

## Belarus' Leader Slams Russian Talk of Taking over His Nation

MINSK, Belarus - The leader of Belarus on Friday accused some politicians in Russia of floating the prospect of incorporating his nation, and vowed that he wouldn't let it happen.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko also criticized the Kremlin's plan to raise crude oil prices for Belarus, describing it as part of efforts to persuade his country to join Russia.

"I understand what all those hints mean: You get the oil but you break up your country and join Russia," he said at a news conference.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Lukashenko engaged in televised bickering during a meeting of a Moscow-dominated economic alli-



ance earlier this month, with the Belarusian leader assailing Moscow for its intention to charge higher prices for energy supplies to Belarus.

Putin countered that Belarus would still get

the energy resources at much cheaper prices than others, and noted that a deeper integration is needed to level the prices between the two countries.

Lukashenko on Friday cited Russian ul-

tranationalist lawmaker Vladimir Zhirinovskiy as one of those who have suggested that Belarus should be incorporated into Russia.

"It will never happen," the Belarusian president said. "Sovereignty is a sacred thing for us." Lukashenko has ruled the nation of 10 million with an iron hand for nearly a quarter century, cracking down on dissent and the media. He has relied on Russia's loans and cheap energy to keep Belarus' Soviet-style economy afloat. Despite the close political, economic and military ties between the two ex-Soviet neighbors, Lukashenko has bristled at what he described as Moscow's attempts to subdue his nation. (Fox News)

### Russia Claims US Ignoring Outreach on Nuclear Disagreement

MOSCOW - Russia wants to sit down with Pentagon officials for "open and specific" talks on alleged violations of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty, the Russian Defense Ministry said Saturday.

The U.S. claims Russia is violating the INF treaty, and on Dec. 4 issued an ultimatum that Moscow come into compliance with the accord in 60 days, or else Washington will withdraw. Russia denies it's in breach

of the treaty. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu sent his counterpart, U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis, a proposal for launching a dialogue three days ago, according to a statement Saturday. But Russia says it hasn't received any official reply from the Pentagon, which spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said proves that the U.S. is unwilling to maintain professional dialogue with Moscow on security issues. (AP)

UNITED NATIONS - The U.N. envoy for Yemen called Friday for the urgent deployment of U.N. monitors to observe the implementation of a cease-fire in the strategic port city of Hodeida and the withdrawal of rival forces - a potential breakthrough in Yemen's four-year civil war. Martin Griffiths told the Security Council that a speedy presence in the field is "an essential part of the confidence" needed to accompany implementation of Thursday's

agreement between Yemen's government and Houthi Shiite rebels reached after eight days of negotiations in Sweden.

Griffiths said in a video briefing from Amman, Jordan that Dutch Maj. Gen. Patrick Cammaert will lead the monitoring mission and could be in the region "as soon as the middle of next week."

While calling the achievements at the talks "a significant step forward," Griffiths also urged caution saying



"what's in front of us is a daunting task ... and the hard work is only about to begin."

The conflict in Yemen began with the 2014 takeover of the capital, Sanaa, by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who toppled the government of Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. (AP)

### UN Envoy: UN Monitors Needed to Observe Yemen Cease-Fire

### Sri Lanka's Disputed Prime Minister Resigns to End Impasse



COLOMBO, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka's disputed prime minister resigned on Saturday, saying he wanted to end a long political impasse over his ap-

pointment and allow the president to form a new government.

Mahinda Rajapaksa signed a letter of resignation, flanked by lawmak-

ers from his party and blessed by Buddhist and other religious leaders in the presence of media. It was not immediately clear if the letter had been handed over to President Maithripala Sirisena.

"Since I have no intention of remaining as Prime Minister without a general election being held, and in order to not hamper the President in any way, I will resign from the position of Prime Minister and make way for the President to form a new government," Rajapaksa said in a statement.

He was to deliver an address to the nation later Saturday in which he was expected to explain his resignation.

Lakshman Yapa Abeywardena, a lawmaker close to Rajapaksa, told reporters on Friday that Rajapaksa had decided to step down to end a crisis that began in October when Sirisena sacked Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. Sirisena then named Rajapaksa the new prime minister, but Parliament twice rejected the appointment. (Fox News)

### China's Xi Declares an 'Overwhelming Victory' over Graft: State Media

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping has declared an "overwhelming victory" in his fight against graft within the ruling Chinese Communist Party, while still vowing that the campaign to weed out deep-seated corruption will continue, state media reported.

Xi has pledged to wage war on graft until corruption of all kinds has been expunged at all levels of the Communist Party, from high-level "tigers" to low-level "flies".

He proclaimed during a twice-a-decade meeting of the top party leadership in October 2017 that his fight against graft had achieved "overwhelming momentum". However, Xi announced at a meeting of the party's Politburo on Friday that the fight had now obtained an "overwhelming victory", state broadcaster CCTV reported. The shift from "momentum" to "victory" reflects an important judgment from the party leadership, CCTV said. (Reuters)

### US, Canada Look to Ease Strains amid 3-Way Spat with China

WASHINGTON - The United States and Canada moved Friday to ease tensions between them over the case of a top Chinese technology executive whose arrest by Canadian authorities has sparked a diplomatic crisis entangling the three countries.

Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei, was arrested in Canada on Dec. 1 at the request of the United States, which wants her extradited to face charges that she and her company misled banks about the company's business dealings in Iran.

China detained two Canadians this week in apparent retaliation for Meng's detention. (AP)

### One 'Nebulous' Word Sends Sparks Flying over Brexit Talks

BRUSSELS - As if the Brexit negotiations aren't tense enough, a "nebulous" linguistic fog briefly spread across the European Union summit on Friday.

One word sent sparks flying between two of the biggest protagonists, British Prime Minister Theresa May and EU Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker.

EU leaders have rebuffed May's request to sweeten the divorce agreement and help her win over a hostile U.K. Parliament, and Juncker complained to reporters Thursday about a political climate which was sometimes "nebulous, imprecise."

Juncker thought little more of it - until a clearly angry May confronted him at the summit table Friday. (Fox News)

### Australia Recognizes West Jerusalem as Israel's Capital

SYDNEY - Australia has decided to formally recognize west Jerusalem as Israel's capital, but won't move its embassy until there's a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced Saturday.

Morrison said in a speech that Australia would recognize east Jerusalem as Palestine's capital only after a settlement has been reached on a two-state solution. The Australian Embassy won't be moved from Tel Aviv until such a time, he said.

While the embassy move is delayed, Morrison said his government would establish a defense and trade office in Jerusalem and would also start look-



ing for an appropriate site for the embassy.

"The Australian government has decided that Australia now recognizes west Jerusalem, as the seat of the Knesset and many of the institutions of government, is the capital of Israel," Morrison said. He said the decision respects both a commitment to a two-state solution and long-standing

respect for relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions. Australia becomes the third country to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, following the U.S. and Guatemala. Unlike its predecessors, however, Australia recognized only the western part of the city. The move, therefore, is unlikely to please either side entirely. (AP)

### 'Time to Learn from the French!' Yellow Vest Protests Spread to Israel, 10 Arrested

Outraged by the rising cost of living and price hikes on basic services, Israeli citizens who were inspired by the French Yellow Vest movement took to the streets of Tel Aviv demanding concessions from the government.

Wearing bright fluorescent yellow vests, symbolic of the French grassroots movement, some 600 Israeli activists blocked the Azrieli intersection and adjacent roads in the city center,

accusing the government of "robbing" the people.

Concerned over the rising price of electricity, water and food, organizers stressed that the "time has come to learn from the French" and that they are "done being nice." The crowd boldly advised Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet to address their grievances before the "entire country is on fire." (Russia Today)

### Fake News Vs Fact in Online Battle for Truth

PARIS - Since US President Donald Trump weaponized the term "fake news" during the 2016 presidential election campaign, the phrase has gone viral. Increasingly it is used by politicians around the world to denounce or dismiss news reports that do not fit their version of the truth.

But as news outlets defend their work, false information is saturating the political debate worldwide and undermining an already weak level of trust in the media and institutions.

The term has come to mean anything from a mistake to a parody or a deliberate misinterpretation of facts.

At the same time, misinformation online is increasingly visible in attempts to manipulate elections.

The build-up to Trump's 2016 victory, for example, saw numerous examples of hoaxes and false news stories: from Hillary Clinton's alleged links to a child sex ring to a false report the Pope had endorsed Trump.

Misinformation had "a significant impact" on voting decisions, according to Ohio State University researchers, who questioned voters. But it was impossible to prove that false information swung the election for Trump.

As president, Trump still denounces any information that displeases him as "fake news". Experts say his aides, meanwhile, have offered a mixture of truth and distortions, sometimes described as "alternative facts". "Lies and fabrication even seem to bolster one's reputation and political prowess among their core supporters," said John Huxford of Illinois State University, who researches false information. (AFP)

## Neighbor News

### Pakistan's Long-Term Debt Rating Downgraded

ISLAMABAD - Fitch Ratings, one of the three major global rating agencies, on Friday downgraded Pakistan's long-term debt rating to 'B-Negative' owing to high debt repayment obligations, low foreign exchange reserves and fragile fiscal situation. The outlook, however, remains stable.

The New York-based agency said the downgrading of the rating from 'B' to 'B-' reflected heightened external financing risk from low reserves and elevated external debt repayments, as well as continued deterioration in the fiscal position, with a rising debt-to-GDP ratio. It said that a suc-

cessful conclusion of the ongoing negotiations on IMF support could help stabilise external finances, but the programme would then face significant implementation risk. Pakistan's liquid reserves have continued to fall, reaching \$7.3 billion as of Dec 6 - equivalent to 1.5 months of imports - despite significant stabilisation efforts by the State Bank of Pakistan and the new PTI government.

The rating agency projected high gross financing needs, with an expected narrowing of the current account deficit offset by higher external debt service payments relative to last year. (Agencies)

### Iran, Russia, Turkey to Meet UN Envoy on Syria Next Week: UN Statement

TEHRAN - The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura will hold talks with senior officials from Iran, Russia and Turkey, as guarantors of the Syria peace process, in Geneva early next week, a UN statement says.

According to the Friday statement, talks among the UN diplomat and high-level officials from the three countries will focus on setting up a "credible, balanced, and inclusive" committee to draft a new constitution for Syria and usher in elections.

It added that the meeting will take place ahead of de Mistura's monthly presentation to the UN Security Council set for December 20.

Late in November, the guarantor states of the Astana peace process ended their 11th round of talks in the Kazakh capital, reiterating their strong commitment to Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Iran, Russia and Turkey also rejected "all desperate attempts" by foreign-backed militant groups to undermine the sovereignty of the Syrian nation.

At the end of the tenth round of the two-day International Meeting on Syria in the Black Sea resort of Sochi on July 31, Tehran, Moscow and Ankara expressed their firm determination to counter any plot aimed at partitioning the Arab country. (Press TV)

### Uzbekistan Reveals Stats on Companies with Foreign Capital

TASHKENT - In January-November 2018, the number of enterprises with foreign capital operating in Uzbekistan grew by 1,863 (33.8 percent) and amounted to 7,371, Trend reports on Dec. 13 referring to the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan.

Of the total number of enterprises, 3,923 are joint ventures, 3,448 are companies with completely foreign capital. Reportedly, the biggest number of enterprises with foreign capital is in the sphere of industry - 2,947 (40 percent), trade - 1,616 (21.9 percent)

and other spheres - 1,216 (16.5 percent), the smallest - in the sphere of healthcare and social services - 96 (1.3 percent).

Of the total number of enterprises established during the eleven months of 2018, 391 are with participation of capital of residents of Russia, 329 - Turkey, 302 - China, 222 - Kazakhstan, and 153 - South Korea. Also, interest in joint activities in 2018 was shown by residents of Afghanistan, India, Germany, Ukraine and Azerbaijan. (Trend)

### Tajik Researcher Receives Sheikh Hamad Award for Translation and International Understanding

DUSHANBE - Tajik researcher Saidrahmon Sulaymoni has received the Sheikh Hamad Award for Translation and International Understanding, Trend reports referring to news.tj.

An international conference of translators took place in Doha, Qatar on December 11-12. Scientists and researchers from twenty countries of the world reportedly participated in the conference.

Winners of the Sheikh Hamad Award for Translation and International Understanding (SHATI) were named on December 12 and Professor Saidrahmon Sulaymoni was among the winners.

Meanwhile, Qatari media reports say SHATI-2018 received 203 entries from 31 countries an increase of 30 percent compared to 141 entries in 2017. This year, SHATI has

reportedly added five new languages including Italian, Russian, Japanese, Bosnian and Swahili in a bid to enhance the interaction with Arab and other cultures of the world.

Last year, five eastern languages had been added including Chinese, Japanese, Persian, Urdu and Malayalam.

The First Category 'Translation Prizes' are subdivided into 'Translation from Arabic into English'; 'Translation from English into Arabic'; 'Translation from Arabic into a language other than English'; 'Translation from a language other than English into Arabic.'

The Second Category 'Achievement Prizes' were awarded for the translation works from five selected languages into Arabic and from Arabic into these languages. (Trend)