

Pence Heads to Seoul as North Korea Tensions Flare

WASHINGTON - U.S. Vice President Mike Pence will travel to South Korea on Sunday in what his aides said was a sign of the U.S. commitment to its ally in the face of rising tensions over North Korea's nuclear program. Pence's Seoul stop kicks off a long-planned 10-day trip to Asia - his first as vice president - and comes amid concerns that Pyongyang could soon conduct its sixth nuclear test. President Donald Trump has warned against further provocations, sending an aircraft carrier group to the region as a show of force. His officials have been assessing tougher economic sanctions as well as military options to curb North



Korea's nuclear ambitions. Pence plans to celebrate Easter with U.S. and Korean troops on Sunday before talks on Monday with acting President Hwang Kyo-ahn. "We're going to consult with the Republic of Korea on North Korea's efforts to advance its ballistic missile and its nuclear program," a White House foreign policy adviser told reporters, previewing Pence's trip. Pence will land in Seoul the day after North Korea's biggest national day, the "Day of the Sun." The White House has contingency plans for Pence's trip should it coincide with another North Korean nuclear test by its leader Kim Jong Un, the adviser said. (Reuters)

DPRK Military Warns U.S. of "Toughest Counteraction"

PYONGYANG - The military of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on Friday warned of "toughest counteraction" in response to what it called "reckless military provocation" by the Trump administration. In a statement carried by the Korean Central News Agency, a spokesman for the Korean People's Army General Staff said the current situation in the Korean Peninsula is "extremely dangerous."

"The Trump administration of the U.S. began to disclose its brigandish nature timed to coincide with Key Resolve and Foal Eagle nuclear war games now under way across South Korea," said the spokesman. "All the brigandish provocative moves of the U.S. in the political, economic and military fields ... will be thoroughly foiled through the toughest counteraction of the ... (More on P4)...(27)

Putin, Erdogan Discuss Syria Situation

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the latest developments in Syria by phone on Thursday, according to Turkish presidency. During the conversation, the two leaders emphasized the importance of cooperation between Turkey and Russia for the continuity of the Geneva and Astana talks, and agreed to make joint efforts to assure a nationwide cease-fire in Syria.

They both backed an independent investigation by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) into the recent deadly chemical incident in Syria's Idlib. The Turkish and Russian presidents also discussed improving economic and political ties as well as speeding up the normalization of bilateral relations. On April 6, the United



States launched 59 cruise missiles at a Syrian military airfield, in response to what U.S. President Donald Trump called a "horrible chemical weapons attack" in the Syrian city of Idlib. (Xinhua)

Merkel Critical of German Anti-Terror Shortcomings

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel criticized the legal obstacles to countering terrorism after an attack on the Borussia Dortmund team bus on Tuesday, Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA) reported Thursday. Merkel noted that variations among the laws and regulations at the federal and state level would make the country vulnerable when facing a terrorism threat. "(There are) unfortunately very different levels of laws in individual states," Merkel said. She referred to North Rhine-Westphalia, saying the state did not allow po-

licemen to conduct random checks and added that surveying people perceived as potential threats was not allowed in every state. Merkel called on states to work in close coordination with the federal government and to do everything to "ensure safety in freedom" for German citizens. On Tuesday, a bus carrying the Borussia Dortmund team was hit by bombs. One of its players was injured. German prosecutors have detained a Iraqi suspect over the incident and investigations are ongoing. (Xinhua)

U.S. Dollar Declines Amid Trump's Remarks

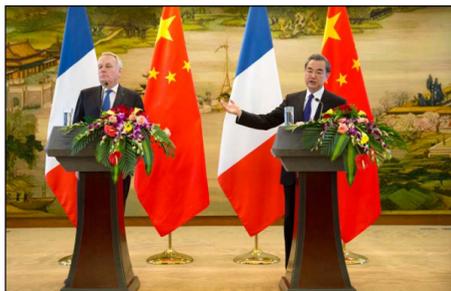
NEW YORK - The U.S. dollar fell against other major currencies on Thursday amid U.S. President Donald Trump's comments on the currency. In an interview with Wall Street Journal on Wednesday, the president said the dollar is getting too strong and the Federal Reserve should keep rates low. The greenback slipped after Trump's comments. The dollar index, which measures the greenback against six major peers, was down 0.22 percent at 100.560 in late trading on Thursday. In late New York trading,



the euro rose to 1.0617 dollars from 1.0600 dollars, and the British pound added to 1.2512 dollars from 1.2497 U.S. dollars in the previous session. The Australian dollar climbed to 0.7578 U.S. dollar from 0.7479 U.S. dollar. The U.S. dollar bought 109.13 Japanese yen, lower than 109.68 yen of the previous session. The U.S. dollar fell to 1.0052 Swiss francs from 1.0082 Swiss francs, and it edged down to 1.3304 Canadian dollars from 1.3312 Canadian dollars. (Xinhua)

China Urges U.S., Russia to Avoid Clashes on Syria

BEIJING - China urges all parties, particularly the United States and Russia, to increase communication and coordination to avoid clashes in dealing with the Syrian crisis, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Thursday. The comment came after Russia vetoed a UN resolution drafted by the United Kingdom, France and the United States demanding a speedy investigation into an alleged chemical weapons attack in the Syrian province of Idlib on April 4. Western powers, including



the United States, blame the Syrian government for the attack. The United States fired 59 cruise missiles at the Shairat military base in central Syria in response.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vladimir Safronkov was quoted by media saying that the draft pre-judged the Syrian government as responsible for the attack. "A ... (More on P4)...(28)

French Investigators Ask EU to Lift Le Pen Immunity over Fund Misuse

PARIS - French magistrates have asked the European Parliament to suspend immunity of far-right presidency front-runner Marine Le Pen as part of an investigation into alleged misuse of parliamentary salaries, a local report said on Friday. Investigating judges issued at the end of March a request to lift Le Pen immunity so that she would be questioned into the allegation that she used European fund to pay her party staff, local broadcaster Europe 1 reported. The judges also requested suspension of immunity of Marie-Christine Boutonnet, another far-rightist legislator over using European salaries to pay assistants working for the party, the report added. Speaking to France info radio earlier on Friday, ... (More on P4)...(29)

US Special Presidential Envoy Visits Canada for ISIS Problem

OTTAWA - U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS Brett McGurk visited Ottawa Thursday for senior-level discussions with Canadian officials including ministers of foreign affairs, national defense and security, according to a news release of the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa Thursday. McGurk provided an update on the Global Coalition's comprehensive campaign to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria and sever its global networks and how the campaign is accelerating at the direction of President Donald Trump. He praised the performance of Iraqi forces in Mosul and the Syrian Democratic Forces completing the isolation of Raqqa. The envoy expressed the United States' appreciation for Canada's recent extension of its many military contributions to the fight against ISIS, including the critical advise and assist role it has played with Iraqi Security Forces in support of the Mosul operation, as well as a combat medical hospital to care for the wounded. McGurk also discussed the aftermath of the horrific chemical weapons attack in Syria, and President Trump's determined response on April 6th to deter further attacks, said the release. "It was discussed that while our immediate priority in Syria is the defeat of ISIS, all stakeholders, including Russia, have an obligation to de-escalate the civil war and set conditions for a meaningful political process that ultimately leads to new leadership in Damascus," the release said. (Xinhua)

Italian PM to Visit U.S., Canada Ahead of G7 Summit

ROME - Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni will pay an official visit to the United States and Canada later this month, the PM's office said on Thursday. Gentiloni will fly to the U.S. on April 19, visiting the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington. He will meet U.S. president Donald Trump at the White House on April 20. A joint press conference would follow the meeting, according to a statement from the PM's office. Gentiloni will then move to Ottawa, Canada, on April 21, and hold talks with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The trip ... (More on P4)...(30)

Russia Proposes UN-Led Investigation into Syria Gassing Accusation

MOSCOW - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Thursday called for the United Nations' chemical weapons watchdog to send an international group of inspectors to investigate an alleged toxic gas attack in Syria last week. "Today there is an emergency meeting of the OPCW Executive Council in the Hague and we have sent our proposal to form such a delegation," Lavrov said at a press conference. He was referring to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, an international body for chemical weapons control. The diplomat suggested that the group of inspectors should include experts from

Western countries, countries in the Middle East and Russia. The investigation should be carried out "transparently, independently and professionally" both in the airbase where the Syrian aircraft allegedly carrying chemical weapons took off, and in the area where the alleged toxic gas was used, Lavrov said. The United States and its allies accused Damascus of gassing civilians on April 4, but Russia said the intoxication was possibly caused by the explosion of chemical weapons produced and stored by the rebels in a local depot during a raid by the Syrian Air Force. On Wednesday, Russia vetoed a ... (More on P4)...(31)

Neighbor News

China, Russia Agree to Further Expand Investment, Energy Cooperation

MOSCOW - China and Russia have agreed to further expand investment and energy cooperation to promote bilateral ties.

The pledges came out of the fourth meeting of the China-Russia Investment Cooperation Committee, co-chaired by visiting Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli and Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, and the meeting between Zhang and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich in Moscow on Wednesday. The main task of the committee meeting is to have in-depth discussions about new measures to lift the scale and level of the investment cooperation between the two countries, turning the advantages of high-level political ties into more cooperation results,

Zhang said. The committee meeting is also meant to prepare for meeting between leaders of the two countries later this year, he said.

Zhang put forward three proposals to boost two-way investment cooperation. He called on both countries to further synergize China's Belt and Road Initiative and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union to give full play to the role of investment cooperation on integrating the two sides' interests, complementing resources, synergizing industries, and conducting technology exchanges, among others. The two countries need to actively explore cooperation on the third-party market, he said. Besides, Zhang encouraged the two countries to ... (More on P4)...(32)

Nawaz Hits out at PPP: 'Votes are Earned Through Actions, Not Slogans'

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Friday announced a Rs1 billion package for Jacobabad and said votes are earned through actions and not through sloganeering while addressing a public gathering in the area. "I have not come empty handed to Jacobabad, I have come with my pockets full," said the prime minister. Taking a swipe at the ruling PPP, the premier asked why the provincial government has failed to build roads or provide clean drinking water in Jacobabad. "I ask the Sindh govern-

ment why no facilities have been given in the district. They could have built roads, schools, hospitals and provided clean drinking water." "It is the same Jacobabad that existed 100 years ago and nothing has changed." Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif criticised PPP leaders for not delivering on their basic promises to the people of Sindh and said his government was responsible for restoring peace in Karachi. "When we came to power, we had to restore peace in Karachi as it is the heart of Pakistan," said Nawaz. (Monitoring Desk)

Iran's Rouhani Reruns for Presidency, Defends His Performance in Office

TEHRAN - Iran's incumbent President Hassan Rouhani registered for the upcoming Iranian presidential election on Friday and defended the performance of his administration over the past four years. Following the registration, Rouhani hailed the Iranian international nuclear deal, known as JCPOA, as his administration's achievements, saying that "from now on, protecting the nuclear deal would be one of the important issues (for the next government) politically and economically." Besides, the nuclear agreement with powers in July 2015 was instrumental to alleviate the risk of war against Iran, he said. Over the past four years, "security of the country was a major

concerns of (his) government, and as you see, the vicious ghost of war against the country has been dispelled and we are witnessing security for the people today," he added. Rouhani also referred to his government's "successful" management of economic issues and said that he was able to curb the inflation, raise the rate of economic growth, stop depression and, to some extent, solve unemployment problem. He also expressed satisfaction with his foreign policy attainments and said as he had pledged during his presidential campaign in 2013, he has taken steps to improve relations with the world and to interact constructively with the western countries. (Xinhua)

Uzbekistan Says Stockholm Suspect Had Ties to IS

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan said Friday the suspect in last week's deadly Stockholm truck attack had ties to Islamic State jihadists and the West had been warned about him. Rakhmat Akilov, a 39-year-old Uzbek national, is in custody on suspicion of mowing down a crowd on a busy street in the Swedish capital, killing four people. Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov said Akilov was radicalised after moving to Sweden in 2014 and

the Central Asian nation's intelligence service had passed on information about him. "During his stay abroad, he was recruited through the internet by emissaries of the international terrorist organisation the Islamic State," Kamilov said in quotes from a press briefing published by the ministry. Kamilov said Akilov had "actively encouraged compatriots to go to Syria to participate in military operations" for the group. (AFP)