

Vancouver Meeting Discusses Measures against DPRK While China, Russia Question its Validity

VANCOUVER - Foreign ministers from 20 nations on Tuesday said they would not accept a nuclear-armed Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and maintain maximum pressure against Pyongyang at a meeting in Vancouver, which was criticized by China and Russia as illegal and counterproductive. Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland reiterated her country's commitment to a diplomatic solution to the Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis. "What we do want is to resolve this crisis peacefully to achieve what is in our collective best interests, and that is security and



stability on the Korean Peninsula," Freeland said during the Foreign Ministers Meeting on Security and Stability on the Korean Peninsula at the Vancouver Convention Center. The meeting, co-hosted by Freeland and U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, was attended by foreign ministers of Britain, Japan and South Korea, among others. They discussed issues that included pressuring and imposing sanctions against the DPRK. It came as the DPRK and South Korea have resumed talks after Pyongyang decided to join the PyeongChang Winter Olympics next month. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

China Further Cuts Red Tape to Improve Business Environment

BEIJING - China will continue to streamline administrative approval and cut red tape to improve business environment, according to a statement released after an executive meeting Wednesday. Premier Li Keqiang, who chaired the meeting, called for more efforts to remove barriers to market access and lower transaction costs. Services should be improved while the supervision should be strengthened, said the statement. All local governments should create healthy business environment for fair competition to enable market players to provide products and services of high quality. (Xinhua)

Pakistan Attaches Great Importance to its Relations with Turkmenistan: Mamnoon

ISLAMABAD - President Mamnoon Hussain on Tuesday said Pakistan attaches great importance to its friendly relations with Turkmenistan and both the countries support each other at the international forums. The president said this while talking to Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov who called on him at the Aiwan-e-Sadr. President Mamnoon stated that the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) was not only a gas pipeline project, but also a trade and transit corridor for the entire region and its credit went to President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. The president underlined that Pakistan desired early implementation of this project, saying Pakistan would be pleased to participate in Ashgabat Agreement for regional connectivity. The president welcomed Turkmenistan's offer to export 1000 MW of electricity to Pakistan and hoped that this project will materialised soon. He expected that the matters related to the transmission lines will be settled soon in bilateral talks between the two countries. The president underscored that the bilateral trade between the two countries is very low which needs to be increased. In this regard, it is necessary that there should be frequent exchange of trade and industrialists delegation between the both countries, he added. He highlighted that Pakistan and Turkmenistan can also cooperate in the fields of livestock, education, culture and science and technology in addition to energy. He also stressed the need for starting joint ventures between the two countries. The foreign minister for Turkmenistan delivered a special message from the President of Turkmenistan to President Mamnoon Hussain and invited the president to the inaugural ceremony of TAPI gas pipeline project. (Monitoring Desk)

Iran, Syria Pass through Difficult Stages Successfully: Zarif

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Syrian Parliament Speaker Hammouda Youssef Sabbagh have discussed issues of mutual interest in Tehran. In a Wednesday meeting, Zarif praised the resistance of the Syrian government and people against plots and their victory against the terrorists, saying that these victories made the US and the Zionist regime boost their destructive plans in favour of the terrorists. The Iranian top diplomat also added that Tehran and Damascus had gone through more difficult stages in the past, expressing hope that the current important stages would be successfully passed. In turn, the Syrian lawmaker appreciated the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Syrian people in their fight against terrorism, noting that "Iran is our main partner in the resistance, victories, political process and reconstruction of Syria." Referring to the holding of the 13th Session of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC members (PUIC), Sabbagh described it as an example of Iran's successful diplomacy, adding that Muslim countries will triumph over all conspiracies with unity and solidarity. (Agencies)

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan May Cancel Visa Regime

DUSHANBE - The agreement on the abolition of the visa regime between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is planned to be signed during Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's forthcoming visit to Dushanbe this year, chairman of the Uzbek State Committee for Tourism Development Aziz Abdulkhakimov told journalists, Sputnik Tajikistan agency reported Jan. 16. Abdulkhakimov has not disclosed the date of Mirziyoyev's visit to Tajikistan, stressing that this will happen soon. "I think that the abolition of the visa regime is a very serious decision, which has a great interest for Tajik people," Abdulkhakimov said. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have had their disagreements through the years. Tajikistan often accused the neighboring country of blocking railroads and roads. Uzbekistan also opposed the construction of the Rogun hydroelectric power plant in Tajikistan, which, according to the Uzbek authorities, is a threat to the entire agricultural sector of the region. The countries introduced a visa regime in 2001. (Trend)

UN Chief Says Peace Remains Elusive over Past Year

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned on Tuesday that conflicts deepened and peace remained elusive over the past year. "I took office last year calling for us to make 2017 a year for peace. One year later, we must recognize that peace remains elusive," Guterres told an informal meeting at which he presented his priorities for 2018. "In fundamental ways, the world has gone in reverse." "Conflicts have deepened

and new dangers have emerged; global anxieties about nuclear weapons are the highest since the Cold War; climate change is moving faster; inequalities are growing," he said, adding that "horrific violations of human rights, nationalism, racism and xenophobia are on the rise." Those indicate that the world needs greater unity and courage - unity and courage to meet today's most urgent needs, to ease the fears of the people and set the world on track toward a better future, he said. (Xinhua)

UN Chief Sounds "Red Alert" over Long-Lasting Conflicts, Terrorism

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday issued a "red alert" because of protracted conflicts, the spread of terrorism and other front-burner issues in the world. "We face a Gordian knot in the Middle East and potential nuclear catastrophe on the Korean Peninsula," said Guterres at his first news conference of the year at UN Headquarters, just after briefing UN members at an informal session of the 193-member General Assembly. The UN chief touched on many topics, ranging from UN reform, sexual exploitation by peacekeepers to gender parity in UN positions. He opened with a focus on peace and security and what he saw as a failure of diplomacy. Guterres recalled his first day as secretary-general last year issuing "an appeal for peace and called for a surge in diplomacy to end the crises that were causing so much suffering." He noted that "At the beginning of 2018, we must recognize the many ways



in which the international community is...falling short." "Climate change is moving faster than we are...Inequality and nationalism are on the rise," Guterres said, adding that instead, trust and solidarity are on the decline. He further explained that the world needs "bold leadership" in the face of today's challenges. (Xinhua)

Indian Army Chief Calls for Curbs on Internet, Social Media to Counter Terrorism



NEW DELHI - Indian army chief Bipin Rawat Wednesday called for restrictions on internet and social media use to counter terrorism. "I understand that in a democratic country people might have issues when we put curbs in place. But it is important to restrict the use of social media to

tackle terrorism. Put some checks and curbs on internet, social media that terrorist organisations always resort to," Rawat said. The army chief was speaking at the Raisina Dialogue - a conference hosted by an Indian think tank in collaboration with India's foreign ministry. Rawat also listed the severity of biological chemical weapons and the threat that it poses. "The threat of nuclear and chemical weapons falling in the hands of terrorists can be a disaster for humanity," he said. (Xinhua)

Koreas to Form Their First Joint Olympic Team

SEOUL - South Korea says the rival Koreas have agreed to form their first joint Olympic team and have their athletes march together during the opening ceremony of next month's Winter Olympics in the South. Seoul's Unification Ministry says the Korea reached the agreement during talks Wednesday at the border village of Panmunjom. It says athletes from the two Koreas will march together under a "unification flag" depicting their peninsula during the opening ceremony and will field a single women's ice hockey team. The measures require approval by the International Olympic Committee. The South Korean ministry says the two Koreas will consult with the IOC this weekend. South Korea says North Korea plans to send a 230-member cheering squad to South Korea during next month's Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. Seoul's Unification Ministry says in a statement the North also proposed its Olympic delegation travel to South Korea across the land border during talks Wednesday. (AP)

Juncker Says Would Like Britain to Rejoin EU after Brexit

STRASBOURG - European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker said on Wednesday he would welcome any British attempt to rejoin the EU after Brexit, as Brussels jumped on speculation about a second referendum. Juncker's comment about possible re-accession comes a day after European Council President Donald Tusk said that the bloc's "hearts were still open" if Britain decided to change its mind about leaving the EU. Top EU officials have made a series of remarks about Britain reversing its decision since leading Brexit campaigner Nigel Farage floated the idea of a new vote following the June 2016 Brexit referendum. Juncker, who heads the EU's powerful executive arm, said Brexit was a "catastrophe" and a "lose-lose situation both for the British and members of the European Union." "Mr Tusk says our hands remain outstretched. If the British wish to find another way than Brexit, we are then ready to talk about it," Juncker told the European Parliament in Strasbourg. "I did note that in London there was a rather irritated response to this proposal, but even if the British leave according to article 50 (of the EU's treaties), there is as well an article 49, which allows rejoining. I would like that," he added. "And I would like that we treat each other now in a reasonable way and do not try to outmanoeuvre each other." Responding to criticisms that the EU still does not understand the eurosceptic sentiments that led to Brexit, Juncker admitted that "the guilt lies on many" for the fact that Britain "never felt entirely comfortable" in the bloc. (AFP)

UN Chief Concerned about Possible U.S. Cut in Aid for Palestinian Refugee Agency

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday expressed concern over a possible cut in U.S. contributions to a UN agency for Palestinian refugees. "In UNRWA, I am very concerned. And I strongly hope that in the end it will be possible for the United States to maintain the funding of UNRWA in which the U.S. has a very important share," Guterres told reporters, referring to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees. UNRWA (the UN Relief and Works Agency) is not a Palestinian institution, UNRWA is a UN institution, Guterres explained. The agency is providing vital services to the Palestinian refugees, both in the occupied territories and in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, he said. "Those services are of extreme importance, not only for the well-being of these populations - and there is a serious humanitarian concern here - but also, in my opinion and the opinion that is shared by most international observers, including some Israeli ones, it is an important factor of stability." If the agency will not be in a position to provide the vital services and the emergency forms of support that it has been providing, this will create a very, very serious problem, said the UN chief. "And we'll do everything we can to avoid the situation to occur." (Xinhua)

Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum to Boost Regional Cooperation: Host Vietnam

HANOI - The upcoming 26th annual meeting of Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF) to be held here will foster cooperation among parliaments, contributing to peace, innovation and sustainable development of the Asia-Pacific region, home to almost 3 billion people, organizers said on Wednesday. Under the theme of "Parliamentary Partnership for Peace, Innovation and Sustainable Development", delegates will discuss four key matters, namely politics and security, economy and trade, regional development cooperation and APPF's future work from Jan. 18-21, Nguyen Van Giau, head of the Foreign Affairs Committee under Vietnam's National Assembly, the country's top legislature, said at a press conference. The discussions will provide a parliamentary perspective to efforts in promoting friendship and cooperation, combating terrorism and other trans-boundary crimes, expanding trade, investment, prosperity and sustainable development which revolve around the agenda of APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Summit 2017, and addressing regional cooperation on climate change responses and regional cultural and tourism cooperation. (Xinhua)

Trump's 1st Year Marked by Rifts, Feuds and Controversies

WASHINGTON - One year into Donald Trump's presidency, the uncertainties and anxieties over his unconventional playbook appear to have not diminished. As he seeks to implement his campaign promises, which seem controversial and even unacceptable to many, rifts, feuds and controversies dogged the year and 2018 would probably not be any different. THE FISSURES Since Trump was sworn in on Jan. 20, 2017, the divide between Republicans and Democrats intensified with the two parties seldom trying to meet each other halfway or make any compromise on GOP-led legislative pushes. The Washington, D.C.-based think tank Pew Research Center said in a report that the divisions between the two sides on fundamental political values, which had reached record levels during the Obama presidency, "have grown even larger" in Trump's first year as president. What has been more frustrating for the Republican president is that he can't even bridge the gap within his own party, which led successive efforts to repeal Obamacare, the healthcare measure introduced by his predecessor Barack Obama, to fail. Thus one of Trump's core campaign promises could not be fulfilled legislatively. Though the administration subsequently notched up a victory by pulling off the largest tax overhaul in 30 years, the fact that the bill didn't gain support from a single Democrat was another example of the gaping political divide. (Xinhua)