

China's Top Diplomat Tells Trump Hopes to Increase Coordination on North Korea

BEIJING - China hopes both it and the United States can increase their coordination on the North Korea issue, China's top diplomat Yang Jiechi told U.S. President Donald Trump during a meeting in Washington, China's Foreign Ministry said on Saturday. The United States has repeatedly pressed China, North Korea's most significant trading partner, to do more to rein in Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes. China says it is committed to fully enforcing United Nations resolutions on North Korea, which include sweeping sanctions, but that all parties must make more efforts to reduce tensions and get the talks process re-started. Meeting on Friday in the White



House, State Councillor Yang, who outranks the foreign minister, told Trump he hopes both countries can work hard together and "strengthen coordination on the Korean peninsula nuclear issue", China's Foreign Ministry said. The statement gave no further details on their discussions on North Korea. China has said it hopes the thaw in ties between North and South Korea over this month's Winter Olympics, happening in South Korea, can be translated over into regular talks between the two and even to talks between Pyongyang and Washington. (Reuters)

Critics in Merkel's Conservatives Vow to Block Coalition Projects

BERLIN - The business wing of Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives on Saturday vowed to block certain projects included in this week's coalition agreement with the Social Democrats (SPD), as tensions roiled both political blocs. Christian von Stetten of Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) said lawmakers in parliament - not coalition negotiators - had the ultimate say on policies, and had gained power since elections last year because the coalition parties now hold only a slender majority. "The coalition agreement is not the Bible," von Stetten

told the German Augsburg newspaper. "As the parliamentary group for medium-sized business, we can make sure that those things that were well-intentioned but not carefully thought through can be held up and corrected." He did not elaborate. Von Stetten has been critical of Merkel's ceding of the finance ministry to the centre-left SPD under the coalition deal. A majority of conservatives in parliament belong to the group, which advocates for small- and medium-sized businesses. (Reuters)

North Korea's Kim Invites South Korean President for Summit

SEOUL / PYEONGCHANG, South Korea - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un invited South Korean President Moon Jae-in for talks in Pyongyang, South Korean officials said on Saturday, setting the stage for the first meeting of Korean leaders in more than 10 years. Any meeting would represent a diplomatic coup for Moon, who swept to power last year on a policy of engaging more with the reclusive North. The recent detente, anchored by South Korea's

hosting of the Winter Olympic Games that began on Friday, came despite acceleration in the North's weapons programmes last year and pressure from Seoul's allies in Washington. The personal invitation from Kim was delivered by his younger sister, Kim Yo Jong, during talks and a lunch hosted at the presidential Blue House in Seoul. Kim Jong Un wanted to



meet Moon "at an early date" and Moon had said "let's create conditions to make it happen", Blue House spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom told a news briefing. A Blue House official said Moon "practically accepted" the invitation. (Reuters)

Abbas Tells India PM He Seeks Multi-Country Peace Mediation



RAMALLAH, West Bank - Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told visiting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sat-

urday that he is counting on India's support for a multi-country sponsorship of any future Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Such a framework would ostensibly replace Washington's long-standing monopoly as mediator. Abbas rejected the traditional U.S. role after President Donald Trump recognized contested Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December. Trump's pivot upset Palestinians who seek the city's Israeli-annexed eastern sector as a capital.

Abbas has appealed to the international community, including countries in Europe and the Arab world, to demand a say in future negotiations, but has so far failed to secure commitments. European leaders have criticized Trump's dramatic policy shift on Jerusalem, but appear unwilling to confront Washington over its handling of more than two decades of failed efforts to broker an Israeli-Palestinian partition deal. (AP)

Trump Won't Declassify Democratic Memo on Russia Probe

WASHINGTON - Citing national security concerns, the White House on Friday formally notified the House intelligence committee that President Donald Trump is "unable" to declassify a memo drafted by Democrats that counters GOP allegations about abuse of government surveillance powers in the FBI's Russia probe. White House counsel Don McGahn said in a letter to the committee that the memo contains "numerous properly classified and especially sensitive passages" and asked the intelligence panel to revise the memo with the help of the Justice Department. He said Trump is still "inclined" to release the memo in the interest of transparency if revisions are made. The president's rejection of the Democratic memo is in contrast to his enthusiastic embrace of releasing the Republican document, which he pledged before reading to make public. The president declassified the document last week, allowing its publication in full over the objections of the Justice Department. (AP)

Neighbor News

Iran Rejects 'Ridiculous' Israeli Claim on Downing Iranian Drone

TEHRAN - Iran has rejected as "ridiculous" claims by the Israeli regime that it had intercepted an Iranian drone launched from Syria, stressing the Islamic Republic's military advisory presence in the Arab country is at the request of Syria's "constitutional and legitimate" government. "Claims about the flight of an Iranian drone ... are too ridiculous to be addressed because the Islamic Republic of Iran has advisory presence in Syria at the request of the country's legitimate and constitutional government," Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Saturday. "The government and army of Syria as an independent country have a legitimate right to defend [the country's] territorial integrity and counter any type of foreign aggression," he added. The Iranian spokesperson emphasized that the "illegitimate" Israeli regime cannot cover up its atrocities and crimes against Muslim nations in the region by playing a blame game and spreading lies. Resilient Syrians will not accept Israeli aggression: Velayati. Meanwhile, a senior adviser to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on international affairs said the resilient Syrian people will never tolerate the Israeli regime's aggression. Speaking to reporters in Tehran, Ali Akbar Velayati added that the Syrian government and nation have proved that they would sacrifice themselves to "safeguard their country's territorial integrity, security and independence." (Presstv)

Cash Circulation in Tajikistan Increases

ASHGABAT - Cash in circulation in Tajikistan stood at \$1.3 billion in 2017, which is 39 percent more than in 2016, TajikTA news agency reported referring to the press center of the country's National Bank. Reserve funds in the reporting period stood at \$1.6 billion, which is 20.9 percent more than in 2016. Last year, due to economic demands, \$566.2 million in cash were introduced into circulation, which is 2.5 percent more than in 2016. Due to the decline of inflation risks in January this year, the National Bank of Tajikistan reduced the refinancing rate by 1.25 percentage points and set it at 14.75 percent. In 2017, the regulator pursued the policy of a managed floating exchange rate regime. As of Dec. 31, 2017, the difference between the official and market exchange rates of Somoni, the Tajik national currency, against the US dollar, was 0.9 percent. (Trend)

Uzbekistan Eyes to Increase Fish Production

TASHKENT - Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev signed a decree on measures to increase fish production in 2018, Uzbek media reported. Under the decree, in 2018 Uzbekistan plans to produce up to 150,000 tons of fish. Also, in accordance with the document, the import of mixed fodders for fish is exempt from customs payments until January 1, 2020. In Uzbekistan there are more than 3,000 farms that specialize in fish farming. Last year about 100,000 tons of fish were bred in Uzbekistan. The weakest link in the fishing industry of Uzbekistan is the production of fish planting material and the inefficient use of natural ponds and artificial ponds. The productivity of artificial ponds does not exceed 20 percent per hectare, which is below the world average. In late 2017, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the program of measures on development of the fishing industry in 2017-2021 and the target parameters for the development of the fishing industry in 2017-2021. Earlier, the President of Uzbekistan signed a decree on the establishment of the Uzbekbalik-sanoat Association. The Association was tasked to create an organizational and technological chain for the production of fish products, reproduction of fish and planting material and strengthen the forage base, ensure rational use of natural reservoirs and artificial ponds resources, as well as to introduce scientifically based methods and intensive technologies in the process of growing fish. (Trend)

Uzbek FM to Visit Iran, India And Pakistan

TASHKENT - Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov will today leave the country for a working visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran, India and Pakistan, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry said in a message on Feb. 10. During the meetings and negotiations with foreign ministers of Iran, India and Pakistan, Muhammad Javad Zarif, Sushma Swaraj and Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Kamilov will mull topical issues of bilateral relations, as well as exchange views on regional issues. The parties also intend to discuss the preparations for the forthcoming international conference entitled "Peace process, cooperation in the field of security and regional cooperation on Afghanistan" to be held in Tashkent. On the outcomes of the conference, it is planned to adopt the Tashkent Declaration, which will define the basic principles and conditions for a peaceful settlement, specify the obligations of the Afghan government and the armed opposition, as well as the international community in terms of "launching" the negotiation process and its support. (Trend)

More Than 1,500 Flights Canceled in US as Snowstorm Slams Midwest

US - More than 1,500 US flights have been canceled Friday as a winter storm slammed the Midwest with at least 1 inch of snow per hour, CNN reported. Heavy snow and strong winds already pounded Chicago and Detroit, where public school systems opted not to open Friday, CNN meteorologist Haley Brink said. "We are getting more snow today, tomorrow and Sunday than we have normally gotten in the last two winters in any one period of time," Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel said in a Friday morning news conference, adding that the city's top priority is the safety of residents. "Whether that's young



kids, homeless, elderly, sick, commuters -- in every capacity we are responding and ensuring that people are able to handle this weather." About 23 million Americans are under winter weather alerts as an arctic front pushes from Montana through the Midwest, CNN meteorologists said. Chicago could get around a foot of snow -- 8 to 14 inches -- by late Friday, and between 2

to 4 inches through the weekend, forecasters said. Much of northern Illinois had seen between 8 and 12 inches of snow by Friday afternoon, CNN meteorologist Taylor Ward said. The bulk of flight cancellations affected Chicago's O'Hare and Midway airports and Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, according to the tracking site FlightAware.com. (Trend)

UK Govt Reviews Oxfam Work Amid Haiti Prostitutes Scandal

LONDON - The British Government announced late Friday it was reviewing all work with Oxfam amid revelations the charity's staff hired prostitutes in Haiti during a 2011 relief effort on the earthquake-hit island. The Department for International Development (DFID) said the UK-based charity's leaders had "showed a lack of judgement" in investigating the matter and in its openness with the government and Britain's Charity Commission regulator. "The International Development Secre-

tary is reviewing our current work with Oxfam and has requested a meeting with the senior team at the earliest opportunity," a DFID spokeswoman said. "The way this appalling abuse of vulnerable people was dealt with raises serious questions that Oxfam must answer." The move follows growing pressure on the charity after an investigation by The Times found young sex workers were hired by senior staff in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake which devastated the island and left up to 300,000 people dead. (AFP)

NAFTA Must Protect Workers Left Behind by Global Economy

LOS ANGELES - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called for better protection of workers "left behind" by globalization and technological development -- and said North American Free Trade Agreement renegotiations should take this into account. "The wave of technological innovation," particularly in Silicon Valley, which Trudeau visited Thursday, "can be hugely positive and transformative," he said Friday during a speech at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, near Los Angeles. "But we cannot allow it to sweep some people and their families aside," he said, adding the issue must be discussed as part of ongoing efforts between Canada, the US and Mexico to revamp NAFTA. Trudeau called for improved sharing of wealth and help for people "whose livelihoods have been disrupted by global economic shifts" -- adding he and US President Donald Trump agree "too many people have been left behind." "We need to collectively do a much better job of ensuring the benefits of trade are shared more broadly to more people," he said. Six rounds of NAFTA talks have already concluded -- the most recent on January 29 -- but the Canadian premier said the toughest issues remain, including "rules of origin in the auto industry." On Wednesday, Trudeau said in Chicago that Canada was ready to withdraw from NAFTA -- described by Trump as a "bad joke" -- if current negotiations did not conclude with a satisfactory deal for the country. But he added Friday that "trade is not a hockey game" with a winner and a loser, and that the trade pact has benefited Canada, the US and Mexico. (AFP)

Israel Jet Crashes After 'Iranian Targets' Attacked in Syria

JERUSALEM - An Israeli F16 fighter jet crashed in Israel Saturday as the air force was carrying out attacks against "Iranian targets" in Syria after intercepting a drone, a spokesman said. "IDF (Israel Defence Force) has targeted the Iranian control systems in Syria that sent the UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) into Israeli airspace. Massive Syrian anti-air fire, one F16 crashed in Israel, pilots safe," Israeli military spokesman Lieutenant Jonathan Conricus wrote on Twitter. According to a separate military statement, Israeli forces had identified an "Iranian UAV" launched from Syria and intercepted it in Israeli airspace with a combat helicopter. Police said the F16 crashed in the Jezreel valley in northern Israel. (AFP)

US Navy Probes Alleged Drug Use by Sailors in Japan

TOKYO - The US Navy said Saturday it was probing sailors at a base in Japan over alleged drug use and vowed no tolerance for any misconduct. "Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) is investigating Yokosuka-based sailors for alleged drug use and distribution," the 7th Fleet said, referring to its home base southwest of Tokyo. "The Navy has zero tolerance for drug abuse and takes all allegations involving misconduct of our sailors, navy civilians and family members very seriously," it said in a comment emailed to AFP. It added the allegations were still under investigation and would not comment further. (AFP)