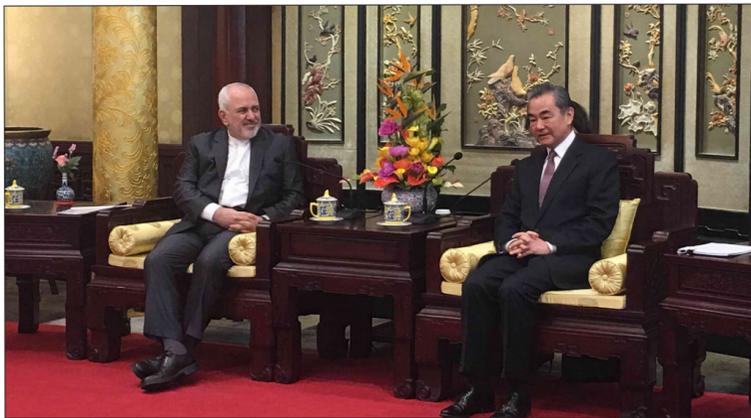


China Expects Iran to Play More Constructive Role in Regional Affairs

BEIJING - Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Tuesday met with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Wang said China valued Iran's role in regional affairs and expected Iran to have a more constructive role in such affairs. "The situation in the Middle East and the world is undergoing major changes, and relations between China and Iran are also facing a new situation," Wang said.

"Both China and Iran are countries with thousands of years of civilization and tradition. In the face of the periodical changes consisting of certain individual events, the two countries can maintain strategic strength, while safeguarding and promoting ties with a long-term per-



spective, in efforts to continuously inject new content into bilateral ties."

Zarif said the Iranian side highly valued the partnership with China and regarded China as an important, all-round cooperation partner.

Zarif, who is accompanying Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani on a visit to China, said he expected the speaker's ongoing China tour to promote bilateral ties to a new stage. Zarif expressed the active will to take part in

the Belt and Road construction, saying the Initiative was of special significance to both Iran and China.

"The Iranian side welcomes China's more important role in issues concerning the Middle East region such as Syria, Iraqi reconstruction and the peace process in Afghanistan," he said.

The two sides also exchanged views on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, an international agreement on Iran's nuclear program reached in 2015, stating that they would continue to strengthen communication and coordination and make active efforts to safeguard legitimate rights and interests, implement the agreement and defend multilateral rules. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

China Urges Restraint by India, Pakistan on Pulwama Terror Attack

ISLAMABAD - China on Tuesday urged restraint by India and Pakistan amid escalating tensions over the Pulwama terror attack and called on both the countries to peacefully resolve their issues through dialogue as soon as possible.

On February 14, at least 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed in Kashmir's Pulwama district in a suicide attack claimed by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terror group.

The attack has heightened bilateral tensions with both New Delhi and Islamabad calling back their envoys for "consultations". India on Friday announced the withdrawal of the Most Favoured Nation status for Pakistan and hiked the customs

duty by 200 per cent on goods originating from the neighbouring country. "Pakistan and India are both important countries in South Asia. A stable bilateral relationship between the two is essential to the peace and stability in the region," Geng Shuang, spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry told a media briefing when asked about the tensions between the two countries following the Pulwama attack. "South Asia has maintained an overall stability which should be cherished and upheld by all sides. China hopes that Pakistan and India will exercise restraint, engage in dialogue and realise the soft landing of the relevant issues as soon as possible," he said. (Agencies)

Iran's New Refinery Opening Is a Poke in US Eye

TEHRAN - Iran is now a gasoline exporter but the country is not exporting any volumes for the moment, preferring to build up its stocks first, Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh says.

The third phase of the Persian Gulf Star Refinery came online Monday, marking self-sufficiency in gasoline with a total production of more than 100 million liters per day.

"Fortunately, we do not need to import gasoline anymore. We have reached self-sufficiency. We can export our produced gasoline but have no export plans," Zangeneh said after the inauguration in Bandar Abbas.

Iran has imported no gasoline since September and sees no need to do so, because the country is now virtually an exporter of the strategic fuel.

"However, we intentionally do not export gasoline because we want to raise the country's gasoline stocks," Zangeneh said.

Despite being a major oil producer for decades, Iran struggled to meet its domestic fuel needs for years because of a lack of refining capacity which made the country prone to foreign sanctions. However, when US President Donald Trump decided in May to reimpose sanctions on ... (More on P4)... (18)

Head of American States Organization to Pay First Visit to Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - The head of administration of the Organization of American States (OAS), Gonzalo Conca, will attend the international conference on regional security in Central Asia in Tashkent on February 19-20, Trend reports via Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This will be the first visit of OAS representative to Uzbekistan.

Earlier, the country's Foreign Ministry reported that President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev is expected to speak at the opening of the international conference "Interconnectivity in Central Asia: Challenges and New Opportunities". The conference is organized by Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UN Regional Center

for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UN-RCCA).

The conference organizing committee states that about 130 foreign experts from 36 countries, nine international and regional organizations have confirmed their participation in the conference. EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Peter Burian, Deputy Director General of the World Trade Organization, Alan Wolfe are among them. Experts will exchange views on regional security issues in Central Asia, cooperation in the trade and economic, transport and communications, water and environmental, energy, tourism and cultural and humanitarian areas during the conference. (Trend)

Water Treatment Plant Built in Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - A water treatment plant with a capacity of 30,000 cubic meters of water per day has been commissioned in Kaka district of Turkmenistan's Ahal region, Trend reports referring to the country's Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs.

The project has been implemented by a local enterprise, Mukaddes Toprak. The new facility has modern equipment that provides high-quality water treatment. Turkmenistan borders Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan,

Iran and Afghanistan and uses water resources coming in accordance with agreed quotas from four trans-boundary rivers, namely, Amu Darya, Tejen, Atrek and Murgab.

Turkmenistan's north was affected by the Aral Sea's drying. Especially, Dashoguz region was adversely affected by environmental catastrophe inasmuch as there are acute problems related to providing the population with clean drinking water and combating salinization of cultivation lands. (Trend)

You Too Can Repeat Yuri Gagarin's 1st-Ever Spaceflight: Russia Announces Space Tourism Projects

MOSCOW - Roscosmos will offer orbital flights replicating the route taken by Vostok 1 when it became the first manned space vessel in 1961. The agency has also signed a contract to take visitors to the ISS for the first time since 2009.

As well as allowing others to step into Yuri Gagarin's (hopefully, perfected) spacesuit, the flight will allow "the preparation time for those who want to see our planet from space" to be cut, Dmitry Rogozin, the head of Roscosmos,

tweeted.

Gagarin spent 108 minutes off the ground during his flight, in which he circled the planet once, before re-entering the atmosphere and ejecting from his capsule 7km above the ground to descend in a parachute. Rogozin's tweet came as the agency made a separate announcement that it signed a contract with US firm Space Adventures to take two "non-professional" astronauts up to the International Space Station before 2021. ... (More on P4)... (15)

U.S. States Take Legal Action against Trump over National Emergency Declaration

WASHINGTON - Sixteen U.S. states Monday jointly sued U.S. President Donald Trump to challenge his national emergency declaration over funding a wall between the United States and Mexico.

Trump signed a national emergency on Friday to build the U.S.-Mexico border wall and push for his signature campaign promise. The move gave the president power to bypass Congress to get access to money.

The lawsuit, led by California Attorney General Xavier Becerra and filed

in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in San Francisco, was joined by attorneys general from Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon and Virginia. "Our goal here is simple: we're trying to stop @realDonaldTrump from violating the Constitution, the separation of powers, from stealing money from Americans and states that has been allocated by #Congress,



lawfully," Becerra tweeted Monday. He said the legal action, filed on U.S. Presidents Day, was aimed at preventing Trump from

"unilaterally robbing taxpayer funds lawfully set aside by Congress for American people." ... (More on P4)... (13)

Pakistan Tells UN Court Indian on Death Row Is a 'Terrorist'



THE HAGUE - An Indian man on death row in Pakistan for alleged spying committed "terrorist acts" including targeted killings and kidnappings

on New Delhi's orders "to create anarchy", Islamabad's lawyers told UN's top court on Tuesday. Islamabad's lawyers

opened their case on the second day of hearings at the International Court of Justice, where they are involved in a tense legal stand-off with bitter rival India in the case of Kulbhushan Jadhav.

The hearings before The Hague-based ICJ coincide with a sharp spike in tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbours after a suicide bombing in restive

Kashmir last week and renewed fighting there on Monday. Jadhav, 48, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court in 2017, with New Delhi dragging Islamabad to the ICJ -- set up in 1946 to rule in disputes between countries -- over the case. A former navy commander, Jadhav was arrested in the restive southwestern province of Baluchistan in 2016 and in 2017 the ICJ issued an urgent order telling Pakistan to stay his execution. (AFP)

'They Want to Enslave Us!' Maduro Slams Trump's Ultimatum & 'Nazi-Style' Attack on Socialism

CARACAS - Nicolas Maduro has slammed Donald Trump's belligerent rhetoric and his crusade against socialism after US president effectively ordered Venezuelan military to support opposition leader Juan Guaido, if they care about their future. "Who is the commander of the armed forces, Donald Trump from Miami?" president Maduro wondered aloud after the US leader virtually issued an ultimatum to the Venezuelan

armed forces, warning officers they won't have any possible "way out" unless they accept Guaido's "generous offer" to defect without retribution while they still can. "They think they own the country!" Maduro said on state television, noting that Trump's "arrogant orders" are an "offense to [the] dignity" of the Venezuelan military, who stand ready to defend the country's sovereignty. ... (More on P4)... (16)

Ex-Diplomat Says North Korean Leader Won't Give Up Nukes

SEOUL, South Korea - A former North Korean diplomat says leader Kim Jong Un has no intention of giving up his nuclear weapons and sees his upcoming second summit with U.S. President Donald Trump as a chance to cement his country's status as a nuclear weapons state.

Thae Yong Ho, who defected to South Korea in 2016, said in a news conference in Seoul on Tuesday that next week's meeting in Vietnam will be a failure if Trump can't get Kim to declare he will abandon all of his nuclear facilities and weapons and return North Korea to the nuclear non-proliferation agreement.

Thae worked as a minister at the North Korean Embassy in London before fleeing to South Korea. He is the highest-level North Korean diplomat to defect to the South. (AP)

Two Hundred Families Trapped by Islamic State in Syria: U.N. Rights Chief

GENEVA - Some 200 families are trapped in a shrinking area of Syria still controlled by Islamic State, whose forces are stopping some from fleeing, U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said on Tuesday. "Many of them (also) ... continue to be subjected to intensified air and ground-based strikes by the U.S.-led Coalition forces and their SDF allies on the ground," Bachelet said in a statement.

The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces attacking Islamic State have an obligation under international law to take all precautions to protect civilians who are mixed in with the foreign fighters, her spokesman Rupert Colville told a briefing. (Reuters)

France Express Support for Georgia Territorial Integrity

PARIS - French President Emmanuel Macron has expressed France's support for Georgia's territorial integrity, as the former Soviet Republic seeks closer ties with the European Union.

Macron met Tuesday in Paris with Georgia's newly-elected President, Salome Zurbishvili, who was born in France and once served as a French diplomat.

He condemned the creation of actual borders between the provinces of South Ossetia and



Abkhazia and the rest of the country. Georgia lost control over both provinces after the war with Russia ten years ago. Macron said France continuously called on Russia to respect the

conditions of the 2008 peace deal. Zurbishvili thanked France for the support and called for closer economic, military and cultural cooperation between both countries. (Fox News)

Vatican Admits to Having Secret Rules for Priests Who Breach Celibacy & Father Children

VATICAN CITY - The Vatican has admitted to having an internal set of guidelines which urge the clergy to "voluntarily" leave their service to the Catholic Church in case they ever father children in violation of their vows of celibacy.

The "internal document" focuses on the "fundamental principle" of child protection by "requesting" the ordained leave the priesthood and "assume his responsibilities as a parent by devoting himself exclusively to the child," Vatican spokesman Alessandro Gisotti told the New York

Times, confirming the existence of the secret internal guidelines. While the protocol asks clergy to abandon their calling, the "request" is more of a non-binding formality, Monsignor Andrea Ripa, the under-secretary in the Congregation for the Clergy, said, noting that the rule is nearly "impossible" to impose. The admission to having a clear set of rules governing parental responsibility for clergy comes as a teaser for the Vatican's upcoming summit on sexual abuse - an issue which has plagued the Holy See for centuries. ... (More on P4)... (14)

EU Commission Rebukes Hungary's New Media Campaign as 'Fake News'

BUDAPEST/BRUSSELS - The European Commission on Tuesday rebuked a media campaign by the Hungarian government aimed at European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and U.S. businessman George Soros, accusing Brussels of pushing migration plans threatening Hungary. Orban's latest campaign, announced in a Facebook post on Monday, depicts smiling images of Soros and Juncker with the text "You also have the right to know what Brussels prepares for!" overlaid in red and white block capitals.

A caption says the EU plans to adopt mandatory relocation quotas for migrants, weaken the border protection rights of member states and make arrivals easier with a "migrant visa". The EU Commission, which is locked in a series of running battles with Orban including over reforms criminalizing support for migrants, dismissed the latest Hungarian campaign as "fake news and disinformation".

"The Hungarian government campaign beggars belief," Commission spokesman Margaritis Schinas told a press briefing. "It is shocking that such a ludicrous conspiracy theory has reached the mainstream to the extent it has."

"It is not true that the EU ... undermines national border protection, quite the contrary. And there are zero plans for the so-called humanitarian visas. Member states decide to what level they want to accept legal migration," Schinas said. ... (More on P4)... (17)