

Sexual Harassment Rampant at UN, Survey Results Suggest

UNITED NATION - Survey results released Tuesday show that a third of United Nations employees reported experiencing sexual harassment at the agency within the last two years.

According to the findings, some 33 percent of respondents reported at least one instance of sexual harassment in that time, but the figure rose to nearly 40 percent when they were asked about their entire career at the U.N. Instances of sexual harassment included offensive jokes or stories, or inappropriate remarks about someone's appearance or sexual activities. Other employees said they had been the victims of unwanted gestures or touching. Some 60 percent of



reported harassers were men, with 25 percent being supervisors or managers and 10 percent being senior leaders, the survey said. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio

Guterres called the results "sobering" and "evidence of what needs to change" at the agency. He said the U.N. needed to set a higher standard than other organizations and vowed to enforce a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment. More than 30,000 staff -- or, 17 percent of the U.N. workforce -- provided answers to a confidential questionnaire, Agence France-Presse reported.

The release of the survey's findings come one month after the resignation of Michel Sidibe, head of UNAIDS, the U.N.'s program on HIV/AIDS, whose management style was found to enable a culture of sexual harassment. (Fox News)

US Assessment Raises Concerns over China Attacking Taiwan

WASHINGTON - Amid increasing tensions with Beijing, the Pentagon has released a new report that lays out U.S. concerns about China's growing military might, underscoring worries about a possible attack against Taiwan.

Speaking to reporters, a senior defense intelligence official said Tuesday that the key concern is that as China upgrades its military equipment and technology and reforms how it trains and develops troops, it becomes more confident in its ability to wage a regional conflict.

And Beijing's leaders have made it clear that reasserting sovereignty over Taiwan is a top priority. The official added, however, that although China could easily fire missiles at Taiwan, it doesn't yet have the military capability to successfully invade the self-governing island, which split from mainland China amid civil war in 1949. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in order to provide more detail on intelligence findings in the report, which was written by the Defense Intelligence Agency. (AP)

German Minister Says 'Hard Brexit Would Hurt Everyone in Europe' after Historic Defeat of May's Deal

BERLIN - It is up to British legislators to avoid a "hard Brexit" because the EU will not substantially renegotiate its terms, German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said. An exit with no deal would hurt both the EU and UK, he said. Britain still has "a few days" before the scheduled departure date of March 29 to come up with a Brexit roadmap, the German minister told public broadcaster ZDF. The substance of the deal negotiated by Prime Minister Theresa May's cabi-

net with the EU is "non-negotiable," but some minor details may yet be changed, he suggested. Altmaier said it was up to British legislators, who defeated May's proposal in a record 'nay' vote on Tuesday, to come up with an alternative. A "hard Brexit" would hurt both the EU and Britain, he warned. "Everyone in Europe would lose, nobody would win," the minister stated.

The defeat of the Brexit deal in the British Parliament was followed by a motion of no confidence



in May's government from the opposition Labour Party. The vote on the motion is scheduled for Wednesday, and the outcome is far from certain. The prime minister already survived one vote of no confidence from her own party over the terms she managed to get from Brussels. (RT)

Modi's Party Wants Expansionary Economic Policy ahead of India Election



NEW DELHI - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party is in favor of an expansionary economic policy

and does not consider the government's plan to keep the fiscal deficit to 3.3 percent of GDP as "sacrosanct", a party

spokesman told Reuters. Ahead of a general election that must be held by May and after a string of losses in recent state polls, the government run by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has announced several stimulus measures for the countryside where millions of farmers are grappling with low crop prices. Other fiscal moves have been aimed at helping small businesses.

The measures are likely to be a drain on finances in Asia's third-biggest

economy, though the Modi administration is expected to get the Reserve Bank of India to agree to transfer an interim dividend of 300-400 billion rupees (\$4.32 billion-\$5.8 billion) to the government by March, Reuters reported last week quoting sources. Weak consumer spending and the fragile farm sector have already been a drag on economic growth, creating a headache for Modi as he struggles to meet ambitious job creation targets. (Reuters)

Russia's Lavrov: We're Not Rubbing Our Hands with Glee over Brexit

MOSCOW - Russia is not rubbing its hands with glee over Britain's chaotic departure from the European Union despite its troubled relations with London and wants the EU to be strong and united, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday. Prime Minister Theresa May suffered a resounding defeat on her Brexit plan in parliament on Tuesday, plunging the country into political uncertainty. Britain is due to leave the EU on March 29.

Some British politicians have suggested that Russia may have meddled in the 2016 Brexit referendum in an attempt to weaken the West, an allegation Moscow has denied.

Lavrov, addressing a news conference in Moscow, said Russia took no pleasure from Britain's Brexit-related political crisis despite its difficult relations with London, which were worsened by the poisoning of a former Russian spy, Sergei Skripal, in England in March last year. (Reuters)

Sweden Looks Set to End Deadlock, Keep Lofven as Premier

COPENHAGEN, Denmark - A left-wing party in Sweden said Wednesday it won't oppose caretaker Prime Minister Stefan Lofven in attempting to form a center-left, minority government after a four-month deadlock to form a coalition.

Two center-right parties already have agreed to abstain from voting against Lofven, who then can form a Social Democrat-led minority government, likely with the left-leaning Greens. Jonas Sjostedt of the small Left Party said it would abstain in Friday's vote, saying the alternative would have been a center-right government, backed by the right-wing Sweden Democrats. In Sweden, a prime minister can govern as long as there is no majority against the government leader. (AP)

British PM May: We Are Leaving the EU on March 29

LONDON - Prime Minister Theresa May said on Wednesday that Britain will be leaving the European Union on March 29, and that the bloc would only consider extending the 'Article 50' negotiating period if there was a credible alternative exit plan.

"The government's policy is that we are leaving the European Union on the 29th of March. But the EU would only extend Article 50 if actually it was clear that there was a plan that was moving towards an agreed deal," she told parliament, a day after her proposed Brexit deal was rejected by a large margin. (Reuters)

Malaysia Says It Won't Host Any More Events Involving Israel

PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia - Malaysia's foreign minister said Wednesday that the government will not budge over a ban on Israeli athletes in a para swimming competition and has decided that the country will not host any events in the future involving Israel.

Malaysia, a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause, is among the predominantly Muslim countries that do not have diplomatic relations with Israel. The government has said Israeli swimmers cannot join the competition in eastern Sarawak state in July, which serves as a qualifying event for the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics.



Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah said the Cabinet affirmed last week that no Israeli delegates can enter Malaysia for sporting or other events in solidarity with the Palestinians. "The Cabinet has also decided that Malaysia will not host any more events involving Israel or its representatives. This is to

me, a decision to reflect the government's firm stance over the Israeli issue," Saifuddin said after meeting a coalition of Muslim groups. The groups submitted a memorandum urging the government to stick to the ban and not to repeat past instances of allowing Israel delegates into the country. (AP)

South Korea Stops Paintings Brought from North Korea

SEOUL, South Korea - South Korean officials said Wednesday they have stopped businessmen from bringing North Korean paintings into the country that a report said were purchased at an art studio under U.N. sanctions. Observers say similar incidents could occur frequently as South Korea's liberal government pushes for deeper exchanges with North Korea. The Korea Customs Service said it has nine North Korean paintings that an un-

identified number of businessmen tried to bring into the country after a trip to Pyongyang, North Korea's capital, last November. It said the businessmen did not have the required South Korean government permission to bring in North Korean products. South Korea's largest newspaper, Chosun Ilbo, reported Wednesday that the paintings were purchased from Pyongyang's Mansudae art studio, which is on a U.N. sanctions blacklist. (AP)

Greek PM Will Win Votes on Confidence and New Macedonia Name: Deputy PM

ATHENS - Greece's deputy prime minister said the government would emerge stronger after winning a confidence vote later on Wednesday and be able to secure parliament's endorsement for an accord to end a dispute over Macedonia's name.

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called the confidence vote following the resignation of his right-wing coalition partner Panos Kammenos in protest over the accord. Greek opponents of the agreement say Macedonia's new name - the Republic of North Macedonia - reached after decades of dispute between Athens and Skopje - represents an attempt to appropriate Greek identity. Macedonia is the name of Greece's biggest northern region.

Tsipras has said that if he wins the vote with an absolute majority of 151 in the 300-seat parliament, he will bring the so-called Prespes agreement to parliament for approval this month. If he fails, he said he would call a snap election. An early election could delay reform implementation, privatizations and Greece's efforts to return to bond markets. Tsipras' party is trailing by up to 12 points behind the main conservative New Democracy party, which opposes the deal.

"The government will win a confidence vote and rise stronger and more coherent from this process," Deputy Prime Minister Yannis Dragassakis told lawmakers hours before the vote takes place, around midnight (2200 GMT). (Reuters)

Neighbor News

Iran Says Will be Ready for New Satellite Launch in a Few Months: IRIB

LONDON - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that Tehran will be ready for a new satellite launch in a few months after a failed attempt this week, ignoring U.S. and European warnings to avoid such activity.

"We have achieved a

lot in satellite technology and we are on the right track. The remaining problems are minor and will be resolved in a few months and we will be ready again for a launch," Rouhani was quoted as saying by state broadcaster IRIB. (Reuters)

Pakistan Adopts Pre-Bailout Recommendation: IMF

ISLAMABAD - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Wednesday said that Pakistan has adopted the first of the several recommendations it had made during recent talks for a bailout package for its tottering economy.

In a statement the money watchdog said that the South Asian nation will now publish critical economic data through National Summary Data Page (NSDP), a portal run by the Finance Ministry, to ensure transparency.

The portal is based on IMF's Enhanced General Data Dissemination System (e-GDDS) established in 2015 to support improved data transparency in financial institutions across the world.

The publication of essential macroeconomic data

will provide national policy makers including investors and rating agencies, with easy access to information for monitoring economic conditions and policies, the statement further added.

Louis Marc Ducharme, chief statistician and data officer at IMF, welcomed the milestone.

"I am confident that Pakistan will benefit from using the e-GDDS as a framework for further development of its statistical system," said Ducharme. The IMF delegation led by Herald Finger, arrived in Islamabad in early November, on a two week-long visit for talks on a financial package on request of the Pakistani government to help in addressing its balance of payment issue. (Agencies)

Small Uzbek Enterprises Prefer Trade, Industry Sectors

TASHKENT - As of January 1, 2019, the number of operating small enterprises and microfirms in Uzbekistan amounted to 262,900, Trend reports referring to the Uzbek media.

According to the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, this is 14.5 percent higher year-on-year.

Most of the small enterprises and microfirms are located in Tashkent city (60,000 or 22.8 percent), as well as the Tashkent (25,400 or 9.6 percent), Fergana (23,300 or 8.9 percent) and Andijan (22,600 or 8.6 percent) regions.

Of the total number of operating small businesses and microfirms, in terms of economic activity, 70,500 (26.8 percent) account for trade,

56,200 (21.4 percent) for industry, 29,000 (11 percent) for construction, 24,000 (9.1 percent) for agriculture, forestry and fisheries, 19,700 (7.5 percent) for accommodation and food services, 13,100 (5 percent) for transportation and storage services, 6,700 (2.6 percent) for information and communication, 5,400 (2 percent) for healthcare and social services, and 38,400 (14.6 percent) for other economic activities.

Thus, the bulk of the small businesses and microfirms in Uzbekistan operate in trade and industry, and the lowest share of economic activity accounts for information and communication, healthcare and social services. (Trend)

Dushanbe Expected to Purchase Belarusian-Made Trolleybuses

DUSHANBE - The so-called non-contact trolleybuses (trolleybuses equipped with electricity storage system) are expected to appear on the roads in Tajik capital soon, Trend reports referring to news.tj.

"Initially, the Dushanbe administration plans to purchase four such trolleybuses, costing approximately 250,000 U.S. dollars each, and they will appear on the roads in Dushanbe in late March," an official source in Dushanbe administration told Asia-Plus in an interview.

According to him, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has allocated funds for buying those trolleybuses. 50 percent of the funds have reportedly been provided in the form of loan and 50 percent of them have been provided in the form of grant. The trolleybuses are being purchased in the framework of the Du-

shanbe Public Transport Extension Project, financed by the EBRD. Dushanbe State Communal Unitary Trolleybus Company intends using the proceeds of a loan from the EBRD and a grant from the EBRD's SF for a project extension to further rehabilitate trolleybus infrastructure in Dushanbe. The proposed project, which has a total estimated cost of US\$ 8 million equivalent in particular, requires supply of 4 trolleybuses with increased autonomous run, spare parts, maintenance equipment and incidental services.

Manufactured at Belkommunmash plant in Belarus, the non-contact trolleybuses (model 32100D) are equipped with the lithium-titanate electricity storage system and the stored power is reportedly enough for up to 15 kilometers of autonomous run. (Trend)