

# Martin Schulz Denies Green Light to Grand Coalition Talks with Merkel

BERLIN - Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Martin Schulz on Friday denied an earlier report that his party was ready to start grand coalition talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Conservatives Union. The message is "simply wrong," said Schulz at a press conference at the SPD headquarter. "We have many options." Schulz attacked the Union at the same time and suspected them of spreading the message of agreement. SPD executive will debate all options, a minority government or a grand coalition again with the Union. A resolution should then be formed



at the party congress in the coming week. German daily Bild reported earlier on Friday that SPD and the Union, comprised with Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister the Christian Social Union (CSU), has agreed to enter exploratory talks for a renewed coalition after the one since 2013 federal elections. Germany's new government is still in vacancy after the Sept. 24 federal elections and the exploratory talks between the Union, the pro-business Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Greens broke down last week. (Xinhua)

## EU Official in Ireland as Border Issue Bedevils Brexit Talks

LONDON - European Council leader Donald Tusk is due to meet Ireland's prime minister in Dublin Friday, with the status of the Irish border threatening to derail divorce negotiations between the EU and Britain. Tusk and Leo Varadkar are holding talks with just two weeks to go until EU leaders will decide whether Brexit negotiations will advance or stall indefinitely. After Britain leaves the bloc in 2019, the currently invisible 310-mile (500-kilometer) frontier will be the U.K.'s only land border with an EU country.

Britain says it wants to maintain a "frictionless" flow of people and goods with no border posts. But the Irish government is demanding to know how that will work if Britain is outside the EU's borderless single market and tariff-free customs union. Ireland says that if Britain does not provide details, the EU will not agree to start discussing future relations and trade. EU leaders are due to decide at a Dec. 14-15 summit whether there has been enough progress in divorce talks to move on to the next phase. (AP)

## Trump Visit to Britain Dropped in Row with PM over Social Media Posts

LONDON - A planned visit to Britain by U.S. President Donald Trump has been dropped by U.S. diplomats, British newspaper The Telegraph reported Friday. Trump was set to travel to Britain in the first month of 2018 on a working visit to open the new U.S. embassy in London, said the report. A war of words has erupted between Trump and British Prime Minister Theresa May over a series of messages on the president's social media site which included videos

posted by a controversial far right group in Britain called Britain First. May responded to Trump's actions with a rebuke saying he was wrong to share the videos. The prime minister also denounced Britain First as a hateful organization that "seeks to spread mistrust and division within British communities. Trump hit back on his social media site by telling May: "Don't focus on me, focus on the destructive Radical Islamic Terrorism that is taking place within the United Kingdom. We



are doing just fine!" It has led to calls by politicians and community groups for an invitation for Trump to pay a state visit to Britain to meet Queen Elizabeth to be with-

drawn. May has so far rejected calls for the invitation to be cancelled telling journalists: "An invitation for a state visit has been extended and has been accepted. (Xinhua)

## White House Dismisses Reports on Tillerson Ouster Plan



WASHINGTON - The White House on Thursday rejected widespread reports about a plan initiated by the Trump administration to oust

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, saying there will be no personnel changes. "There are no personnel announcements at this time. Secretary Tillerson

continues to lead the State Department," said White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders in a statement released in the day. Sanders' remarks came after multiple major U.S. news outlets reported on Thursday morning that the White House is planning to remove the current head of the State Department.

Tillerson's relationship with U.S. President Donald Trump "has been strained" and perhaps he will be replaced "within the next several weeks,"

reported The New York Times, citing senior administration officials. Incumbent CIA Director Mike Pompeo, a former three-term Congressman and a sturdy supporter of Trump, is said to be Tillerson's successor. Trump, when asked if he wanted Tillerson to stay on the job on Thursday morning, made a simple reply. "Rex is here," he said, seemingly dodging the question. It was not the first time that the Trump-Tillerson relationship has been scrutinized. (Xinhua)

## Germany Withdraws Diplomat from North Korea

WASHINGTON - Germany is withdrawing a third diplomat from its embassy in North Korea over increasing concerns about Pyongyang's missile program, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said on Thursday, a day after Pyongyang test fired a new missile. North Korea said on Wednesday it had successfully tested a powerful new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that put the entire U.S. mainland within range of its nuclear weapons. Speaking in Washington after meeting U.S. Secretary of State Rex Till-

son, Gabriel said he had offered support for taking a tough line towards Pyongyang. "He wants our support for their efforts to pursue a hardline position vis a vis North Korea, and he has it. But it's our job to decide what we will do in diplomatic channels." Two diplomats had already been withdrawn from the German embassy in Pyongyang, and a third was being pulled out now, Gabriel said. Germany was also demanding North Korea reduce its diplomatic presence in Germany. (Reuters)

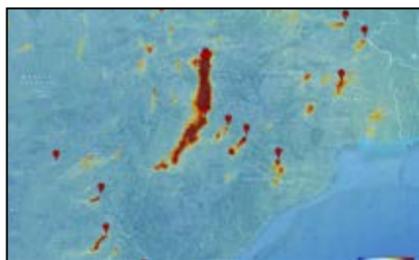
## Pentagon Withdraws Plan to Ban Use of Certain Cluster Bombs

WASHINGTON - The Pentagon has withdrawn a plan to ban the use of certain cluster bombs that are widely seen as a hazard to civilians, Pentagon spokesman Tom Crossen said in a statement on Thursday. "The Department of Defense has determined that cluster munitions remain a vital military capability in the tougher war-fighting environment ahead of us, while still a relatively safe one," said the statement.

In response, Mary Wareham, from the Cluster Munition Coalition, an international campaign seeking to eliminate cluster bombs, argued that there is no compelling reason for the use of cluster munitions. "We condemn this decision to reverse the long-held U.S. commitment not to use cluster munitions that fail more than 1 percent of the time, resulting in deadly unexploded sub-munitions," she said. Cluster bombs contain bomblets that scatter widely and can detonate months or years later. The Convention on Cluster Munitions, an international treaty that began in 2018 and has been signed by more than 100 countries, prohibits the use, transfer and stockpile of the weapon. However, the United States is not a signatory. Instead, the then Republican George W. Bush administration set a now nine-year-old policy that the United States, by Jan. 1, 2019, would end its use of cluster bombs that did not meet a standard of failing to detonate 1 percent of the time or less, according to a TheHill news daily report. The U.S. rarely uses cluster bombs, but it has sold them to other countries and says they could be useful in any future large-scale ground war, said the report. (Xinhua)

## Satellite Images Show Extent of Air Pollution Worldwide

BERLIN - Images taken by a new European satellite show the levels and distribution of air pollutants around the world, including ash spewing from a volcano in Indonesia. The European Space Agency released images Friday made by its Sentinel-5P satellite that show high concentrations of nitrogen dioxide in parts of Europe on Nov. 22. Nitrogen dioxide is mainly caused by vehicle emissions and in industrial processes. Another image shows



high levels of carbon monoxide, commonly produce by fires, in Asia, Africa and South America. A series of images also show sulfur dioxide, ash and smoke from the Mount Agung volcano in

Bali last month. Sentinel-5P, launched Oct. 13, can map levels of nitrogen dioxide, methane, carbon monoxide and other pollutants that can be hazardous to human health or contribute to global warming. (AP)

## Russia Mulls Ban on Access of all U.S. Media to State Duma

MOSCOW - A decree on banning the entry for all media outlets from the United States to the Russian State Duma lower parliament house may take effect on Dec 6, Chairperson of the Duma's Rules and Regulations Committee Olga Savostyanova said Friday. It is in response to the U.S. move to withdraw press accreditation for the American arm of Russian television station RT. Savostyanova said the committee intends to propose the measure Monday, and submit it for approval at the house plenary session scheduled for Wednesday. "This decision will come into effect from the moment the State

Duma takes a decision," Savostyanova added. The committee would also recommend regional parliaments to ban entry of U.S. journalists, she said. On Wednesday, RT America was stripped of its press credentials for working in the Capitol Hill due to its registration as a foreign agent in the United States. RT America said the registration was done at the demand of the U.S. Department of Justice. Washington has been accusing some Russian media, including state-sponsored RT and Sputnik, of influencing public opinion during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, while Moscow says they are being oppressed by U.S. authorities. (Xinhua)

## British Labour Leader Corbyn Tells Morgan Stanley: 'We're a Threat'

LONDON - Britain's opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn warned Morgan Stanley that bankers are right to regard him as a threat because he wants to transform what he cast as a rigged economy that profits speculators at the expense of ordinary people. Morgan Stanley cautioned investors on Nov. 26 that political uncertainty in Britain was a bigger threat than Brexit given the risk of Corbyn winning power and then dismantling what was once seen as one of the world's most stable free-market economies. "Bankers like Morgan Stanley should not run our country but they think they do," Corbyn, a 68-year-old socialist, said in a video posted on Twitter that showed the towers of the City of London and Canary Wharf financial districts. "So when they say we're a threat, they're right: We're a threat to a damaging and failed system that is rigged for the few," he said. Morgan Stanley declined to comment. London, which vies with New York for the title of the world's financial capital, dominates the \$5.1-trillion-a-day global foreign exchange market and is home to more banks than any other financial center. But many bankers, CEOs and investors were spooked by the shock 2016 vote for Brexit and have been dismayed by the political turmoil which followed, including Prime Minister Theresa May's botched gamble on a snap election in June. (Reuters)

## Nieghbor News

### President Xi Says China Will not Export its Political System

BEIJING - China will not export its political system, President Xi Jinping told a forum for foreign political groups on Friday, as the ruling Communist Party seeks to boost its global image and take a more assertive international role. China's state media has this year touted the annual inter-party meeting as a "high-level dialogue" with Xi speaking at it for the first time. Xi told the forum's opening session China was "struggling for the cause of human progress" and it would bring benefits to every country in the world, according to state television. "We will not import other countries' models, and will not export the China model," Xi said. "We will provide more

opportunities for the world through our development," he said. The official Xinhua news agency has said that representatives from hundreds of political parties in more than 120 countries have registered for the four-day meeting, though it has not provided a full list. Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Tony Parker, treasurer of the U.S. Republican National Committee, were among attendees who spoke at the forum's opening. At a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) congress in October, where Xi cemented his power, he laid out a confident vision for a proud and prosperous China in a "new era" under his leadership. (Reuters)

### Pakistan Made Great Strides in Fight against Terrorism: Aizaz

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's Ambassador to US, Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry during a meeting with US Senator Jeff Merkley (Democrat-Oregon) who serves on the Senate Foreign Relations and Appropriations Committees of US on Capitol Hill, has said that Pakistan had made great strides in the fight against terrorism by driving out militant groups from the country. According to a message received here Friday from Pakistan Embassy USA, Ambassador Chaudhry gave Senator Merkley an overview of Pakistan-US relations. He informed the Senator about the efforts of Pakistan in fight against terrorism as a result of this successful ven-

ture, terrorist incidents had shown a marked decline in recent times. Meanwhile, he added, an improved security environment and economic stabilization were driving force for bringing in foreign investors. Highlighting Pakistan's perspective on the new U.S. strategy for South Asia, the Ambassador said that Pakistan wanted to work with the United States to bring peace to Afghanistan since Pakistan's economic and security gains were at risk from continued instability in Afghanistan. A comprehensive political process was required to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan, he added. (Monitoring Desk)

### Italy Stresses EU's Commitment to Iran Nuclear Deal

TEHRAN - Italian Foreign Minister Alfonso D'Alema says the EU believes all the signatories to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), should remain committed to the agreement. Angelino said in a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in Rome on Thursday that the EU has a completely positive view about the JCPOA and underlines the need for all sides to remain committed to it. The JCPOA was reached between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries - namely the US, Russia, China, France, and

Britain plus Germany - in July 2015. Under the deal, Iran undertook to apply certain limits to its nuclear program in exchange for the termination of all nuclear-related sanctions against Tehran. The administration of US President Donald Trump has been opposed to the JCPOA, which was negotiated by his predecessor, Barack Obama. Trump warned in October that he might ultimately "terminate" the nuclear accord. Except for Washington, all other parties to the JCPOA have announced their support for the agreement and censured any move that could harm it. (Presstv)

### China, Tajikistan Eye Closer Cooperation in Regional Connectivity, Agricultural Trade

SOCHI, Russia - China and Tajikistan agreed on Thursday to continuously promote bilateral cooperation in regional connectivity and trading of agricultural products. China is willing to make efforts for better alignment of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative with Tajikistan's development strategy, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang told his Tajik counterpart Qohir Rasulzoda in the coastal city of Sochi. Li said the joint projects of production capacity will be well implemented and cooperation in transportation infrastructure construction will be fur-

ther explored, so as to promote the industrialization, connectivity and trade facilitation in the Middle Asian country. Noting the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the two countries' diplomatic ties, the premier said that China is fully confident with the continuous development of its relations with Tajikistan. Rasulzoda spoke highly of the close partnership and all-round cooperation between the two neighboring countries, saying that developing ties with China is and will always be a priority of Tajikistan's foreign policy. (Xinhua)