

WTO Approves China's Hong Kong-Macao CEPA Agreement

MACAO - The World Trade Organization (WTO) has recently examined and approved the China's Hong Kong-Macao Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) to ensure that the agreement is in lines with the WTO rules, the government of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) said in a press release on Wednesday.

At the WTO meeting held on Monday, both the representatives from the Macao SAR government and the Hong Kong SAR government presented the objectives and contents of the Hong Kong-Macao CEPA, which was signed in October 2017 to strengthen trade relations and exchanges of technical cooperation be-



tween Macao and Hong Kong. The Hong Kong-Macao CEPA is a free-trade agreement with the characteristics of the principle of "one country, two sys-

tems", which also complies with the WTO rules, the representatives said at the meeting, according to the press release.

The Hong Kong-Macao CEPA mainly covers expansion of trade in goods and services, simplification of customs procedures, collaboration in matters relating to intellectual property, and establishment of a work program on economic and technical cooperation.

Under the arrangement, Hong Kong is to make available to Macao service suppliers a further 105 service sectors in Hong Kong, while Macao is to make available an additional 72 service sectors in Macao to Hong Kong service suppliers. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

Pakistan to Become Member of SCO Youth Council

ISLAMABAD - "Surpassing India and Bangladesh, Pakistan would be the first country in the region to secure membership of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Youth Council", Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Youth Affairs Muhammad Usman Dar said after a meeting with Additional Secretary Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mr. Zahoor Ahmed on Wednesday. He said that, "Pakistan is going to achieve this distinction as it aims to

focus on socio-political empowerment of its youth by announcing, for the first time in its national history, prestigious National Youth Council comprising of outstanding youth from all across the country".

Mr. Muhammad Usman Dar expressed hope that this achievement would greatly benefit our youth by giving them exposure to the best international opportunities aimed at socio-economic development of youth. (Monitoring Desk)

Russian Company to Supply Pipes for TAPI Gas Pipeline to Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - The Russian group of ChIPZ (Chelyabinsk Pipe-Rolling Plant) won the tender of the Turkmenistan State Concern for the supply of pipes for the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline under construction, Trend reports with reference to the Russian media.

The company will supply pipes for the construction of the linear part of the pipeline with a length of 214 kilometers. The deal amounted to \$219 million.

Russia's Sberbank, a state-owned Russian banking and financial services company, confirmed the letter of credit of the State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of Turkmenistan for this amount under the reimbursement obli-

gation of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in favor of ChIPZ.

Construction of the Turkmen section of the TAPI, with an annual capacity of 33 billion cubic meters of gas, was launched Dec. 13, 2015. The IDB issued a loan for Turkmenistan in 2016 to finance the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline.

An agreement worth \$700 million was signed with the State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan supplies gas to China and Iran. The ChIPZ group at one time shipped large-diameter pipes for the construction of the third stage of the Central Asia-China gas pipeline. (Trend)

Uzbekistan to Launch 17 Investment Projects in Its Special Economic Zones

TASHKENT - In the near future, 17 investment projects in such areas as agriculture, industry and tourism will be implemented in the special economic zones of Uzbekistan, Trend reports with reference to the Ministry of Economy and Industry.

As follows from the information of the state enterprise "Center for Complex Examination of Projects and Import Contracts" under the Ministry of Economy and Industry, a comprehensive examination of investment projects being implemented is carried out in the FEZs. After that, conclusions are issued on business plans and feasibility studies of investment projects proposed for implementation in the FEZ territories.

During the comprehensive examination of the documentation of investment projects, an analysis of their compliance with the requirements established for investment projects implemented in the territories of special economic zones is carried out. Following the issue of a positive conclusion of the Center, the administrative councils of the FEZ decide on the implementation of investment projects in the territory of the FEZ, for which concessions and other types of state support are provided. (Trend)

Iran Launched Cyber-Attacks on the Post Office and Government Networks

TEHRAN - Iran has been accused of launching many cyber-attacks on the Post Office and the local government networks in the UK in the run up to Christmas.

According to Sky News the attacks happened on 23 December and more than 10,000 pieces of people personal data was stolen.

The data includes postal addresses, email addresses along with people phone numbers and company positions, including the mobile number of Paula Vennells that chief executive of the Post office, 10 peers and MPs. Banks and other private companies were affected, experts in cyber-security blamed the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and fur-

ther blamed them for the cyber attack the hit the parliamentary network in 2017.

The British security services have remained tight lipped and not confirmed Iran's involvement in the National Cyber Security Centre said they are "aware of a cyber incident affecting some UK organisations in late 2018." Darren Anstee, chief technical officer at IT specialist firm Netscout said, "Political disruption provides a fertile ground for cyber-attacks against government, non-government and international organisations, meaning it's hardly surprising malicious actors in Iran have mounted an attack against the UK. (Agencies)

Malaysia's Former PM Najib in The Dock for Three Hours as IMDB Graft Trial Begins

KUALA LUMPUR - Ten years to the day after he was first sworn in as Malaysia's prime minister, Najib Razak stood trial on Wednesday for corruption charges linked to a multi-billion-dollar scandal that brought down his government.

Najib, in dark blue suit and matching tie, sat in the dock for nearly three hours before proceedings were adjourned until April 15, in the first of many trials he faces over graft accusations at state fund IMDB. It was a stunning fall from grace for a leader who just

a year ago was Malaysia's most powerful person, described by the attorney general on Wednesday as wielding "near absolute power" in office. "The accused is not above the law and his prosecution and this trial should serve as precedents," Tommy Thomas said in an opening statement. It is rare for the attorney general to lead the prosecution, and his presence signals the importance the government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad attaches to the trial. (Reuters)

U.S. Says will Not Send High-Level Officials to China's Silk Road Summit

WASHINGTON - The United States will not send high-level officials to attend China's second Belt and Road summit in Beijing this month, a U.S. State Department spokesman said on Tuesday, citing concerns about financing practices for the initiative. China's top diplomat, Yang Jiechi, said on Saturday that almost 40 foreign leaders would take part in the summit due to be held in Beijing in late April. He rejected criticisms of the plan as "prejudiced."

The first summit for Belt and Road, which envisions rebuilding the old Silk Road to connect China with Asia, Europe and beyond with massive infrastructure spending, was held in Tuesday, and attended by Matt Pottinger, the senior White House official for Asia. There are no such plans this year.

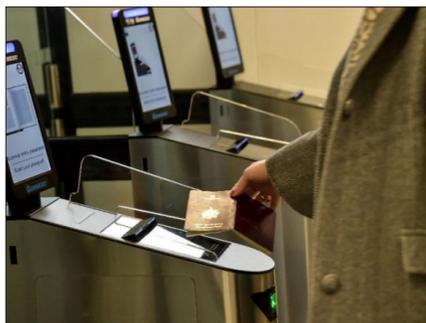
"We will not send high-level officials from the United States," U.S. State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said in answer to



a question from Reuters. "We will continue to raise concerns about opaque financing practices, poor governance, and disregard for in-

ternationally accepted norms and standards, which undermine many of the standards and principles that we rely... (More on P4)... (13)

EU Waives Visas for Brits Despite Gibraltar Row



BRUSSELS - European Union lawmakers approved a law Wednesday that will allow Britons visa-free visits even

after a "no deal" Brexit, despite a furious dispute over the status of Gibraltar. The European Parlia-

ment's justice committee approved the text of the law that already had the backing of member states and should now be formally confirmed. Britain is due to leave the European Union, perhaps as early as next week, but the law allows British visitors 90-day trips to the Schengen passport-free zone. Implementation will depend on Britain according EU citizens reciprocal rights, but it has said it will do so and the principle of the law has broad support.

Nevertheless, the text itself triggered a bitter row in Brussels, after member states -- referred in a footnote to the draft to Gibraltar as a "colony of the British crown". The United Nations does legally list Gibraltar as a "non-self-governing territory" under colonial rule, but Britain insists it is part of "the UK family" and that its citizens freely voted to remain British. Britain's decision to leave... (More on P4)... (14)

In Trump Times, Agreeing to Disagree Becomes Norm At G7 Meetings

PARIS - Foreign ministers from the Group of Seven nations meet on Friday in France to prepare for the leaders' summit in August, but the absence of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo underscores how tough agreeing common ground between allies has become.

Ten months after U.S. President Donald Trump threw the efforts of other leaders to show a united front into disarray by leaving early, backing out

of a joint communique and criticizing his Canadian host, senior diplomats are scrambling to avoid a repeat episode.

France, which took over the rotating presidency of the group of major industrialized nations, has scaled back its ambitions, counting on minor advances in areas where consensus can be found easily, including the dangers of cyber crime for democracy and tackling inequalities between men and women. (Reuters)

Venezuelan FM Visits Anti-US Allies in Mideast

BEIRUT - Venezuela's foreign minister, meeting with anti-U.S. allies in the Middle East, says opposition leader Juan Guaidó is in breach of the constitution and that the judiciary has to "take care" of it.

Jorge Arreaza met Wednesday with Lebanon's president and foreign minister in Beirut. He is expected to meet with an official from the Hezbollah militant group before traveling onward to Syria. Venezuela's National Constituent Assembly, loyal to President Nicolas Maduro, has stripped Guaidó of his immunity, putting him at risk of arrest for supposedly violating the constitution when he declared himself interim president in January. (Fox News)

Saudi Women Activists' Trials to Continue after 3rd Hearing

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates - Nearly a dozen Saudi women's rights activists, most of them imprisoned, attended their third court session and were told their trials will continue for at least two more weeks.

People with knowledge of the trials say most of the women were told by the Riyadh criminal court on Wednesday their next court session would be in two weeks. They spoke with the AP on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. Meanwhile, two women who were granted temporary release last week - Aziza al-Yousef and Eman al-Najfan - were told their next court session would take place after the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which coincides with early June. (Fox News)

UK Government Would Accept Parliament Decision for Soft Brexit: Barclay

LONDON - Britain's Conservative government would accept parliament's choosing a so-called 'soft' Brexit after failing to secure backing for Prime Minister Theresa May's deal, Brexit minister Stephen Barclay said on Wednesday.

"You are then left with an unpalatable choice, in my view, but a choice nonetheless between either not having Brexit (...) or you end up with what is referred to as a softer Brexit," Stephen Bar-



clay told a committee of lawmakers on Brexit, when asked on the way forward.

"Ultimately, if that is where the numbers of the House of Commons

go, then the government would, in order to bring this to a resolution in the national interest, would accept what the house voted for," he said. (Reuters)

Turkey Starts Istanbul Vote Recount after Erdogan's Party Appeals

ISTANBUL - Turkish electoral authorities on Wednesday began recounting votes from Istanbul districts after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AKP challenged tallies showing an opposition candidate narrowly won a weekend local election.

The AKP won most votes nationwide in Sunday's municipal ballot, but results also showed the party lost the capital Ankara and the country's economic hub Istanbul in one of its worst setbacks in a decade and a half in power.

AKP officials on Tuesday filed a challenge with electoral authorities saying

they had found irregularities in ballots in Ankara and Istanbul.

"The district branches of the electoral board in Istanbul decided to recount the ballots in eight districts after the appeals yesterday," Supreme Election Board chief Sadi Guven told reporters.

He said some of the district branches had already started rechecking ballots, most of which were votes that had been rejected as invalid. AKP officials had said there was a huge discrepancy between ballots cast at polling stations and data sent to election authorities. (AFP)