

Southern Gas Corridor to Help Cover Europe's Growing Gas Needs

EUROPE - The Southern Gas Corridor will help cover Europe's growing gas needs taking into account that own gas production in the European Union is declining, Russia's TASS news agency quoted European Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel Arias Canete as saying Feb. 9. Canete was addressing the recent plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. He also stressed that the EU dependence on gas imports will increase from current approximately 70 percent up to 83 percent by 2040. "Gas remains a significant source of energy for the EU,"



he said. "Europe is increasingly dependent on gas imports. Presently, EU imports 70 percent of gas." Canete said that own gas production in Europe is declining. "Our dependence on gas imports is expected to continue to increase and reach over 83 percent by 2040," he added. The Southern Gas Corridor is one of the priority projects for the EU and provides for the transportation of 10 billion cubic meters of Azerbaijani gas from the Caspian region through Georgia and Turkey to Europe. (Trend)

Thais Arrest Alleged Russian Cybercrime Market Operator

BANGKOK - Police in Thailand say they have arrested a Russian national accused by U.S. authorities of running an online cybercrime marketplace where everything from stolen credit card information to hardware for compromising ATM machines could be purchased. Police said Friday that Sergey Medvedev was arrested at his Bangkok apartment on Feb. 2 at the request of U.S. authorities. The U.S. Justice Department on Wednesday announced indictments against 36 people ac-

cused of being active in the Infracard Organization - founded in 2010 and operated under the slogan "In Fraud We Trust" - which was an anonymous online forum with nearly 11,000 members who traded more than 4.3 million credit cards, debit cards and bank accounts worldwide, leading to losses of more than \$530 million for legitimate users and businesses. Copyright 2018 the Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed. (WP)

US Congress Passes Funding Bill to Reopen Government after Hours-Long Shutdown

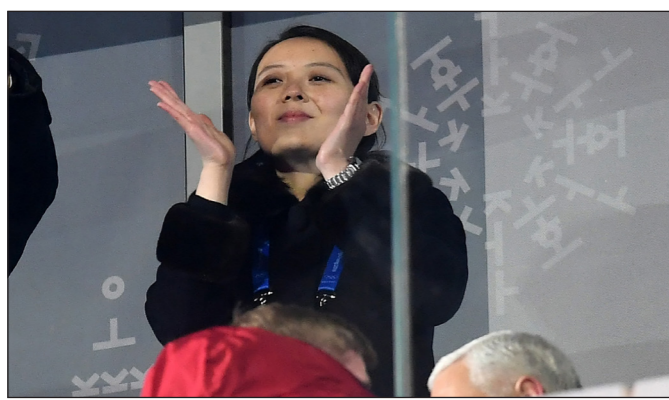
WASHINGTON - The US Congress passed a crucial federal spending bill Friday after hours of delay, sending the measure for President Donald Trump's signature to end the nation's second government shutdown in three weeks. The House voted 240 to 186 in support of a bipartisan package that extends funding until March 23, and which will reopen government hours after a conservative senator forced Congress to miss a midnight deadline, sparking the

shutdown. Spending Bill Passed By Congress Congress Shutdown Federal Budget 2018 Passed Government Funding Bill Government Shutdown Votes Trump supports the measure and is expected to sign it into law on Friday, ending a serious and embarrassing drama on Capitol Hill over federal spending. House Speaker Paul



Ryan, the top Republican in Congress, acknowledged the perversity of the "entirely needless" shutdown, which may enter the history books as just a blip but speaks volumes about the political gridlock that defines Washington. (AFP)

Kim Jong Un's Sister Makes History as She Arrives at Winter Olympics in South Korea



PYEONGCHANG - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's younger sister arrived in South Korea on Friday to begin an un-

precedented three-day visit in which she will attend the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and then sit down

with South Korean President Moon Jae-in for a luncheon at the presidential Blue House in Seoul. Kim Yo Jong, who is probably Kim's closest confidant and is a senior cadre in North Korea's ruling party, is the first member of the Kim dynasty to visit South Korea, though her grandfather, Kim Il Sung, traveled to

areas occupied by his troops south of what is now the Demilitarized Zone during the 1950-53 Korean War. The trip has the potential to become something of a coming out party - certainly for Kim Yo Jong, but also for her deeply isolated country. Kim Jong Un hasn't set foot outside North Korea or met a single head of state since he assumed power upon the death of their father, Kim Jong Il, in late 2011. (Agencies)

UK Demands Putting Brexit Transition Deal in Doubt

UK - Agreement on a transition period after Brexit has been thrown into doubt by the UK's demands, the EU's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, has said. Speaking to reporters in Brussels after the latest round of talks, Barnier said he could not understand the positions taken by Downing Street in recent days. No 10 wants to treat EU citizens arriving in the UK during the transition period differently to those already living in the country. The UK is also seeking a right to object to the application of new EU laws. He added: "I don't understand some of the positions of the UK." Barnier claimed a presentation on the UK's vision of the future relationship had been cancelled by the British government on Friday morning due to what he described as "diary constraints on the UK side". Government sources denied the claim and insisted a discussion would happen later on Friday. (The Guardian)

North Korean Withdraws Request for Ferry Fuel

PYEONGCHANG - The Latest on the arrival of a high-level North Korean delegation to South Korea for the Olympics South Korea says North Korea has withdrawn a request that the South provide fuel to a North Korean ferry that transported more than a 100 artists for performances marking the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. Seoul's Unification Ministry said Friday that the Mangyongbong-92 will return to the North on Saturday. The North Korean artists performed Thursday in Gangneung, a coastal city that will host the skating, hockey and curling events during the games, and are to perform again in Seoul. South Korea says the artists will return to the North on Tuesday by a land route. (AP)

Eiffel Tower Closed as Snow, Freezing Rain Pummel France

PARIS - The Eiffel Tower is closed and authorities are telling drivers in the Paris region to stay home as snow and freezing rain have hit a swath of France ill-prepared for the wintry weather. The company that manages France's most-visited monument said the 19th-century Eiffel Tower will be closed all day Friday and Saturday "to ensure the security of visitors." Workers with hand shovels will carefully clear snow from the intricate ironwork and de-ice stairs and platforms. The company said in a statement they can't use salt because it could corrode the metal and damage the elevators. Heavy snowfall earlier this week trapped hundreds of drivers in cars and caused the worst-ever traffic jams in the Paris region. More snow is forecast Friday and authorities are warning of dangerous conditions in about a quarter of the country. (AP)

Pence Will Use Olympics to Push Tougher Stance on N. Korea

PYEONGCHANG - U.S. Vice President Mike Pence is using his appearance at the Winter Olympics to call on the international community to get tougher on North Korea's nuclear program and human rights abuses. Pence arrived Friday in Pyeongchang to cheer on American athletes, but said he is warning the world against falling for the glossy image of the two Koreas as they are set to march in the opening ceremony under one flag. After meetings with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Pence said there should be no consideration of using the Games as an opening for substan-



tive talks with the North until its nuclear program is up for negotiations. Pence said the U.S. would "demand at the outset of any new dialogue or negotiations that the Kim regime put denuclearization on the table and take concrete steps with the world community to dismantle, permanently and irreversibly, their nuclear and ballistic missile programs."

"Then and only then will the world community consider negotiating and making changes in the sanctions regime that's placed on them today," he added. Pence is in Pyeongchang at the same time as a high-level North Korean delegation including leader Kim Jong Un's sister, Kim Yo Jong, and nominal head of state Kim Yong Nam. (AP)

Turkey Orders Arrest of Pro-Kurdish Party Leader

ISTANBUL - Turkey has ordered the arrest of 17 people including the co-leader of the main pro-Kurdish political party over opposition to the military's offensive in Syria, the state-run Anadolu news agency said on Friday. Since the launch of the campaign in northwest Syria's Afrin nearly three weeks ago, authorities have said they would arrest those who criticize or oppose it. So far, some 600 people have been detained for protests or for social media posts against the offensive. Anadolu cited the Ankara prosecu-

tor's office as saying the 17 suspects now facing arrest were accused of seeking to stir street protests and clashes under the guise of opposition to the Afrin offensive. Among them were Serpil Kemalbay, the co-leader of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), it said. The HDP, parliament's second-largest opposition party, is the only major political party to oppose the campaign - dubbed "Operation Olive Branch" - against the Kurdish YPG militia in Afrin. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

PCB Charges Jamshed for Violating Anti-Corruption Codes

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - The Pakistan Cricket Board has formally charged former opening batsman Nasir Jamshed with violating five anti-corruption codes. Jamshed is already serving a one-year ban, which ends on Feb. 13, after the PCB found him guilty of minor charges in its Pakistan Super League spot-fixing investigation last year. "Nasir Jamshed now has 14 days to respond to the notice of charge," the PCB said in a statement Friday. The charges include spot-fixing matches, accept-

ing money to influence games and also inducing other players to get involved in corrupt activities. Jamshed was also arrested in Britain by the National Crime Agency last year in connection with the PSL investigation before he was released on bail. Jamshed, who played his last international game for Pakistan at the 2015 World Cup, lives in Birmingham, England and has appeared before the PCB tribunal through video link. The left-handed batsman has denied any wrongdoing. (AP)

No Link between Nuclear Deal, Iran Regional Role: Deputy FM

TEHRAN - An Iranian deputy foreign minister says there is no link between the country's 2015 nuclear agreement with world countries and the role it plays in the region. "We have always fought against terrorism. Iran has always played a key role in bringing stability and peace to the region... There is no link between the (nuclear) deal and our role in the region," said Araqchi, who served as a senior negotiator in the talks in the run-up to the deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In remarks to Reuters on Thursday on the sidelines of a Euromoney conference in Paris, Abbas Araqchi highlighted

Iran's efforts to restore calm to the terror-hit region, but said this has nothing to do with the nuclear deal it signed with the six powers. Araqchi further slammed the "policies of Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United States," which he said "have led to crises and wars in the Middle East." The JCPOA was clinched between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany in Vienna. It lifted nuclear-related sanctions against the Islamic Republic, and, in turn, placed certain restrictions on its nuclear energy program. (Presstv)

Turkmenistan's Northern Region Developing Industrial Potential

ASHGABAT - A variety of products worth 265,000 Turkmen manats was produced in January 2018 by the Dashoguz Polymer Products Plant of the Turkmenmashinstroy Concern of Turkmenistan's Ministry of Industry, the country's media reported. Established about thirty years ago, the plant specializes in manufacturing of polypropylene pipes of various diameters, as well as disposable dishes for food. The

plant has been partially modernized in recent years. The production process is based on the processing of domestic raw materials coming from the Balkan district. A number of modern processing enterprises operate in the Dashoguz province. Most of them are connected with the agrarian sector. Examples include cotton ginning plants, cotton spinning and garment factories, a medical sterile dressing factory. (Trend)

IFAD to Invest in Stimulating Inclusive Economic Growth in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Tajikistan signed a financing agreement to reduce poverty and stimulate inclusive economic growth in poor rural communities, the IFAD said in a message. The agreement for the Community-Based Agricultural Support Project was signed by Gilbert F. Houngbo, President of IFAD, and Qahhorzoda Faiziddin Sattor, Minister of Finance, Tajikistan. The total cost of the project is \$39.3 million, including a \$15.3 million loan and a \$15.3 million grant, each from IFAD. The government contribution is estimated at \$4.9 million while approximately \$1.6 million will be provided by the beneficiaries. In addition, a contribution of about \$1.9 million is expected from private service providers operating in the field of agricultural mechanization. The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) co-financing of \$0.25 million through the Technical Cooperation Programme will contrib-

ute towards technical assistance and training of machinery service providers. The project will be implemented over six years. The project will be implemented in Devashchik, Dusti, Jaihun, Norak, Rasht, Shahriston and Tajikobod districts, where poverty levels are high and there is potential for agriculture development. The project aims to reach over 48,000 households. The project will address these problems while supporting and in alignment with, key priorities of the Government for ensuring food security and nutrition. The project will incorporate a strategy to ensure women's inclusion in community development and equitable access to opportunities. In Tajikistan, agricultural productivity falls far below its potential, especially for key smallholder staples such as wheat, potatoes and apples. A primary cause is the lack of access to modern technologies, notably farm equipment and machinery. (Trend)