

# U.S. Top Diplomat Hints at Possible Direct Talks with Iranian Counterpart

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson hinted on Saturday that he was open to direct talks with Iran in the future.

"In terms of whether I would ever pick the phone up, I've never shut off the phone to anyone that wants to talk or have a productive conversation," said Tillerson during a press conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

"At this point, I have no plans to call my counterpart in Iran, although in all likelihood we will talk at the right time," said Tillerson.

Iran's incumbent mod-



erate President Hassan Rouhani on Saturday won the presidential election by garnering 57 percent of the votes, according to the Iranian Interior Ministry.

Tillerson said he wanted Rouhani to "begin a process of dismantling" what he called "destabilizing forces that exist in this region."

Tillerson's remarks were made during U.S. President Donald Trump's first official overseas trip to Saudi Arabia and Israel, Iran's main regional rivals in the Middle East. (Xinhua)

## Germany Says Considering Jordan as Alternative for Troops in Turkey

AMMAN - German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen said Saturday that Jordan has a potential to host German troops currently located in Turkey.

The minister said no decision has been made yet in this regard.

Referring to a Jordanian air base, the minister said it holds potential as an alternative for German troops located in Turkey's Incirlik air base.

"We were very grateful for a very positive reception and a lot of support,"

the minister said at a press conference during World Economic Forum at the Dead Sea.

The minister said it is important to be prepared "in case we have to move."

However, the minister noted that no final decision has been made yet as discussions were still going on with Turkey.

She stressed it was very important for the German parliament members to be able to visit their troops.

Germany said recently it was considering withdrawing its military in-



stallations in Incirlik Air base, which was deployed for efforts against Islamic State (IS) group in Syria, after a delegation of Ger-

man lawmakers were blocked from visiting the country's soldiers stationed at the base. (Xinhua)

## Tillerson Says in Riyadh Coordination Needed to Tackle Iran's Expansion

RIYADH - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on Saturday that coordination was needed to tackle Iranian expansion ambitions in Yemen and Syria, Al Arabiya local news reported.

During a press conference in Riyadh as part of the visit of U.S. President Donald Trump to Saudi Arabia, Tillerson highlighted that the partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia focuses on achieving common goals while the strategic agreements

signed on Saturday will send powerful messages to enemies.

The U.S. official also said defense deals signed between the two countries will enable Saudi Arabia to confront terrorism and Iranian interference.

Meanwhile, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said the two countries discussed steps to force Iran to stop its support to terrorism, situations in Syria and peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel. (Xinhua)

## Trump to Urge Muslim Leaders to Confront Extremism in Major Speech

RIYADH - US President Donald Trump is to urge the Islamic world to confront extremism in a highly anticipated speech Sunday to dozens of Muslim leaders in Saudi Arabia.

According to excerpts released by the White House, Trump will say the time has come for "honestly confronting the crisis of Islamist extremism", calling on religious leaders to condemn extremist attacks.

But Trump, who has been accused of anti-Islamic rhetoric in the past, will

also extend a hand by insisting that "this is not a battle between different faiths". "This is a battle between barbaric criminals who seek to obliterate human life, and decent people of all religions who seek to protect it. This is a battle between good and evil," Trump is expected to say.

The speech comes on the second day of a visit to Saudi Arabia, part of Trump's first foreign tour that will take him next to Israel and the Palestinian territories and then to Europe. (AFP)

## Trump Due on Egypt Visit to Mend Soured Ties under Obama

CAIRO - U.S. President Donald Trump said Sunday he will visit Egypt soon at an invitation from Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi to mend soured ties under former U.S. administration, official MENA news agency reported.

"I will get to Egypt. We will absolutely be putting that on the list very soon," Trump said in a statement following his meeting with the Egyptian president in Riyadh, MENA reported.

Sisi had "done a tremendous job under trying circumstance," Trump

added.

The Trump-Sisi meeting was held on the sidelines of the Arab-Islamic-U.S. summit.

The bilateral relations between Egypt and U.S. worsened during Trump's predecessor Barack Obama's administration after the Egyptian military ousted Islamist president Mohammed Morsi in 2013.

Obama did not invite Sisi for a visit and even temporarily suspended U.S.



aid to the Arabic country citing U.S. concerns about human rights situation in Egypt.

The ties, however, have improved under the new U.S.

administration of President Trump, who pledged to support the key U.S. ally with 1.3 billion U.S. dollars annually in military aid. (Xinhua)

## Trump Confirms U.S. Ties with Bahrain Won't Face Tension

RIYADH - U.S. President Donald Trump confirmed on Sunday that the ties of his country with Bahrain will be stronger and won't face tension after today, Al Arabiya local news reported.

He highlighted that as part of his two-day visit to Riyadh when he met with Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in the sideline of U.S.-Gulf summit.

"Relations between the two countries are great, although there were some tensions before that won't exist in the current management. We will build long term ties based on common grounds," he said.

The former U.S. administration backed the Shiite opposition in Bahrain since the beginning of unrest in 2011, despite Bahrain is one of its alliance. (Xinhua)

## State of Emergency Won't be Lifted Until Peace Achieved: Erdogan

ANKARA - Turkey's President Erdogan said Sunday that the ongoing state of emergency will not be lifted soon until the country achieves peace and welfare.

At the extraordinary congress of the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party which set to return him to the party helm, Recep Tayyip Erdogan cited the 2-year-long state of emergency in France.

"A state of emergency was declared in France when 15 terrorists arose. In my country, they tried to overthrow the state, and we gave 249 martyrs, and had 2,193 injured," said Erdogan, stressing "How dare you ask us to lift the state of emergency?"

"It will not be lifted. Until when? Until the situation reaches welfare and peace," he stressed. (Xinhua)

## Black Sea States Call for Reforms to Address Changing World

ISTANBUL - The foreign ministers of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) member nations on Sunday called for reforms to better address the requirements of a changing world.

"Technological advances, faster communication and more dynamic bureaucracy have been consolidating the necessity of enforcing reforms," Tugrul Turkes, Turkey's deputy prime minister, said at the opening ceremony of BSEC foreign ministers meeting in Istanbul.

The deputy prime minister noted that new and modern approaches have



emerged not only in economics and foreign politics, but also in many other areas including employment, job security, transportation, environment, energy, agriculture and customs enforcement. "It is now a necessity for the BSEC to keep pace with today's constantly chang-

ing environment and its testing," Turkes said.

The BSEC was founded in 1992 by Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and Serbia to ensure peace, stability and prosperity by means of cooperation. (Xinhua)

## U.S. and Pacific Rim Countries at Odds in Heated Trade Meeting

HANOI - Japan and other members of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreed on Sunday to pursue their trade deal without the United States, as the Trump administration's "America First" policy created tension at a meeting of Asia-Pacific countries.

Turmoil over global trade negotiations was laid bare at a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, which failed to agree on its usual joint statement after U.S. opposition to wording on free trade and fighting protectionism. The meeting in Hanoi, Viet-

nam, was the biggest global trade gathering since U.S. President Donald Trump upended the old order, arguing that multilateral free-trade agreements were costing American jobs and that he wanted to cut new deals. On the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific meeting, the 11 remaining countries of the TPP agreed to explore how they could move ahead without erstwhile leader the United States - partly in the hope that Washington would reconsider leaving. New U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said there was no way back. (Reuters)

## Poll Lead Falls, but British PM May to Stick with Elderly-Care Cuts

LONDON - British Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservative Party said on Sunday it would not ditch proposals to reduce support for elderly voters, as opinion polls showing their lead ahead of the June 8 national election falling.

Polls published late on Saturday showed the Conservative lead over the center-left Labour Party has narrowed after both parties set out their policy offerings last week - the first real sign that an expected victory for May could be less emphatic than many had predicted.

May has faced criticism from political rivals and pressure groups over her planned social care reforms, which include a making elderly homeowners - a core voter group for the Conservatives - pay more towards their old-age care.

The criticism, including within the Sunday editions of usually friendly right-leaning newspapers, prompted senior ministers to defend the reform package in a series of television interviews.

"This is necessary ... we have to do something about the huge costs of social care," Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson told ITV's Peston on Sunday show.

The growing cost of caring for the elderly as the population ages is a problem that has bedeviled successive governments, with the current system widely seen as inadequate.

"I do understand people's reservations and the questions that some people are asking about the detail of all this, but the broad thrust is right," Johnson said. (Reuters)

## Neighbor News

### China to Host Global Meeting of Antarctic Treaty

BEIJING - China will for the first time host a meeting of the group overseeing management of the Antarctic at a time when Beijing is seeking to bolster its presence in both polar regions.

Some 400 delegates, from more than 40 countries and international organizations, will attend the annual meeting of the Antarctic Treaty, which begins on Monday and ends on June 1. China's top diplomat, Yang Jiechi, and Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli are representing China. The meeting will cover administration of the treaty, climate change, tourism and other management issues.

Will the Arctic be the next stop on China's new Silk Road?

The treaty has 53 members, 29 of which are

consultative parties with voting rights, including China, which joined in 1983. Seven countries - Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway and Britain - made territorial claims to parts of the Antarctica, but their claims are not recognized by other countries. Russia and the US have reserved their rights to make a claim.

The South Shetland Islands in Antarctica. China is expected to issue a white paper on its objectives in the region during the conference. On the sidelines of the talks, China will sign memorandums of understanding on cooperation in the Antarctic with the United States, Russia and Germany, and issue a white paper on its objectives in the region. (Agencies)

### Iran's Zarif Urges Trump to Discuss Avoiding Another 9/11 with Saudis

DUBAI - Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, advised U.S. President Donald Trump to discuss how to avoid another September 11 attack with the Saudi hosts of his first official visit abroad, Zarif wrote in an editorial published on Sunday.

Tehran and Riyadh are regional arch-rivals which accuse each other of sponsoring fundamentalist militias aligned to their competing sects of Islam in war zones across the Middle East. Critics of Saudi Arabia say its strict view of Islam fuels Sunni extremism, called takfir, and some even accuse the kingdom of responsibility for the September 11 attacks.

Saudi Arabia denies providing any support for the 19 hijackers - most of

whom were Saudi citizens - who killed nearly 3,000 people in 2001.

"(Trump) must enter into dialogue with them about ways to prevent terrorists and takfiris from continuing to fuel the fire in the region and repeating the likes of the September 11 incident by their sponsors in Western countries," Zarif wrote for the website of the London-based Al Araby Al-Jadeed news network. At a campaign event last February, Trump himself suggested to supporters that the kingdom may be behind the attacks.

"You will find out who really knocked down the World Trade Center because they have papers out there that are very secret. You may find it's the Saudis, okay, but you will find out." (Reuters)

### Nawaz Leaves for Saudi Arabia

ISLAMABAD - On the invitation of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) from May 21-23 to participate in the first trilateral US-Arab-Islamic Summit, to be held in Riyadh.

In addition to King Salman and US President Donald Trump, 55 heads of state and government from the Muslim world have been invited to participate in the summit. The summit in Riyadh will provide an opportunity for the participating countries to discuss how to overcome the menace of terrorism and extremism across the world. The summit is expected to delink 'terrorism' from any particular religion, (Monitoring Desk)

culture, civilisation or region. In his address at the summit, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will focus on Islam's message of peace, tolerance and unity. He will highlight the great sacrifices and major successes achieved by Pakistan in defeating the scourge of terrorism and extremism in the region. The prime minister will also join the world leaders to attend the inauguration ceremony of the World Centre against Extremism, an important counter-radicalisation initiative by Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, Foreign Office Spokesman Nafees Zakaria on Saturday said that Nawaz Sharif would not have bilateral meetings during his visit. (Monitoring Desk)

### Uzbekistan, IDB to Develop New Co-Op Program

TASHKENT - President of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Bandar Hajjar met with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev as part of his working visit to Saudi Arabia, the Uzbek national news agency (UzA) reported Sunday.

The meeting participants discussed the cooperation of Uzbekistan and IDB in the development and implementation of projects in healthcare, education, energy, housing and utilities and irrigation.

Uzbekistan has been an IDB member since 2003.

The bank takes part in co-financing of the projects in healthcare, education, agriculture, irrigation, power engineering, transport and private enterprise support.

At present, the total amount of the IDB loan funds and investments in the Uzbek economy is more than \$1 billion for 38 projects.

A decision was made to develop a specific program of actions for the exchange of delegations of various levels to expand the scope of the partnership. (Trend)