

Xi, Trump Vow Cooperation on Diplomatic Anniversary

BEIJING - The presidents of China and the US have exchanged messages vowing to boost cooperation despite a bruising trade war on the 40th anniversary of the countries' diplomatic relations, Chinese state media reported.

Tensions between Beijing and Washington soared in 2018 over trade disputes, although US President Donald Trump has frozen the latest planned tariff hike and on Saturday reported "big progress" after a call with his counterpart Xi Jinping.

In the messages sent Tuesday, Xi underlined the importance of working with the US "to advance China-US relations featuring coordination, cooperation and stability", state news agency Xinhua reported. According to Xinhua, Trump



praised the last four decades of diplomacy between China and the US, hailing his "solid friendship" with the Chinese leader. Washington and Beijing imposed tit-for-tat tariffs on more than \$300 billion worth of

goods in total two-way trade last year, locking them in a conflict that has begun to eat into profits and contributed to stock market plunges. Trump initiated the trade war because of

complaints over unfair Chinese trade practices -- concerns shared by the European Union, Japan and others.

Since the two leaders agreed on a truce on the sidelines of the G20 summit meeting in Buenos Aires, however, there have been small signs of progress -- and an absence of new threats from Trump.

China and the US established diplomatic relations on January 1, 1979, with Washington pledging to maintain only non-official ties with Taiwan.

In the same year, late paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, often credited with China's "Reform and Opening" policy which led to its economic transformation, met US president Jimmy Carter in the United States. (AFP)

Neighbor News

China to Lend \$2bn to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD - China has agreed to lend at least \$2bn to Pakistan to shore up its foreign exchange reserves, the Financial Times reported quoting two senior government officials. The officials told FT that amount from China will prevent further devaluations of the rupee against the dollar. "China's promise to

Pakistan is an indication of their commitment to help us avoid a crisis. If the rupee falls sharply and we need to prevent its slide, we can turn to China," said a senior government official in Islamabad. Chinese officials were not immediately available for comment. (Agencies)

Pakistan Eyeing Further Electricity Import from Iran

TEHRAN - Pakistan's Minister for Power Omar Ayub Khan, in a meeting with Tehran's Ambassador to Islamabad Mehdi Honardoost, underlined his country's interest in boosting power supplies from Iran.

Ayub Khan said on Monday that Pakistan is ready to hold negotiations on the renewal of the agreement on 100MW electricity import to its border province of Baluchistan.

The two sides stressed the need to continue joint efforts in the power sector on both power generation and transmission.

Honardoost, for his part, noted that Iranian companies and contractors are ready to take part in the neighboring country's power sector.

Last year, Iran expressed readiness to provide up to 3,000 MW electricity to Pakistan.

However, according to Ayub Khan, there is a problem on Pakistan side because importing such quantity of electricity requires a robust transmission system, which requires a lot of investment.

Earlier on Saturday, Ambassador Riffat Masood said that Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan is keen on increasing bilateral ties with Iran, adding that the premier has ordered solution of all economic problems with Tehran.

Masood made the remarks a meeting with the provincial governor of Iranian Sistan and Baluchistan province Ahmad Ali Mohebbati in Zahedan.

She said that Iran and Pakistan share a lot of commonalities that need to be tapped into to develop bilateral relations between the two countries. (FNA)

France: Festive Celebration in Paris; Macron Defends Agenda

PARIS - Hundreds of thousands of people celebrated New Year's Eve on Paris' Champs-Elysees avenue in a festive and joyful atmosphere amid heavy security.

Parisians and tourists gathered on the avenue known for luxury shops and refined air to watch a 20-minute light show at the Arc de Triomphe monument and a fireworks display at the start of the new year. At midnight, revelers kissed and hugged each other. Some people wearing yellow vests could be

seen peacefully standing in the huge crowd. The yellow vest protesters, angry over taxes and what they see as President Emmanuel Macron's pro-business policies, called on social media for a "festive event" in the French capital and other cities.

Previous demonstrations since November have led to violent clashes with police in Paris. The Arc de Triomphe has notably been tagged with anti-government graffiti that have been cleaned since then. (AP)

Russia 'Never Had Helpers & Never Will,' Says Putin in New Year's Address

MOSCOW - Russia has never had "helpers" aiding it and so the nation should stay united and work as one strong, solid team, President Vladimir Putin told his compatriots in the traditional New Year's message for 2019.

There are challenges facing Russia in economy, science, education and healthcare, Putin said. Improving the quality of life is also a top priority in the coming year. "We can achieve it only if we stand together side by side. We had never had helpers and will never have." (Russia Today)



Netanyahu Says Israel Is Arabs' 'Ally' against Iran



RIO DE JANEIRO - Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday that Arab countries viewed Israel as an "indispensable ally" fighting Iran and the Islamic State group.

That evaluation, he told Brazil's Globo TV during a visit to Rio, has caused

"a revolution in relations with the Arab world."

The comments came as Israel has stepped up air strikes on Iranian positions in neighboring Syria, and as Israel digested an abrupt decision by President Donald Trump to withdraw US troops from Syria.

Netanyahu has repeatedly warned that Iran is trying to develop nuclear weapons to destroy his country.

Israel, he said, had shown itself to be active in battling "radical Islam, violent Islam -- either the one

led by radical Shiites led by Iran, or the one led by the radical Sunnis led by Daesh (IS) and Al-Qaeda."

"Unfortunately we have not made any advance with the Palestinians. Half of them are already under the gun of Iran and of radical Islam," Netanyahu added.

Asked if he could ever contemplate sitting down with an Iranian leader to talk peace, Netanyahu replied: "If Iran remains committed to our destruction the answer is no." (AFP)

Taiwan Tells China to Use Peaceful Means to Resolve Differences

TAIPEI - China must use peaceful means to resolve its differences with Taiwan and respect its democratic values, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen said on Tuesday, ahead of a major speech about the island by Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing.

China has heaped pressure on Tsai since she took office in 2016, cutting off dialogue, whittling down Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic allies and forcing foreign airlines to list Taiwan as part of China on their

websites.

China fears Tsai wishes to push for Taiwan's formal independence, though Tsai says she wants to maintain the status quo. Beijing has regularly sent military aircraft and ships to circle the island on drills.

Taiwan is gearing up for presidential elections in a year's time. Tsai's pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party suffered stinging losses to the China-friendly Kuomintang in mayoral and local elections in November. (Reuters)

Iran FM Wishes for World Peace in Year 2019

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has wished for peace all across the globe on the occasion of the New Year, urging concerted action to work towards ending terrorism, wars and starvation in the year 2019.

In a post on his official Twitter account on Monday, Zarif hoped for "a happy, healthy and peaceful New Year."

The top diplomat prayed that no innocent man, woman or child would lose their lives to hunger, conflict and terror this year.

Earlier in the day, President Hassan

Rouhani, in separate congratulatory messages addressed to world leaders as well as Iranian Christians, expressed hope that the world would be witness to increased welfare and prosperity through collective efforts.

He also met with the families of Iranian Armenian martyr Alfred Gabri and war veteran Hasou Keshish Danilian on New Year's Eve.

The Iranian president appreciated Gabri's parents for their patience and sacrifices, and hailed Armenian Iranians for their contributions to preserving national security. (Press TV)

Super jets in Iran 'Out of Question for Now'

TEHRAN - Plans to use Sukhoi Superjet 100 aircraft in Iranian airlines have been put on hold for now because the Russian planemaker has failed to receive a US license for sales to the Islamic Republic, an official says.

Iran Air Tours, a subsidiary of national flag carrier IranAir, had recently signed an initial agreement to buy 20 Superjets, while another Iranian airline had reached a draft agreement to lease three planes, secretary of Association of Iranian Airlines Maqsood Asadi Samani said. "However, it appears that due to the lack of license issued by OFAC (the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control), the arrival of the planes is out of question for now," he told Iranian Labor New Agency (ILNA). Superjets have more

than 10 percent in American parts, the threshold for needing US Treasury approval. Russian officials had said Sukhoi was working on reducing the number of US parts in order to win an Iranian order for up to 100 aircraft.

However, the state-owned Russian company "was unable to do that," Samani said, adding the replacement of American parts would probably be time-consuming. Sukhoi Superjet 100 is the first newly-designed passenger aircraft built by Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union, and is aimed at challenging Canada's Bombardier and Brazil's Embraer in the regional airliner sector. The aircraft, with a capacity of 68-103 passengers, was developed in partnership with Boeing and Italy's Finmeccanica. (Press TV)

Brazil Enters New Era with Far-Right President

BRAZILIA - Brazil entered a new chapter in its history on Tuesday, embracing a far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, whose determination to break with decades of centrist rule has raised both hopes and fears.

The former paratrooper and longtime lawmaker was starting his four-year mandate on January 1 as required by the constitution, after a night of New Year's celebrations across the country.

He was taking office with a sky-high approval rating, fueled by public expectations that he will be a new broom sweeping away chronic crime and corruption, and boosting an economy still limping after a record recession. (AFP)

British New Pay Regulations Come into Force

LONDON - British new pay ratio regulations came into force on Tuesday, aiming to enhance the salary transparency between bosses and ordinary employees.

According to a statement issued by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, the pay ratio regulations will apply to large Britain listed companies with over 250 employees, which are required to be disclosed annually.

The first statutory disclosures will be issued from the start of 2020, which will cover CEO and employee pay awarded in 2019. The new regulations coming into force meant that "for the first time, the UK's biggest companies will have to disclose and explain every year their top bosses pay and the gap between that and their average worker," said in the statement. (Xinhua)

Kim Jong Un Says He's Willing to Meet Trump at Any Time, in New Year's Message

PYONGYANG - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said Tuesday that he is prepared to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump at any time, but warned that he would pursue an alternative course if Washington kept up sanctions on Pyongyang.

In his closely watched New Year's address, Kim said he was ready to pursue an outcome that would be "welcomed by the international community." However, he said the North will be forced to take a different path if the United States "continues to break its promises and misjudges our patience by unilaterally



demanding certain things and pushes ahead with sanctions and pressure." Kim also said the U.S. should continue its halt to joint military exercises with South Korea and not deploy strategic military assets to the South. He also made a nationalistic call urging for stronger inter-Korean cooperation

and said the North is ready to resume operations at a jointly run factory park in the North Korean border town of Kaesong and restart South Korean tours to the North's Diamond Mountain resort. Neither of those is possible for South Korea unless sanctions are removed. (Fox News)

UNESCO's Turn: Washington & Tel Aviv Ditch International Body over 'Anti-Israel Bias'

WASHINGTON - The decision of the US took effect late Monday, closely followed by Tel Aviv, which kicked in on the first day of 2019.

The withdrawal of the US and Israel from UNESCO is hardly surprising as both have had long-standing tensions with the agency. Washington's move was made public in October 2017 when it announced the withdrawal, citing "concerns with mounting arrears at UNESCO, the need for fundamental reform in the organization, and con-

tinuing anti-Israel bias at UNESCO."

A similar evaluation was produced by Israeli officials, who have repeatedly made accusations against the UN cultural body.

"It is corrupted and manipulated by Israel's enemies, and continually singles out the only Jewish state for condemnation. We are not going to be a member of an organization that deliberately acts against us," Israeli Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon told The Times of Israel on Monday. (Russia Today)