

# Putin, Trump Discuss "Urgent" Bilateral Issues, Korean Peninsula

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump discussed "urgent issues" in bilateral diplomatic relations and the situation on the Korean Peninsula in a phone call Thursday, the Kremlin said in a statement.

"At the initiative of the American side, urgent issues of the bilateral agenda were discussed, as well as the situation in hot-spots with a focus on the settlement of the Korean nuclear crisis," the statement read.

Earlier in the day, Putin said at an annual press conference that he believed in Trump's ability to honor the promises made during the latter's election campaign on getting relations be-



tween Moscow and Washington back on track.

The White House said in a statement that Trump thanked Putin "for acknowledging America's strong economic performance in his annual press conference."

The two also discussed working together to resolve the "very dangerous situation" on the Korean Peninsula, the White House said. U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said that while the Trump administration is still determined to force Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear arsenal, Washington is willing to "have the first meeting without preconditions" with representatives of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. (Xinhua)

## Security Council to Hold Ministerial-Level Meeting on DPRK

UNITED NATIONS - The UN Security Council (UNSC) will hold a ministerial-level meeting Friday on the "threats and challenges" posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to international peace and security, diplomatic sources said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson are expected to be present at the meeting to be chaired by Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono, with the presence of a DPRK representative.

Some other Security Council members will also be represented at the ministerial-level meeting, according to the sources. Japan, the rotating chair of the UNSC in December, has circulated a note, suggesting Security Council members could focus on nuclear and missile development programs as well as other weapons of mass destruction. The members are also interested in the follow-up to UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman's visit to Pyongyang from Dec. 5-8. (Xinhua)

## EU Launches Next Phase of Brexit

BRUSSELS - The European Union agreed on Friday to move talks forward with London on Britain's exit from the bloc as leaders warned to the British premier, but there was little clarity on trade, as well as on some issues already discussed. On the second day of a Brussels summit, EU leaders agreed "sufficient progress" was made after a deal on citizens' rights, the Irish border and Britain's outstanding payments, giving negotiators a mandate to move on to the main phase of talks. "EU leaders agree to move on to the second

phase of Brexit talks. Congratulations PM Theresa May," European Council President Donald Tusk, who chairs EU summits, said on Twitter. Discussion of a transition period to calm nerves among businesses is due to start in the new year, although talks on a future free trade pact will not begin until after March -- a date underlined by "guidelines" that set out how to proceed as Brit-



ain seeks to unravel more than 40 years of membership.

May replied via Twitter, thanking Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude

Junker: "Today is an important step on the road to delivering a smooth and orderly Brexit and forging our deep and special future partnership," May said. (Reuters)

## UN Regrets "Missed Opportunity" as New Round of Geneva Talks on Syria Fails to Move Ahead



GENEVA - The UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura said Thursday evening that the way Intra-Syrian peace talks proceed will

come after he speaks to the Security Council as the eighth round ended Thursday without "real negotiations" taking place. The UN official is expect-

ed to leave Geneva to consult in New York with the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on further steps, where he will also meet with the UN Security Council next week. He told a press conference after announcing the end of the new round of the UN-led Geneva peace talks on Syria that the last two weeks of talks had not yielded the intended results despite great efforts, which he described as a "missed golden opportunity".

"Though a lot of efforts by my whole team have been made, day and night, with all sorts of creative formulas, we only have bilateral discussions with both parties, we did not have real negotiations," de Mistura said. The UN envoy said that both the government side and the opposition group had accused each other of setting preconditions, but there had been none in Geneva before the talks proceeded. (Xinhua)

## Merkel Says Tougher Brexit Work Lies Ahead

BRUSSELS - German Chancellor Angela Merkel says even tougher work lies ahead after the European Union agreed to move talks on Britain's departure to the second stage. The talks starting in the new year will involve wide-ranging discussions on the future relationship between Britain and the 27 remaining EU nations, including trade. Merkel said Friday: "We have taken a good step forward. The second phase can begin -- but with that, an even harder piece of work begins than what we had so far." Merkel added that the 27 nations staying in

the EU have worked together and maintained their unity "wonderfully" so far in the Brexit negotiations, "and I am hopeful and very optimistic that we will also succeed in doing this as the process continues." In a joint statement, groups including the British Chambers of Commerce, the Confederation of British Industry and the Federation of Small Businesses say a delay in beginning trade talks "could have damaging consequences for business investment and trade, as firms in 2018 review their investment plans and strategies." (AP)

## Muslim Nations to Go to UN over Jerusalem: Erdogan

ISTANBUL - Turkey's president says Muslim nations will ask the United Nations for an "annulment" of President Donald Trump's controversial decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Recep Tayyip Erdogan says the initiative would start at the U.N. Security Council and if it's "vetoed there, we will work within the U.N. General Assembly for the annulment of this unjust and lawless decision." Erdogan spoke to a rally in the central province of Konya via teleconference on Friday. His comments followed Wednesday's summit of Muslim and Arab nations -- the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation -- which declared east Jerusalem the capital of occupied Palestine and urged the world to recognize the state of Palestine. Turkey has been one of the most vocal critics of Trump's Dec. 6 decision on recognizing Jerusalem. (AP)

## Britain, Japan Agree to Strengthen Defense Ties

LONDON - Britain's recently appointed Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson said here Thursday that 2018 will mark the year British and Japanese military forces work even more closely together.

His comments came after Williamson and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson met their Japanese counterparts at Greenwich Naval College to strengthen security and defense cooperation between the two countries. Britain and Japan both agreed a three-year defense cooperation plan, with a communiqué after Thursday's meeting saying: "It demonstrates the UK's dedication to working with Japan as a long term security partner, including activity across air, land and sea in the Asia Pacific region." (Xinhua)

## S. Korea to Continue Efforts for Peaceful Resolution of Korean Peninsula Issue: Ministry

SEOUL - South Korea's unification ministry confirmed its position Friday that it will continue efforts to peacefully resolve the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue. Lee Yu-jin, deputy spokesperson of the unification ministry, told a press briefing that there has been no change in the government's position to continue efforts for the peaceful resolution of the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue in cooperation with the international community. She said South Korea



will not accept the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s unilateral claim that it had completed its nuclear force. The deputy spokesperson added that Seoul

will continue efforts to encourage the DPRK to come to a path to peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula until Pyongyang gives up its nuclear and missile programs. (Xinhua)

## Russian Presidential Election Slated for March 18

MOSCOW - The Russian Federation Council, or the upper house of parliament, on Friday officially set the country's presidential election date for March 18, 2018.

The resolution setting the date to be published on Monday will effectively give a start to the election campaign, chairman of the Federation Council's Constitutional Legislation Committee Andrei Klisshas said in a statement.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has declared his intention to participate in the race as an independent candidate, is widely expected to win his

fourth term. The latest public opinion poll by government-owned research center VTSIOM showed that Putin's approval rating stood at 53.5 percent as of Dec. 10, up from 53.0 percent a week earlier, leaving all possible rivals far behind. To be registered as an independent presidential candidate, a candidate has to collect at least 300,000 voters' signatures on his or her behalf by Feb. 1.

If a candidate wishes to run within the framework of a political party, this party will have to collect no less than 100,000 signatures on the candidate's behalf. (Xinhua)

## Turkish, Iraqi, U.S. Military Officials Meet to Discuss Security Issues



ANKARA - The highest-ranking military officials of Turkey, Iraq and the U.S. on Thursday discussed issues about counter-terrorism and regional security at a trilateral meeting in Ankara, the Turkish Armed Force (TSK) said.

Joseph Votel, U.S. Central Command Commander, Curtis Scaparrotti, commander of U.S. Forces in Europe, and Iraqi Chief of General Staff Osman Ghanimi were present at the meeting hosted by Turkey's Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar, the TSK said in a written statement.

The officials discussed the general security situation in the region, particularly in Syria and Iraq, and measures needed to fight terror organizations, said the statement, without giving further details.

According to local Hurriyet Daily News, the meeting is believed to have focused on efforts to prevent the resurgence of the Islamic State and other extremist groups in both Syria and Iraq. On Dec. 9, the Iraqi government declared full liberation of Iraq from IS militants, saying Iraqi forces have recaptured all the areas once seized by the extremist group. (Xinhua)

## Neighbor News

### Britain's Finance Minister in China to Promote Trade

BEIJING - Britain's finance minister told the Chinese premier there are "many opportunities" for closer commercial ties as he started a visit Friday aimed at developing trade as the United Kingdom prepares to leave the European Union. British leaders are looking to China for trade and investment as they try to fashion a new global role and offset reduced access to the European common market. Chinese officials believe a post-Brexit Britain needs China more than ever but its companies are uneasy about the future of a market they see as one of Europe's most welcoming.

Philip Hammond was in Beijing for an annual "economic dialogue" that has taken on added significance this year. He was

accompanied by an unusually large delegation of businesspeople and British economic officials for such an event.

Premier Li Keqiang, China's top economic official, expressed confidence in "steady and sound growth" of Chinese-British relations regardless of what happens between London and the EU.

"We see many opportunities to build on our strong relationship," said Hammond in the meeting at the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing, the symbolic seat of China's government.

Both governments have declared themselves to be in a "Golden Era" of relations. They say they want closer cooperation in finance, clean energy, nuclear power and other fields. (AP)

### Political, Non-Political Forces Need to Respect 'Rule of the Game': Mamnoon

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain on Friday called upon the country's political and non-political forces to have respect for law and 'Rule of the Game' to find solutions to the matters of national importance.

"The issues we are facing today relating to politics, economy, society, religion and administration and even sensitive matter such as countering of enemy are rooted in disrespect of law and violation of Rules of the Game," the President said at a seminar held in connection with the birth anniversary of Quid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, held here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr.

The President warned that the same approach of rivalry at national level, if continued, could lead to

chaos which would be difficult to overcome.

"Setting aside mutual adversities, the best way is to sit together and settle the issues with unity, patriotism and nationalism," he said. President Mamnoon said such situation could also affect the economic stability and progress as envisioned for this country.

He advised all segments of nation particularly youth to focus their energies on achieving the national objectives of prosperity and development and refrain from indulging in political and non-political disputes including pointless discussions on the working of government. The President stressed the need for unity among all ranks of nation and to avoid becoming part of anarchy. (Monitoring Desk)

### Iran Expresses Reservations about OIC Summit's Documents

TEHRAN - Iran has expressed reservations about certain articles of the documents adopted at a recent emergency summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Jerusalem al-Quds, which suggest, somehow, the recognition of the occupying Israeli regime.

On Wednesday, the 57-member Muslim body held an emergency summit in Istanbul, Turkey, to coordinate a response to a decision by the US on December 6 to recognize Jerusalem al-Quds as the "capital" of Israel.

In its final communiqué, the OIC declared that it would recognize "East Jerusalem [al-Quds] as

the capital of the State of Palestine and invite all countries to recognize the State of Palestine and East Jerusalem as its occupied capital." The main summit was preceded by a meeting of the OIC Foreign Ministers, during which the participants adopted a declaration dubbed "Freedom for al-Quds." Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif also attended the event. Speaking to reporters on Thursday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi reiterated the Islamic Republic's support for the "inalienable rights of the Palestinian people." (Presstv)

### US to Assist Uzbekistan in Joining WTO

TASHKENT - The US will assist Uzbekistan in joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Ministry of Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan said in a message.

On Dec. 14, the ministry hosted a meeting with Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asian Affairs Mark Linscott, and the sides discussed issues of Uzbekistan's accession to the WTO. In addition, the issues related to Uzbekistan's membership in the US Generalized System

of Preferences and legal protection of intellectual property were discussed in detail.

"Agreements were reached, in particular, on the US technical assistance to Uzbekistan in the process of the country's accession to the WTO," the ministry said. "In order to promote these issues, permanent contacts will be established among officials of the Ministry of Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan and the office of the US trade mission." (Trend)