

Beijing Warns Against 'Bullying' Its Citizens amid Ongoing US-Huawei Saga

BEIJING - In an apparent message to Washington, China has warned against "bullying" its citizens and "creating new opponents," after the Huawei CFO was arrested in Canada on a US warrant. "China will never sit idly by and ignore any bullying that violates the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens," Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Tuesday, just before the chief financial officer of Chinese tech giant Huawei was granted bail in Canada. Meng Wanzhou was detained by Canadian authorities on December 1, almost immediately after presidents Trump and Xi Jinping agreed to a 90-day ceasefire in the ongoing trade conflict dispute. Meng



was apprehended, on Washington's request, for allegedly violating US sanctions on Iran. While the foreign minister did not mention the Huawei CFO in his speech, he did

warn the US that "there is no need to artificially create new opponents" at a time when both countries are trying to strike a trade deal. "The US should abandon its zero-sum game mindset, take a positive

view of China's development and continuously expand the mutually beneficial space and prospects," Wang said. Trump apparently took notice of this advice on Tuesday, suggesting he may personally intervene to save Meng from prosecution if it helps accomplish an agreement with China. "If I think it's good for what will be certainly the largest trade deal ever made - which is a very important thing - what's good for national security - I would certainly intervene if I thought it was necessary," Trump told Reuters shortly after the CFO was granted a \$7.5 million bail by a judge in Vancouver. (Russia Today)

Nobel Laureate Returns to Iraq, Pledges to Work for Peace

BAGHDAD - Iraqi activist Nadia Murad met her country's president in Baghdad on Wednesday after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for her advocacy on behalf of victims of wartime sexual violence. Murad, a member of Iraq's Yazidi minority, was among thousands of women and girls who were captured and forced into sexual slavery by Islamic State militants in 2014. She became an activist on behalf of women and girls after escaping and finding refuge in Germany. She arrived in Baghdad from Stockholm on Wednesday,

and was received by President Barham Salih. "There is no meaning to the Nobel prize without the ongoing work for the sake of peace," Murad told group of community leaders and foreign ambassadors at the presidential palace. Murad is a member of Iraq's Yazidi minority, followers of an ancient faith who are falsely branded devil-worshippers by Sunni extremists. When IS swept into northern Iraq in 2014 the militants massacred thousands of Yazidi men and enslaved an estimated 7,000 women and girls. (AP)

British PM Theresa May to Face No-Confidence Vote by Lawmakers

LONDON - A British Conservative Party official says Prime Minister Theresa May will face a no-confidence vote from party lawmakers. Graham Brady says the threshold of 48 letters from lawmakers needed to trigger a leadership vote has been reached. Brady chairs the party committee that oversees leadership contests. Many lawmakers have been growing angry with May over her handling of Brexit. If she loses the vote of



party legislators, taking place on Wednesday evening, May must step down. If she wins, she can't be challenged again for a year. (AP)

'Total Mobilization': Strasbourg Bans Public Demos amid Massive Manhunt for Christmas Market Gunman



PARIS - With a major operation underway to find the suspect, France has raised its threat level and introduced extra security and border controls, as

well as a ban on public assemblies in Strasbourg, following the Christmas market attack. The city of Strasbourg was subject to a "rein-

forced grid," French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said on Tuesday night, hours after the attack on the market left two people dead and 14 others injured. "We are currently in a reinforced vigilance stance," he said, noting that demonstrations are now banned in the city to allow a "total" police mobilization to ensure public safety. Announcing that protests and public demonstrations have been temporarily banned in the city, the minister explained this would allow the po-

lice to "totally mobilize" to ensure public safety. "All assemblies, either stationary or as a march (cortege), are banned until the order is rescinded. Anyone in breach of the order will be subject to the penalties provided for by law," Strasbourg authorities said in the official notice of the protest assembly ban, issued immediately after Castaner's statement. Additional resources are being deployed to Strasbourg to help local units engage in a search for the suspect. (Russia Today)

Greece Cancels Pension Cuts after Budget Improvements

ATHENS, Greece - Greek lawmakers have voted to cancel a major round of pension cuts which were to take effect on Jan. 1, following a fast-track debate procedure in parliament. Lawmakers in the 300-seat parliament voted unanimously late Tuesday in favor of canceling the cuts that would have been worth around 1 percent of Greece's annual GDP. The measures would have seen 1.4 million of Greece's 2.6 million pensioners suf-

fer monthly losses of at least 14 percent, according to European Commission estimates. Greece's third and final international bailout program ended in August, but the country pledged to continue imposing stringent fiscal policies for years to come in return for lenders' promise to ease repayment terms on existing loans. Bailout lenders recently agreed the cuts were no longer necessary for a balanced budget. (AP)

India to Launch 35th Communication Satellite

NEW DELHI - The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Wednesday said it would launch communication satellite GSAT-7A on Dec. 19. The satellite would be launched from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) in Sriharikota, off the Bay of Bengal coast located in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. "India's Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV), in its 13th flight, will launch the 2,250 kg operational communication satellite, GSAT-7A from the Second Launch Pad (SLP) of Satish Dhawan Space Centre SHAR, Sriharikota on December 19, 2018," the space agency said in a statement. (Xinhua)

Spain PM Accuses Catalan Separatists of 'Lying' Like Brexiters

MADRID - Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Wednesday accused Catalan separatists of basing their cause on "lies" and "manipulation", comparing them to Brexit supporters in Britain. Using an unusually tough tone in parliament, he said both movements were built on "a tale of invented grievances, magnified by manipulation". "It is necessary to remember that Brexit was based on a grotesque campaign of lies and unprecedented misinformation," he told lawmakers. Sanchez said Catalan separatists "only have lies to back their political positions." "With Brexit we face a movement which goes against history and also against reason... Brexit and the Catalan separatist movement advance on parallel paths and with similar rhetoric. (AFP)

North and South Korean Soldiers Enter Each Other's Territory

SEOUL - Soldiers from North and South Korea crossed into each other's territory peacefully for the first time on Wednesday, Seoul said, as they began checking the dismantlement of guard posts in the Demilitarized Zone. The North invaded the South in 1950, triggering the Korean War, and Seoul went on to change hands four times as Pyongyang's Chinese-backed forces and the US-led UN troops supporting the South fought their way up and down the peninsula and back again. The conflict ended in an armistice in 1953, leaving the two technically still in a state of war, but a rapid reconciliation has taken place this year.



The South's President Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong Un, leader of the nuclear-armed North, agreed to remove a limited number of guardposts along their heavily-fortified frontier at a September summit in Pyongyang, among other measures. North Korea blew up 10 of its facilities in November, while the South tore 10 down on its own side using excavators.

South Korean inspectors visited each of the guard posts on the North's side on Wednesday to make sure they had been dismantled and all firearms and troops removed, Seoul's defence ministry said. North Korean inspectors carried out the same process at the South's bunkers in the afternoon, it added. (AFP)

Oil Producers to Review Cuts Impact in April: UAE

DUBAI - Oil producers who agreed last week to trim production to boost prices will meet in April to review the impact and sign a long-term pact, the UAE minister said Wednesday. OPEC and some non-OPEC producers decided to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day for six months from January after world prices shed a quarter of their value in just

a few weeks. Prices currently hover around \$60 a barrel, down from more than \$85 a barrel in early October in the face of fears of weaker demand and an increase in supplies. "In April, we will have a meeting to review the decision," United Arab Emirates Energy Minister Suhail al-Mazrouei told reporters on the sidelines of a conference in Dubai. (AFP)

Sri Lanka's Sacked Prime Minister Wins Confidence Vote

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka - The former Sri Lankan prime minister whose October sacking by the president precipitated a political crisis won a confidence vote in Parliament on Wednesday. Ranil Wickremesinghe received 117 votes in favor in the 225-member legislative body. The result is expected to increase pressure on President Maithripala Sirisena to reappoint Wickremesinghe as prime minister. Sirisena has vowed not to reappoint him despite criticism that such refusal is against the constitution. After Sirisena sacked Wickremesinghe, he appointed his former rival Mahinda Rajapaksa in his place. Sirisena has said he has no cultural coherence with Wickremesinghe, who is more Westernized and holds liberal views. Sirisena had opposed Wickremesinghe's economic policies and his efforts to investigate alleged abuses during Sri Lanka's long civil war, which ended in 2009. Wickremesinghe's sacking has precipitated bitter political bickering, physical fighting in Parliament and a sequence of complex court battles. Soon after being appointed prime minister, Rajapaksa sought to secure a working majority in Parliament but failed. Sirisena dissolved Parliament and ordered fresh elections and the move has been stayed by the Supreme Court. Rajapaksa has been defeated twice in no-confidence motions in Parliament and also had his and his ministers' finances cut by majority votes. (AP)

Neighbor News

US, EU Exports to Iran Soar Despite Sanctions

TEHRAN - The US and Europe diverge on the need to uphold a landmark nuclear deal with Iran, but their trade path has taken a curiously similar trajectory since Washington re-imposed sanctions on Tehran in August. While Iran's exports to the United States almost reached zero in October, its imports from the country grew, a month after the first round of the sanctions was imposed, new data has shown. Meanwhile, German exports to the Islamic Republic soared during the period. Official figures by the Federal Statistics Office showed German companies exported almost 400 million euros (\$455 million) to Iran in October, a rise of 85

percent year-on-year. Chemicals made up about half the German goods and machines and plant equipment accounted for a third, Reuters reported. German exports to Iran grew by 4 percent to 2.4 billion euros in the first 10 months of this year, with Michael Tockuss of the German-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry expecting them to continue growing. The report is one rare piece of good news in an ongoing struggle to keep European trade with Iran on track. For months, the Europeans have been working on a virtual clearing house to process Iran-related transactions independent of the US. (Press TV)

Acting Minister of Textile Industry Appointed in Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - Turkmen Deputy Minister Ogulhajat Ishangulyev has been appointed acting Minister of Textile Industry of Turkmenistan, Trend reports citing a presidential decree released Dec. 12. Former minister of textile industry, Nepes Gaylyev, has been dismissed from this position for serious work-related shortcomings. More than one million tons of cotton are grown annually in Turkmenistan, and this serves as a raw material base for the development of the textile industry. The textile industry of

Turkmenistan is represented by a wide range of exported products - from cotton fiber and yarn to finished garments and knitwear, which are produced by the largest textile complexes in Central Asia, located in the capital and in all regions of the country. A significant part of the products of Turkmenistan supplied abroad are home textiles, sportswear and jeans, produced under the world-famous trademarks IKEA, Puma, Walmart, Lidl, Bershka, Pool & Bear, River Island, Cosco. (Trend)

Dushanbe Mayor Takes Education Sector under Control

DUSHANBE - Dushanbe Mayor Rustam Emomali has signed a decree on establishing the Education Development Council under the City Administration, Trend reports referring to news.tj. The Council members include representatives of the municipal authorities, science and education. The mayor himself will head the Council, according to the Dushanbe mayor's office. At the same time, the mayor signed a decree on abolishing the Education Development Council that was estab-

lished on March 5, 2015. The new Council has been established for the purpose of coordinating activities of the Dushanbe-based education facilities and professional communities, as well as public associations dealing with child, family, school and society issues, an official source at the Dushanbe mayor's office told Asia-Plus in an interview. According to him, the mayor ordered heads of Dushanbe's districts and relevant municipal agencies to provide assistance to the Council. (Trend)

China Steady on Iran Oilfields, to Ditch South Pars Project: Report

TEHRAN - China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) has decided to continue investing in two major Iranian oilfields but suspend investment in the South Pars natural gas project, Reuters claimed on Wednesday. CNPC convinced the US to continue investing in the North Azadegan and Masjid-i-Suleiman (MIS) oilfields, the news agency quoted two unidentified Chinese sources as saying. Senior US officials reportedly met CNPC executives in Beijing, most recently in October, and pressed them against injecting fresh financing in Iran. The Chinese company convinced the US that it needed to continue investing in the two Iranian fields to recoup the billions of dollars spent under buy-back con-

tracts signed years ago, the sources allegedly told Reuters. CNPC brought online the first phase of North Azadegan with 75,000 barrels per day (bpd) of output in November 2016. The field on the border with Iraq is estimated to contain 5.7 billion barrels of crude reserves. In March, former managing director of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Ali Kardor said the second phase of North Azadegan was being considered for development under a new contract model and CNPC was interested. Iran's Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh said last month that CNPC had replaced Total in the multibillion-dollar South Pars gas project after the French company left Iran due to the return of US sanctions. (Press TV)