

Trump Says US-EU Trade Very Unfair, May Morph into Big Problem

LONDON- In an interview with a British TV anchor, U.S. President Donald Trump complained about what he said was very unfair trade relationship between the United States and the European Union (EU), warning trade disputes could become a big problem.

"The European Union has treated the United States very unfairly when it came to trade ... I've had a lot of problems with (the) European Union, and it may morph into something very big ... from a trade standpoint," Trump said.

The president has always complained about other



economies taking advantage of Washington by means of "unfair" trade practices. He repeated his stance in Davos, Switzerland, when sitting down with British journalist Piers Morgan for an interview aired on Sunday.

As regards the EU market, Trump said: "We cannot get our product in. It's very very tough," adding products from the EU are sold to the United States with "no taxes - very little taxes."

Trump's "America First" slogan was snubbed by international politicians and business leaders as they gathered in the Swiss ski resort for the annual World Economic Forum. (Xinhua)

EU Ministers to Endorse New Brexit Transition Orders

BRUSSELS - European Union government ministers are meeting to endorse a new set of orders for their Brexit negotiator, focused on ways to ease Britain out of the EU from next year and lay the foundations for their future ties.

The negotiating guidelines set out the terms of a "transition period" that the Europeans want to run from the end of March next year until December 31, 2020.

In a draft of the guidelines, seen by The Associated Press, the EU insists that Britain should have no decision-making pow-



ers during the transition, while still abiding by all the bloc's rules, including any new ones. Ireland's European Affairs Minister Helen McEntee said Monday that "When the U.K. leave the European Union they will not be a voice around the table." (AP)

UN Envoy Calls for Viable Political Settlement to Syrian Crisis

MAFRAQ, JORDAN - The UN Higher Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) special envoy Angelina Jolie visited Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan on Sunday, calling for "a viable political settlement" to the Syrian crisis.

Accompanied by the UNHCR Representative in Jordan Stefano Severe, the Hollywood actress called on UN Security Council members to visit the refugee camps and see first hand the plight of the refugees after seven years of displacement.

"After seven years of war,

most Syrian refugees have exhausted any savings they had. The vast majority of them already live below the poverty line, on less than three dollars a day. Imagine what that would mean for your family," Jolie said. The Hollywood star, at her fifth visit to Jordan since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, sent a message publicly urging the international community to do more to meet the needs of desperate Syrian families and the countries hosting them as well. "UNHCR does not have the funds to provide



in full even the most necessities for survival for many families," Jolie said, adding that the UNHCR response for the Syria crisis was only 50 percent funded in 2017.

After talking with a Syrian refugee family who had

been living in Zaatari refugee camp for the past five years, Jolie visited "Tiger Girls" program funded by UNHCR, which aims to empower young refugee girls through a range of academic and social skills courses. (Xinhua)

Trump's Foreign Policy Incurs Record Low Global Approval of U.S. Leadership: Russian Media



BEIJING - U.S. President Donald Trump's nationalist and protectionist foreign policy has provoked the decline of the country's international approval rating, which has eventually hit a record

low of 30 percent, Russian media pointed out.

One year after Trump took office, median approval of U.S. leadership across 134 countries and areas hit a new low of 30 percent, according to the

survey published by Gallup on January 18. The reason lies in Trump's political strategy, which "is characterized by a racist and nationalist approach," and has been viewed negatively by the public, Sputnik quoted Mojtaba Jalalzadeh, an Iranian observer and expert in international affairs at Azad University in Tehran, as saying.

The second reason behind the record low rating of the U.S. is "Trump's failure to show adherence to the liabilities of international agreements, for instance, the unilateral

withdrawal of the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement at Trump's pleasure," Jalalzadeh told Sputnik. The expert also stressed that Trump's America First policy remains another important factor, adding that Trump only considers America's interests when making decisions of international importance.

In this regard, he talked about Trump's official acknowledgement of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, saying that the decision would backfire by "fueling sectarian violence." (Xinhua)

French Budget Chief under Pressure after Rape Accusation

PARIS - Pressure is mounting on a member of French President Emmanuel Macron's government accused of rape.

Budget Minister Gerald Darmanin strongly denies wrongdoing, and other government members have rallied around him. Darmanin is the highest-ranking French official accused of sexual misconduct since the Hollywood scandals that broke last year.

Nearly 3,000 people signed an online petition launched by a feminist

group urging the prime minister to fire Darmanin. It argues that ministers facing corruption investigations have lost their jobs in the past, and asks whether being accused of a sexual crime "is less serious."

Prime Minister Edouard Philippe's office said Monday that he continues to have confidence in Darmanin.

A preliminary investigation is underway into an accusation that Darmanin raped her when she sought legal help in 2009. (AP)

Russian Military Calls for Direct Talks in Syria's Eastern Ghouta: RIA

MOSCOW - Russia's military called on Damascus to hold direct talks with Syrian opposition groups in the besieged enclave of eastern Ghouta so the sick could be evacuated, RIA news said on Monday, citing Russia's defense ministry.

International concern has been rising over the fate of 400,000 people living in besieged, rebel-held eastern Ghouta as acute food and medicine shortages have contributed to what the United Nations has called the worst malnutrition of the war. (Reuters)

EU's Tusk Urges Czech President Zeman to Cooperate in Europe

BRUSSELS - The chair of EU national leaders, Donald Tusk, urged Czech President Milos Zeman on Monday to pursue cooperation with the European Union following his re-election after a campaign critical of the bloc. In a message of congratulations, European Council President Tusk wrote: "I trust that your country will continue to play an active and constructive role within the European Union."

The former Polish prime minister, who has tried to calm mounting frictions between wealthier governments in the west and former-communist EU members in the east, highlighted his own efforts to get the Union to "better respond to European citizens' concerns" - a nod to popular worries over issues such as immigration, on which Zeman based some of his campaigning.

Asked whether the European Commission was troubled by Zeman's re-election, a spokesman for the EU executive said it respected the vote: "We are not worried," he told reporters. (Reuters)

EU Ready to Hit Back if Trump Imposes Anti-EU Trade Measures

BRUSSELS - The European Union said Monday that it stands ready to hit back "swiftly and appropriately" if U.S. President Donald Trump takes unfair trade measures against the 28-nation bloc.

The EU's warning comes less than 24 hours after Trump expressed his annoyance with EU trade policy, saying it "may morph into something very big." The standoff contrasted sharply with relations during the administration of Barack Obama, when both sides sought to create a massive free trade zone between the EU and United States that was argued could yield over \$100 billion a



year for both sides. When Trump won the presidential election in November 2016, those hopes evaporated as the new president talked about protecting American jobs and going against multilateral trade deals that he portrayed as detrimental to his "America First" policies. On Sunday, Trump said in a Brit-

ish television interview that "the European Union has been very, very unfair to the United States, and I think it'll turn out to be very much to their detriment." He insisted that his trade issues with the EU "may morph into something very big from that standpoint, from a trade standpoint." (AP)

U.S. Middle East Envoy Tours Israel-Gaza Border

JERUSALEM - U.S. special Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt on Sunday took a tour near the fence between Israel and the Gaza Strip, and called on Hamas to stop "to attack Israel." The tour, guided by senior Israel Defense Forces (IDF) officers, included a visit inside a cross-border tunnel, dug by Hamas, the organization that runs Gaza. The tunnel was recently exposed by the Israeli military.

Greenblatt, the White House' Special Representative for International Nego-

tiations, also heard a briefing from Brig. Gen. Yehuda Fox. After the tour, Greenblatt urged Hamas to stop their struggle against Israel. "Hamas wastes resources on tunnels and rockets to attack Israel, instead of helping the people of Gaza by getting the lights on, the water flowing and the economy growing," Greenblatt wrote on his Twitter account.

"Hamas spews hateful rhetoric and foments a vicious cycle of violence. Gaza deserves better!" he wrote. (Xinhua)

Syria Peace Talks to Begin in Russia despite Opposition Boycott

SOCHI, Russia - Delegates on Monday arrived for the first Syria peace congress in Russia, but expectations for the dialogue were tempered after the war-torn country's main opposition group said it would boycott the event.

Regime-backer Moscow has invited 1,600 people to the talks in the Black Sea resort of Sochi as part of a broader push to consolidate its influence in the region and start hammering out a path to a political solution to end the bloody conflict.

Only a fraction of the invitees are set to participate in the event, however, according to a list of participants seen by AFP which has about 350 people on it.

The aim of the Tuesday congress is to bring Syria closer to creating a post-war constitution, after two days of separate UN-backed talks in Vienna last week closed without any sign the warring sides had met face-to-face to discuss the groundwork for the document.

The Kremlin has downplayed expectations of the event, with presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov telling journalists Monday that "breakthroughs in the task of political regulation in Syria are hardly possible."

He added however that under-representation will not "disrupt this congress or undermine its importance," calling the Sochi talks a "very important" step toward peace.

The Syrian Negotiation Commission (SNC), the country's main opposition group, said following the talks in Vienna on Thursday and Friday that it would not attend the Sochi congress. (AFP)

Neighbor News

China, Britain Expect More Results from Belt and Road Initiative Cooperation

LONDON - The Belt and Road Initiative offers opportunities in logistics and stimulates supply in China and Britain, a British expert told Xinhua, ahead of an upcoming visit by British Prime Minister Theresa May to Beijing. Britain needs to look beyond traditional partnerships with the European Union and start to look at China as a new partner, said Kerry Brown, a professor of Chinese studies and director of the Lau China Institute at King's College London. May's three-day visit starting on Wednesday will be her first official visit to China since she took office in

2016. Brown highlighted the direct express freight train between London and eastern China's Yiwu city known as China's "world supermarket." The first China-bound freight train carrying British products left DP World London Gateway terminal on April 10, 2017 and arrived at Yiwu after a 19-day journey. London is the 15th European city on an expanding route of China's rail freight.

The professor said he expects more tangible projects from the Belt and Road Initiative and it remains to be seen what possibilities the initiative will bring to both countries. (Xinhua)

Senate Elections to Take Place on March 3: ECP

ISLAMABAD - The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) finalized the schedule for Senate elections on Monday, setting March 3 as the date of the polling.

A returning officer (RO) will issue a public notice on February 3, while nomination papers will be filed between February 4 and 6, the commission announced.

Following the scrutiny of nomination papers by February 9, a list of candidates will be issued on February 15, allowing candidates to withdraw nominations by the following day. A formal notification by the commission will be issued on February 2. A total of 52 Senators in the house of 104 are set to retire following the completion of their six-year term. The biggest loser of the

exercise will be the PPP, whose 18 Senators, including Chairman Raza Rabbani, will be replaced by newcomers. Nine Senators from the ruling PML-N are also among those retiring but the party is expected to gain seats by the exercise, despite the recent upheaval in Balochistan Assembly which saw PML-Q's Abdul Quddus Bizenjo replacing PML-N's Sanaullah Zehri for the chief minister slot. "Asif Ali Zardari's dinner for Balochistan CM Bizenjo and his cabinet depicts that the PPP has become a partner in the 'joint venture' [to oust the PML-N majority government] to secure a few seats in the Senate," Railways Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique said regarding the development on Friday. (Monitoring Desk)

Senior Officials of Central Asia + Japan Dialogue Meet

DUSHANBE - The 12th meeting of senior officials of the Central Asia + Japan Dialogue was held in Dushanbe on Jan 26, Kabar with reference to the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan reported.

The delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic, headed by the First Deputy Foreign Minister Dinara Kemelova took part in it. During the meeting, the sides discussed the issues of cooperation in transport and logistics, tourism and regional security. The theme of tourism has become a new direction for practical interaction within the framework of the Dialogue. In addition, all participants in the Dialogue noted the expediency of intensifying cooperation in the spheres of agricul-

ture, fighting emergencies and trade and economic cooperation, in particular, enhancing the effectiveness of the capacities of the Central Asian countries. The proposal of the Kyrgyz side on the need to promote cultural and humanitarian cooperation in the framework of the Dialogue, as well as the involvement of Japanese digital technologies in the region, was supported by the majority of participants in the meeting. At the same time, all participating countries confirmed that the issues of cooperation in the sphere of trade and investment, energy and natural resources, industry, health, climate and environmental change, personnel training are still vital. (Trend)

Seoul, Ashgabat Strengthening Mutually Beneficial Partnership

ASHGABAT - Diplomatic relations between Turkmenistan and South Korea have been systematically developing since their establishment in 1992, South Korean President Moon Jae-in said in a letter to his Turkmen counterpart Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

The South Korean president expressed hope that the bilateral relations will reach an even higher level by strengthening the existing mutually beneficial partnership between South Korea and Turkmenistan.

In his letter, Moon Jae-in also expressed confidence in the great success of economic develop-

ment policy pursued by the Turkmen president and expressed hope that South Korea will be able to contribute to this process.

It was earlier reported that Seoul hopes for partnership with Turkmenistan in such areas as development of gas fields, creation of petrochemical and gas infrastructure. Meanwhile, Ashgabat and Seoul pay special attention to the transport sector in the context of development of transit and logistics infrastructure along the East-West and North-South routes, giving access to European and Middle Eastern markets. (Trend)