

# Trump Says Appointing Special Counsel to Oversee Trump-Russia Probe “Divides Country”

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump said on Thursday the appointment of former FBI director Robert Mueller as the special counsel to oversee his campaign's ties with Russia “divides country.” “I respect the move but the entire thing has been a witch hunt and there is no collusion between - certainly myself and my campaign, but I can only speak for myself and the Russians. Zero.” Trump said at a joint press conference with his Colombian counterpart Juan Manuel Santos in the White House.

In contrast with Trump's remarks, Mueller's appointment has received widely bipartisan welcome across Congress since Wednesday evening when the news went public.



At the press conference, Trump also dismissed suggestions of criminal charges or impeachment: “I think it's totally ridiculous.”

Asked whether he required ousted FBI chief James Comey to shut down a probe into former National Security advisor Michael Flynn, Trump answered: “No. No. Next question.”

The U.S. president tweeted Thursday morning branding the probe into possibly Russian collusion with his campaign the “single greatest witch hunt” in political history. “I believe it hurts our country terribly, because it shows we're a divided, mixed-up, not-unified country,” Trump said later at a luncheon with a group of television news anchors. (Xinhua)

## Modern Missile Systems to Account for 72 Pct by End of Year: Putin

MOSCOW - The share of modern weapons systems in the Russian Strategic Missile Force will rise to 72 percent by the end of this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday.

“The Strategic Missile Forces continue as planned the transition to mobile systems. Such modern weapons systems now account for 62 percent of the total in this branch, and this figure will increase to 72 percent by the end of 2017,” Putin said at a meeting on draft-

ing a new state armament program for 2018-2025.

The percentage of modern equipments and weapons in Russia's Aerospace Forces will rise from the current 66 percent to 68 percent by the end of this year, and the figure in the Navy will rise from 47 percent to 55 percent, the president added.

Over the past two days, Putin has been discussing with senior Defense Min-



istry officials and defense industry representatives the new armament program, which is expected to be the main instrument

for implementing Russia's military-technical policy in defence and security sector through 2025 and beyond. (Xinhua)

## “No Secrets were Passed by Trump to me”: Lavrov

NICOSIA - Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Thursday dismissed United States media reports that U.S. President Donald Trump passed to him classified information when they met recently in the White House. He said during a working visit to Cyprus that what Trump actually told him was that Islamic State terrorists were capable of staffing untraceable explosives into laptops.

“As far as I can recall, maybe one month or two months before, the Trump administration had an of-

ficial ban on laptops on airlines from seven Middle Eastern countries... So if you are talking about that, I see no secret here,” Lavrov told reporters in Nicosia during a joint news conference with Cypriot Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides. Lavrov's comments on the issue were the first since his meeting with Trump and after allegations were made by two U.S. officials on May 15 that the American President had divulged to Lavrov secrets about planned Islamic State operations. (Xinhua)

## Erdogan Says State of Emergency to Stay Till Peace Returns to Turkey

ISTANBUL - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Thursday that the state of emergency imposed in the aftermath of a failed coup last year will not be lifted until peace is restored in the country.

“We cannot lift the state of emergency unless peace and welfare are restored,” the president told business leaders in Istanbul, saying the step was taken to make all work in the country to be done in a much healthier way. Erdogan insisted

that the state of emergency is not a hurdle to business. Turkey has been fighting the Kurdistan Workers' Party for three decades, as the group is seeking an autonomous region in the country's southeast, as well as the Islamic State emerging in neighboring Syria and Iraq.

“At the moment the mountains are filled with ammunition,” Erdogan said, adding Turkish security forces have been engaging in all kinds of struggle. (Xinhua)

## German President Says EU Needs Poland to Help Solve Crisis

WARSAW, Poland - Germany President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said Friday he thinks Poland will need to play a role if the European Union is to emerge united from its current crisis.

Steinmeier spoke during his first visit as president to Poland, which will become the EU's fifth largest member by population following Britain's departure from the bloc. Steinmeier had visited his nation's eastern neighbor several times in his earlier position of foreign minister.

The one-day visit comes as

Poland's ties have cooled with Germany, as well with the rest of the EU, under a nationalist Polish government that has at times taken Euroskeptical positions.

“For me it's clear that Poland belongs to the core of Europe and Poland will be needed if we are to overcome this crisis that we are no doubt in,” Steinmeier said at a news conference alongside Polish President Andrzej Duda.

“The crisis did not start with Brexit but without a doubt it has gotten deeper with Brexit and that makes



it even more important that the 27 of us stick together and we need Poland for that.” He said he also hoped that Poland could reach an understanding with the European Commission, which is concerned over rule of

law in the country due to the government's erosion of independence of the Constitutional Tribunal.

Newly elected German leaders usually make Poland one of their first foreign visits. (AP)

## Merkel Says Britain to be Treated Fairly, but will Pay Brexit Price

BERLIN - Britain would be treated fairly by the European Union after it quit the bloc, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Friday, but Brexit would nonetheless have its price.

Britain formally announced its intention to leave the 28-nation bloc in March, and has stated its intention to maintain a close relationship with the EU on exit. In recent days, Merkel has repeatedly stated that Britain must expect a more distant relationship if it is no longer a member. (Reuters)

## Trump Labor Secretary Tells G-20: More Apprenticeships in US

WASHINGTON - U.S. Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta is making public-private apprenticeships his debut issue as President Donald Trump's point man on matching American workers with specific jobs. “CEO after CEO has told me that they are eager to fill their vacancies, but they cannot find workers with the right skills,” Acosta said Friday in remarks prepared for the labor ministers of the Group of 20 industrial and emerging-market nations gathered this week in Germany.

Apprenticeships that pay salaries and often lead to careers, he added, “are a major priority for President Trump and the Department of Labor.”

The declaration, and a new campaign of tweets on the subject, represent the first indication since Acosta's swearing-in three weeks ago that apprenticeships are at the core of the Trump administration's plans to train a new generation of workers. (AP)

## S.Korean President Says to Take Cautious Approach to THAAD Issue

SEOUL - South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Friday that he will take a cautious approach to the issue on the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system.

Moon made the remarks at a meeting with floor leaders of the five major parties, including the ruling Democratic Party, the main opposition Liberty Korea Party, the centrist People's Party, the minor conservative Righteous Party and the minor liberal Justice Party, presi-



dential spokesman Park Su-hyun told reporters. Moon's special envoys arrived in Beijing and Washington respectively

earlier this week to explain the new government's policy stance on the issues of the Korean Peninsula. (Xinhua)

## 20 Mln Africans on Brink of Famine: UN Agencies

ROME - Twenty million people in four African countries are on the brink of famine, senior staffers at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) said Thursday in Rome. People in northeastern Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen face an “unprecedented” humanitarian crisis due to a combination of drought and armed conflict with fundamentalist insurgencies, such as the Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab groups. “It's the biggest crisis any of us have ever seen,” Denise Brown, Director of Emergencies at the WFP told reporters at a news conference. She described the situation as millions of people “standing on the edge of a cliff, and the number keeps increasing.”

Conflict and adverse climate are causing animals to die and fields to go untilled in a part of the world in which 80 percent of the population relies on farming and fishing to survive, according to FAO Director of Emergency and Rehabilitation Division Dominique Burgeon. If action is not taken, the world will witness a repeat of the 2010-2011 famine in Somalia, in which 250,000 people died because the international community did not act soon enough, the senior staffers said.

Famine is defined as occurring when 20 percent of the population is starving, 30 percent of the children are extremely malnourished, and the mortality rate has reached double its average, explained WFP chief economist Arif Husein. (Xinhua)

## Syria Calls U.S. Air Strike ‘Terrorism’, Russia Says ‘Unacceptable’

GENEVA/MOSCOW - A U.S. military strike in Syria on Thursday was “government terrorism” and caused a massacre, Syrian government negotiator Bashar al-Ja'afari said on Friday, while Russia called it an unacceptable breach of Syrian sovereignty.

U.S. officials told Reuters that the U.S. military carried out the air strike on Thursday against militia supported by the Syrian government that posed a threat to U.S. forces and U.S.-backed Syrian fighters in the country's south. Ja'afari said he had raised the incident with U.N. mediator Staffan de Mistura at peace talks in Geneva.

“We discussed the massacre that the U.S. aggressor committed yesterday in our country. This subject was widely discussed,” Ja'afari told reporters.

“The important thing is that our political ambition is higher because we want to focus on fighting terrorism represented by armed groups and the state and government terrorism happening against our country.

“This includes the American aggression, French aggression and British aggression, whether on civilian or military targets.”

The U.S. strike was the second deliberate military attack on forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In April U.S. President Donald Trump ordered cruise missile strikes in retaliation for a chemical weapons attack that Washington blamed on Damascus. (Reuters)

## Neighbor News

### Iranians Vote in ‘Important’ Presidential Election

TEHRAN - Iranians are voting in a presidential contest which pits President Hassan Rouhani against a serious challenger, Seyyed Ebrahim Raeisi, in what is believed to be a close race.

Some 63,500 polling stations opened at 08:00 local time (0330 GMT) Friday for long lines which had already formed around the country where more than 56 million are eligible to vote. Polls close at 18:00 (1330 GMT), but voting hours will most likely be extended as the country has seen in previous elections, amid expectations of a high turnout. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei was among the first to cast his ballot, calling on Iranians to turn out in big numbers. Speaking after casting his vote, the Leader said, “I thank God Almighty for the blessing of democracy and people's participation in the election. This is a great blessing.” “Praise be to God, our people are thankful for this blessing.

You see they are participating and my advice is that more and more people participate and come to the polls at the earliest time possible.” Ayatollah Khamenei described the 2017 elections as very important, saying the destiny of the country is in the hands of the masses. “I believe a good work should be done in early hours and should not be delayed. I also believe the presidential election is very important,” the Leader said. “The destiny of the country is in the hands of the people who choose the chief executive. They should heed the importance of this task,” Ayatollah Khamenei added. Besides picking a president, Iranians are also voting to choose members of the country's City and Village Councils. “The City and Village Councils Election is also important as it elects those who are in charge of urban and rural services, namely the everyday issues involving the people,” the Leader said. (Monitoring Desk)

### Belt and Road Initiative Offers Connectivity Crucial for World Development: Envoy

WASHINGTON - China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative offers connectivity crucial to world development, Chinese Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai said here on Thursday. “Just as blood vessels bring life to the body, if we want to bring prosperity to every corner of the world, we need connectivity,” said Cui at the 2017 Awards Gala Dinner held by Committee of 100, a U.S. non-partisan organization focused on U.S.-China relations.

“The Belt and Road Initiative offers just the right spirit and tools that connect countries and peoples,” he added.

Calling the initiative “constructive and forward-looking”, Cui said the connectivity it offers will help people worldwide to

make joint efforts to address the global deficits in peace, development and governance.

“We are encouraged by the positive response from the international community to the initiative and the success of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing,” the Chinese ambassador said.

“China is ready to work with all parties, including particularly the United States to translate this grand idea into reality.” Cui also said that when Chinese President Xi Jinping and U.S. President Donald Trump met at the Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida last month, “the essence of that meeting was also about fostering better connectivity between China and the United States.” (Xinhua)

### ‘Civil Society Responsible for Battling Extremism, Army to Fight Terrorism’: Gen. Bajwa

ISLAMABAD - Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa on Thursday said the military could only defeat terrorists but extremism is something civil society is better equipped to deal with.

Speaking at a seminar in Islamabad, titled ‘Role of Youth in Rejecting Extremism’, attended by students, army personnel and academicians, Gen Bajwa said extremism is the foremost factor driving the terrorism. “Though the former is a term relative to our perception of what is normal, it has a lot to do with the

environment in which people live,” he said.

“From that perspective,” he added, “We must admit that Pakistani youth is being exploited due to the poor governance [of the country] and lack of justice in society.”

The COAS said 50 percent of country's population is projected to be less than 25 years of age, adding that the future of this country literally lies in whatever direction the youth takes. “The most important stimulus driving a young adult is to find purpose and meaning in life. (Monitoring Desk)

### Turkmenistan Preparing new Draft Law on Anti-Corruption

ASHGABAT - Preparation of a new version of the law “On Combating Corruption” is underway in Turkmenistan, the country's defense minister, secretary of the State Security Council Yaylym Berdiyev said, Turkmenistan State News Agency reported.

He made the remarks at a joint meeting of the Turkmen government and the State Security Council.

It was mentioned that the anti-corruption law, which will be amended, will define the legal and

organizational bases for combating corruption.

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said that this work is aimed at protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens, increasing the efficiency of state bodies, ensuring the national security and stable economic development of Turkmenistan. In mid-May 2017, it was reported that criminal cases related to bribery and embezzlement of state property were launched in Turkmenistan. (Trend)