

# U.S. Embassy Unlikely to Move to Jerusalem before 2020: Tillerson

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Tuesday the U.S. embassy in Israel was unlikely to be moved to Jerusalem before 2020, national media outlets reported.

"It's not going to be anything that happens right away," U.S. news daily the New York Times quoted Tillerson's speech at the State Department to report on Tuesday.

"Probably no earlier than three years out, and that's pretty ambitious," the head of the State Department added.

U.S. President Donald Trump announced on Wednesday the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and his intention



of moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The declaration serves "the interest of the United States and the peace between Israel and the Palestinians," said Trump at a televised speech.

Speaking of the moving of the U.S. embassy, Trump said the State Department will immediately begin to hire architects and engineers, so as to make the new embassy "a magnificent tribute to peace" when completed.

Trump's decision, which was seen as undermining the Middle East peace process and further destabilizing the region, has drawn condemnation and opposition globally. (Xinhua)

## Neighbor News

### China Responds to Tillerson's Statements on Korean Peninsula Nuclear Issue

BEIJING - China on Wednesday responded to U.S. State Secretary Rex Tillerson's statements, by calling on the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to step forward for dialogue and contact.

Tillerson said at a forum in Washington, D.C. Tuesday that the United States was ready to talk with the DPRK without preconditions.

"We have noticed the remarks. It has been a consistent stance of the Chinese government to peacefully resolve the peninsula issue through dialogue and negotiation," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lu Kang at a press briefing. "China welcomes all efforts to ease tension and promote dialogue to resolve the problem."

"China has proposed a dual track approach and suspension for suspension initiative to settle the issue," said the spokesman. "We hope the United States and the DPRK will meet each other halfway and take a significant step to engage in dialogue and contact. China will continue to play a constructive role in promoting proper settlement of the peninsula issue in a peaceful way." (Xinhua)

### Tillerson Signals Diplomatic Talks with DPRK, Seemingly Lacking Trump Endorsement

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Tuesday that Washington is willing to talk with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) "without precondition," a rhetoric seemingly not fully supported by U.S. President Donald Trump.

"We're ready to have the first meeting without precondition," Tillerson made the remarks at a policy forum at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank, signaling a new diplomatic opening for dialogue with Pyongyang.

"Let's just meet," the top

U.S. diplomat told an audience of around 300 on Tuesday afternoon. "We can talk about the weather if you want. However, responding to Tillerson's remarks which differed from the harsh tone that has long been held by the Trump administration, the White House said there was no policy change on the DPRK. "The President's views on North Korea (the DPRK) have not changed," said the White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders in a statement released hours after Tillerson's speech. (Xinhua)

### Syrian Gov't, Opposition Delegations Continue Indirect Peace Talks in Geneva

GENEVA - Syrian peace talks continued here Tuesday, with United Nations (UN) Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura meeting and holding separate bilateral talks with both the Syrian government and opposition delegations. It is the 8th round of Syrian peace talks led by the UN. The government delegation, headed by its UN representative Bashar al-Jaafari, made no statement after the meeting with the UN envoy. While the opposition claimed, "there is an opportunity here in Geneva this week

that we must take for the sake of our people." "The opportunity is to sit down, face to face, under the chairmanship of the UN Special Envoy, and begin negotiations on political transition on the basis of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254," the opposition delegation said in a statement issued after their meeting with de Mistura. "Our goal is a transition to make Syria safe for our people to come home," the statement said. The opposition has remained firm in their stance that Syrian



President Bashar al-Assad must be deposed as a prelude to any political process, which is seen by the government as unacceptable, since the Syrian government forces have retaken key and large areas from the rebels. The new round of the UN-led Syrian peace talks started on Nov. 28 and is scheduled to continue until Dec. 15. The major obstacle for any expected breakthrough was described by the UN as a lack of trust. (Xinhua)

### US Lawmakers Agree US-Pakistan Cooperation Essential to Achieve Common Objectives

WASHINGTON - Board-based partnership between Pakistan and the United States was vital to achieving common bilateral and regional objectives, Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Aizaz Chaudhry Wednesday said during his meetings with the US lawmakers at Capitol Hill. As part of his outreach to the US Congress, the Ambassador met Republican Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas. Senator Cotton is a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He also serves on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

Separately, the Ambassador met with Congressman Mark Meadows, a Republican member of the House of Representatives from North Carolina. Congressman Wilson serves on the House Foreign

Affairs Committee. Ambassador Chaudhry updated Senator Cotton and Congressman Meadows on the latest developments in the sphere of bilateral relations. He said that a broad-based partnership between Pakistan and the United States remained vital to achieving their common bilateral and regional interests. The Ambassador briefed the U.S. legislators on Pakistan's successes in the fight against terrorism and the government's efforts for economic stabilization. Ambassador Chaudhry said that Pakistan shared the United States' aspiration for peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan's domestic and security gains were at risk from continued instability in Afghanistan. (Monitoring Desk)

### China, Russia Conclude Joint Counter-Terror Exercises



YINCHUAN - Chinese and Russian forces concluded their joint counter-terror exercises Wednesday at a training base

near Yinchuan, capital of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in northwest China. Troops from the Chinese People's Armed

Police Force and the Russian National Guard conducted exercises on jointly cleaning up terrorist groups in simulated

situations, such as a bus hijacking. Wang Ning, commander of the Chinese People's Armed Police Force, said the participating officers and soldiers cooperated with each other closely and carried out exchanges on counter-terror expertise and combat and command. "This is the latest achievement in promoting exchanges and cooperation in security between the two forces, and a concrete action in improving their counter-terror capabilities," Wang said. (Xinhua)

### British PM May Says Lawmakers to Vote on Final Brexit Deal



LONDON - British Prime Minister Theresa May said on Wednesday that the final Brexit withdrawal agreement will be put to a vote in both houses of parliament. "We will put the final withdrawal agreement between the UK and the EU to a vote in both houses of parliament before it comes into force," May told parliament. "Of course after we leave, the withdrawal agreement will be followed up by one or more agreements covering different aspects of the future relationship and we will introduce further legislation where it is needed to implement this into UK law, providing yet another opportunity for proper parliamentary scrutiny." (Reuters)

### Iran Urges Muslim Nations to Defend Palestinians after Trump Move

ISTANBUL - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday all Muslim nations should work together to defend the rights of Palestinians following Donald Trump's decision last week to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Rouhani, attending an emergency meeting of Muslim leaders, said the U.S. president's move showed the United States lacked any respect for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian nation. "Iran is ready to cooperate with all Muslim countries without any precondition to defend the legitimate rights of Palestinians," Rouhani told the gathering in the Turkish city Istanbul. "Unity among Muslim countries is very important and Quds (Jerusalem) should become our top priority." Opposition to Israel and support for the Palestinian cause have been central to Iran's foreign policy since the Islamic revolution of 1979 that toppled the U.S.-backed Shah. Iran, the leading Shi'ite Muslim power, and Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia are competing for influence in the Middle East, where they support rival groups in Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. (Reuters)

### Putin Submits Deal on Syrian Naval Base to Parliament

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin has submitted to the lower house of parliament an agreement with Syria, under which Damascus will allow Moscow to keep its naval facility in the Syrian port of Tartus for at least 49 years. The document posted on the website of the Russian State Duma on Wednesday states that the deal may be automatically extended every 25 years after its expiry. Under the deal, which was signed on Jan. 18, Russia and Syria agreed to expand and overhaul the maintenance infrastructure in Tartus, which was established in 1977 and is currently Russia's sole naval support facility in the Mediterranean region. The deal allows Russia to deploy up to 11 warships, including nuclear-powered combat vessels, to the Syrian port. (Xinhua)

### German Chancellor, Centre-Left in Talks to Break Stalemate

BERLIN - Chancellor Angela Merkel meets Social Democrat leaders on Wednesday, in a new bid to end a political stalemate nearly three months after elections left Germany in limbo. The meeting at 7 pm (1800 GMT), which also gathers the leader of Merkel's Bavarian allies, comes after SPD chief Martin Schulz obtained the blessing from his party last week to hold open-ended talks with the chancellor. Germans handed Merkel a victory with no majority in the September 24 polls, and after coalition talks with two smaller parties collapsed, she is struggling to forge a new government to run Europe's biggest economy for the next four years. (AFP)

### DPRK Might be Digesting UN Message: UN Official

UNITED NATIONS - UN Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman said Tuesday that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) could be digesting the message he took to Pyongyang last week. During his visit on Dec. 5-8, Feltman met with DPRK Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho and Vice Foreign Minister Pak Myong Guk. The DPRK officials needed time to discuss internally and brief their leaders on the UN message, Feltman told reporters at UN Headquarters in New York after he briefed the Security Council on his visit to Pyongyang.



The DPRK interlocutors listened carefully, asked questions and argued with his delegation, said Feltman. The DPRK side did not make any specific pledges, he said. "Time will tell what was the impact of our discussions. But I think we have left the door ajar. And I fervently hope that the

door to a negotiated solution will now be opened wide," he said. The DPRK officials agreed that Feltman's visit was the first step and the dialogue should continue, said Feltman. He said he underscored the need to prevent miscalculation and reduce the risk of conflict. (Xinhua)

### ASEAN+3 Countries to Strengthen Solidarity and Cooperation in Culture Field

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN - The 13th ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Senior Officials Meeting on Culture and the Arts (SOMCA) and Related Meetings with Dialogue Partners concluded here on Wednesday. At the meeting, a consensus was reached to promote solidarity and cooperation in culture field among ASEAN member countries and their three dialogue partners, namely China, South Korea and Japan. The meeting aimed to strengthen solidarity and cooperation among member

countries in envisioning a peaceful and stable community with enhanced capacity response to effectively face challenges faced by ASEAN. Hajah Norlila, permanent secretary at Brunei's Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports as the Chairperson of the 13th SOMCA, said in her welcoming remarks. The 13th SOMCA and Related Meetings with Dialogue Partners discussed the status and actions implemented following the decision taken during the 7th AMCA and 12th SOMCA and Related Meetings with Dialogue Partners. (Xinhua)

### EU Parliament Backs Opening Next Round of Brexit Talks

STRASBOURG, France - The European Parliament on Wednesday gave its backing to opening the next phase of Brexit talks, but said Britain must "fully and faithfully" turn last week's hard-fought divorce deal into a final exit treaty. Parliament President Antonio Tajani welcomed the vote in Strasbourg, eastern France, as "an important step forward" but said MEPs still had concerns about citizens' rights and the Irish border. The resolution, which passed by 556 votes to 62 with 68 abstentions, includes a stinging rebuke for Britain's Brexit minister David Davis, saying comments he made at the weekend "risk undermining" the negotiations. Davis caused alarm by telling the BBC on Sunday that a deal struck in Brussels last Friday after six months of tough, at times acrimonious talks was a "statement of intent" rather than "legally enforceable". This prompted the EU to toughen its stance on trade talks and warn London against backsliding on the agreement, which paves the way for an EU summit this Friday to open the next round of negotiations, covering Britain's future relations with the remaining 27 members of the bloc. The European Parliament will have the final say on any eventual Brexit deal in 2019, but Wednesday's vote was not binding. "While I am optimistic as far as the second phase is concerned, we have to ensure that the joint report presented last week is fully and faithfully translated into the wording of the exit treaty," Tajani said. (AFP)

### Uzbekistan Restoring Closer Military Ties with Russia

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan has agreed to buy Russian attack helicopters, the latest sign that the new leadership in Tashkent is committed to reversing the country's previous policy of shunning Moscow's military advances. The purchase of the 12 Mi-35 helicopters wasn't formally announced, but reported by Russian news agency IASS, citing a "diplomatic source." The source said the deal was reached after "prolonged negotiations" during the visit of Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev to Tashkent in November. The deal appears to be the first significant arms purchase made under the leadership of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who assumed power last year after the death of long-time president Islam Karimov. Mirziyoyev has been opening up the country in a variety of directions, including in the military sphere. And he seems to be opening up to no one as much as Russia. In October the two countries held their first joint military exercises since 2005. Uzbekistan also took part, albeit in a limited fashion, in Russia-led exercises in Tajikistan earlier this year, which would not have happened under Karimov. (Agencies)