

Kim-Trump Summit A 'Remarkable Breakthrough' for Peace: Moon

SEOUL - The agreement for a second summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un was a "remarkable breakthrough" for peace negotiations on the Korean peninsula, President Moon Jae-in said Monday, but he acknowledged doubts remained over denuclearisation.

The US President and North Korean leader are due to meet in Hanoi from February 27 to 28 following their landmark first summit in Singapore last June. That meeting - the first-ever between the leaders of the US and North Korea - produced a vaguely-worded document in which Kim pledged to work towards "the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula".

But progress has since stalled with the two sides disagreeing over it means and analysts say



tangible progress on denuclearisation will be needed if the talks are to avoid being dismissed as "reality TV". With the high-stakes summit now two weeks

away, Pyongyang has yet to provide any official confirmation of the meeting in the Vietnamese capital.

"For us, the era of peace and prosperity on the

peninsula has drawn closer," said Moon in his first comments since the summit was announced. The meeting was a "remarkable breakthrough in the peace process on the Korean peninsula", the South Korean president added. But he acknowledged there were "still many doubts about whether the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and peace process can be concluded successfully". The leaders of the two Koreas and the US have persisted in talks over the issue because of "strong confidence in the direction history should take", added Moon, who has taken on the role of middle man between Pyongyang and Washington, trying to bridge the gap on denuclearisation talks. (AFP)

Neighbor News

Iran Ready for 190k-SWU Uranium Enrichment: AEOI Spokesman

TEHRAN - Iran is prepared to boost the capacity of its uranium enrichment to 190,000 separative work units (SWUs), an official at the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says. "Based on a decree by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution [Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei] and the emphasis put on this issue by head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, the country is ready to increase its uranium enrichment capacity to 190,000 SWUs," Behrouz Kamalvandi, the AEOI's spokesman, said on Sunday. Back in January, Ayatollah Khamenei ordered the AEOI to make preparations for the enrichment of uranium up to a level of 190,000 SWUs without any delay. "It seems from what they say that some European governments expect the Iranian nation to both put up with sanctions and give up its nuclear activities and continue to observe limitations [on its nuclear program]. I tell those governments that this bad dream will never come true," the Leader said. US President Donald Trump withdrew Washington in May 2018 from the landmark Iran nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and decided to re-impose unilateral sanctions against Tehran. (Press TV)

Turkmenistan Registering Candidates for Additional Parliamentary Elections

ASHGABAT - Registration of candidates as part of additional elections to the vacant parliament seats is underway in Turkmenistan, Trend reports referring to the Turkmen Central Election Commission (CEC) Feb. 11. The registration will last until March 5. The elections are scheduled for March 31, 2019. Among the primary tasks, the CEC identified ensuring transparency of elections, as well as raising public awareness. In line with the Constitution, the parliament adopts laws, makes changes and additions to the basic law, approves the state budget; resolves issues of holding national referendums; appoints elections of the president, members of the Parliament, members of representative bodies; considers issues of appointment and dismissal of the Chairman of the Supreme Court, the Prosecutor General, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Justice based on the proposal of the head of state; ratifies and denounces international treaties; and solves the issues of changing the state border and administrative-territorial division of the country. (Trend)

IAEA Talks on Uzbekistan's First Nuclear Power Plant

TASHKENT - The first nuclear power plant in Uzbekistan is a national project that can be considered a reason for pride, Trend reports with reference to the IAEA expert John Haddad. The seminar of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was held in Uzbek capital from 4 to 6 February 2019. It became the first large-scale seminar with the participation of the IAEA mission for specialists from Uzbekistan, Uzatom Agency and Rosatom State Corporation and was devoted to the topic of choosing a site for building the first nuclear power plant in Uzbekistan. "You should be proud of this project and work together. No country, no department builds nuclear power plants on their own. It is important to understand that this project is important for everyone. It is necessary to coordinate the work on the project and with other departments," John Haddad, an engineer on nuclear infrastructure of the IAEA said while speaking before the participants of seminar. Another IAEA expert, Director of the Nuclear Installations Safety Division, Greg Jankowski stated that it is very important that Uzbekistan takes such a serious approach to the issue of careful selection of a site for a future nuclear power plant. The invitation of the IAEA mission to Tashkent at this stage to increase the knowledge of Uzbek specialists is a proof of Uzbekistan seriousness. (Trend)

Pakistan 'Very Close' to Securing IMF Bailout: Minister

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan is likely to secure an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout soon to stave off a balance of payment crisis and help shore up its economy, Finance Minister Asad Umar said on Monday, as talks between Islamabad and the fund continue. A day earlier, Prime Minister Imran Khan met IMF chief Christine Lagarde in Dubai to discuss a bailout, and the country's foreign currency reserves have dwindled to around \$8 billion, just enough to cover about two months of imports. That meeting ended with a pledge to continue talks, and while there had not been any indication of a breakthrough, Umar said

'It's Like Indira's Come Back': India's Nehru-Gandhi Dynasty Rolls On

LUCKNOW, India - Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, the latest entrant into politics from India's Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, made her debut on Monday with a roadshow drawing thousands to see her in the most populous state, months before a general election due to be held by May. Congress President Rahul Gandhi pulled a surprise last month by appointing his younger sister a party general secretary. She will also be its face in Uttar

Pradesh, the state that sends the highest number of lawmakers to the lower house of parliament and is currently dominated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But a string of BJP defeats in state elections late last year and rising discontent over a weak farm economy and lackluster jobs growth have weakened Modi's position, which an increasingly aggressive Congress is looking to capitalize on. (Reuters)

Maduro Kicks Off Venezuela's 'Most Important Military Drills in History'

CARACAS - Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro has launched what he described as the 'most important' drills in history, preparing to repel any potential invasion after the US and its allies backed self-proclaimed 'interim president' Guaido. The drills will last until February 15 and are set to become the largest military exercises the country has held in its 200-year history, President Maduro reiterated, as he arrived at Guacaipuro Fort in Miranda State. "We must prepare to

defend [Venezuela's] sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence," the elected head of state proclaimed, apparently preparing to Washington's calls for a regime change and its aggressive backing of opposition parliament speaker Juan Guaido might escalate into a direct military invasion. Guaido, who proclaimed himself 'interim president' of Venezuela in January and got the immediate blessing of the United States and its allies in Europe and across Latin America, did not rule



out that he might have to make a "controversial" decision to "authorize" a "humanitarian" intervention. The Trump administration also said all options remain on the table to rid Venezuelans of the "oppressive dictator" Maduro. (RT)

INF Treaty Is About European Security, Not American; US Left It to Get New Missiles - Russian Envoy



MOSCOW - The INF Treaty that Washington abandoned was aimed at primarily providing security for Europe, not

the US, the Russian envoy to the US said, explaining the US move was driven by a desire to get new missiles.

"The INF Treaty is dealing with the security of the European countries and the Russian Federation, not with the security of the US," Russia's ambassador to the US, Anatoly Antonov, told RT, adding that Washington has apparently not been very interested in preserving the agreement, which it began to see as a limitation on its own military capabilities. Washington confirmed its withdrawal from the treaty, signed by the US and the USSR back in

1987, earlier this year and Moscow said it would also quit in a mirror response. The pact banned nuclear-armed and conventional land-launched missiles with a range between 500 and 5,500km. The fact that Washington opted for an openly confrontational approach to talks with Moscow on the issue only proves that the US was not genuinely interested in keeping the agreement but instead looked for a pretext to leave it. (RT)

Asian Stocks Mixed Ahead of Next Round of US-China Talks

SINGAPORE - Asian stocks were mixed on Monday as traders watched for developments on a fresh round of trade talks with the United States this week in Beijing. Markets in China and Taiwan, reopening after a weeklong Lunar New Year break, edged higher on hopes that American and Chinese officials will make progress on a wide-ranging dispute that has weighed on the global economy. KEEPING SCORE: The Shanghai Composite index picked up 0.4 percent to 2,628.50. The Kospi

in South Korea declined 0.1 percent to 2,175.04 while Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 0.2 percent to 27,991.49. Australia's S&P ASX 200 was down 0.5 percent at 6,040.00. Stocks rose in Taiwan but fell in Singapore and Indonesia. JAPANESE MARKETS: Gains by technology and consumer goods companies led most U.S. indexes higher on Friday. They more than balanced out losses by financial stocks and retailers after a mixed bag of quarterly earnings. (AP)

Relationship with Italy Has Ups and Downs: French FM Says in Doha

DUBAI - The relationship between Italy and France has its ups and downs, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told reporters in Doha on Monday when asked about France recalling its ambassador to Italy. "The relationship with Italy has ups and downs ... while it is a straight line with Qatar," Le Drian said. (Reuters)

Qatar Revamps Investment Strategy after Kushner Building Bailout

LONDON/NEW YORK/DUBAI - When news emerged that Qatar may have unwittingly helped bail out a New York skyscraper owned by the family of Jared Kushner, Donald Trump's son-in-law, eyebrows were raised in Doha. Kushner, a senior White House adviser, was a close ally of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman - a key architect of a regional boycott against Qatar, which Riyadh accuses of sponsoring terrorism. Doha denies the charge. Brookfield, a global property investor in which the Qatari government has placed investments, struck a deal last year that rescued the Kushner Companies' 666 Fifth Avenue tower in Manhattan from financial straits. The bailout, in which Doha played no part and first learned about in the media, has prompted a rethink of how the gas-rich kingdom invests money abroad via its giant sovereign wealth fund, two sources with knowledge of the matter told Reuters. (Reuters)

Egypt Parliament to Vote to Extend El-Sissi's Rule This Week

CAIRO - Egypt's parliament has rescheduled for this week its vote on proposed changes to the constitution that would allow President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi to stay in office well beyond his current term, which ends in 2020.

Parliament spokesman Ahmed Saad el-Din said on Sunday that the legislature would hold the crucial vote on Wednesday, instead of a scheduled meeting on Feb. 17. The 596-seat assembly had given its preliminary approval to the changes last week. The motion is near-cer-



tain to be overwhelmingly approved by the legislature, which is packed with el-Sissi's supporters, but the amendments would also need to be put to a national referendum to

become law. The proposed amendments also include the introduction of the role of vice president and the reintroduction of a Senate, or upper chamber. (Fox News)

Macedonia Prepares for Name Change by Removing Signs

SKOPIJE, Macedonia - Authorities in Macedonia have begun removing official signs from government buildings to prepare for its new name: North Macedonia. "Government of the Republic of Macedonia" signs were removed from the country's main government building early Monday in the capital Skopje. The small Balkan country will change its name to North Macedonia after reaching a landmark agreement over the summer with neighboring

Greece, which has a neighboring province called Macedonia. Macedonia is due to become a NATO member now that Greece's parliament approved a measure Friday that would allow the country to join the alliance. Previously, Greece had blocked Macedonia's accession to NATO. Macedonia will now publish the deal with Greece in its government gazette so that it's officially enshrined in law. (Fox News)

Australian Prime Minister Boasts Security Credentials

CANBERRA, Australia - Australia's prime minister on Monday described his government as stronger on national security than the opposition after signing an agreement with the French government to deliver a fleet of submarines and ahead of federal elections expected to be held in May. Prime Minister Scott Morrison used a speech to Australia's National Press Club on the eve of Parliament's first sitting day of the year to detail his conservative coalition's record on a diverse range of security issues including military spending, stripping extremists of Australian citizenship, asylum seekers, contentious laws to prevent criminals from using encrypted communications, and domestic violence. Earlier, Morrison and French Defense Minister Florence Parly signed a new agreement to deliver the first of a fleet of 12 submarines to Australia in the early 2030s. French state majority-owned shipbuilder DCNS won the 56 billion Australian dollar (\$40 billion) contract in 2016 to build the world's largest diesel-electric submarines. The partnering agreement was reached after months of heated negotiation. The agreement spells out details such as warranties for defects and how much Australia must pay if it cancels the contract. U.S. defense company Lockheed Martin Corp. has been contracted to design and fit the submarines' weapon systems. (AP)