

# Putin Likely to Win Presidential Race with 81.1 Percent of Votes: Poll

MOSCOW - Russia's incumbent president Vladimir Putin is likely to win the 2018 presidential race with 81.1 percent of votes, leaving all rival candidates far behind, a public opinion poll by the government-owned research center VTSIOM showed Monday.

About 67 percent of the Russian citizens tend to take part in the voting, among which 81.1 percent of the people would support Putin, according to a special research project launched by VTSIOM for the 2018 presidential elections on March 18.

Results of the research also showed that Pavel Grudinin,



a farmer supported by the Russian Communist Party, might get 7.6 percent of votes, while Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, might get 4.2 percent.

TV presenter Ksenia Sobchak is likely to get 0.7 percent of votes, and Grigory Yavlinsky, founder of the opposition Yabloko party, would get 0.6 percent. The Presidential Commissioner for Entrepreneurs' Rights Boris Titov might just get 0.3 percent.

The survey was conducted over the phone on Jan. 8-10, involving 3,000 Russians aged more than 18 years old. (Xinhua)

## DPRK Hopes Inter-Korean Talks Lead to End of Military Confrontation on Peninsula

PYONGYANG - The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) said Monday that it hopes the inter-Korean peace efforts could lead to an end of military confrontation on the peninsula.

The official Central Korean News Agency (KCNA) said in a commentary that the DPRK proposal of seeking detente with Seoul has "enjoyed positive response from the public at home and abroad for its validity and vitality."

"The proposal reflects the DPRK's firm will to pre-

vent a war on the peninsula and defend peace ... under the condition that a powerful war deterrent has been provided to frustrate and contain any nuclear threat from the U.S.," said the KCNA.

The commentary also claimed that the U.S. delaying of joint military maneuvers with South Korea is "attributable to the bold measure for north-south dialogue and positive efforts for peace on the peninsula and strong demands of the public at home and abroad." (Xinhua)

BRUSSELS - Britain must tell the EU what kind of post-Brexit relations it wants with the bloc before negotiations can start, European Commission vice president Frans Timmermans said Monday.

Dutchman Timmermans also rejected claims by British finance minister Philip Hammond that the EU was pushing a punitive deal for Britain because it was paranoid that other countries would leave.

"Tell us what you want. That would be useful," Timmermans, the right-hand man to European

## Tell us What You Want on Brexit, EU Urges Britain

Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker, told a small group of Brussels-based media including AFP.

"We are not leaving the UK, the UK is leaving the EU. So tell us what you want," Timmermans added.

"We need to know precisely what the UK wants and then we will negotiate." A year and a half after Britain's shock referendum vote to leave the EU, Prime Minister Theresa May has still



not set out what kind of relationship she wants with the bloc after Brexit.

Discussions on future relations - including the all-important issue of a possible trade deal, and how closely Britain will stay allied to the EU's single market and customs union - are not due to start until April. (AFP)

## France Seeks New Deal with UK over Migrants



PARIS - French officials say France wants to sign a new deal with the U.K. that would involve greater British financing

of the costs of handling migrants camped in the northern French port city of Calais.

A top French official, who

spoke on condition of anonymity, said Monday that the two countries are negotiating "day and night" to sign an agreement at

Thursday's joint summit. Separately, French Interior minister Gerard Colomb said Sunday in Le Parisien newspaper that France also wants Britain to take in more refugees, especially unaccompanied minors. Under the terms of the 2003 Touquet accords, British border officials are stationed in northern France.

Many migrants want to try to enter illegally into Britain and remain in and around Calais.

French President Emmanuel Macron will visit the town Tuesday. (AP)

## German Conservatives Seek to Allay SPD Fears over Coalition Deal

BERLIN - A senior member of Germany's conservatives said a blueprint on forming a coalition government with the Social Democrats (SPD) would be further refined, in remarks seemingly intended to appease opponents of the deal.

Some SPD members have vowed to vote at a party congress this week against giving leaders the go-ahead for formal negotiations with the conservatives. They say key election promises, like raising taxes,

were forfeited. The initial agreement struck on Friday raised hopes that Europe's largest economy could finally have a government, more than three months after an election that weakened both major parties.

SPD members who feel their party made too many concessions - giving up on pledges to raise taxes for top earners and abolish a dual health-insurance system in favor of a single "citizen's insurance" - want changes to the document. (Reuters)

## Syrian Gov't Voices Determination to End U.S. Presence in Syria

DAMASCUS - The Syrian Foreign Ministry on Monday slammed the U.S. bid to form an armed militia in northern Syria as a flagrant violation of Syria's sovereignty, stressing resolve to end the U.S. presence in Syria, according to state news agency SANA.

The U.S. declaration constitutes a flagrant aggression on the unity and sovereignty of Syria and a violation of the international law, the ministry said.

A day earlier, reports cited the U.S.-led anti-terror coalition as saying that the United States is working to form an armed group of 30,000 fighters, which will be under the command of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an alliance of Kurds, Arabs, and Assyrians supported by the United States in northern Syria.

"The U.S. action comes in the framework of its destructive policy in the region to fragment the countries and spur tensions to hinder any solution to the crisis," the ministry charged.

Meanwhile, the ministry warned that it will regard any Syrian citizen taking part in this U.S.-backed militia as a "traitor" and will be dealt with accordingly.

The ministry called the new U.S. move as a "renewed conspiracy" that will be brought down by the Syrian army to end any form of presence of the U.S. and its tools in Syria. The U.S. has been carrying out military operations in Syria since 2014, claiming to be fighting against the Islamic State (IS) group.

The SDF captured Raqqa, the de facto capital of IS, late last year, and the Syrian army captured the eastern city of Deir al-Zour, another IS bastion almost in the same timeframe. (Xinhua)

## Germany Seeks More Detail on What US Wants on Iran Nuke Deal

BERLIN - The German government says it will seek more detail on what the U.S. wants regarding the nuclear deal with Iran after President Donald Trump demanded that European allies fix what he called "terrible flaws."

Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, stressed Monday that Germany stands by the nuclear deal. He said that Germany will analyze the situation with its European partners.

Trump threatened Friday to pull the U.S. out



of the nuclear deal in a few months' time. Iran has said it's not interested in any renegotiation. German Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Adebahr said officials will sit down with the Americans and

"see what goal and request exactly Mr. Trump's comments contain." She said that Trump's statement appeared to have been directed "first and foremost to his own Congress." (AP)

## Turkey's Erdogan Says New Operation in Syria to Start "at Any Moment"

ANKARA - Turkish military will soon start a new operation in a besieged border area of Syria, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday.

"We have finished our preparations and an operation could start at any moment," Erdogan said in Ankara.

The Turkish Armed Forces will resolve the Afrin and Manbij issue as soon as possible, he said.

The Turkish president also strongly slammed the United States over its plans to form a 30,000-strong border forces based on the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), dominated by the People's Protec-

tion Units (YPG).

"It is our duty to kill this terrorist army before it is born," he vowed.

The U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State (IS) had issued a written statement to some media outlets earlier on Sunday, confirming it will set up a 30,000-strong new border security forces with the YPG-led SDF.

The coalition named the new army the Syrian Border Security Force. About 15,000 of the fighters will be SDF veterans as the fight against IS comes to a close. The remaining 15,000 will be recruited and trained in the near future. (Xinhua)

## Palestinians Meet to Respond to Trump's 'Slap of the Century'

RAMALLAH - Palestinian leaders met Monday to plan a response to what they see as US President Donald Trump's attack on their long bid for statehood, after Mahmud Abbas denounced White House peace efforts as the "slap of the century".

The rare meeting of the Palestinian Central Council - a high-ranking arm of the Palestine Liberation Organisation - was called after Trump's controversial December 6 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Palestinians want the annexed eastern sector of the city as the capital of their future state and president Abbas has said Trump's stance means the US can no longer be the mediator in peace talks with Israel.

The US president has sought to bring Israel and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table, with talks stalled since 2014.

Speaking Sunday evening at the opening of the council, which brings together Palestinians from multiple political parties, Abbas told delegates: "We said 'no' to Trump, 'we will not accept your project'."

"The deal of the century is the slap of the century and we will not accept it," the 82-year-old leader added, referring to Trump's pledge to reach the "ultimate deal".

He instead called for an internationally mediated peace process.

Israel is unlikely to accept any other mediator than the United States, accusing United Nations bodies of systematic bias against it. (AFP)

## Neighbor News

### Party Leaders Reiterate Authority, Leadership of CPC Central Committee

BEIJING - Members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee on Monday reiterated the authority and unified, centralized leadership of the CPC Central Committee.

The Standing Committee heard reports from leading Party members' groups of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), the State Council, the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the Supreme People's Court (SPC) and Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP) as well as a report from

the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee.

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the meeting and delivered a speech. For the whole Party, it should be "a primary political principle and essential political rule" to safeguard the authority of CPC Central Committee and its unified and centralized leadership, said a statement issued after the meeting. The committee urged all Party members to strengthen their consciousness of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms, follow the leadership core and keep in alignment. (Xinhua)

### Senior U.S. Diplomat in Pakistan for Talks Amid Tension

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani officials say U.S. Acting Assistant Secretary of State Alice Wells arrived here Monday on a scheduled visit.

"Her third visit since last August, it is part of the regular engagement between the two countries to find common ground on shared objectives of peace and stability in the region," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Muhammad Faisal said on Twitter.

Alice Wells met Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua at the foreign ministry and discussed bilateral matters, he said.

This is the first visit by a senior U.S. diplomat after the Jan. 1 tweet by U.S. President Donald Trump in which he had leveled serious charges against Pakistan including the allegation that the country supports the Afghan

Taliban and the Haqqani Network.

Days after the controversial tweet, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley announced that Washington would withhold 255 million U.S. dollars in assistance to Pakistan from the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) fund, which is used to provide military equipment and training to friendly countries. In an apparent tit-for-tat reaction, Pakistani Defense Minister Khuram Dastgir Khan announced last week that Pakistan has suspended defense and intelligence cooperation with the United States amid growing tensions over the U.S. suspension of military aid to Pakistan.

Alice Wells is likely to explore ways in meetings in Islamabad to reduce the tension. (Xinhua)

### Russia Will Not Support U.S. Bid to Change Iran Nuclear Deal: Lavrov

MOSCOW - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Monday Moscow will not support attempts by Washington to modify the Iran nuclear deal, arguing such a move could also complicate diplomacy over North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

Lavrov spoke days after U.S. President Donald Trump said he would waive nuclear sanctions against Iran for the last time to give Washington and its European allies a chance to fix the "terrible flaws" of the 2015 nuclear deal.

"We will not support what the United States is trying to do, chang-

ing the wording of the agreement, incorporating things that will be absolutely unacceptable for Iran," Lavrov told a news conference in Moscow.

Russia's top diplomat, who stressed that Russia will work to preserve the existing Iran nuclear deal, also warned that the agreement's collapse could be detrimental to dialogue with North Korea. Lavrov suggested Pyongyang would look at how Iran had been treated by Washington and wonder if any deal it did with the United States on its own missile and nuclear program would hold or also be called into question. (Reuters)

### S.Korea Mulls Further Trade & Economic Co-Op with Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan's Foreign Ministry hosted a meeting with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Korea Chin Ki Hoon.

The ministry said in a message that the parties exchanged views on intensifying the interstate cooperation and expressed commitment to interaction within international organizations.

The two sides spoke about the great prospects for trade and economic cooperation, and also discussed the possibility of establishing close ties between the business structures of the two

countries.

Seoul counts on partnership with Turkmenistan in such areas as the development of gas fields, the creation of petrochemical and gas infrastructures, and the modernization of industry.

South Korean LG and Hyundai with Japanese TOYO are building a polyethylene and polypropylene production complex in the village of Kiyany, near the Turkmen coast of the Caspian Sea. The total cost of the project is more than \$3.4 billion. The facility is scheduled for commissioning in September 2018. (Trend)