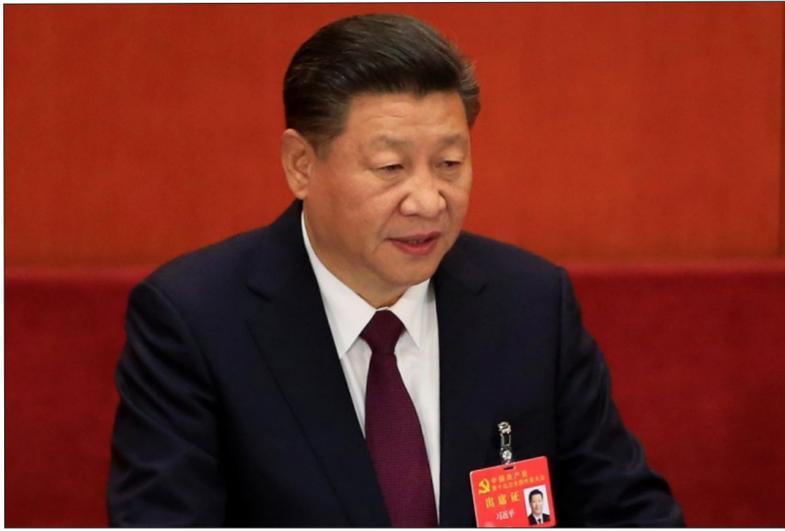


China's National Congress Re-Elects Xi Jinping as President

Xi Jinping was elected Chinese president for the second time and chairman of the Central Military Commission of China on Saturday morning at the first sessions of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC).

Xi took the oath of office after the announcement of the voting's result in the Great Hall of the People. Oaths of allegiance was added to the Chinese Constitution only a week ago and it was the first time for President Xi to pledge oath.

On Saturday's session, Wang Qishan, who was the secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of China within the past five years, was elected as the vice president.



Meanwhile, Li Zhangshu was elected chairman of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) on Saturday's morning session.

Xi's re-election for the second round was beyond doubt. NPC voted last week to amend the constitution of China to remove presidential term limits, based on which Xi can stay as president indefinitely.

Xi received a standing ovation after winning all 2,970 votes. The vice president won 2,969 votes, only one against him. In his first round in 2013, President Xi had received 99.86 percent of votes (2,952) as one was against and three were abstentions. This year he won 100 percent. **Reported By: Hujjatullah Zia**

Neighbor News

Tajik Parliament Mulls Visa-Free Agreement with Uzbekistan

DUSHANBE - The Parliamentary Council of Tajikistan has discussed an agreement with Uzbekistan that allows a visa-free stay for citizens of both countries for a period of up to 30 days, TajikTA reported. "The lower house of the Parliament has today considered the agreement between the governments of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on reciprocal visa-free travel of citizens. The deal was signed during

the state visit of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Tajikistan on March 9, 2018," the Parliament said. Ratification of the agreement will be considered at the next session of the Tajik Parliament, which will be held on March 19, 2018. Previously, President Mirziyoyev has signed an order allowing a visa-free entry to Uzbekistan for citizens of Tajikistan since March 16. (Trend)

Pm Decides To Give 1 Mln New Gas Connections: NA Told

ISLAMABAD - Parliamentary Secretary for Cabinet Division Raja Javed Akhlaq on Friday apprised the National Assembly that the Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi has decided to give one million new domestic gas connections the consumers across the country. Responding to a Calling Attention Notice moved by Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho and others regarding non-provision of new gas connections to the consumers of Sindh provinces, he said the Cabinet approved the policy in 2013 to provide gas connection purely on merit.

He said there was no discretionary quota of anyone including the Prime Minister, the minister or MNA. Connections were strictly being provided on merit basis, he said. He said since 2007, there were total 1.9 million consumers of Sui Southern Gas Company Limited (SSGCL) and now number of connections was surged to 2.89 million. SSGCL received around 80,000 to 100,000 applications for new connections every year, he said. Raja Javed said SSGCL was providing new gas connection to the consumers in just 45 days. As many as 15,000 to 20,000 gas connection applications were pending with SSGCL, he said. He said some 2.2 million applications were pending in Punjab with Sui Northern Gas Company Limited (SNGPL). The Parliamentary Secretary said under Article 158, priority was being given to the areas where new gas reserves were discovered.

He said commercial and industrial gas connections were also being provided after import of RLNG. (Monitoring Desk)

Pakistan Has Become Strong Economy Due To Pml-N Govt's Efforts: Ahsan

LAHORE - Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal has said that Pakistan has become a strong economy due to efforts of the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) government.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony of mobile registration service in the country here on Saturday, he said that initially the equipment fitted in 122 cars would prepare computerised national identity cards (CNIC). He said that peace is prevailing in the country now, adding that several projects were under progress and motorways as well as technology centres were being constructed. Ahsan said that continuity of peace in the country would be ensured for continuity of progress. He urged the opposition to join hands with the government for installing a caretaker setup for holding general elections; otherwise, the third force would form the caretaker government. (Monitoring Desk)

He said that elections would be held on time, adding that it was a success of democracy that Senate elections were held according to schedule; otherwise, some elements wanted to derail democratic process by dissolution of the National Assembly. He said that the country was facing political instability and urged that no one should be allowed to create uncertainty in the country. The minister said that

NIOC Signs Second Major Oil Deal This Year

TEHRAN - The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) was to sign on Saturday the development of two more oilfields with a local holding company, Tasnim news agency reported.

"The contract for the development of Jofeir and Sepehr oilfields will be signed between NIOC and the Pasargad Energy Development Company (PEDC)" in the presence of Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh and NIOC Managing Director Ali Kardor, it said. PEDC is owned by the Pasargad Financial Group, which includes a number of businesses such as Pasargad Bank. The Jofeir oilfield in the southwestern province of Khuzestan on the Iraq border is estimated to hold 2.1 billion barrels of in-place reserves. Sepehr is part of the West Karoun block which includes several large oilfields straddling the Iran-Iraq border, namely Azadegan, Yaran, Yada-varan and Darkhoen. The block holds an estimated 67 billion barrels of oil in place, including 2 billion barrels at the Sepehr oilfield. (PRESS TV)

Australia, Southeast Asia to Share Intelligence to Fight Terror

SYDNEY - Australia signed an agreement on Saturday with Southeast Asian nations including Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines promising to share intelligence to combat terrorism. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced the signing of the memorandum of understanding in which Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) agreed to share intelligence, cooperate on lawmaking and counter extremism on social media.

Australia is hosting ASEAN meetings this weekend, despite not being a member of the 10-nation

bloc, as it seeks to tighten political and trade ties in the region amid China's rising influence. Turnbull said in a televised address to ASEAN that Islamic State's influence was growing in Southeast Asia after the militants had lost their caliphate in the Middle East. "They'll return battle-hardened and trained, so it's vital for Australia and our ASEAN partners to collaborate across borders," he said. Turnbull said non-conventional tools such as digital currencies, stored value cards and crowd-funding platforms were making it harder to detect terror financing. (Reuters)

UK's May to Address Party Members amid Russia Crisis

LONDON - British Prime Minister Theresa May will on Saturday address members of her Conservative Party, rejuvenated by the widespread praise for her handling of the Russian spy crisis but still dogged by Brexit. May's last major party conference speech ended in disaster as a cough, a prankster and a collapsing backdrop undermined her address - intended to restore her authority following last year's disastrous snap general election in which the Conservatives lost

their parliamentary majority. A pre-Christmas breakthrough with the European Union in Brexit negotiations gave her a boost, but she was again under pressure after pro-EU rebels within her centre-right party delivered her a stinging parliamentary defeat.

However, she comes into the Conservatives' spring forum in London with renewed authority following her firm response to the poisoning of a former Russian double agent on British



soil, which she blames on Moscow.

Her decision to expel 23 Russian diplomats and suspend high-level contacts received cross-party

and media support, but more importantly rallied the Conservatives, heralding a ceasefire in the bitter internal row over Brexit. (AFP)

Russia, Ever More Isolated, Set To Re-Elect Putin



MOSCOW - Russia is on Sunday set to elect Vladimir Putin to a historic fourth Kremlin term, as the country faces increasing isolation over a spy poisoning in Britain and

a fresh round of US sanctions. Putin, who has ruled Russia for almost two decades, is polling at around 70 percent and is sure to extend his term to 2024

despite a lacklustre campaign.

In the run-up to the election, he and a compliant state media have sought to reinforce his image as the man who restored stability and national pride after the humiliating collapse of the USSR.

Putin has sought to emphasise Russia's role as a major world power, recently boasting of its "invincible" new weapons and doubling down on Moscow's support for the Syrian regime in a bloody civil war.

Rising tensions with the West over the poisoning

of former double agent Sergei Skripal in Britain, and new sanctions from Washington over alleged election meddling, strengthen the impression of a Russia at loggerheads with the rest of the world. "In America and Europe, they are trying to make us bend over and kneel, but we're still standing," Sergei Babayev, a 55-year-old transport manager, told AFP in central Moscow shortly ahead of the vote. "They promised us a crisis and we stuck it out. That's Putin's main quality - he is at the core of our state." (AFP)

New European Sanctions Would Affect Nuclear Deal: Iran Official

BEIRUT - Any new European sanctions against Iran will have a direct effect on the nuclear deal struck between world powers and Tehran, Iran's deputy foreign minister said Friday, according to state media.

"In case some European countries are following steps to put non-nuclear sanctions against Iran in order to please the American president, they will be making a big mistake and they will see the direct result of that on the nuclear deal," Abbas Araqchi said, according to state media.

"It's better that European countries continue their current action to persuade

America to keep its promises in the nuclear deal and for that country to effectively execute the deal in all its parts with good will and in a productive atmosphere." Araqchi's comments were in reaction to a Reuters report that Britain, France and Germany have proposed fresh EU sanctions on Iran over its ballistic missiles and its role in Syria's war to try to persuade Washington to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.

Iran agreed to curbs on its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of a number of sanctions as part of the deal. (Reuters)

'Mr. Fix-It': China's New VP Has Tackled Thorniest Of Crises

BEIJING - Wang Qishan is known as China's "Mr. Fix-It," a trustworthy official deployed to tackle the thorniest of crises - from crumbling banks to deadly illness to high-level corruption.

Those who've met him describe him as bold and probing, a problem solver who enjoys philosophical debates and has a wicked sense of humor. As China's vice president, the 69-year-old Wang is expected to be a key element in furthering President Xi Jinping's agenda of shoring up Communist Party rule while ending corruption and poverty.

Wang is known for integrity and competence, but his appointment Saturday by the ceremonial legislature, in a pro-forma vote of 2,969 to 1, was widely regarded as unconventional. To keep Wang past retirement age, Xi had him step down from the Politburo Standing Committee while ennobling him in what had been a relatively meaningless ceremonial post.

That stands to diminish the influence of the others on the seven-member committee, including Xi's rival, Premier Li Keqiang - ostensibly China's second-most powerful official - particularly if Wang is handed important tasks giving him authority over their affairs. "Definitely, this will further marginalize Li Keqiang," said University of Miami Chinese politics expert June Teufel Dreyer. "Having amassed so much power, it's to be expected that Xi wants a lieutenant in whom he has complete trust." While Wang's specific duties have yet to be spelled out, under China's constitution, he would take over as head of state should Xi be unable to fulfill his duties. Unconfirmed reports also say he will be permitted to attend high-level meetings, including those of the Politburo Standing Committee, as a non-voting observer. (AP)

European Powers Propose New Iran Sanctions to Meet Trump Ultimatum

BRUSSELS/PARIS - Britain, France and Germany have proposed fresh EU sanctions on Iran over its ballistic missiles and its role in Syria's war, according to a confidential document, in a bid to persuade Washington to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.

The joint paper, seen by Reuters, was sent to European Union capitals on Friday, said two people familiar with the matter, to sound out support for such sanctions as they would need the support of all 28 EU member governments.

The proposal is part of an EU strategy to save the accord signed by world powers that curbs Tehran's ability to develop nuclear weapons, namely by showing U.S. President Donald Trump that there are other ways to counter Iranian



power abroad. Trump delivered an ultimatum to the Europeans on Jan. 12. It said they must agree to "fix the terrible flaws of the Iran nuclear deal" - which was sealed under his predecessor Barack Obama - or he would refuse to extend U.S. sanctions relief on Iran. U.S. sanctions will resume unless Trump issues fresh "waivers" to suspend them

on May 12. "We will therefore be circulating in the coming days a list of persons and entities that we believe should be targeted in view of their publicly demonstrated roles," the document said, referring to Iranian ballistic missile tests and Tehran's role in backing Syria's government in the seven-year-old civil war. (Reuters)

Theron Calls Idea of Arming US Teachers 'So Outrageous'

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates - Actress Charlize Theron says the idea of arming teachers after recent U.S. school shootings or "adding more guns" to the situation is "so outrageous."

The South African says: "I have a very personal experience with gun violence. I lost my father to gun violence." She added: "I just don't understand when people try to make the conversation, the

argument that the fix is more guns. It is so outrageous to me."

Theron spoke Saturday at the Global Education and Skills Forum being held in Dubai.

Theron says people should "listen to our kids" to solve the problem, speaking just after three students talked about the Feb. 14 Florida school shooting that killed 17 people. (AP)

Trump Signs U.S.-Taiwan Travel Bill, Angering China

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday signed legislation that encourages the United States to send senior officials to Taiwan to meet Taiwanese counterparts and vice versa, angering China, which views the self-ruled island as a wayward province. Taiwan Travel Act/Taiwan Travel Act Passes U.S. Foreign Relations China Taiwan Trump China Trump Signs Executive Orders

The bill, which is non-binding, would have gone into effect on Saturday morning, even if Trump had not signed it, said the White House.

The move adds to strains between the two countries over trade, as Trump has enacted tariffs and called for China to reduce its huge trade imbalance with the United States, even while Washington has leaned on Beijing to help resolve tensions with North Korea.

Earlier on Friday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang reiterated that Beijing was opposed to the legislation and urged the United States to abide by the "one China" policy, that stipulates that Taiwan is part of China, and cease official exchanges with Taiwan.

In a statement after Trump's signing of the bill, the Chinese embassy said clauses of the legislation "severely violate the one-China principle, the political foundation of the China-U.S. relationship".

"China is strongly dissatisfied with that and firmly opposes it," the statement said, adding that the United States should "stop pursuing any official ties with Taiwan or improving its current relations with Taiwan in any substantive way." (Reuters)