelligence and political efforts of every



member state". The summit is the first meeting of defence ministers and other senior officials from the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition, which officially counts 41 members. The alliance was announced in 2015 under the auspices of Prince Mohammed, whose rapid ascent since his appointment as heir to the throne in June has shaken the political scene across the region. The alliance groups largely, although not exclusively, Sunni-majority or Sunni-ruled countries. It excludes Saudi Arabia's arch-rival, Shiite-dominated Iran, as well as Syria and Iraq, whose leaders have close ties to Tehran. (AFP)

Israel Races to Head Off UN Settlement 'Blacklist'

JERUSALEM - Weeks ahead of the expected completion of a U.N. database of companies that operate in Israel's West Bank settlements, Israel and the Trump Administration are working feverishly to prevent its publication.

While Israel is usually quick to brush off U.N. criticism, officials say they are taking the so-called "blacklist" seriously, fearing its publication could have devastating consequences by driving companies away, deterring others from coming and prompting investors to dump shares of Israeli firms. Doz-

ens of major Israeli companies, as well as multinationals that do business in Israel, are expected to appear on the list.

"We will do everything we can to ensure that this list does not see the light of day," Israel's U.N. ambassador, Danny Danon, told The Associated Press. The U.N.'s top human rights body, the Human Rights Council, ordered the compilation of the database in March 2016, calling on U.N. rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein to "investigate the implications of the Israeli settlements on Palestinians." (AP)

Erdogan, Macron Discuss Syria Situation Seeking Political Settlement

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron on Saturday discussed Syria situation and Sochi summit on phone, state-run Anadolu Agency reported.

During the phone meeting, Erdogan informed Macron about the trilateral Sochi summit held on Nov. 22 with the participation of Turkey, Iran and Russia, underlining the importance of holding an independent and fair election in Syria. The two leaders stressed that Syria's territorial integrity must be respected, and the region should be protected from other terrorist organizations after the defeat of Islamic State. Moreover, they also agreed to strengthen bilateral relations in the areas of economy, energy and defense industry.



On Friday, Erdogan had a "fruitful" conversation with U.S. President Donald Trump on current Syria issues, achieving consensus on stopping the delivery of weapons from the U.S. to the People's Protection Units (YPG). (Xinhua)

Qatar Seeks to Expand Trade Ties with Iran: Qatari Minister



TEHRAN - Bilateral ties between Iran and Qatar have significantly increased during the last few months and Doha seeks to increase trade with Iran further, the vis-

iting Qatari minister of economy was quoted as saying by Financial Tribune daily on Sunday.

"Foodstuff and construction material have been Qatar's main imported

goods from Iran," Ahmed bin Jassim Al Thani said in a meeting with Iranian Minister of Industries, Mining and Trade Mohammad Shariatmadari on Saturday.

Besides, "Iran is playing an important role in the transport of goods from Turkey and Azerbaijan to Qatar," Al Thani said.

Shariatmadari, for his part, said that given that Qatar will be hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Iran's technical and engineering services can meet the needs of the Qatari market. The Qatari offi-

cial is currently heading an economic and trade delegation to Iran. It was announced here last week that the economy ministers of Iran, Qatar and Turkey would hold a meeting in the near future to discuss the expansion of trilateral trade cooperation. The three ministers were expected to coordinate plans for closer trade ties, particularly after imposition of sanctions against Qatar by Saudi Arabia and some other Arab countries, Tasnim news agency reported. (Xinhua)

UN Aims to Restart Syria Talks with Unified Opposition

GENEVA - The United Nations will try to revitalize its flagging Syria peace process this week, buoyed by the prospect of hosting a unified opposition delegation in Geneva for the first time.

The UN-brokered talks to end the war that has killed more than 340,000 people since 2011 have achieved little through seven previous rounds, leaving them overshadowed by separate diplomatic pushes led by Russia, Turkey and Iran. UN mediator Staffan de Mistura, who describes himself as a "chronic optimist" and highlights incremental progress where others see stalemate, has voiced hope that the eighth round, which opens on Tuesday, will mark the first "real negotiation". For that to happen rival sides will need to overcome the hurdle that has derailed past discussions: the fate of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. De Mistura, typically a cautious diplomat, has bluntly told the main opposition High Negotiations Committee that its demand for Assad's ouster may no longer be tenable. (AFP)

UN Says 11 Million Yemen Children Desperately Need Aid

AMMAN - More than 11 million children in war-torn Yemen are in desperate need of humanitarian aid, the United Nations children's fund warned on Sunday.

"Today it is fair to say that Yemen is one of the worst places on earth to be a child," said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF's regional director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Two million children today in Yemen suffer acute malnutrition (and) almost every single Yemeni boy and girl" is in acute need of humanitarian assistance, he told a press conference in Jordan's capital Amman.

"Today we estimate that every 10 minutes a child in Yemen is dying from preventable diseases." UN officials have warned that Yemen could face the world's largest famine in decades unless a crippling blockade by a Saudi-led coalition battling Huthi rebels is lifted. The blockade, put in place after Saudi forces intercepted a missile fired by Huthi forces at Riyadh's international airport early this month, has further tightened the coalition's stranglehold on the rebel-held port of Hodeida, the main conduit for UN-supervised deliveries of food and medicine.

A UN plane carrying desperately needed vaccines landed in the rebel-held Yemeni capital Sanaa on Saturday after coalition forces partly lifted the blockade, after warnings that thousands of people could die.

But UN officials have said desperately needed shipments of food and medicines to Hodeida remain blocked.

Cappelaere welcomed the reopening of Sanaa airport but said much more aid was needed. "The war in Yemen is sadly a war on children," Cappelaere said, adding that close to 5,000 children had been killed or seriously injured since the start of a Saudi-led campaign in support of the government in March 2015. (AFP)

Ireland will Block Brexit Talks Unless Border Issue Agreed

LONDON - Ireland's EU commissioner said Dublin would "continue to play tough" over its threat to veto talks about trade after Brexit unless Britain provided guarantees over the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Phil Hogan, the EU's agricultural commissioner, said that Britain, or Northern Ireland at least, should remain in the single market and the customs union to avoid a hard border dividing the island. "If the UK or Northern Ireland remained in the EU customs union, or better still the single market, there



would be no border issue," he told the Observer newspaper on Sunday. British Prime Minister Theresa May has said Britain will leave the single market and the customs unions after Brexit. Dublin wants a written guarantee that there will be no hard border between the Republic

of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The European Union has said "sufficient progress" needs to be made on the Irish border, along with two other key issues, before EU leaders can approve the opening of trade talks in the new year at a summit on Dec. 14-15. (Reuters)

Germany's Merkel Faces Pressure for Quick Coalition Talks

BERLIN - Chancellor Angela Merkel faced pressure from inside her conservative bloc Sunday to aim for a quick coalition deal with center-left rivals without conceding too much ground on core issues such as immigration.

Talks between Merkel's conservative bloc and two smaller parties to form a previously untried coalition collapsed a week ago. Merkel's partners in the outgoing government, the center-left Social Democrats, initially refused to consider a repeat but said Friday they're open to holding talks. If Merkel can't put to-

gether a coalition, the only options would be a minority government or a new election, months after the Sept. 24 vote.

On Sunday, the youth wing of Merkel's Union bloc published a resolution stating that the conservatives must not enter a coalition "at any price."

Its leader, Paul Ziemiak, said any deal must contain recognizable conservative policies, particularly on migration and public finances. Merkel's conservatives have pushed to curb migrant flows and are keen to ensure that Germany sticks to a balanced budget. (AP)

Merkel Ally Sees Repeat Coalition with SPD as 'Best Option'

BERLIN - A renewed coalition between Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU/CSU conservatives and the centre-left Social Democrats is "the best option for Germany", CSU head Horst Seehofer said Sunday, raising hopes for an end to the political impasse.

Merkel has been scrambling to avert snap elections after talks to form a new government with the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP) and the left-leaning Greens broke down a week ago.

The Social Democrats had vowed to go into opposition after a disappointing showing in the September general election, but in a U-turn on Friday SPD chief Martin Schulz said he was ready for talks with Merkel's bloc.

"An alliance between the conservatives and the SPD is the best option for Germany, better in any case than 'Jamaica', new elections or a minority government," Seehofer, the leader of Merkel's Bavarian sister party, told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper.

The failed three-way tie-up between the CDU/CSU, the Greens and the FDP had been dubbed "Jamaica" because the parties' colours match those of the Caribbean country's flag.

Merkel, who has baulked at the idea of a repeat election, on Saturday said she wanted to form a government "very soon".

Talks with the SPD should be based on "mutual respect" and "compromise", she added.

The veteran chancellor, who is eyeing a fourth term, will meet with top brass from her CDU party on Sunday evening to discuss the way forward. (AFP)

Neighbor News

China, Russia Uphold NK Sanctions Amid NK Protest

BEIJING - Despite a series of complaints from North Korea against sanctions imposed against the country, its key business partners are showing signs of upholding the measures drawn to cripple the rogue nation's economic growth.

North Korea's exports to China in October dropped 62 percent on-year, amounting to about \$90 million, showed Chinese customs data released Thursday. The figure also fell nearly 38 percent compared to \$145.8 in September.

The data also indicated that China has blocked all imports of key trade items from the North, such as coal, iron, lead, aluminum, zinc or copper, Bloomberg said Friday.

The abrupt decline in the figures represents a whole month of China's trade with North Korea, following the announcement of the United Nations Security Council resolutions, which came into effect on Sept. 5. The set of rules impose a total ban of coal trade with the North.

China has also decided to "temporarily" shut down the Sino-Korean Friendship Bridge, which has acted as a main gateway of trade between the two communist nations. (Agencies)

Pakistan, Turkey Vow to Further Boost Defence Cooperation

ANKARA - Pakistan's Federal Minister for Defence Production Rana Tanveer Hussain has held a meeting with the Minister for National Defence of Turkey Mr Nurettin Canikli in Ankara. They had a comprehensive review of bilateral cooperation, particularly the ongoing defence industry projects between the two countries.

While expressing satisfaction at the flourishing relationship between Pakistan and Turkey, the two ministers vowed to further deepen and broaden defence industry cooperation.

They noted that the growing level of bilateral cooperation is consistent with the vision of the leaders on both the sides. Both sides agreed to further increase mutual contact and exchange of visits with a view to realise the full potential in defence collaboration and identifying new projects.

Rana Tanveer noted that the defence industries of the two brotherly countries had significant capacities and closer mutual collaboration would help them realise the full potential. He hoped that both the countries would explore further possibilities of joint ventures and co-production.

Turkish Defence Minister Mr Nurettin Canikli said that the brotherly relations between Pakistan and Turkey are deeply rooted in history. He said that this brotherhood is reflected in all levels of relationships. (Agencies)

Daesh Product of US, Saudi Arabia, Israel, UAE: IRGC

TEHRAN - A senior commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has described Daesh as a product of US, Saudi, Israeli and Emirati intelligence agencies tasked with toppling regional governments.

"Intelligence services of the US, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and certain other countries, naming which is not in our interest for now, created Daesh to overthrow the Syrian administration," General Hossein Salami said.

"We have information that in 2013 and 2014, hundreds of American cargo flights transported ammunition for Takfiri groups in neighboring countries," the IRGC's second-in-command said during a live TV program Saturday night.

Salami also said the conflicts in Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen "are the result of the Saudi regime's evil and criminal nature, which wants to buy credibility for itself with petrodollars."

The Saudis were the link between Americans and the Takfiri groups, he said, adding they spared no efforts to topple the Syrian government and split up Iraq.

"The threat of Daesh was very serious and if the domino effect of the fall of cities had continued, a big disaster would have threatened the Muslim world and even other countries," Salami said. (Presstv)

Uzbekistan's Uzbekenergo Increases Electricity Supplies to Regions

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan's energy company Uzbekenergo supplied 44.9 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity to the regions in January-October 2017, which is by 3.1 billion kilowatt-hours more than in the same period of 2016, Ruzikul Raimov, deputy chairman of the company's board, said.

Raimov made the remarks during the event dedicated to the preparation for the autumn-winter season 2017-2018.

Over the reporting period, 3,124 kilometers of power transmission lines and more than 1,000 transformer stations were modernized and reconstructed.

Moreover, 406 kilometers of power transmission lines and 380 transformer units are planned to be built and reconstructed in the country's regions. Meanwhile, 336.6 kilometers of power transmission lines and 311 transformer units have been modernized. Thus, 324 emergency brigades, equipped with modern communication facilities and 315 special vehicles, were created to eliminate possible malfunctions during the autumn-winter season. (Trend)