

UN Council to Vote on Monitors for Truce at Key Yemen Port

UNITED NATIONS - The U.N. Security Council called a vote for Friday on a resolution that would authorize the use of U.N. monitors to observe the implementation of a cease-fire in Yemen's important port of Hodeida and the withdrawal of rival forces from that area. Passage could offer a potential breakthrough in the four-year civil war that has brought the Arab world's poorest country to the brink of starvation. The U.N. envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, has urged rapid deployment of U.N. monitors as "an essential part of the confidence" needed to help implement the Dec. 13 cease-fire agreement between Yemen's government and Houthi Shiite rebels. The pact also calls for the "phased but rapid mutual with-



drawals" of fighters from Hodeida as well as its main docks and two others in the province. The fragile cease-fire has halted months of heavy fighting in Hodeida, which handles 70 percent of the food and humanitarian aid

imported into Yemen. But the Saudi-led coalition backing the government bombed an air base in the rebel-held capital of Sanaa on Wednesday, and Yemeni officials have reported sporadic artillery and automatic

weapons fire.

There had been intense negotiations over the past week on a British-drafted resolution that would authorize the U.N. monitors, including over whether to condemn Iran for supplying weapons to the Houthis - a statement that the U.S. wanted and Russia strongly opposed.

Then the United States surprised the council by circulating a stripped-down rival resolution Thursday. It is exceedingly rare for allies to present rival resolutions to the Security Council.

The British responded by putting their draft in a final form that can be voted on, and diplomats said it would be put to a vote on Friday morning. (Fox News)

Neighbor News

Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev Becomes "Asian of The Year"

TASHKENT - President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has been selected as "Asian of the Year" for 2018 by the Asia Journalist Association (AJA), Trend reports referring to Uzbek media.

The winners were selected after final deliberation by the AJA leaders and each country's representatives' evaluation. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the President of Uzbekistan, was named for the politics category, as he tried to settle peace and

continue interaction between countries in Central Asia. Since he became president in Dec. 2016, he has reformed policies to open the economy and improve human rights, releasing political prisoners.

Other winners include Koo Bon-moo, the late former chairman of LG Group, Park Hang-seo, the Korean coach of the Vietnam national football team and Magdi Habib Yacoub, an Egyptian thoracic surgeon. (Trend)

Tajikistan Works out Draft Law on Managing Conflict of Interest in the Public Service

DUSHANBE - The Agency for State Financial Control and Combating Corruption and the Public Service Agency under the President of Tajikistan are working out a draft law on managing conflict of interest in the public service, Trend reports referring to news.tj.

The draft law is currently in the consultation phase and is being discussed by relevant ministries and agencies.

The law on managing conflict of interest in the public service is reportedly expected to promote reduction of corruption in government bodies. A conflict of interests is a situation in which a person or organization is involved in multiple interests, financial or otherwise, and serv-

ing one interest could involve working against another. Typically, this relates to situations in which the personal interest of an individual or organization might adversely affect a duty owed to make decisions for the benefit of a third party. Any conflict of interest must be resolved in favor of the public interest.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that ensuring that government decisions are not influenced by public officials' private interests is a growing concern. New forms of partnerships between government and the private sector present new challenges for policymakers and public managers. (Trend)

Turkmenistan Starts Construction of Ashgabat-Turkmenabat Highway

ASHGABAT - At a government working meeting, Deputy Prime Minister of Turkmenistan Dadebay Amangeldiyev presented the general scheme of location and technical characteristics of the Ashgabat-Turkmenabat high-speed highway, Trend reports citing the Neutral Turkmenistan newspaper.

He also spoke about the plan of placing payment terminals along this route, as well as resting places with motels, parking lots and other engineering and communication facilities. In accordance with the project, maintenance and

road service points are also envisaged along the route with a length of 600 kilometers and a width of 34 meters.

Earlier it was reported that Turkmenautoban OJSC will build the highway. A soft state loan in the amount of up to \$2.4 billion was allocated for the implementation of this project.

The commissioning of the Ashgabat-Turkmenabat highway will allow improving the quality of logistics services, expanding the international transit and transport infrastructure, and increasing trade with neighboring countries. (Trend)

IRGC Vows to Continue Missile Tests, Research More Actively Than Ever

TEHRAN - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says it will continue its missile tests and research more actively than ever in defiance of the US pressure and sanctions. Speaking to Iran's official news agency IRNA on Friday, IRGC deputy commander for coordination Brigadier General Ali Fadavi said conducting research on military equipment and missiles is a permanent job of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps.

Fadavi described it as a vital issue for Iran just like breathing, and asked, "Is it possible [for a person] to stop breathing?" He pointed to the US pressures and sanctions on the Islamic Republic, and said they are always opportunities for Iran, as they create conditions for the country to rely

on its own capabilities. "The harsher the sanctions get, the more defensive capabilities Iran will achieve," he added. Fadavi's comments came a few weeks after the latest ballistic missile test by the Iranian armed forces. The move was described as a significant one by IRGC Aerospace Commander Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh.

"We will continue to conduct our missile tests and this latest one was particularly significant," Hajizadeh said on Dec. 11, reacting to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's position on Iran's missile tests. Hajizadeh said that Iran conducts more than 50 missile tests each year. "That the Americans react to certain tests is indicative of the [amount of] pressure on them." (Press TV)

'We'll Crush Them!' Greece Threatens NATO Ally Turkey over Aegean Islets

ATHENS - Greece's top military brass have fired off a set of unusually stern warnings to Turkey, threatening to crush its troops if they dare to land on any disputed islet in the Aegean Sea - but Ankara didn't mince its words either.

Reacting to violations of Greek airspace by Turkish jets over the Aegean, Defense Minister Panos Kammenos warned that Ankara would pay a price. "If they make the slightest move, we will crush them," Kammenos

threatened. Athens wants peace and harmony, he said, but it won't "concede a single centimeter" of its land.

The minister was visiting a military outpost on the small Aegean island of Leros, so the bellicose rhetoric could be explained by his desire to raise the troops' morale. But it was also echoed by Admiral Evangelos Apostolakis, chief of the Hellenic General Staff. "If the Turks land on a rocky islet, we will raise it to the ground. (Russia Today)

India, China Discuss Enhancing Academic Exchanges, Tourism

NEW DELHI - The foreign ministers of India and China on Friday discussed steps to deepen ties through academic exchanges and tourism even as they vie for influence with their smaller neighbors.

Sushma Swaraj and Wang Yi at their meeting in New Delhi took up enhancing cooperation in tourism, art, film, media, culture, yoga, sports, academic and youth exchanges, according to a tweet from India's External Affairs Ministry spokesman Raveesh Ku-

mar.

"As our relations are deepening and our regional and international role evolving, there are expectations from our two countries to lead Asia and usher in an 'Asian Century,'" Swaraj said in a message ahead of a meeting of the Indian Council of World Affairs and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Wang attended the inaugural meeting of a forum that is part of a cultural exchange program set up by the two countries in April. A series of re-

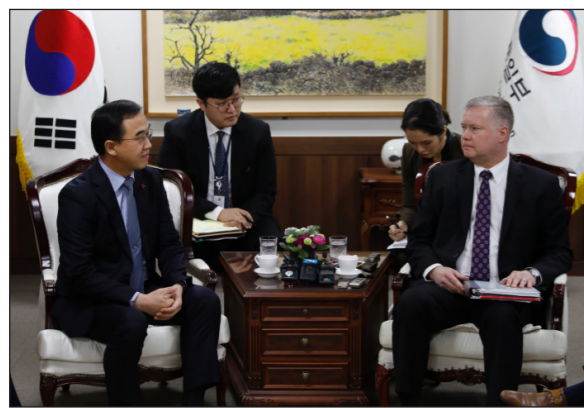


cent India-China meetings have eased tensions along their contested border after last year's 10-week standoff in the neighboring state of Bhutan. The countries fought a border war in 1962 over

a disputed border.

Swaraj said Friday the armies of the two countries were making efforts to strengthen contacts to promote peace and tranquility in the border areas. (AP)

US Envoy Optimistic about N. Korea despite Latest Friction



SEOUL, South Korea - The Trump administration's special envoy for North Korea on Friday expressed optimism about the diplomatic push to

resolve the nuclear crisis, a day after the North issued a surprisingly blunt statement saying it will never disarm unless the U.S. removes what it calls

a nuclear threat. Stephen Biegun said ahead of a meeting with South Korean officials that the allies are committed to ending seven decades of hostility and creating a "new, brighter future for all of the Korean people."

He did not directly address the North Korean statement, which jared with Seoul's rosier presentation of the North Korean position and could potentially rattle the fragile diplomacy between Washington, Seoul and Pyongyang to defuse a nuclear crisis that last year had many fearing

war. Biegun's comments echoed those of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who told a Kansas radio station that Washington and Pyongyang were still working through the execution of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's "commitment to denuclearize." "We are hopeful that in the new year President Trump and Chairman Kim will get together not too long after the first of the year and make even further progress on taking this threat to the United States away from us," Pompeo said. (Fox News)

Germany Closes Last of Black Coal Mines That Shaped Country

BERLIN - Germany is closing its last black coal mines, ending an industry that laid the foundations for the country's industrial revolution and its post-war economic recovery.

On Friday, Miners planned to hand German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier a symbolic last lump of coal hauled up from 1,200 meters (3,940 feet) below ground at the Prosper-Haniel mine in the western city of Bottrop. Along with another mine, in the town of Ibbenbueren about 100 kilometers (62 miles) to the north, it will be formally

shuttered at the end of the year.

"This marks the end of a significant era in Germany," government spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer said.

"Black coal enabled the industrialization of the region and with it prosperity in all of Germany," she added. "This should be honored because we all benefit, even indirectly, to this day." Black coal mines once dominated the Ruhr region surrounding Bottrop, employing up to half a million people at their peak in the 1950s. (AP)

Global Stocks Sink for 2nd Day after Wall Street Slide

BEIJING - Global stocks fell further Friday after Wall Street slid on recession fears, putting markets in London, Frankfurt, Shanghai and Tokyo on track to end 2018 down more than 10 percent. In early trading, Germany's DAX lost 0.5 percent and France's CAC 40 retreated 0.4 percent. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index fell 1.6 percent and the Shanghai Composite Index ended down 0.8 percent. The Chinese market is 2018's worst performer, down nearly 25 percent for the year. Stocks usually end the year with a flourish. (AP)

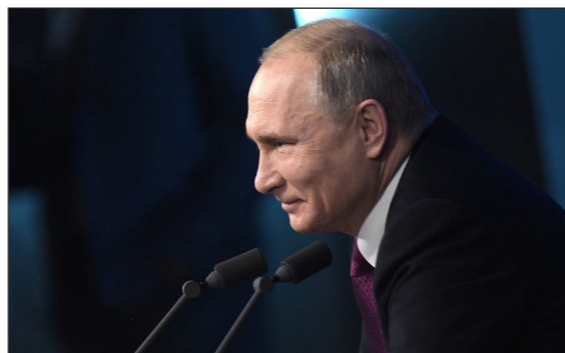
Japan Accuses South Korea of 'Extremely Dangerous' Radar Lock on Plane

TOKYO/SEOUL - Japanese Defence Minister Takeshi Iwaya "strongly protested" to South Korea on Friday after a South Korean destroyer allegedly locked its targeting radar on a Japanese surveillance plane. Iwaya, speaking to reporters at his ministry, described the action as "extremely dangerous that could cause an unexpected situation". The incident came at a time when greater coordination is called for between the two Asian neighbors to tackle issues including North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, maritime security and natural disasters, he said. "It's extremely regrettable that the incident of this time happened," Iwaya said. "We will urge South Korea to prevent a recurrence." South Korea's defense ministry said its destroyer was performing routine operations. (Reuters)

Rule The World? Not Us. Get Married? Someday. Putin's Quips at Annual Q&A

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin is a no-nonsense public speaker, and his four-hour annual Q&A was bound to produce some examples of his trademark wit. Here are some of Putin's most noteworthy replies.

On wanting to rule the world "When it comes to ruling the world, we know very well where those who are trying to do exactly that have their headquarters," Putin said. "And it's not in Moscow," he added. On the benefits of sanctions "Our economy adapted to [the sanctions]. Yes, there are negative ef-



facts, but there are also plus points from this whole sanction business," the president said. "It made us switch our brains on in many areas." On the Crimea referendum conundrum "If it was an illegal seizure, then the people of Crimea aren't guilty of anything. But if they came and voted - then

there was no annexation. Sanctions have been imposed against the Crimean citizens. But if they did nothing wrong - why were they introduced?" the head of state wondered. "And if they were imposed over the vote - then it must be acknowledged that the vote succeeded." (Russia Today)

Brazil AG Seeks Corruption Charges against President Temer

RIO DE JANEIRO - Brazil's attorney general has accused President Michele Temer of sitting at the center of "an institutionalized system of corruption" and has asked the courts to charge him with crimes as soon as he leaves office at the year's end. Attorney General Raquel Dodge filed a request late Wednesday asking the Supreme Court to assign the case to a lower court after Temer loses his limited protections from prosecution. "The evidence we have collected in our

investigations points to an ongoing pernicious scheme based on trading favors, with Michele Temer at the center creating an institutionalized system of corruption," Dodge said. The case focused on Grupo Rodrimar, a company accused of funneling bribes through companies associated with the president. Prosecutors say one of the companies, Argeplan, paid for renovations of Temer's residence in 2000 and again for his daughter Maristela's house in 2014. (Fox News)

Pope Vows Church Will 'Never Again' Ignore Abuse Accusations

VATICAN CITY - Pope Francis vowed Friday that the Catholic Church will never again treat abuse allegations without "seriousness and promptness", calling on abusers to hand themselves in to police. "The Church will never seek to hush up or not take seriously any case," the pope said in his annual address to the Church's governing Curia at the Vatican. "Let it be clear that before these abominations the Church will spare no effort to do all that is necessary to bring to justice whosoever has committed such crimes". A litany of child sexual abuse scandals has rocked the Roman Catholic Church, which has 1.3 billion followers around the world, with the pope as recently as Wednesday accepting the resignation of a US auxiliary bishop over his "misconduct" with a minor. "It is undeniable that some in the past, out of irresponsibility, disbelief, lack of training, inexperience, or spiritual and human short-sightedness, treated many cases without the seriousness and promptness that was due.

"That must never happen again. This is the choice and the decision of the whole Church." The pope on Friday also called on for anyone who has committed child abuse, including priests, to hand themselves over to justice. "To those who abuse minors I would say this: convert and hand yourself over to human justice, and prepare for divine justice," the pope told Curia. (AFP)