

DPRK Vows Never to Change Policy of Bolstering Nuclear, Missile Capabilities

PYONGYANG - The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) said Saturday that it will never change its policy of developing nuclear and missile capabilities as a means to counter threats from the United States. The official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) released a detailed report on the situation of the Korean peninsula this year, accusing the United States of being culpable for the dangerous tension there. It said that the Donald Trump administration "has resorted to the



hard-line hostile policy toward the DPRK, the degree of which dwarfs the policies of the former administrations." "Our party and state ...clarified the principled stand that it would continue bolstering the capabilities for self-defense and preemptive attack with the nuclear force as the pivot, as long as the U.S. and its vassal forces persist in nuclear threat and blackmail," said the KCNA. The report also listed chronically the events which marked the nuclear and missile crisis this year. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

China-Russia Ties Grow Closer in 2017: Chinese Ambassador to Russia

MOSCOW - China and Russia have consolidated the foundation of their bilateral relations as their comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination continues to develop at a high level in 2017, Chinese Ambassador to Russia Li Hui has said. "High-level communication between China and Russia has taken the lead in boosting the development of bilateral ties. In 2017, the Chinese and Russian heads of state maintained a high frequency of interaction and held five meetings," Li said. At the same time, non-governmental exchanges have also laid a firm ground for the development of bilateral rela-

tions, the ambassador said. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Russia Friendship Committee for Peace and Development (CRFCPD) and the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Russia-China Friendship Association (RCFA). In this context, the two countries improved their bilateral exchange mechanism in various fields during the year, undertaking a series of activities which "further promoted mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples and consolidated the social and popular foundation for the development of China-Russia ties," Li said. (Xinhua)

Diplomats Still in Lead on Korean Peninsula Issue: U.S. Defence Secretary

WASHINGTON - U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis said on Friday that diplomats are still leading the effort to deal with the Korean Peninsula issue, according to a Pentagon statement. Right now there was clearly "a diplomatically led effort with a lot of international diplomatic support" when dealing with escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula after a nuclear test and multiple ballistic missile launches by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) this year,

Mattis told a press briefing. "We still have the diplomats in the lead," the Pentagon chief said. When asked if the United States considered postponing a joint exercise with South Korea scheduled for February, Mattis shunned a direct answer by saying a rescheduling of the exercise will be subject to many reasons, including ship availability and political considerations. "I don't consider rescheduling to be pausing them," Mattis added. (Xinhua)

LONDON - One of Theresa May's key government advisers announced Friday he is quitting his role, making a stinging attack against the prime minister. Lord Andrew Adonis, one-time secretary of state in Tony Blair's Labor government, has resigned as chair of the National Infrastructure Commission. Adonis, who was appointed to the role in 2015, is a strong supporter of Britain remaining as a member of the European Union (EU). In his letter to 10 Downing Street, Adonis, who now sits in the unelected House

British PM May's Key Adviser Quits over Brexit

of Lords, tells May: "The European Union Withdrawal Bill is the worst legislation of my lifetime. It arrives soon in the House of Lords and I feel duty-bound to oppose it relentlessly from the Labor benches." Adonis told May her government "is hurtling towards the EU's emergency exit with no credible plan for the future of British trade and European cooperation". He also claimed that Brexit is causing a nervous breakdown across Whitehall. He adds: "If Brexit hap-



pens, taking us back into Europe will become the mission of our children's generation, who will marvel at your acts of destruction." There was no immediate official response from Downing Street, but unnamed government sources told media in London that Adonis had "jumped before he was pushed" because his belief that Brexit can be reversed is the exact opposite of government policy. (Xinhua)

Pakistani Political Parties Make Moves Ahead of Upcoming Elections

ISLAMABAD - Political parties in Pakistan are making efforts to fully prepare themselves for next year's parliamentary elections, as Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, to some extent, relieved uncertainty by setting July in 2018 for the general elections to be held. Abbasi assumed office after the country's Supreme Court disqualified Nawaz Sharif as prime minister in July over corruption charges. Sharif, however continues to serve as the president of the country's ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Abbasi's announcement came at a time when doubts had been blurring the possibility of the next general election and the continuation of

the democratic system in the country due to ongoing crises and legal complications. Senator Mushahidullah Khan, Minister for Climate Change, said that the announcement of the election date is very encouraging for the political system as well as for political workers. An influential opposition party the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI), or the Pakistan Justice Movement, had campaigned for snap polls and underscored their demand by saying that the apex court's decision against the former prime minister and corruption cases had created political uncertainty in the country and the government of Abbasi has no public support. (Xinhua)

Putin Voices Hope for Cooperation with US in Letter to Trump



MOSCOW - In a New Year telegram to U.S. President Donald Trump, Russia's President Vladimir Putin says a constructive

dialogue between the two nations is essential for global stability. The Kremlin said Saturday that Putin emphasized in

his Seasons Greetings to Trump that Russia and the U.S. could develop a "pragmatic cooperation aimed at long-term perspective" on

the basis of "equality and mutual respect." Putin noted that "the development a constructive Russian-U.S. dialogue is particularly important for strengthening strategic stability in the world and finding the optimal answers to global threats and challenges." Ties between Moscow and Washington sank to a post-Cold War low following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the allegations of its meddling in the U.S. presidential election last year. (AP)

Russian Tankers Fueled North Korea Via Transfers at Sea

LONDON/MOSCOW - Russian tankers have supplied fuel to North Korea on at least three occasions in recent months by transferring cargoes at sea, according to two senior Western European security sources, providing an economic lifeline to the secretive Communist state. The sales of oil or oil products from Russia, the world's second biggest oil exporter and a veto-wielding member of the United Nations Security Council, breach U.N. sanctions, the security sources said. The transfers in October

and November indicate that smuggling from Russia to North Korea has evolved to loading cargoes at sea since Reuters reported in September that North Korean ships were sailing directly from Russia to their homeland. "The Russian vessels made transfers at sea to the North Koreans," the first security source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Reuters. The source said the transfers of oil or oil products took place on several occasions and were a breach of sanctions. (Reuters)

Russia Amends Law to Toughen Terrorist Punishment



MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed amendments to the Criminal Law to toughen punishment of those who finance terrorism or recruit terrorists. The amendments were published on Russia's official website of legal information on Friday. Suspects convicted of funding terrorism or recruiting terrorists will face eight to 20 years in jail together with a fine of 300,000 (about 5,172 U.S. dollars) to 700,000 rubles or a life imprisonment. Before the amendments, such criminals will face a prison term of up to ten years. The amendments also introduced "propaganda of terrorism" to the Criminal Law, and the convicted will face five to seven years in prison with a fine of 300,000 to one million rubles. Earlier this month, Russian Federal Security Service director Alexander Bortnikov said terrorists from the Middle East are attempting to penetrate Russia and other former Soviet republics after defeats in Syria and Iraq. On April 3, several Central Asian nationals detonated a bomb in St. Petersburg's metro system, killing 14 people and injuring more than 50 others. That was the worst terrorist act this year in Russia, which was also hit by repeated minor attacks, mainly in the North Caucasus region. (Xinhua)

Mattis Sees Larger U.S. Civilian Presence in Syria

WASHINGTON - U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said on Friday that he expected to see a larger U.S. civilian presence in Syria, including contractors and diplomats, as the fight against Islamic State militants nears its end and the focus turns toward rebuilding and ensuring the militants do not return. The United States has about 2,000 troops in Syria fighting Islamic State. Mattis' comments are likely to anger Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who has previously called U.S. troops "illegal invader" forces. "What we will be do-



ing is shifting from what I would call an offensive, shifting from an offensive terrain-seizing approach to a stabilizing ... you'll see more U.S. diplomats on the ground," Mattis told reporters. He has previously stated that U.S. forces will stay in Syria as long as Islamic State fighters

want to fight and prevent the return of an "ISIS 2.0," using an acronym for Islamic State. His comments marked the first time Mattis has indicated there would be an increase of civilians in parts of the country taken from Islamic State militants. (Reuters)

Erdogan Signals to Warm up Turkey-EU Ties after Rowing Whole Year

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivered warm messages towards the European Union this week after a year of particularly strained relations between the two sides. "I always say this, We are compelled to reduce the number of foes and increase the number of friends. We have no problems with Germany, the Netherlands or Belgium. On the contrary, those who are in the governments of these countries are my old friends," Erdogan told journalists on Thursday during a tour of African countries. There might be official visits to France and Vatican in the coming months as there have been positive signals and easing of strained relations, he said. His comments came after recent remarks by German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte encouraging positive relations with Turkey. Gabriel said earlier this week that the EU should seek new ways of dealing with Turkey. According to Gabriel, the EU needs to find "alternative" ways of creating closer cooperation and partnerships with both Turkey and Ukraine as both countries are unlikely to join the 28-member bloc in the foreseeable future. Rutte said on Dec. 23 that the "cold relations" between the Netherlands and Turkey should be fixed. "I think it would be good if relations with Turkey could improve. Turkey is a NATO partner," he told Dutch daily De Telegraaf in an interview. (Xinhua)

Canada's G7 Presidency: A 'Progressive Agenda' at Risk

MONTREAL - Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promises a "progressive agenda" for Canada's G7 presidency in 2018, but talks may once again hit a snag over climate change after the US withdrawal from the Paris agreement. For Justin Trudeau, this presidency comes at a time when his government has been struggling with a difficult renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Mexico, which was demanded by US President Donald Trump amid

rising American protectionism. Gender equality, climate change and economic growth "that works for everyone" are among Ottawa's top priorities for the meeting of the world's largest advanced economies - Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States. The leaders of the Group of Seven industrialized nations will meet June 8 and 9 at Le Manoir Richelieu in the Charlevoix region of Quebec, a popular tourist destination 150 kilometers (93 miles) northeast of Quebec City. (AFP)

Iranian Administration Vows to Address Concerns over Price Hikes after Protests

TEHRAN - The Iranian administration has assured the nation that it will work to tackle the economic problems in the country following protests in some cities over price hikes and unauthorized credit institutions. Iran's First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri highlighted the administration's economic achievements and ongoing efforts in that sphere, emphasizing that the country's economy is all in all "on the right track" despite "certain shortcomings." The official added that "the prices of several commodities may have seen a rise due to some incidents, and each case has its own reason," add-

ing that the government is duty-bound to revise them. The price hikes triggered demonstrations earlier this week in a number of Iranian cities, including the capital, Tehran, and Mashhad, with the participants demanding the administration of President Hassan Rouhani resolve the economic woes. Several arrests were made during the gatherings, which were organized without permits from relevant authorities. Local officials said those arrested were trying to damage public property. Police also exercised restraint in bringing the situation under control. (Presstv)

Azerbaijan, Tajikistan Mull Expansion of Economic Relations

DUSHANBE - Azerbaijan and Tajikistan discussed the prospects for the expansion of economic cooperation, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Economy said in a message Dec. 30. According to the message, the prospects were discussed during the meeting between Azerbaijani Minister of Economy Shahin Mustafayev and Tajik ambassador to Azerbaijan Rustam Soliev. During the meeting, the sides stressed the potential for developing relations in various spheres of the economy, as well as the importance of cooperation in transit, the export of Azerbaijani agricultural products to

Tajikistan, organizing of export missions of Azerbaijani businessmen, as well as the participation of Azerbaijani companies in Tajikistan's projects to expand economic cooperation between the two countries. Azerbaijani ambassador to Tajikistan Hasan Mammadzade also attended the meeting. The data of the Azerbaijani State Customs Committee shows that the trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Tajikistan for 11 months of 2017 amounted to \$1.76 million, of which \$1.73 million accounted for the export of Azerbaijani products. (Trend)