

Iran 'Inching' Toward Place Where Talks Could be Held: Pentagon Chief

LONDON - U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said on Friday that it appeared Iran was inching toward a place where talks could be held, days after U.S. President Donald Trump left the door open to a possible meeting with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

Friction between the two countries has deepened since Trump last year withdrew from a 2015 international accord under which Iran had agreed to rein in its atomic program in exchange for relief from economic sanctions.

Washington has renewed and intensified its sanctions, slashing Iran's crude oil sales by more than 80%.

"It seems in some ways that Iran is inching toward that place where we could have



talks and hopefully it'll play out that way," Esper said at the Royal United Services Institute think-tank in London.

Asked at a press conference later what he was basing his comments on, Esper said it was "in light of some of the comments made by the Iranians in the wake of the G7."

He added: "Inching' is subtle movements and I think that's a good thing."

Iran's foreign minister visited France briefly for side talks during the G7 summit of industrialized nations last month, although he did not meet Trump.

There was no sign of any softening in Iran's position on Friday, with Revolutionary Guards chief Hos-

sein Salami saying "Iran will never negotiate with America, which is our enemy's (U.S.) main goal and no one will help the enemy to achieve its goal", Iran's semi-official Fars news agency reported. (Reuters)

'She Is Indeed Ugly': Brazil's Economy Minister Echoes Bolsonaro's Insults against Brigitte Macron

BRASILIA - Brazil's economy minister has tried to make a point about where media focus lies, as he echoed President Jair Bolsonaro's insults about French First Lady Brigitte Macron, saying she is "indeed ugly." Paulo Guedes was complaining to businessmen in Fortaleza about media coverage of the Bolsonaro administration when he made the comments about French President Emmanuel Macron's wife, which unsurprisingly is what

the media has zeroed in on. "What I see in the newspapers is that he insulted [UN high commissioner for human rights Michelle] Bachelet, or that he called Macron's wife ugly," he said. "He did say that and it's true - the woman is indeed ugly."

After the audience laughed, Guedes added, "There's no such thing as an ugly woman, there's only women seen from the wrong angle." The economy minister ... (More on P4)... (13)

Pope Denounces Danger of Corruption in Mozambique Mass

MAPUTO, Mozambique - Pope Francis wrapped up his visit to Mozambique on Friday by consoling HIV-infected mothers and children and denouncing the rampant corruption that has helped make the southern African nation one of the world's poorest countries.

Francis received a raucous welcome at both a medical center specializing in AIDS treatment and a rain-soaked sports stadium full of singing and dancing faithful, evidence of his popular-

ity in a country where Catholics represent less than a third of the population.

At the Mass, Francis urged an estimated 60,000 Mozambicans to continue on the path of post-civil war reconciliation. But he warned of the dangers of corruption and the injustices committed when public officials claim to help the poor but have personal interests at heart. "Mozambique is a land of abundant natural and cultural riches, yet paradoxically, great num-



bers of its people live below the poverty line," Francis told the faithful at Mass in the Zimpeto stadium. "And at times it seems that those who

approach with the alleged desire to help have other interests. Sadly, this happens with brothers and sisters of ... (More on P4)... (12)

Merkel Says Peaceful Solution Needed for Hong Kong



BEIJING - German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Friday that she discussed Hong Kong with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and that there needed to be a peaceful solution for the city.

Li, speaking at a joint news conference in Beijing with Merkel, said China wanted to prevent unrest in the former British colony, which has been convulsed by protests in the past few weeks. (Reuters)

Amazon Is On Fire, But Are We DOOMED? What's Behind the Climate Catastrophe Headlines

The Amazon is burning, the planet is heating, and it seems like the four horsemen of the climate change apocalypse are knocking at our door. But just how right are the prophets of ecological doom?

The Amazon rainforest is ablaze. Wildfires have increased by 83 percent this year on last, with nearly 80,000 individual fires spotted by Brazil's National Institute for Space Research. Fires in this region are typically started by farmers every year to clear over-

grown land for grazing and replanting, but the extent of this year's inferno has captured the attention of the global media like never before.

"Our home is burning," tweeted French President Emmanuel Macron, promising to make the "emergency" top of the agenda at last month's G7 summit. Macron was joined by US lawmakers, presidential candidates, climate activists, and much of the ... (More on P4)... (14)

X-Ray Machines to Be Installed at Thai Airport to Prevent Goods Smuggling

BANGKOK - The Thai Customs Department said here on Friday that it will install 23 X-ray machines at Thailand's main international airport before the end of 2019.

Customs director-general Krisada Jinawijarana said the X-ray machine installation above the baggage carousels at Suvarnabhumi International Airport is aimed at improving the efficiency of security checks of luggage of inbound passengers and to prevent goods smuggling.

"The machines will help improve the security check of luggage transported from inbound planes before the passengers ... (More on P4)... (15)

Kyrgyz PM Instructs to Strengthen Measures to Improve Public Procurement System

BISHKEK - Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic Mukhammedkalyi Abylgaziev held meeting on improving the public procurement system, Trend reports with reference to Kabar which cited the Government's press service.

Abylgaziev noted in order to support domestic producers, the law has been amended to provide benefits of up to 20% for domestic producers, removal from the national regime and approval of the list of domestic producers by the Government, the production of goods that are fully carried out in the country for purchase by direct contract. During the meeting the prime minister was informed about the measures taken to ... (More on P4)... (16)

Flow of Undocumented Migrants Towards U.S. Border Fell 56%: Mexican FM

MEXICO CITY - Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard said on Friday that the country's immigration plan had reduced the flow of undocumented migrants crossing the U.S. border by 56% between May and August.

Speaking at a regular government news conference alongside President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, Ebrard said Mexico would keep investing in social programs in the south as well as in countries of origin Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

"This reduction of 56% in the flow of migrants is a result of diverse measures that the gov-



ernment has taken, in compliance with the Mexican migration law," he said, adding that there had been only seven official complaints about human rights violations.

Ebrard said he would travel to Washington to discuss the progress of the program on Monday.

In June, Mexico and the United States struck a deal to avert a tariff war, with Mexico agreeing

to rapidly expand an asylum program and deploy security forces to curb illegal immigration from Central America.

U.S. President Donald Trump had been threatening to impose 5% import tariffs on all Mexican goods if Mexico did not commit to do more to tighten its borders and stop the flow of undocumented migrants seeking to cross into the United States. (Reuters)

Turkish Court Sentences Opposition Figure to Nearly 10 Years in Jail: Lawmaker

ISTANBUL - A Turkish court on Friday sentenced a prominent opposition official to nine years and eight months in prison over several crimes including insulting the president and spreading terrorist propaganda, a lawmaker from the main opposition party said.

The Republican People's Party (CHP) said Canan Kaftancıoğlu, the head of its leadership in Istanbul, would not immediately go to jail pending the appeals process. The indictment against Kaftancıoğlu cited several tweets she shared between 2012 and 2017. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

Pakistan Vows 'Fullest Possible Response' to India Over Kashmir

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan will make the fullest possible response to India's actions in disputed Kashmir and the global community would be responsible for any "catastrophic" aftermath, Imran Khan, the prime minister of the Muslim-majority nation, said on Friday.

The rhetoric on the annual Defence Day remembrance of Pakistan's fighters in a 1965 war with India underscores rising tension between the nuclear-armed foes after New Delhi last month revoked the autonomy of its part of disputed Kashmir.

"I have informed the

world that Pakistan does not want war, but at the same time, Pakistan cannot remain oblivious to the challenges posed to its security and integrity," Khan said in a statement on the website of state-run Radio Pakistan.

"We are prepared to give the enemy the fullest possible response. Failing, the world community will be responsible for the catastrophic aftermath," he added.

This week Khan had said war between the South Asian neighbors was a risk, but Pakistan would not act first. (Agencies)

US Will Not Drop Iran Sanctions, Trump Tells Macron

TEHRAN - US President Donald Trump has informed French President Emmanuel Macron that the United States will not lift economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, according to the White House.

The two presidents also agreed it was essential to "curb Iran's actions threatening freedom of navigation and commerce in the Persian Gulf," the White House claimed in a statement issued late Thursday.

"President Trump reiterated that dropping sanctions against Iran is not going to happen at this time," the statement said.

Macron has sought to arrange a meeting between Trump and Ira-

nian President Hassan Rouhani in order to end the tensions between the US and Iran since Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

During a joint press conference with Trump last week, Macron said he hoped a meeting between the presidents of Iran and the United States would take place "in the next few weeks."

"I hope [the meeting between Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Trump] could take place in the next few weeks," the French president said, adding, "Nothing is for sure, things are eminently fragile." (Press TV)

Iran's Third JCPOA Step Reversible Like Previous Ones: Zarif

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says the upcoming third phase of Iran's nuclear countermeasures has been so devised to be reversible, as is the case with its previous nuclear responses, if Europe meets its nuclear commitments towards Tehran.

"Should they act on their obligations, this step, like the two previous steps, which have already been taken, could be reversed," Zarif said on Thursday at the airport in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, where he arrived as part of an Asian tour. Iran's top diplomat added that "in the next sev-

eral hours," he will be notifying the European Union foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, of the third step, as announced by President Hassan Rouhani earlier, adding that the third phase is a "very important" one.

Iran began the countermeasures in May on the anniversary of the United States withdrawal from its historic 2015 nuclear agreement with major world powers. The deal was signed in Vienna in 2015 between the Islamic Republic and the P5+1 group of states comprising the US, the UK, France, China, and Russia plus Germany. (Press TV)

Islamic Development Bank Allocates Over \$80M for Social Projects in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Islamic Development Bank allocates \$80.3 million for the implementation of two social projects in the Khatlon region, as well as provide technical assistance for the development of a feasibility study for another project, Trend reports with reference Asia-Plus news agency.

Tajik Finance Minister Fayziddin Kakhhorzoda and IDB Regional Director for Central Asia Hisham Maruf signed an agreement on financing the project "Improving Water Management in Khatlon Region", the secretary of the Ministry of Finance reports.

The amount of funding for this project, which is aimed at improving the

quality of life of rural residents through improved water resources management, will be \$53.5 million.

The parties also signed an investment agreement on the project "Improving the health of mothers, newborns and children", he secretary of the Ministry of Finance reports.

The total amount of this project, which will be implemented in four regions of Khatlon, is \$26.87 million.

The goal of the project is the modernization of medical institutions, the installation of modern equipment in the first-aid posts of target areas, as well as increasing the capacity of health workers through seminars. (Trend)