

# Trump Reverses Views on Russia, China.

WASHINGTON - Once soft on Russia and hard on China, President Donald Trump rapidly reversed course in the last weeks, concluding there's more business to be done with Beijing than with Moscow.

Trump's evolving views on those two world powers have brought the U.S. back into alignment with former President Barack Obama's pattern of "great power" politics. Though Russia critics welcomed Trump's newly hardened tone, there's less enthusiasm from America's allies in Asia, who fear the U.S. could overlook China's more aggressive posture toward its neighbors.

It may be that Trump, the



businessman-turned-world leader, is discovering China's transactional approach to foreign relations is better suited to achieving his own goals. Chinese leaders have sought a U.S. relationship based on the two powers respecting each other's spheres of influence and not intervening in one another's internal affairs.

Such a balance-of-powers approach had been Russia's traditional stance. Moscow still wants Washington out of its backyard, but Russia's alleged campaigns to influence the U.S. presidential election and upcoming votes in the heart of Western Europe have made it harder for American officials to take the offer seriously. (AP)

## Pence Aims to Reassure Allies Amid North Korea Threat

WASHINGTON - President Donald Trump has labeled North Korea a "problem" country and says it will be dealt with through a broad — and vague — set of options. It may be up to his vice president, Mike Pence, to fill in the details when he arrives in Asia.

Pence will be diving into a tense standoff along the Korean Peninsula with visits to South Korea and Japan beginning Sunday. His travels to the Asia-

Pacific region come amid indications that North Korea is potentially preparing its sixth nuclear test in a decade or a significant missile launch, such as its first flight test of an intercontinental ballistic missile. Trump, who has proven to be unpredictable on foreign policy, has responded to the recent concerns over North Korea with a swagger that suggests a new, tougher stance. Asked ...*(More on P4)...(11)*

## Ukraine May Double Defence Budget if Economy Strengthens: PM

KIEV - The Ukrainian government may double the country's defence budget if the economy strengthens further, Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman said here on Friday.

Ukraine's defence spending may rise to 9.6 billion U.S. dollars per year when the country achieves a sustainable economic growth, Groysman told the parliament.

After two decades of keeping its defence expenditures at below 1.5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), Ukraine started to gradually boost its defence budget in 2014, when the conflict between

government troops and independence-seeking insurgents started in eastern regions.

While in 2013 the country's defence budget stood at 1.11 percent of the GDP, in 2016 it has reached 5 percent of the GDP.

The Ukrainian government has estimated that the country's spending on defense will stand at about 4.8 billion dollars or 5 percent of the GDP this year.

The Ukrainian economy grew by 2.3 percent in 2016 compared with a consolidated decline of 16.5 percent over the previous two years. (Xinhua)

## Ready for War if Trump Wants it: N. Korean Official

PYONGYANG, North Korea - President Donald Trump's tweets are adding fuel to a "vicious cycle" of tensions on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea's vice foreign minister told The Associated Press in an exclusive interview Friday. The official added that if the U.S. shows any sign of "reckless" military aggression, Pyongyang is ready to launch a pre-emptive strike of its own.

Vice Minister Han Song Ryol said Pyongyang has determined the Trump

administration is "more vicious and more aggressive" than that of Barack Obama. He added that North Korea will keep building up its nuclear arsenal in "quality and quantity" and said Pyongyang is ready to go to war if that's what Trump wants. Tensions between Pyongyang and Washington go back to President Harry Truman and the 1950-53 Korean War, which ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty. But the heat has been rising rapidly since



Trump took office in January. This year's joint war games between the U.S. and South Korean militaries are the biggest so far.

The USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier has been diverted back to the waters off Korea after heading for ...*(More on P4)...(12)*

## EU Parliament could Summon Le Pen over Funds before French Presidential Runoff Vote

BRUSSELS - European Union lawmakers could summon French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen to discuss the lifting of her immunity over the alleged misuse of European Union money, before the second round of the French election, an influential legislator said on Saturday.

French judges have asked the European parliament to lift the immunity of the National Front leader, who is a member of the EU legislature, to permit further investigations over alleged misuse of funds to pay for party assistants [N-

8N1HMOCR]. "The legal affairs committee has agreed that Le Pen will be summoned for a hearing on the first possible date in May," Laura Ferrara, the deputy chair of the committee, told Reuters.

She said the hearing could take place in the first week of May, before the May 7 runoff in the French election, which polls show Le Pen is likely to reach.

Le Pen has denounced legal proceedings against her as political interference.

Opinion polls have put Le Pen in first or second place



in the first round of voting on April 23, although her three main rivals are now close enough for any two of the four to go through to the runoff. Polls show Le Pen is not likely to win

the runoff. Ferrara, who is a member of the Italian eurosceptic 5 Star Movement, said that Le Pen may decide not to appear before the parliamentary committee. (Reuters)

## Russia Urges Restraint Amid Korean Peninsula Tensions

MOSCOW - Russia on Friday called on relevant countries to exercise restraint to cool down the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

Moscow is watching the escalation of tensions with great concern and asks relevant countries to refrain from provocative actions, said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. He reiterated Russia's non-proliferation stance, adding that all crises should be settled with political and diplomatic methods. The United States has sent the USS Carl Vinson aircraft car-



rier group to waters near the Korean Peninsula in what it called a "reaction to provocations" by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) with re-

cent missile tests. Pyongyang on Friday warned the United States of "toughest counteraction" to its "reckless military provocation." (Xinhua)

## Boat with 199 Migrants Stopped in Turkish Waters

BARCELONA, Spain — The Latest on Europe's response to the large number of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers trying to reach the continent: (all times local):

Turkey's coast guard says 199 migrants and three smugglers have been intercepted in western Turkey as they were embarking for Italy on a sailboat.

The coast guard said in a statement that their units set out to stop the journey from Izmir, Turkey on Friday morning after receiving a tip that a sailboat was transporting migrants illegally. Aerial footage of the operation shows people waiting to board the sailboat. An hour later, two coast guard boats intercepted the boat as it started its journey. The migrants include Pakistanis, Syrians, Sri Lankans and Iranians. Sixteen ...*(More on P4)...(13)*

## WFP, Saudi Arabia Support Drought Relief in Ethiopia

ADDIS ABABA - The World Food Programme (WFP) and Saudi Arabia have joined hands to provide emergency food assistance to drought-hit Ethiopians.

The two on Friday held a food aid hand-over ceremony as part of their effort to address over 127,666 peoples in drought-hit Somali region in southeastern Ethiopia.

The support from Saudi Arabia, through the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, includes 1,938.8 tonnes of food items, worth 1 million U.S. dollars. According to WFP, 103,040 Ethiopians have so far been reached through the joint emergency food assistance package.

"This particular contribution comes at a critical moment for Ethiopia. A serious drought has once more struck the country, placing millions of Ethiopians at considerable risk," said John Aylieff, WFP Representative and Country Director to Ethiopia.

According to Aylieff, 1.7 million people in the Somali region are currently facing "extremely difficult circumstances battered by unfavorable climatic conditions which have threatened their livelihoods and their existence".

The East African country has faced many climatic challenges in recent years. The El Nino-driven drought that struck the country since 2015 was among the worst the country had seen in its history. This year's drought, provoked by the Indian Ocean Dipole, has put more than 5 million Ethiopians in need of emergency assistance. (Xinhua)

## Japan Says it Must Remain on Alert over N. Korea

PYONGYANG, North Korea — The latest on celebrations in North Korea marking the 105th birthday of the country's late founder, Kim Il Sung (all times local):

Japan's foreign minister says his country needs to remain on alert over North Korea even after this weekend's celebrations.

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida made the comment to reporters Saturday just as a massive parade started in North Korea marking the 105th birthday of the country's late founder, Kim Il Sung. Kishida noted that more events are expected in North Korea later in April, and said "there is a possibility ...*(More on P4)...(14)*

## Syrian Air Force Hit IS in Syria Based on Iraqi Intelligence: Iraq

BAGHDAD - The Syrian aircraft carried out airstrikes on the positions of Islamic State (IS) militants inside Syria based on Iraqi intelligence reports for the first time since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the Iraqi military said on Saturday.

A statement by the Iraqi Joint Operations Command (JOC) said that the Iraqi intelligence information was shared with the Syrian side through a committee formed in 2015 that includes Russia, Syria, Iran and Iraq. The Syrian air force conducted airstrikes on IS positions and headquarters in the major IS stronghold in Raqqa, the town of Albu Kamal and Dshisha vil-

lage near the Iraqi Syrian border, the statement said without saying when exactly the attacked were carried out.

The airstrikes destroyed an IS headquarter in Raqqa, in addition to the killing of an IS prominent figure, who is believed to be the military leader of IS group in Raqqa, the statement said.

The airstrikes also destroyed two IS headquarters in Albu Kamal area, as well as bombing dozens of IS militants gathering at Dshisha village preparing to enter Iraq, and killed many of them, the statement added. The four-side committee is a joint intelligence-sharing cooperation between Russia, Syria, Iran ...*(More on P4)...(15)*

## Neighbor News

### Sharif Removes Pak Petroleum Secretary



ISLAMABAD - Ahead of formal launch of gas schemes, the Pakistani government on Friday removed Petroleum Secretary Arshad Mirza and directed him to report to the establishment division.

Raja Jalal Sikandar Sultan, a close friend of prime minister's secretary Fawad Hassan Fawad, has been transferred and posted as additional secretary in charge of the petroleum ministry.

This is the second major change in the energy sector after the removal of Water and Power Secretary Younas Daghera on March 31. Informed sources said Mr Mirza had to face the ire of the prime minister for taking lightly a gas development scheme for Murree he had personally cleared three to four months ago. He

was called on an urgent basis from Karachi early in the morning for an explanation and sent packing by the evening. According to the sources, explanations were also sought from the managing director of Sui Northern Gas Pipeline Limited and the director general gas, who said the approval of required funding for the Murree gas scheme had not reached them.

The sources said the prime minister was unhappy that a scheme cleared much earlier on his desire could be clubbed with now politicised schemes cleared after the removal of moratorium on gas connections recently that had been criticised by the media and Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah for being politically motivated. (Monitoring Desk)

### Brother of Late Rafsanjani Registers to Run in May Elections

TEHARN - A brother of late President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani has registered to run in the upcoming Iranian presidential elections in May. Associated Press journalists watched as Mohammad Hashemi Rafsanjani, 75, registered Saturday — the last day of the registration period.

Mohammad Hashemi Rafsanjani was head of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) for 10 years until 1994. He was also a member of

the Expediency Council, an administrative assembly that plays an advisory role to Iran's Supreme Leader, or head of state.

The family of late Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani is supporting incumbent President Hassan Rouhani, who is running for a second term.

The upcoming vote will be seen, among other things, as a referendum on the 2015 nuclear agreement with world powers. (AP)

### Uzbekistan Aims to Build Strong Relations with Neighbors: FM

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan's foreign policy is primarily aimed at creating strong relations with neighbor countries, Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov told reporters in Tashkent at an International Press Club meeting.

The Foreign Ministry is taking all diplomatic and political measures to ensure the peaceful life of the Uzbek people, according to Kamilov. Touching upon the issue of water use in the region, the foreign min-

ister said he sees no alternative to a common regional agreement on the use of trans-boundary water resources in Central Asia.

He noted that the countries of the region must come to an agreement, taking into account the interests of one another.

It was earlier reported that presidents of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan agreed on sustainable use of trans-boundary water resources of the region. (Trend)

### Turkmen President Due in Kazakhstan

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov will pay a visit to Kazakhstan on Apr. 18-19, the Turkmen government has said.

The visit was mullied in a meeting of the Turkmen Cabinet of Ministers, where Berdimuhamedov noted that the upcoming summit with his Kazakh counterpart will give an effective momentum to the de-

velopment of bilateral cooperation.

Diplomatic relations between Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan date back to 1992. Ashgabat and Astana have been discussing the prospects of trade and economic partnership, cooperation in the gas sector, agriculture, the development of trans-boundary mineral deposits, transportation, environment and fishery. (Trend)