

Kremlin Says Ready to Mediate North Korea-U.S. Talks, if Both Sides Willing

MOSCOW - Russia is ready to act as a mediator between North Korea and the United States if both parties are willing for it to play such a role, the Kremlin said on Tuesday. Moscow has long called for the two sides to hold negotiations aimed at reducing tensions over the nuclear and missile program North Korea is pursuing in defiance of years of U.N. Security Council resolutions. "Russia's readiness to clear the way for de-escalation is obvious," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in a phone call with reporters. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called on Monday



for Washington and Pyongyang to start negotiations, saying Russia was ready to facilitate such talks.

Though U.S. diplomats have said they are pursuing a diplomatic solution, President Donald Trump has said Pyongyang must commit to giving up its nuclear weapons before any talks can begin.

The U.N. Security Council unanimously voted to impose new sanctions on North Korea on Friday in response to its recent intercontinental ballistic missile test, a move North Korea called an act of war, tantamount to a complete economic blockade. (Reuters)

North Korea UN Ambassador Demands US Prove Ransomware Claim

TOKYO — North Korea's envoy in charge of U.S. affairs at the United Nations demanded Washington provide evidence to back up its claim Pyongyang was behind the WannaCry ransomware attack, an allegation said was a "baseless provocation" being used to generate tensions. Pak Song Il told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from New York late Monday that Pyongyang sees the allegation as an effort to create an "extremely confrontational atmosphere."

"If they are so sure, show us the evidence," he said. The WannaCry ransomware attack infected hundreds of thousands of computers worldwide and crippled parts of Britain's National Health Service in May. U.S. Homeland security adviser Tom Bossert wrote in a Wall Street Journal op-ed published last week that the U.S. administration had determined North Korea was behind the WannaCry attack. He wrote that North Korea would be held accountable. (AP)

Brexit Deal Could be Template for EU Ties to Ukraine, Turkey, Germany's: Gabriel

BERLIN - An EU agreement with Britain on relations after Brexit could serve as a model for ties with other countries that want to be as close as possible to the bloc but are not yet ready to join, such as Ukraine and Turkey, Germany's foreign minister said.

Britain secured the go-ahead from Brussels to start talks on its future relationship with the EU earlier this month, with London saying it aspires to a closer relationship as a former member than that of any other third

country. In an interview with the Funke newspaper group published on Tuesday, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said such a deal could offer a solution to the puzzle of how the bloc of 27 can manage its ties with two other large non-members. "I can't imagine Turkey or Ukraine becoming EU members in the next few years," he said. "If we get a smart agreement with Britain regulating relations with Europe after Brexit, that could be a model for other countries - Ukraine and also



Turkey." Turkey, a candidate for EU membership for decades, already has a customs union with the EU which allows the trade of most goods without tariffs. One possibility would be

to offer Ankara a "new, closer form of the customs union", Gabriel said, although he also said such a project would have to wait for changes in Turkey's political environment. (Reuters)

Macron's Firm Migrant Policy in France Tarnishes Human Touch



PARIS — it's getting colder and colder, the clock is ticking and regional authorities are scrambling to meet President Emmanuel Macron's deadline: get migrants off France's streets and out of forest

hideouts by year's end. That won't likely happen, and Macron's government is now tightening the screws: ramping up expulsions, raising pressure on economic migrants and allowing divisive ID

checks in emergency shelters. Critics contend that Macron's increasingly tough policy on migrants — though wrapped in a cloak of goodwill — contradicts his image as a humanist who defeated an anti-immigrant populist for the presidency, and has crossed a line passed by no other president in the land that prides itself as the cradle of human rights. From snowy Alpine passes to the borders with Spain or Germany, migrants keep making their way to France. In Paris alone,

police have evacuated around 30,000 people camping on sidewalks in the last two years. "Living in the street. Living in a tent. Sometimes you get food. Sometimes you not get food," said Samsoor Rasooli, a 25-year-old Afghan standing in line since 6 a.m. to apply for asylum at a Paris facility, where some spend the night on the sidewalk, strewn with filth, to keep their place. The door closed at mid-day, the 100 places allotted that day for applicants filled. (AP)

Turkey Urges End of Qatar Crisis Citing Damage to Islamic Unity

KHARTOUM - Turkey on Tuesday urged the end of the Gulf crisis around Qatar, saying there is no reason for its continuation which undermines the efforts of uniting Islamic countries. "In Turkey's opinion, the crisis in the Gulf is a crisis without a reason. So far allegations have been made, but they have not been proven," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said at a joint press conference with his Sudanese counterpart in Khartoum.

"In my opinion, there is no reason not to settle this crisis. Brothers should avoid such crisis among them. Turkey supports the Kuwaiti initiative and it has made intensive contacts with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar," noted Cavusoglu. In June, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar, accusing it of backing terrorism. Qatar has denied all the charges. (Xinhua)

S.Korea's Defense Ministry to Launch Control Tower of DPRK Policy

SEOUL - South Korea's defense ministry will launch a control tower dedicated to taking charge of the ministry's policy on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

The partial reorganization plan was approved Tuesday during the cabinet meeting to create a director-general post who is in charge of the DPRK policy under the deputy defense minister for the national defense policy.

The new post will take charge of responding to the DPRK's nuclear and missile threats, the inter-Korean talks of the military authorities and building trust in the military area.

The director general will control four departments, including the DPRK's nuclear program response department, the DPRK policy department, the arms control department and the missile and space policy department.

The DPRK's nuclear program response department will be newly launched under the reorganization plan to respond to the DPRK's nuclear and missile threats more effectively. The missile and space policy department will replace the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) response department. (Xinhua)

US Says it Negotiated \$285M Cut in United Nations Budget

UNITED NATIONS - The U.S. government says it has negotiated a significant cut in the United Nations budget. The U.S. Mission to the United Nations said on Sunday that the U.N.'s 2018-2019 budget would be slashed by over \$285 million.

The mission said reductions would also be made to the U.N.'s management and support functions.

The announcement didn't make clear the entire amount of the budget or specify what effect the cut would have on



the U.S. contribution. U.S. ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley said that the "inefficiency and overspending" of the organization is well-known, and she would not let "the generosity of the American people be

taken advantage of." She also said that while the mission was pleased with the results of budget negotiations, it would continue to "look at ways to increase the U.N.'s efficiency" while protecting our interests." (AP)

Russia Establishing Permanent Presence at its Syrian Bases

MOSCOW - Russia has started establishing a permanent military presence at naval and air bases in Syria, the defense minister said on Tuesday as parliament ratified a deal with Damascus to cement Russian presence in the country, the RIA news agency reported.

The deal, signed on Jan. 18 will expand the Tartus naval facility, Russia's only naval foothold in the Mediterranean, and grant Russian warships access to Syrian waters and ports, Viktor Bondarev, head of the upper house security and defense committee, told RIA. RIA news agency separately quoted Sergei Shoigu as saying: "Last week

the Commander-in-Chief (President Vladimir Putin) approved the structure and the bases in Tartus and in Hmeimim (air base). We have begun forming a permanent presence there." According to the RIA report, the agreement will allow Russia to keep 11 warships at Tartus, including nuclear vessels. The agreement will last for 49 years and could be prolonged further.

The Hmeimim air base, from which Russia has launched numerous air strikes in support of President Bashar al-Assad during his war with rebels, can now be used by Russia indefinitely, according to the deal. (Reuters)

Russia Election Boycott Campaign May be Illegal: Kremlin

MOSCOW — Russian officials should review opposition leader Alexei Navalny's calls for an election boycott to see if they might be breaking the law, the Kremlin said Tuesday, hinting at possible legal repercussions.

In a widely anticipated decision, Russia's top election body ruled Monday to formally bar anti-corruption crusader Navalny from running in the presidential election next March. Navalny promptly put out a video statement, saying that the ban shows that President Vladimir "Putin is terribly scared and is afraid of running against me," and called on his supporters to stay away from the vote in protest. Putin, who has been in power for 18 years, announced his bid for re-election earlier this month, but so far has refrained from canvassing. In contrast, his most prominent rival, anti-corruption crusader Navalny has been campaigning aggressively all year, reaching out to the most remote parts of the country. Opinion polls say that Putin should easily win the March vote.

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday wouldn't comment on the Election Commission's decision to bar Navalny but said the "calls for boycott ought to be carefully studied to see if they are breaking the law." Peskov also rejected suggestions that Navalny's absence on the ballot could dent the legitimacy of Putin's possible re-election. Russian law doesn't specifically prohibit someone from calling for an election boycott, but authorities last year blocked access to several websites that did so. (AP)

Neighbor News

"China Mark" Shines in Development of Asia-Pacific

HONG KONG - As the year of 2017 is coming to an end, the Asia-Pacific has remained as the most dynamic region in the world despite a host of challenges, including security threats, a rising trend of de-globalization and an anemic economic recovery.

In 2007, the Asia-Pacific region has continued to serve as the "locomotive" of global economic growth as it is accelerating the process of regional integration and building a community with a shared future for mankind.

China, with its concept of win-win cooperation and a slew of feasible, practical solutions, has helped manage and resolve regional hotspot issues, and spurred economic development in the Asia-Pacific region.

"BALLAST" FOR REGIONAL PEACE, STABILITY

The Asia-Pacific region, which accounts for 40 percent of the world's population and 60 percent of the global GDP, is faced with severe security challenges, including the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula and territorial or maritime disputes. China issued a white paper entitled "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation" for the first time this year, outlining China's concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, which was in distinct contrast to the out-of-date security concepts of the Western world such as the Cold War mentality, zero-sum game and military force worship. (Xinhua)

Ahsan Urges Nation to Focus on Economy Rather Politics

ISLAMABAD - Minister for Interior and Planning, Ahsan Iqbal Tuesday stressed the need to become an economic focused nation rather than a political nation to further boost the country's economic development.

"The political crisis during current year has dented the country's rapidly growing economic journey, therefore we need to divert our attention from political issues to economic development," he said while talking to media after launching PC-1 Automation System here. Replying to a question, Ahsan Iqbal said due to some court decisions, a political turmoil like situation erupted in the country due to which the economic journey of the country stopped and the country's stock exchange had to face a huge loss of

over Rs16 billion in market capitalization. He said bringing the country's economic situation out of crisis was one of the biggest achievements of the current government. Earlier the ministry of planning launched PC-1 automation under which all information regarding any PC-1 will be available on finger tips. There are numerous reports available in the application that will enable users to classify the number of projects approved, rejected, and conditional approved. The application will be able to track any PC-1 on different stages such as pending projects in technical section, rejected in CDWP meeting, and presented projects in CDWP meeting. (Monitoring Desk)

US Playing Games, Not Fighting Terrorism: Iran's Larijani

TEHRAN - Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani says the United States is not sincere in its campaign against terrorism, adding that Washington is only "playing games."

Larijani made the remarks while speaking to reporters in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad on Monday on the sidelines of a conference on the challenge of terrorism and inter-regional connectivity. He said the Islamic Republic condemned terrorism in all its forms and emphasized that the US had created terrorist groups, including Daesh, to destroy the resources of Muslim countries and serve the Israeli regime's interests. "Iran opposes any act of terrorism in all its forms and shapes whether in

Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq and regards it as tyranny against Muslims," the top Iranian parliamentarian official pointed out. Larijani said the US attacked Afghanistan in 2001 under the pretext of fighting terrorism and the cultivation of narcotics, but the production of drugs has increased by more than 45 percent in the war-stricken country. There are some 400 laboratories in Afghanistan, which are producing heroin, he said, criticizing NATO's inaction in this regard. A recent survey by the United Nations and the Afghan government revealed that opium production in the restive country had almost doubled in 2017 compared to the previous year. (Presstv)

Turkmenistan, Russia Mull Bilateral Co-Op Prospects

ASHGABAT - Presidents of Turkmenistan and Russia Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Vladimir Putin spoke on the phone and discussed prospects for bilateral cooperation, the Turkmen government said in a message.

Having mentioned strategic nature of the Turkmen-Russian relations, the two presidents noted that a high level of mutual understanding and trust will continue to serve as a solid basis for building up interstate relations. The parties spoke in fa-

vor of strengthening and development of the significant potential of the partnership. "Productive activity of Russian companies in the Turkmen market, as well as participation of Turkmen entrepreneurs in joint projects is a vivid indicator of successful economic cooperation," Turkmenistan State News Agency reported. The parties specified priorities for cooperation, in particular in the political, trade-economic and cultural spheres. (Trend)