

## U.S. Navy Ship Sails in Disputed South China Sea Amid Trade Talks with Beijing

BEIJING - A U.S. guided-missile destroyer sailed near disputed islands in the South China Sea in what China called a "provocation" as U.S. officials joined talks in Beijing during a truce in a bitter trade war.

The USS McCampbell carried out a "freedom of navigation" operation, sailing within 12 nautical miles of the Paracel Island chain, "to challenge excessive maritime claims", Pacific Fleet spokeswoman Rachel McMarr said in an emailed statement.

The operation was not about any one country or to make a political statement, McMarr said.

The statement came as trade talks between China and the United States were under way in Beijing, the first round



of face-to-face discussions since both sides agreed to a 90-day truce in a trade war that has roiled international markets.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said that the conduct of the U.S. ship had violated China's and international law,

and China had lodged "stern representations".

"We urge the United States to immediately cease this kind of provocation," he said, adding that China had sent military ships and aircraft to identify and warn off the ship.

Asked about the timing of the operation during trade talks, Lu said resolving issues would benefit the two countries and the world.

"Both sides have the responsibility to create the necessary positive atmosphere for this," he said.

China claims almost all of the strategic South China Sea and frequently lambastes the United States and its allies for freedom of navigation naval operations near Chinese-occupied islands. (Reuters)

## Neighbor News

### Chinese Construction Giant to Build Academy for Training Workers in Egypt

CAIRO - Egypt has approved a request by China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC) to establish an academy for training Egyptian workers, state media reported Monday.

The New Urban Communities Authorities (NUCA), an agency under the Housing Ministry, allocated 20.16 hectares in Egypt's new administrative capital to establish a training academy for Egyptian workers to learn the most advanced methods in the construction sector.

According to the NUCA, the academy seeks "to provide professional

workers to meet the urgent demands and needs in the projects run at the new capital."

The academy will be run by the CSCEC for seven years, after which the building and equipment of the academy will be transferred to the NUCA.

The CSCEC has been carrying out the construction of the central business district in Egypt's new capital, some 50 km east of the capital Cairo.

The construction work, which started in 2018, will be finished in 3.5 years, the CSCEC's chief executive officer told

Xinhua. (Xinhua)

### ADB Approves Grant to Support Increased Cross-Border Energy Trading in Central Asia

DUSHANBE - The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$4.5 million cluster regional technical assistance grant to support an increase in regional power trade in Central Asia Power System (CAPS) and explore potential reconnection of Turkmenistan to CAPS and its further expansion to Afghanistan, Trend reports citing the ADB website.

"With increased regional power trade, countries will be able to meet local demand for power and supply surpluses to their neighbors," said Director of Energy Division at ADB's Central and West Asia Department Ashok Bhargava. He added that this will improve regional energy security.

Power trade among

Central Asian countries has declined dramatically since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

First in 2003, Turkmenistan disconnected from CAPS and then in 2009, Tajikistan did the same. As a result, compared to 25,413 million kilowatt hour (kWh) traded in CAPS in 1990, the traded energy volume declined to 2,080 million kWh in 2016. This caused widespread power outages notably in Tajikistan in winter and resulted in increased fossil fuel use by Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in summer mainly because hydropower surpluses from Tajikistan were not available to CAPS.

Tajikistan has since reconnected to Uzbekistan and to CAPS in March 2018. (Trend)

### Turkmenistan to Hold Additional Parliamentary Elections

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan on March 31 will hold election of MPs to the vacant parliament seats, Trend reports referring to the Turkmen government Jan. 7. The document was signed in accordance with Articles 4 and 85 of the Electoral Code of Turkmenistan.

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)

### Pakistan Says UAE's Financial Assistance to Shore Up Economy

ISLAMABAD - A loan facility from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will help cash-starved Pakistan bridge a yawning current account deficit and shore up foreign reserves, Pakistan's chief government spokesman said on Monday.

The UAE's crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, visited Islamabad on Sunday and confirmed a \$3 billion loan package first announced last month. "The \$3 billion package which has already been announced was formalised," the government's top spokesman, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, told a news conference.

Chaudhry did not give any details about any further assistance through deferred oil payments, which he said late last year the UAE would be extending to Pakistan on

top of the loan. Nor did he give details of the interest rate on the \$3 billion loan.

However, Pakistan's English-language daily Dawn quoted Chaudhry as saying the loan had been given on an interest rate of 2.8 percent, and that the UAE would be giving another \$3.2 billion for the supply of oil on deferred payment.

Pakistan has been facing an economic crisis due to depleting foreign reserves and a widening current account deficit since the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan took office in August. Khan, who has been critical of foreign loans throughout his political career, had no option but to seek financial support from friendly countries besides approaching the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a bailout. (Reuters)

### Putin, Modi Agree to Enhance Anti-Terror Cooperation

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a phone conversation and discussed important issues of bilateral and international agendas, including joint efforts in the fight against terrorism, the Kremlin said Monday.

The heads of state noted the traditional friendship and a "particularly privileged strategic partnership" between Russia and India that continue to develop dynamically, a Kremlin

statement said. They confirmed the "mutual spirit" of the two countries to increase cooperation in the fight against international terrorism and seek solutions to other pressing world problems.

Putin wished Modi success in the forthcoming parliamentary elections in India and invited him to attend the Eastern Economic Forum in the Russian city of Vladivostok in September 2019, the Kremlin said. (Xinhua)

### Two Americans Among Foreign Jihadists Captured by Syrian Kurds

BEIRUT - The Kurdish-led force battling the remnants of the Islamic State group in eastern Syria said Monday it captured five foreign jihadists, including two US citizens. The two Americans, two Pakistanis and an Irishman were part of a cell planning an attack on civilians fleeing the jihadist group's last bastion, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said.

The SDF has spearheaded the battle against IS in eastern Syria and is close to flushing out the jihadists from their last pocket



near the Iraqi border. The force, which receives key support in the air and on the ground from the US military, said in a

statement that the jihadists were captured on December 30.

The SDF said its forces detected "a group of terrorists who had been preparing to attack the civilians who were trying to get out of the war zone". (AFP)

### Singapore Leading Family Feud Resurfaces over Founder's Will



SINGAPORE - A feud between Singapore's prime minister and his siblings resurfaced on Monday when the pub-

lic prosecutor said there were questions over the involvement of a family member in the preparation of their father's

will. The case, which comes ahead of a general election expected as soon as this year, stems from a dispute over the old house of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first premier and the father of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. The siblings have publicly bickered since June 2017 over the future of the family home in which the late leader, who died in 2015, had lived for most of his life.

Prime Minister Lee's

younger brother, Lee Hsien Yang, and sister, Lee Wei Ling, want the house to be eventually demolished in accordance, they have said, with their father's wishes as stated in his will.

But the prime minister has questioned whether his father really wanted the home, near Singapore's bustling Orchard Road shopping district, to be knocked down. He has said he has recused himself from government discussions on the matter. (Reuters)

### Thailand Will Not Forcibly Deport Saudi Woman

BANGKOK - The Saudi woman who made a desperate plea for asylum after landing at Bangkok airport will not be forcibly deported from Thailand, an official said Monday. Rahaf Mohammed al-Qununi told AFP she ran away from her family while travelling in Kuwait because they subjected her to physical and psychological abuse. The 18-year-old said she had planned to seek asylum in Australia and feared she would be killed if repatriated by Thai immigration officials who stopped her during transit

on Sunday.

The incident comes as Saudi Arabia faces intense scrutiny over the shocking murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year, which has renewed criticism of the kingdom's rights record.

Thai immigration chief Surachate Hakpam had said Sunday that Qununi was denied entry because of her lack of documents. But he made an abrupt about-face the next day, following a global media frenzy as the young woman pleaded on Twitter for different countries to help her. (AFP)

### U.S. and North Korean Officials Met in Hanoi to Discuss Second Trump-Kim Summit

SEOUL - U.S. State Department officials recently met multiple times with North Korean counterparts in Hanoi and discussed planning a second summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, a South Korean newspaper reported on Monday.

U.S. officials discussed the schedule for the second Trump-Kim summit while in contact with North Korean officials in the Vietnamese capital city, fuelling speculation that Vietnam could host the event, the Munhwa Ilbo reported, citing unnamed diplomatic sources in Seoul and Washington.

Vietnam has diplomatic relations with both the United States and North Korea, with North Korea maintaining a diplomatic office in Vietnam, and has the symbolic significance of a communist country that has reformed its economy, the newspaper reported. (Reuters)

### Britain's May to Hold Parliamentary Brexit Vote on January 15

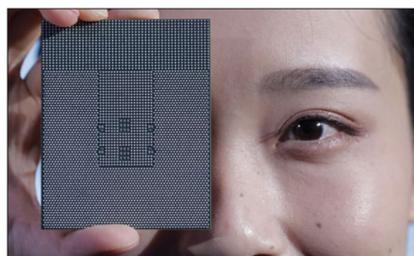
LONDON - Prime Minister Theresa May will hold a delayed parliamentary vote on her Brexit deal on Tuesday, January 15, the BBC reported on Monday, citing government sources. May was forced to pull the vote on her deal in December after she said it would be defeated by a large majority. The government had previously said the vote would be held in the week of January 14. May said on Sunday that Britain would be in uncharted territory if her Brexit deal is rejected by parliament, despite little sign that she has won over sceptical lawmakers. (Reuters)

### China's Huawei Unveils Chip for Global Big Data Market

BEIJING - Huawei Technologies Ltd. showed off a new processor chip for data centers and cloud computing Monday, expanding into new and growing markets despite Western warnings the company might be a security risk.

Huawei and other Chinese technology companies that rely on Western technology are stepping up efforts to develop their own.

The company based in southern China's Shenzhen has pushed ahead with commercial initiatives despite the Dec. 1 arrest of its chief finan-



cial officer, Meng Wanzhou, the daughter of Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei, in Canada on U.S. charges related to possible violations of trade sanctions on Iran. The Huawei said the Kunpeng 920 chip is designed for servers that handle a flood of data

from smartphones, video and other network services - a fast growing sector with the development of artificial intelligence and the "internet of things." The company said it is part of a planned product lineup to support "intelligent computing." (AP)

### Avalanche Risk High in Alps, Several Dead in Accidents

BERLIN - Authorities in southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland warned Monday that the risk for avalanches in the northern Alps remains high after several people died in weather-related incidents.

A 44-year-old man died in Wackersberg in Bavaria when he was hit by tree branches brought down by heavy snow, police said. Authorities also said Monday that a woman who was buried by an avalanche last week the Uri canton (state) in Switzerland died of her in-

juries Saturday.

Also on the weekend, three skiers in Austria were killed by avalanches and one woman in Bavaria died in a weather-related incident.

Some 40 rescuers with dogs are still searching for two snowshoers missing near Hohenberg in Lower Austria, Austrian news agency APA reported.

Due to the high risk of avalanches, the Hochkar alpine road and the entire Hochkar skiing region in Lower Austria was closed. (AP)

### Japan Rebounds, Asia Jumps on US Data as Trade Talks Begin

SINGAPORE - Asian markets were broadly higher on Monday after strong U.S. jobs data lifted indexes on Wall Street. All eyes are on trade talks in Beijing, where American and Chinese officials are trying to resolve a trade dispute that threatens to worsen an economic slowdown and put a drag on the global economy

KEEPING SCORE: Japan's benchmark, bouncing back from steep losses last week, started the day trading over 3 percent higher. By mid-day, the Nikkei 225 index was up 2.8 percent at 20,113.37. South Korea's Kospi gained 1.2 percent to 2,033.32. Australia's S&P-ASX 200 added 1.2 percent to 5,687.80. Hong Kong's Hang Seng climbed 1.1 percent to 25,896.85 and the Shanghai Composite index gained 0.7 percent to 2,532.48. Shares rallied in Taiwan and throughout Southeast Asia.

WALL STREET: U.S. indexes soared on Friday after the Labor Department announced that employers added a better-than-expected 312,000 jobs in December. While the unemployment rate rose slightly, it was taken as a good sign that more people were looking for jobs. Gains were also supported by Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell saying that the central bank will be flexible in deciding if and when it raises interest rates. The broad S&P 500 index advanced 3.4 percent to 2,531.94. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 3.3 percent to 23,433.16 and the Nasdaq composite was up 4.3 percent at 6,738.86. (AP)