

## DPRK willing to Talk with U.S. For Denuclearization, Agrees On Summit with S.Korea

SEOUL - The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) showed willingness to hold talks with the United States about issues, including the denuclearized Korean Peninsula, and agreed on the third summit meeting with South Korea next month, the Blue House of South Korea said Tuesday. Chung Eui-yong, top national security adviser for South Korean President Moon Jae-in, told a televised press briefing that the DPRK side expressed its willingness to talk candidly with the United States about the denuclearization issue and normalized ties between Pyongyang and Washington.

The DPRK confirmed its



will to denuclearize the peninsula, making it clear that if military threat toward the country is removed and its regime safety is guaranteed, the DPRK has no reason to possess its nuclear program, the senior Blue House official said.

Chung returned home earlier in the day after making a two-day visit to Pyong-

yang, where he met top DPRK leader Kim Jong Un on Monday night together with four other special envoys, including Suh Hoon, director of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), South Korea's spy agency.

As long as dialogues continue, the DPRK will conduct no strategic provo-

cation, including a nuclear test and ballistic missile test launches, without fail, while using no weapons, both conventional and nuclear, toward South Korea. The first and second inter-Korean summit meetings were held in Pyongyang in 2000 and 2007 respectively. Working-level talks for preparations for the third meeting between the leaders of the two Koreas will be held going forward. The two sides also agreed to set up a hotline between the leaders to ease military tensions and closely coordinate. The first talks through the hotline will be held before the summit scheduled for late April. (Xinhua)

### Malaysia Gets Leading EU Countries' Support against Palm Oil Ban: Minister

KUALA LUMPUR - Malaysia has received support from leading European Union (EU) countries over its stand in opposing any discriminatory measures against palm oil, said its Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Mah Siew Keong Tuesday. These EU countries include Spain, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, according to Mah. "I am positive that these countries will not support any discrimination against palm oil," he told reporters when attending the 2018 Global Annual

Palm and Lauric Price Outlook Conference. He also said, Malaysia did not want a trade war with Europe. "But if one is foisted on us, we will respond with might and tact," he added. The European Parliament in January voted to phase out palm oil bio-fuels by 2021 from the EU's renewable energy mix under EU's Renewable Energy Directive (RED) II. Malaysia is the second largest palm oil producer in the world, accounting for 30 percent of the world palm oil production and 34 percent of the world palm exports. (Xinhua)

## China Defends Hike in Military Spending As Proportionate and Low

BEIJING - China's increase in military spending for 2018, the biggest rise in three years, was proportionate and low, and Beijing had not been goaded into an arms race with the United States, state media said on Tuesday. China on Monday unveiled an 8.1 percent rise in defense spending at the opening of parliament, fueling an ambitious military modernization program and making its neighbors, particularly Japan and self-ruled Taiwan, nerv-

ous. In an editorial, the official China Daily said the figure had prompted "finger-pointing from the usual suspects". "China's defense budget is neither the largest in size - it accounts for just one-fourth of the military spending of the United States - nor does it have the fastest growth rate," the English-language newspaper said. "And if calculated in per capita terms, China's military lags well behind other major countries." The defense spending



figure is closely watched worldwide for clues to China's strategic intentions as it develops new military capabilities, including stealth fighters, aircraft carriers and anti-satellite missiles. Commander of the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet Admiral Scott Swift described China's lack of transparency as "troubling." (Reuters)

## A Hard Sell? Saudi Crown Prince Goes West to Woo Allies



RIYADH/LONDON - Saudi Arabia's crown prince wants to persuade his British and U.S. allies that "shock" reforms have made his country a better place to invest and

a more tolerant society on his first foreign tour as heir apparent. But it could be a tough sell. Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who starts talks

in London on Wednesday, has won Western plaudits for seeking to reduce Saudi Arabia's reliance on oil, tackle chronic corruption and transform the deeply conservative, mainly Sunni Muslim kingdom. But the severity and secrecy of an anti-corruption crackdown last November, after Prince Mohammed ousted an older cousin as crown prince in a palace coup last June, has unnerved some investors. Though London and New York are rivals to host the partial public list-

ing of state oil firm Saudi Aramco, the enthusiasm of some Western business leaders -- even for such an important contract -- has been sapped by concerns about human rights and a lack of limitations on executive power in Saudi Arabia. "Investors are intrigued by MbS's (Prince Mohammed's) reform projects, and there will be a huge amount of interest in hearing his views, but uncertainty lingers," said Jane Kinninmont, a Middle East expert at Chatham House think tank. (Reuters)

### Northern Ireland Party Rejects EU Plans on Ireland Border

BRUSSELS - The Northern Ireland party that props up the government of British Prime Minister Theresa May insists that European Union proposals to avoid a hard border in Ireland after Brexit are "not acceptable." Democratic Unionist Party leader Arlene Foster said after a meeting with the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, that there can be no division between Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K. to accommodate for a soft border with the EU. The border on the island will be the only land border after the U.K. breaks away as of March 2019 and maintaining open trade and passage is proving to be one of the more intractable issues during the Brexit talks. And the DUP fears that as the EU seeks to keep the Irish border as transparent as possible, it is at the same time erecting obstacles between Northern Ireland and Britain. "What we're concerned about is to have a barrier between ourselves and the rest of the United Kingdom. That is the critical point for us," Foster said, adding that 72 percent of Northern Ireland goods go to the rest of the U.K. (AP)

## Neighbor News

### Uzbek Delegation Discusses Co-Op with Belgian Barco

TASHKENT - A delegation of the Uzbek embassy in Brussels visited the headquarters of Belgian Barco, a European technology company, Uzbek news agency Jahon reported. According to the information, the sides discussed perspective spheres of cooperation, including innovations and know-how transfer and attraction of investments and advanced technologies. One of the important spheres of Barco's operation is production of stand video panels, which are used in airport check-

points, for urban surveillance cameras and for advertising. Manager of the Barco Innovations Center Liesbet Soenens noted that Uzbekistan is a rapidly growing market for Barco's production. "We have been producing medical appliances for more than 30 years already. Our production is used in radiology, mammography, surgery and pathology detection. I believe that our appliances can be used in Uzbek healthcare institutions as well," she added. (Trend)

### Chairman of Turkmen Parliament to Visit Kazakhstan

ASHGABAT - A Turkmen delegation led by Chairman of the Assembly of Turkmenistan Akja Nurberdiyeva will make a working trip to Astana to participate in the high-level summit of the heads of state of the Central Asian countries, the Turkmen government said in a message. The relevant decree was signed by Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. Turkmenistan, which ranks fourth in the world in terms of having biggest reserves of natural gas, is one of the key players in the energy market of the Caspian region and Central Asia. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on "The Role of the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA)" in late November 2017. The UNRCCA is headquartered in Ashgabat. The Center assists the governments of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in building capacity for the peaceful resolution of disputes and the prevention of conflicts through dialogue and international support. (Trend)

### Tajikistan's State Debt Increases

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan's state debt reached \$3.670 billion at the beginning of the year, TajikTA agency reported. This figure accounts for 51.4 percent of the country's gross domestic product, Tajik Finance Ministry said in a message. The growth in the volume of state debt in 2017 was mainly due to the attraction of Chinese loans for the implementation of government investment projects, the issuance of domestic debt instruments to support the energy sector, and the sale of government bonds (\$500 million) on international markets. The ministry said that it is planned to attract foreign debt worth \$200 million in 2018. (Trend)

### All to Regret Nuclear Deal Failure: Iran President

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says everyone will regret the possible collapse of the landmark nuclear agreement reached between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries in 2015 as the US continues its efforts to sabotage the deal and issues threats to pull out of it. In a meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian in Tehran on Monday, the Iranian president added that it is imperative to save the nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in order to improve regional security, stability and cooperation. Iran and the P5+1 countries - namely the United States, France, Britain, Russia and China plus Germany - finalized the nuclear accord in July 2015 and started implementing it in January 2016. Under the deal, Iran undertook to apply certain limits to its nuclear program in exchange for the termination of all nuclear-related sanctions against Tehran. "The survival of the JCPOA will prove to the world that negotiations and diplomacy are the best options to solve problems," President Rouhani said. He, however, warned that any collapse of the nuclear deal would mean that political negotiations are a waste of time. The Iranian president urged all the signatories to the JCPOA to remain committed to their obligations under the deal, saying, "Iran will never be the first party to violate the JCPOA and regards this deal as effective in increasing regional and international trust, peace, cooperation and stability." US President Donald Trump on January 12 reluctantly agreed to waive sanctions against Iran that were lifted as part of the landmark deal, but said it would be the last time he issued such a waiver unless conditions were met. Trump said he wanted Congress and America's European allies to use the 120-day period before sanctions relief once again comes up for renewal to agree to tougher measures and new conditions; otherwise Washington would pull out of the deal. In a telephone conversation with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron on Sunday, President Rouhani hailed France's stance on the multilateral deal. (Press Tv)

### Unidentified Substance Leaves Ex-Russian Double Agent and Daughter Ill in Britain

SALISBURY, England - British police raced on Tuesday to identify the substance suspected of striking down a former Russian double agent convicted of treason in Moscow for betraying dozens of spies to British intelligence. Mark Rowley, Britain's top counter-terrorism officer, said investigators needed to be "alive to the fact of state threats" after Sergei Skripal, once a colonel in Russia's GRU military intelligence service, was taken ill. The 66-year-old former spy and his 33-year-old daughter, Yulia, were found on Sunday unconscious on a bench outside a shopping center in the English city of Salisbury after exposure to what police said was an unknown substance. Both were still critically ill in intensive care, nearly 48 hours after emergency services were first called. "They are currently being treated for suspected exposure to an unknown substance," Wiltshire Police said in a statement. "Both remain in a critical condition in intensive care." While the British authorities said there was no known risk to the public, police sealed off the area where the former spy was found, a pizza restaurant called Zizzi and the Bishop's Mill pub in the center of Salisbury. Some investigators at one point wore yellow chemical suits, though most police at the scene did not. Skripal, who passed the identity of dozens of spies to the MI6 foreign intelligence agency, was given refuge in Britain after he was exchanged in 2010 for Russian spies caught in the West as part of a Cold War-style spy swap at Vienna airport. (Reuters)

## Child Marriages Decline, Led By Big Fall in South Asia

NEW DELHI - A significant fall in the number of child marriages in South Asia has helped reduced the rate of marriage for girls globally, the U.N. children's agency said Tuesday. More educational opportunities for young girls, government investments in adolescent girls and strong advocacy about the illegality of child marriage saw 25 million fewer child marriages in the last decade. UNICEF says progress in India helped reduce the risk of a girl in South Asia marrying before her 18th birthday to about 30 percent from nearly 50 percent. Some 650 million women living today were married as children. A girl forced



to marry young is less likely to finish school and more likely to be abused and suffer pregnancy complications, said Anju Malhotra, UNICEF's principal gender adviser. Such marriages also are more likely to perpetuate poverty. In India, the legal age for marriage is 18 for women

### Merkel Dismisses Proposal to Make German Anthem "Gender Sensitive"

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel has rejected to change gendered language in the country's national anthem as suggested by a government official. "The chancellor is very happy with our nice national anthem as it is in its traditional form and doesn't see any need for change," Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert told a regular news conference on Monday. The proposal was made by Germany's family ministry commissioner Kristin Rose-Mohring.

"Why don't we make our national anthem ... gender sensitive," the commissioner said in a letter as quoted by German broadcaster Deutsche Welle. Rose-Mohring recommended changing "Vaterland", the German word meaning fatherland, to "Heimatland" which roughly means homeland in English, and the German phrase meaning "brotherly with heart and hand" to a phrase translating to "courageously with heart and hand." (Xinhua)

### Lego Struggles to Boost Sales after 13 Years of Growth

COPENHAGEN, Denmark - Toy maker Lego says its earnings and sales fell in 2017 as it tried to turn around its business after 13 years of growth. The Danish company had warned in October that sales were falling for the first time since 2004 from record highs and that it would seek new ways to grow. In its annual report Tuesday, it said that effort was still ongoing. Sales in 2017 fell 8 percent to 35 billion kroner (\$5.8 billion), with net income dropping 17 percent to 7.8 billion kroner. CEO Niels B. Christiansen said: "2017 was a challenging year and overall we are not satisfied with the financial results." However, he noted a pickup toward the end of the year and said Lego was moving ahead to simplify its business model. (AP)

### Greece Seeks EU, NATO Help over Soldiers Arrested in Turkey

ATHENS, Greece - Greece's defense minister says he has complained to the European Union and NATO following the arrest of two Greek soldiers in Turkey after they strayed across the border during a patrol last week. Panos Kammenos said the two men, a lieutenant and a sergeant, were arrested a "few meters" inside Turkish territory while on a patrol against migrant smuggling. He made the remarks in Brussels on Tuesday while attending a meeting of EU defense ministers. A Turkish court in the border city of Edirne rejected a request for their provisional release. The incident has further strained relations between the two NATO allies who have longstanding disputes over maritime boundaries and commercial rights. (AP)