

Brexit Not Limit of Britain's Ambitions in 2018: PM

LONDON - Making a success of Brexit in 2018 is crucial, but it will not be the limit of Britain's ambitions, Prime Minister Theresa May said Sunday in her New Year message.

May said in the new year negotiations will move on to vital issues of trade and security as Britain continues negotiations over its departure from the European Union, adding: "I am determined that we will keep up our progress in 2018". In a message directed at the population, May said: "Whichever way you voted in the referendum, most people just want the government to get on and deliver a good Brexit, and that's exactly what we are doing," May added: "I believe



2018 can be a year of renewed confidence and pride in our country.

A year in which we continue to make good progress towards a successful Brexit deal, an economy that's fit for the future, and a stronger and fairer society for everyone."

Aside from Brexit, May said she wants Britain to carry on making a difference on the issues that matter to people's daily lives.

"That means building an economy fit for the future and taking a balanced approach to government spending, so we get our debt falling but can also invest in the things that matter - our schools, our police and our precious NHS. (Xinhua)

Spain Saves 66 Migrants Crossing Mediterranean Sea



MADRID - Spain's maritime rescue service says it has saved 66 migrants from two boats in the Mediterranean Sea. The service says that one boat carrying 58 migrants was intercepted by rescue craft in the Strait of Gibraltar before sunrise on Sunday. A further eight migrants were pulled from a second boat in waters east

of the strait. Spain saved 177 migrants traveling in six boats on Saturday. Thousands of refugees and other migrants attempt the perilous crossing from Africa in hopes of reaching European shores each year. They are often packed by human traffickers into small boats unfit for the open sea. (AP)

Turkey's Erdogan to Discuss Syria with Macron in Paris

PARIS - Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan will visit Paris on Jan. 5 to meet his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, with the conflict in Syria high on the agenda, a source in the French president's office said on Saturday. Among the regional crises the two leaders plan to discuss, there would be a particular focus on Syria as well as on the Palestinian situation, the source said, weeks after U.S. President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The move stirred concern

among Western allies and outrage in the Arab World.

Erdogan earlier this week made some of his harshest comments in weeks regarding Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, calling him a terrorist and saying it was impossible for peace efforts in Syria to continue if he did not leave power.

Macron, meanwhile, said recently that France would push for peace talks involving all parties in the six-year-old Syrian conflict, including al-Assad, and promised "initia-



tives" early next year. The Elysee source said "the question of human rights will also be raised" when Erdogan and Macron meet. A security crackdown in

Turkey after a failed coup in 2016 has drawn criticism from campaigners as well as the European Union, which is overseeing Ankara's halting bid to join the bloc. (Reuters)

Merkel Declares Europe Top Priority for New Government



BERLIN - Chancellor Angela Merkel will tell Germans that European cooperation is "the decisive question of the coming years" in a New Year's Eve broadcast Sunday, as her conservatives eye tricky

coalition talks. Merkel will say that "27 states in Europe must be persuaded more strongly than ever to hold together as a community," according to a script of the annual televised address released

by her office. Britain is on course to leave the bloc in March 2019 after last year's referendum vote for Brexit - leaving the European Union with 27 members. As for Germany, its "future is bound indivisibly with the future of Europe," the chancellor will declare, recalling that Berlin hopes to work with France's pro-European President Emmanuel Macron to future-proof the EU. "The question will be whether we Europeans can represent our values inwardly and outwardly,

with self-confidence and with solidarity," she will add. Brexit and fights over upholding democratic norms and sharing responsibility for refugees are weighing on continental cooperation. Europe must be economically strong and fair, as well as able to "protect our external borders and the security of our citizens," according to the text. Merkel and Macron vowed in mid-December to deliver a plan to reform the 19-nation euro single currency area. (AFP)

FDP Leader Wants Germany to Deport Minor Refugees Linked to Crime

BERLIN - Germany should be able to deport unaccompanied minor refugees who commit crimes if their families can be identified, the head of the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP) said in remarks released ahead of publication on Sunday. FDP leader Christian Lindner spoke amid growing debate about unaccompanied refugees after the fatal stabbing of a 15-year-old German girl on Wednesday by a suspect later identified by police as her former boyfriend, a 15-year-old

Afghan refugee who had entered Germany in early 2016. Lindner told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper that authorities should be able to deport unaccompanied minors who resisted "educational measures" and caused problems, if their families could be identified in their home countries. The girl who was killed had filed charges days earlier accusing the Afghan teenager of harassing and threatening her after she broke up with him, police officials said. (Reuters)

Australian Diplomat's Tip a Factor in FBI's Russia Probe

WASHINGTON - An Australian diplomat's tip appears to have helped persuade the FBI to investigate Russian meddling in the U.S. election and possible coordination with the Trump campaign, The New York Times reported Saturday.

Trump campaign adviser George Papadopoulos told the diplomat, Alexander Downer, during a meeting in London in May 2016 that Russia had thousands of emails that would embarrass Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, the report said. Downer, a former foreign minister, is Australia's top diplomat in Britain. Australia passed the information on to the FBI after the Democratic emails were leaked, according to The Times, which cited four current and former U.S. and foreign officials with direct knowledge of the Australians' role.

"The hacking and the revelation that a member of the Trump campaign may have had inside information about it were driving factors that led the FBI to open an investigation in July 2016," the newspaper said. White House lawyer Ty Cobb declined to comment, saying in a statement that the administration is continuing to cooperate with the investigation now led by special counsel Robert Mueller "to help complete their inquiry expeditiously." Papadopoulos has pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI and is a cooperating witness. Court documents unsealed two months ago show he met in April 2016 with Joseph Mifsud, a professor in London who told him about Russia's cache of emails. This was before the Democratic National Committee became aware of the scope of the intrusion into its email systems by hackers later linked to the Russian government. (AP)

Fugitive Catalan Leader Asks Spain to Restore His Government

MADRID - Catalonia's fugitive former president has called for Spanish authorities to open negotiations regarding the restitution of what he calls his "legitimate government." Carles Puigdemont said via social media channels from Brussels on Saturday that Spain should "recognize the election results of Dec. 21 and start negotiating politically with the legitimate government of Catalonia." Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy deposed Puigdemont and his cabinet after Catalonia's regional parliament voted



in favor of a declaration of independence from the rest of the country in October. But pro-secession parties, including one led by Puigdemont, won the most seats in elections last week. Puigdemont fled to Belgium to avoid a judicial investigation into

suspensions of rebellion by him and his government. He did not say Saturday if he plans to return to Spain, where an arrest warrant awaits him. Rajoy said on Friday that he plans to convene Catalonia's newly elected parliament on Jan. 17. (AP)

Russia Accuses US of Breaking Treaty over Defence System Sale to Japan

MOSCOW: Russia's deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov on Saturday accused the United States of violating a key arms treaty by selling a missile defence system to Japan.

"The US is deploying them (missile defence systems) at their military bases in Romania and Poland, that is near our western borders, which goes against the 1987 INF Treaty banning the deployment of such systems on the ground," Ryabkov said in a statement published on the Russian Foreign Ministry website. "The fact that such complexes could now ap-

pear on Russia's eastern borders creates a situation that we cannot ignore in our military planning," said Ryabkov.

On Thursday, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the deployment of the US missile defence system would have a negative impact on relations between Tokyo and Moscow.

"We consider the step made by the Japanese side as going against efforts of ensuring peace and stability in the region," Zakharova said, adding that Moscow has "deep regret and serious concern" over the move. (AFP)

South Korea Seizes Second Ship Suspected of Providing Oil to North Korea

SEOUL - South Korean authorities have seized a Panama-flagged vessel suspected of transferring oil products to North Korea in violation of international sanctions, a customs official said on Sunday.

The seizure was the second to be revealed by South Korea within a few days, as the United Nations steps up efforts to squeeze essential oil supplies to the reclusive North following its nuclear or ballistic missile tests.

The ship, KOTI, was seized at Pyeongtaek-Dangjin port, the official told Reuters, without elaborating, due to the sensitivity of the issue. The port is on the west coast, south of Incheon.

A marine official also confirmed the seizure, which he said was done "recently".

The KOTI's estimated time of arrival at the port was Dec. 19, according to VesselFinder Ltd., a tracking service provider.

The ship can carry 5,100 tonnes of oil and has a crew mostly from China and Myanmar, Yonhap News Agency reported, adding that South Korea's intelligence and customs officials are conducting a joint probe into the vessel. A Foreign Ministry spokesman confirmed the probe, declining to provide details.

"The government has been in close consultations with related countries and ministries to thoroughly implement the sanctions by the U.N. Security Council," the spokesman said. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

President Xi Delivers New Year Speech Vowing Resolute Reform in 2018

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping Sunday delivered a New Year speech, vowing that China would resolutely carry out reform in 2018.

"We will take the opportunity of celebrating the 40th anniversary of the reform and opening-up in 2018 to further carry out reform, as reform and opening-up is the path we must take to make progress in contemporary China and to realize the Chinese dream," Xi said.

He cited a Chinese adage, saying that the Chinese people would "cut paths through mountains, and build bridges across rivers" to move forward on reform.

He extended New Year greetings to all Chinese, and best wishes to friends all over the world. Xi said the year 2018

marked the first year of fully implementing "the spirit of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China," which outlines China's desired development blueprint over the next three decades.

"Building a high-rise begins with mounds of soil," Xi said, borrowing an ancient Chinese phrase to urge his fellow Chinese to take a step-by-step approach and work hard to turn the blueprint into a reality.

Xi said that by 2020 all rural residents living below the current poverty line should have been lifted out of poverty. It will be the first time in China's thousands of years of history that extreme poverty is eliminated. "It is our solemn promise," Xi said. "Only three years are left to 2020. (Xinhua)

Iran Warns Protesters Will 'Pay the Price' as Unrest Turns Deadly

TEHRAN - Iran warned on Sunday that protesters will "pay the price" after a third night of unrest saw mass demonstrations across the country, two people killed and dozens arrested.

Videos on social media showed thousands marching across the country overnight in the biggest test for the Islamic republic since mass protests in 2009.

They showed demonstrations in Mashhad, Isfahan and many smaller cities but travel restrictions and limited coverage by official media made it difficult to confirm reports.

State media began to show footage of the protests on Sunday, focusing on attacks by young

men against banks and vehicles, an attack on a town hall in Tehran, and images of a man burning the Iranian flag.

"Those who damage public property, disrupt order and break the law must be responsible for their behaviour and pay the price," Interior Minister Abdolrahman Rahmani Fazli said on state television. "The spreading of violence, fear and terror will definitely be confronted," he added.

Loresstan province deputy governor Habibollah Khojastehpour told state television that two people were killed in the small western town of Dorud late on Saturday but denied security forces were responsible. (AFP)

Nawaz Sharif in S. Arabia to Hold Talks on 'Matters of National Interest'

LAHORE - Ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif on Saturday arrived in Saudi Arabia where he would hold meetings with the royal family on what his party said "matters of national interest and not for personal reasons".

Mr Sharif flew to Saudi Arabia by a foreign airline from the Allama Iqbal International Airport of Lahore.

The ruling party also dismissed the reports as "absurd" that said efforts were under way to have another National Reconciliation Order (NRO). "Those claiming that an NRO is being prepared

should at least know that it is signed secretly and not so openly," a close aide to Mr Sharif, Senator Pervaiz Rashid, said.

He was talking to Dawn about the purpose of Mr Sharif's visit that created much hype in media about reaching a possible deal between the embattled Sharif family and the military establishment.

"Mian Sahib's visit is that of national interest as it has nothing to do with his personal interest. It will not be good to talk about the matters of sensitive nature before they take final shape," he said. (Monitoring Desk)

Iran, Tajikistan Review Development of Bilateral Ties

DUSHANBE - Iranian Ambassador to Tajikistan Hojjatollah Faghani in a meeting with Speaker of Tajikistan's Parliament Shukurjon Zuhurov in Dushanbe discussed ways of expanding mutual relations.

The two sides also discussed parliamentary cooperation and their enhancement and reviewed the latest regional and international developments.

Referring to the recent visit to Tajikistan by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif as well as holding a joint economic commission in Dushanbe, Faghani said that relations between the

two countries are increasingly gaining momentum.

The Iranian diplomat also emphasized the need for exchanging parliamentary delegations and friendship groups between the two nations.

Touching on the defeat of the Daesh (ISIS) terrorists in Syria and Iraq, the Iranian envoy to Tajikistan said the terrorists have changed the geography of their activities. Faghani warned about the possible threat of the terrorists against countries in Central Asia. He also voiced Iran's willingness to share its experiences with Tajikistan in counter-terrorism efforts. (IRNA)