

# UN Security Council Imposes New Sanctions on North Korea

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. Security Council unanimously approved tough new sanctions against North Korea on Friday in response to its latest launch of a ballistic missile that Pyongyang says is capable of reaching anywhere on the U.S. mainland. The resolution adopted by the council includes sharply lower limits on North Korea's refined oil imports, the return home of all North Koreans working overseas within 24 months, and a crackdown on ships smuggling banned items including coal and oil to and from the country. But the resolution doesn't include even harsher measures sought by the Trump admin-



istration that would ban all oil imports and freeze international assets of the government and its leader, Kim Jong Un. The resolution, drafted by the United States and negotiated with the North's closest ally China, drew criticism from Russia for the short time the 13 other council nations had to consider the draft, and last-minute changes to the text. Two of those changes were extending the deadline for North Korean workers to return home from 12 months to 24 months — which Russia said was the minimum needed — and reducing the number of North Koreans being put on the U.N. sanctions blacklist from 19 to 15. (AP)

## US Weapons Will Only Fuel Fighting in Ukraine

MOSCOW — The U.S. decision to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons will only fuel hostilities and raise casualties from the conflict in the country's east, Russian officials and lawmakers warned Saturday. The angry response from Moscow comes a day after President Donald Trump's administration approved a plan to provide weapons to Ukraine, including Javelin anti-tank missiles. Ukraine has long sought the weapons for its fight against Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine that has killed

more than 10,000 since April 2014. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that the U.S. administration's move has "crossed a line," adding that the U.S. can no longer claim a mediatory role. "Washington has sought to cast itself as a 'mediator,'" he said in a statement. "It's not a mediator. It's an accomplice in fueling a war." Without mentioning the U.S. decision, France and Germany on Saturday urged combatants to fully implement a much-violated ceasefire agreement. (AP)

## Merkel, Macron Say No Alternative to Peaceful Settlement in Eastern Ukraine

PARIS — German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron urged the parties involved in an increase of ceasefire violations in eastern Ukraine to implement decisions they have already agreed upon as soon as possible. Ukrainian officials, security monitors and Kiev's foreign backers had warned on Wednesday that Moscow's decision to withdraw from a Ukrainian-Russian ceasefire control group could worsen the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

Macron and Merkel said in their statement there was no alternative to an exclusively peaceful settlement and called for a return of the Russian officers to the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination. Russia had accused the Ukrainian side of obstructing their work and limiting access to the front line. "In the light of the volatile security situation, they ask the sides for immediate and verifiable steps to remedy this situation," Macron and Merkel's statement said. "It is necessary to im-



plement agreements on the disengagement and the withdrawal of heavy weapons behind the agreed withdrawal lines, withdrawal of tanks, artillery and mortars to the agreed storage sites". "Other aspects of the Minsk agreements, like the withdrawal of foreign armed formations or the return of control over the Russian-Ukrainian border need to be addressed seriously as well." (Reuters)

## Russia's Ruling Party Seeks Putin's 'Ultimate Victory' at 2018 Election



MOSCOW — Russia's ruling party United Russia wants the "ultimate victory" of President Vladimir Putin at the presidential election in March, party head and Prime Minister

Dmitry Medvedev said on Saturday. Putin, 65, said earlier this month he would run for re-election as a self-nominated candidate, in a contest he seems sure to

win comfortably, extending his grip on power into a third decade. Speaking at an annual gathering of United Russia, Medvedev said the party was Putin's party, and his key political resource. Medvedev promised it would support Putin in the election, which is scheduled for March 18. "We will give you, Vladimir Vladimirovich, all possible support, now and in the future," said Medvedev, addressing Putin by his first and patronymic names. Putin has been in power

since 2000 either as president or prime minister. If he wins what would be a fourth presidential term, he will be eligible to serve another six years until 2024, when he turns 72. Putin thanked Medvedev for the support and announced some goals for the future, such as higher economic growth and better healthcare. "We need to achieve a long-range steady increase in real incomes of citizens, to increase pensions and social support," he said. (Reuters)

## Russia Must Have Best Forces to Resist Aggression: Putin

MOSCOW — Russia should have the best armed forces in face of the "aggressive" plans of the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday. "Russia should be among the leading states, and in some areas — the absolute leader in building the army of a new generation, the army of the new technological era," Putin said at a meeting of senior Defense Ministry officials. "This is of utmost importance for ensuring our sovereignty, peace and

security of our citizens, for a confident development of the country and for an open and independent foreign policy in the interests of our country," he said. He called the new security strategy recently outlined by the U.S. Administration "offensive" and "aggressive", saying that the Russian military should take this into account in their practical work. He said that although Russian nuclear forces had a level that provided "reliable strategic deterrence", they should be developed further. (Xinhua)

## Spanish PM Rules out Talks with Puigdemont after Catalan Vote

MADRID — Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy on Friday said he would not hold talks with exiled Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont in the wake of the results of Catalan regional elections held Thursday. The elections saw the center-right party Ciudadanos, led by Ines Arrimadas, claim most seats and votes. But with 37 seats in the 135-seat Catalan assembly, she is well short of a majority (68 seats) and would not be able to form one, even if Ciudadanos attempted to form a coalition with the Spanish Socialist Party and Rajoy's People's Party (PP). The Socialists had 18 seats and PP just three, leaving the three pro-constitution forces with a total of 58 seats. While Puigdemont's Junts per Catalonia party claimed 34 and Esquerra Republicana, whose leader Oriol Junqueras is currently in prison, won 32. Should the two separatist parties reach agreement, they will be able to form a government if the radical separatist party CUP, which won four seats, supports them or offers to abstain from government. However, after congratulating voters for an election with no incidents, Rajoy ruled out speaking to Puigdemont saying the person he "has to sit down with is Arrimadas." He said that he would only speak to Puigdemont, who is in exile in Belgium and has a Spanish arrest warrant to his name, when he is "in a condition to speak to me." Rajoy also said the elections showed Catalonia was a "plural" region and that "nobody can speak in the name of Catalonia." He added any new Catalan government would have to abide by the law, obey the Spanish Constitution, and that he would lift article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, which suspended Catalan autonomy until the region had a new government. (Xinhua)

## France's Macron Says to Recognize Palestinian State "At Right Time"

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday said he would recognize a Palestinian state "at the right time," reiterating Paris' commitment to a two-state solution for lasting peace in the region. "Is unilateral decision to recognize Palestine effective? I do not believe, because it would be a reaction to an unilateral decision that has caused unrest in the region," he told reporters. "I will do it at the right time when I judge it will be useful to build peace on the ground and not... under pressure," he added at a joint press conference with visiting Palestinian



President Mahmoud Abbas. Abbas denounced the United States' "partisan spirit" in handling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, stressing that Washington "disqualified itself" from the Middle East peace process due to its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. "The United States are no longer an honest

mediator in the peace process, we will not accept any plan put forward by the United States," Abbas said. In 1967, Israel took over East Jerusalem from Jordan and declared the whole city as its eternal indivisible capital in 1980. But, it has not been recognized by the international community. (Xinhua)

## Trump Signs Tax Cut Bill into Law

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday signed a 1.5-trillion-dollar tax cut bill into law, as well as a spending bill to keep the federal government running through January 19, 2018. The U.S. Congress this week passed the tax bill along party line, with no Democrats voting for it. At the signing ceremony, Trump called it "a bill for the middle class and a bill for jobs," adding that "corporations are literally going wild." The tax bill, the sweeping rewrite of U.S. tax law since 1986, would cut the corporate income tax rate to 21 percent from the current 35 percent and lower individual income rates. The tax bill is expected to add

1.46 trillion U.S. dollars to federal deficits over the next 10 years, according to estimates by the nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation. In order to avoid further adding budget deficits, the individual tax cuts would expire by the end of 2025, while the corporate tax cuts would be permanent in order to stimulate investment. With Trump's signature, the tax bill will become effective from January, 2018. On Friday, Trump also signed a short-term spending bill that cleared the House and Senate Thursday night. The spending bill included 4.7 billion dollars in emergency funding requested by the administration for missile defense. (Xinhua)

## Pence Says Administration Fully Cooperating with Mueller's Russia Probe

WASHINGTON — U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said Thursday that the administration is fully cooperating with the Russia probe led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller. Mueller is investigating allegations of Russian interference in last year's U.S. presidential election and collusion between U.S. President Donald Trump's campaign and Moscow. Pence, reportedly speaking to reporters during an unannounced trip to Afghanistan, made the remarks when asked whether he would agree to be interviewed by the special counsel's team if there is a request. "Let me just say we are fully cooperating with the special counsel and will continue to provide any and all assistance and information," Pence said. GOP critics and conservative media outlets have said the investigation is tainted with bias against Trump. Several Republican congressmen have urged Mueller to step down, while Trump said he's not considering firing Mueller. Last week, Mueller's team received tens of thousands of emails sent and received by officials from Trump's transition team before the start of the presidency. A lawyer for the transition team accused Mueller of illegally obtaining those emails, while a spokesman for Mueller defended himself against any wrongdoing. Mueller's probe entered a new phase earlier this month when former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his contacts with Russia. (Xinhua)

## Neighbor News

### India, China Pledge to Develop Stable, Healthy Bilateral Relations

NEW DELHI — India and China have pledged here to develop stable and healthy bilateral relations to contribute to regional and world stability and development. While meeting with visiting Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi on Friday, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his country has always attached great importance to developing ties with China. Modi said India is willing to joint hands with China to enhance mutual beneficiary cooperation so as to develop stable and healthy bilateral ties which is conducive to regional and world stability and development. For his part, Yang said Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Indian prime

minister have met for several times in recent years, which has played a strategic leading role for the development of bilateral relations. China is ready to work together with India to strengthen strategic communication, promote strategic mutual trust and broaden pragmatic cooperation in all sectors to become good neighbors, who coexist peacefully, and good friends, who collaborate sincerely to revitalize their countries, in a bid to make important contribution to stability and prosperity in Asia and the world at large, Yang said. Yang was in India for the 20th round of talks between Chinese and Indian special representatives on boundary issues. (Xinhua)

### Pakistan, Turkmenistan Agree To Further Enhance Bilateral Economic Ties

ISLAMABAD — President Mamnoon Hussain and Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov Saturday expressed their satisfaction at the current level of bilateral relationship between the two countries. They expressed these views during a telephonic call made by Turkmenistan president to the president of Pakistan, Foreign Office said in a press statement. They agreed that both sides needed to make efforts to further enhance the economic relations through joint ventures in agriculture, textile, livestock and IT sectors. The two leaders acknowledged the importance of early implementation of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project. The Turkmenistan president informed that Turkmenistan had com-

pleted the rail network up to the border of Afghanistan and expressed his desire to extend it to Pakistan. President Mamnoon Hussain appreciated and welcomed the Turkmenistan efforts aimed at enhancing connectivity between both the countries and the region. The Turkmenistan president invited president of Pakistan to witness the ground breaking ceremony for the Afghanistan section of the TAPI gas pipeline project scheduled to be held in February 2018 at Turkmenistan-Afghanistan border. He also conveyed New Year greetings and expressed his gratitude to President Mamnoon Hussain for witnessing the inaugural ceremony of the V-Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games held in September in Ashgabat. (Monitoring Desk)

### Iran Urges EU Support for Drug War

TEHRAN — Iran's ambassador to the Netherlands called on European states to support Tehran in its fight against drug trafficking. In a meeting with a group of Dutch lawmakers, Alireza Jahangiri highlighted the heavy costs the war on drugs has inflicted on Iran, saying the country has lost many servicemen in the battle against narcotics smuggled to Europe, Tasnim News Agency reported. Iran is on a major transit route for drugs being smuggled from Afghani-

stan to Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Despite high economic and human costs, the Islamic Republic has been actively fighting drug trafficking. The war on drug trade originating from Afghanistan has claimed the lives of nearly 4,000 Iranian police officers over the past three decades. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Iran is netting eight times more opium and three times more heroin than all other countries in the world combined. (Agencies)

### Turkmenistan Preparing For Parliamentary Elections

ASHGABAT — Parliament of Turkmenistan is working jointly with the Central Commission for Elections and Referendums to organize elections of MPs as well as members of provincial and district authorities

on March 25, 2018, Vatan newspaper reported Dec. 23. Among the primary tasks are the provision of openness and alternatives in elections. Election campaigns were started on December 4. (Trend)

### Uzbek President Says Economic Data Was 'Fiction' For Years

TASHKENT — President Shavkat Mirziyoyev said on Friday Uzbekistan had reported inflated economic growth and employment figures for years, describing the amplified numbers as "fiction", and promised more reforms in the Cen-

tral Asian nation. The former Soviet republic has reported gross domestic product growth of about eight to 10 percent for a decade, although foreign economists have often questioned the quality and veracity of its data. (Reuters)