

Putin Asks Italy to Help Restoring Ties with EU, Meets Pope

ROME — Russian President Vladimir Putin asked Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte on Thursday for help in improving relations between the European Union and Russia and stop sanctions on Moscow.

After meeting with Conte as part of a one-day visit to Rome, Putin said he hopes Italy will explain to the EU the damage that has been caused by economic sanctions imposed by the EU and the U.S. after Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula in 2014.

"European nations missed the chance to sell billions worth of goods on the Russian market," Putin said at a joint news conference with Conte. "This means losses



for all of us."

Putin has acknowledged that sanctions have cost Russia an estimated \$50 billion since 2014, but he contends EU nations have suffered even greater damage.

Conte said Italy would act as far as possible to help restore a full relationship between Russia and the EU.

Addressing the situation in Libya, the two leaders agreed that the parties in the conflict should

conclude a cease-fire agreement and start dialogue.

Putin, however, said Russia is not obligated to make any substantial effort in Libya because it has never bombed the country.

"It would be right to remember how the whole thing started, who destroyed Libya's statehood. As far as I understand, it was NATO's decision," Putin said.

In his first visit to Rome in four years, Putin also met with Pope Francis for "substantive talks" at the Vatican and thanked the pontiff for discussions on a range.

During an hour meeting at the Apostolic Palace, the two addressed "various ... (More on P4)...(12)

Neighbor News

Iran Threatens British Shipping in Retaliation for Tanker Seizure

LONDON/DUBAI - An Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander threatened on Friday to seize a British ship in retaliation for the capture of an Iranian supertanker in Gibraltar by Royal Marines.

"If Britain does not release the Iranian oil tanker, it is the authorities duty to seize a British oil tanker," Mohsen Rezaei said on Twitter.

The Gibraltar government said the crew on board the supertanker Grace 1 were being interviewed as witnesses, not criminal suspects, in an effort to establish the nature of the cargo and its ultimate destination. British Royal Marines abseiled onto the ship off the coast of the British territory on Thursday and seized it. They landed a helicopter on the moving vessel in pitch darkness.

The move escalates a confrontation between Iran and the West just weeks after the United States called off air

strikes minutes before impact, and draws Washington's close ally into a crisis in which European powers had striven to appear neutral.

Tehran summoned the British ambassador on Thursday to voice "its very strong objection to the illegal and unacceptable seizure" of its ship, a move that also eliminated doubt about the ownership of the vessel.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said the crude oil cargo was from Iran. The ship's paperwork had said the oil was from neighboring Iraq, but tracking data reviewed by Reuters suggested it had loaded at an Iranian port. European countries have walked a careful line since last year when the United States ignored their pleas and pulled out of a pact between Iran and world powers that gave Tehran access to global trade in return for curbs on its nuclear program. (Reuters)

US Weighing Extension of Iran Oil Waiver after China's Defiance

TEHRAN - The US State Department is seriously considering using an Obama-era loophole to allow China to import oil from Iran, violating the Trump administration's earlier pledge to bring Iranian oil exports down to zero, a report said.

Only last week, a senior State Department official handling Iran said the US would "sanction any imports of Iranian crude oil."

But according to three US officials, the department's Iran envoy, Brian Hook, and his team of negotiators have discussed granting China a waiver to a 2012 law intended to kneecap the Iranian oil industry. The alternative is allowing China, which recently welcomed a shipment of approximately a million barrels of Iranian oil, to openly defy US sanctions, Politico reported on Wednesday.

The Trump team has kept the details of its deliberations closely held as news reports of the Chinese oil imports have proliferated in recent days — and hawks on Capitol Hill have begun to ask questions. It is the latest in a series of dust-ups between the administration and Congress on an Iran policy that has often appeared inconsistent, careening between threats of military action and offers to talk with Iranian leaders. The 2012 Iran Freedom and Counterproliferation Act targeted the Iranian shipping, shipbuilding and energy sectors, requiring states or companies that wish to import Iranian oil and conduct business with the US to obtain waivers from the US government. A separate law targeted purchases, rather than imports of that oil. (Press TV)

Sudan's Protesters Welcome Power-Sharing Deal with Military

KHARTOUM, Sudan — Leaders of Sudan's pro-democracy movement on Friday welcomed a new power-sharing agreement with the ruling military council as a victory for their "revolution," raising hopes for an end to the three-month standoff with the generals and deadly violence.

The emerging deal could break the political impasse that has gripped the country since the military ousted the longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir in

April, amid an uprising against his rule.

"Today, our revolution has won and our victory shines," said a statement posted early Friday on the Facebook page of the Sudanese Professionals' Association, which has spearheaded the protests.

Talks on a power-sharing agreement had collapsed when security forces razed a protest camp outside the military headquarters in Khartoum on June 3. More than a hundred ... (More on P4)...(16)

Deadly India Dam Break Blamed on... 'Gathering of Crabs'

NEW DELHI - A water official in India took flak after he suggested that crabs caused a deadly dam breach which destroyed several villages and claimed multiple lives.

The Tiware Dam in India's central Maharashtra state was breached on Tuesday night during heavy rain. Water from the dam flooded several villages, killing at least 18 people.

An official probe was launched into the incident. But Maharashtra legislator and

Water Conservation Minister Tanaji Sawant made headlines on Thursday when he told reporters that the dam, built in the early 2000s, worked fine before and that crabs were actually to blame for the tragedy. There were no leakages earlier. Leakage happened after a large number of crabs gathered around the dam. Locals brought the issue to our notice and our department acted on it. The incident is unfortunate.

According to local media, the official made his



comments while trying to dismiss the question whether the dam had construction flaws. The minister's remarks

did not go down well with some of his political opponents, who accused him of making up ... (More on P4)...(13)

'Wolf of Wall Street' Producer Charged in Malaysian Scandal



KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — "The Wolf of Wall Street" producer and stepson of Malaysia's former prime minister

pleaded not guilty on Friday to laundering \$248 million from a state investment fund, becoming the third person

in his family charged in the 1MDB scandal that helped end Najib Razak's government last year.

Riza Aziz was solemn as he appeared in court to be charged with receiving the illicit funds between 2011 and 2012 in the U.S. and Singapore. The charge sheets said the money was misappropriated from 1MDB and channeled into bank accounts of Riza's company Red Granite Pictures Inc., which produced films including the Martin Scorsese-

directed film starring Leonardo DiCaprio. The 2013 film was nominated for five Academy Awards, including best picture.

The money was transferred from Swiss bank accounts of two companies U.S. investigators identified as being linked to 1MDB into Red Granite's accounts in the United States and Singapore, according to the charge sheets describing the evidence. Riza, 42, was released on bail. He was charged with ... (More on P4)...(14)

South Africa's Graft Watchdog Tells Ramaphosa to Discipline Minister Gordhan

JOHANNESBURG - South Africa's anti-corruption watchdog said on Friday that President Cyril Ramaphosa should discipline Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan for establishing an "intelligence unit" while serving as tax commissioner and for misleading parliament. Public Protector Busisiwe Mkhwebane, who investigates alleged wrongdoing by state officials, said that setting up such an intelligence unit was a violation of the constitution.

She also said that by misleading parliament over whether he had met the Gupta, friends of former president Jacob Zuma at the centre of an influence-peddling scandal, Gordhan had violated an executive ethics code. The findings are a headache for Ramaphosa, who relies on Gordhan to oversee efforts to revive struggling state-owned companies like power firm Eskom and weapons manufacturer Denel. ... (More on P4)...(17)

No Breakthrough with Russia on INF Treaty Dispute: NATO's Stoltenberg

BRUSSELS - NATO and Russia did not make significant progress on saving the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in talks at the alliance headquarters on Friday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said. Barring a last-minute decision by Russia to destroy a new medium-range missile that NATO says violates the INF, the United States is set to pull out of the accord on Aug. 2, arguing that it needs to develop its own warheads to deter Moscow.

Moscow says ... (More on P4)...(18)

Naming of Von der Leyen as EU Executive Chief Not Transparent: Juncker

BRUSSELS - European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said the process to appoint his successor, Germany's Ursula von der Leyen, was not transparent and marked an unwelcome break with the practice of choosing parties' lead candidates. "The process was not very transparent," Juncker told a news conference in Helsinki on Friday, replying to a question about how EU leaders this week selected the next president of the EU executive. The nominee requires European Parliament approval.

He added that his appointment five years ago was transparent as he was chosen by leaders after having campaigned in European elections. "Unfortunately it did not become a tradition," Juncker said. "I was the first and the last Spitzenkandidat," he added, using the German word for lead candidate in EU elections. (Reuters)

Greece: 4th Wildfire Breaks Out on Island of Evia

ATHENS, Greece — More than 250 firefighters were battling four wildfires on the Greek island of Evia on Friday, with authorities ordering the evacuation of four villages as a precaution.

One of the blazes broke out early Thursday afternoon and was burning woodland and agricultural areas, while another two started simultaneously just before midnight Thursday. The blazes led to four villages being evacuated.

The fire department said a fourth, a forest fire, broke out in the same area Friday afternoon.



The fourth blaze was being tackled by firefighting forces already in the area, authorities said. A total of 255 firefighters, four water-dropping planes and three helicopters along with 100 vehicles and earth-moving machinery were battling the flames.

Earlier Friday, fire de-

partment said that a 64-year-old man had been arrested on suspicion of starting the first fire by using a naked flame to burn dried weeds near his house. The man was to appear before a prosecutor in court Friday. Burning dried weeds and ... (More on P4)...(15)

Reforming EU Won't Block Balkan Enlargement: Merkel

POZNAN, Poland - French President Emmanuel Macron's view that the European Union cannot admit more members until its governance mechanisms have become more efficient need not delay the accession of Balkan countries to the bloc, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said. Speaking at a summit in Poland of some leaders from the EU and the Balkans, Merkel said that Macron was right to say at the weekend's Brussels summit that the

bloc's governance needed streamlining. But she added that the accession process for Balkan countries waiting to join, which include Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia, was sufficiently lengthy that the two objectives need not collide. "I share President Macron's view that the EU's working mechanisms must be improved," she said. "I don't see that as an abandonment of the accession talks." (Reuters)

Former Ambassador May be North Korea's New Point Man in U.S. Talks: Source

SEOUL - North Korea appears to have appointed a long-time veteran of international diplomacy as point man in the new round of denuclearisation talks with the United States, a diplomatic source in Seoul confirmed on Friday.

At Sunday's surprise U.S.-North Korea summit at the demilitarised border between the two Koreas, the North Koreans informed the Americans that former ambassador to Vietnam Kim Myong Gil would act as counterpart to U.S. Special Representative Stephen Biegun, the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the ongoing negotiations.

A spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Seoul declined to comment.

South Korean media, citing unnamed diplomatic sources, reported on Thursday that Kim Myong Gil would be taking over for Kim Hyok Chol, the North Korean diplomat who served as Biegun's counterpart ahead of the Hanoi summit, which collapsed with no deal in February.

In June, CNN reported that Kim Hyok Chol, a former ambassador to Spain, was alive and in state custody, contradicting a South Korean newspaper report that he had been executed for his role in the summit breakdown. Reuters was unable to independently confirm the accounts. Previously, some North Korean officials who were reported to have been executed or purged reappeared later with new titles. (Reuters)

PM Launches Rs 42.65 Bln Interest Free Loans, Skill Training Scheme for Poor

ISLAMABAD - Prime Minister Imran Khan Friday launched the National Poverty Graduation Initiative here to steer the poorest household out of poverty by providing them interest free loans, assets transfers and vocational and skills trainings.

The launching ceremony, held at the PM Office, marked the distribution of cheques of varying amounts of interest free loans to help the poor establish, or uplift their small scale businesses to support their living. (Monitor-ing Desk)

Turkmenistan Preparing for Caspian Exhibition of Innovative Technologies

ASGHABAT - Caspian Exhibition of Innovative Technologies is scheduled to be held in Turkmenistan's Awaza resort town on August 11-12, 2019, Trend reports with reference to the Neytralni Turkmenistan newspaper.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan is the organizer of the event to be part of the first Caspian Economic Fom, the opening of which is scheduled for August 12.

The exhibition will include presentation of national stands of Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan and Iran and

round table discussions on the development of the movement of goods through the North-South and West-East international transport corridors.

Companies from Turkey, Belarus, France, Japan, Germany, Uzbekistan, the Netherlands, the UAE, China, Finland and other states will also take part in the exhibition. The organizers undertake visa support for participants, preferential customs clearance of goods, and booking hotels and air tickets along the Ashgabat-Turkmenbashi-Ashgabat route. (Trend)