

China, Japan Hold Sixth High-Level Political Dialogue

TOKYO - Yang Jiechi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee, co-chaired the sixth high-level political dialogue between China and Japan in Japan's Nagano Prefecture on Friday with Japanese National Security Advisor Shotaro Yachi.

Yang said that China-Japan relations

have been continuously improving, and the positive interactions between the two sides have been increasingly active. China is ready to work with Japan to push forward the steady development of bilateral relations along the right track under the guidance of the spirit of the four political documents between China and Japan and the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, he said. (Xinhua)

(1) Afghan Election...

transparent elections in September," the statement read.

"We are prepared to continue supporting this process."

The embassy statement comes after Alice Wells, the principal deputy assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, met with Afghan leaders in Kabul this week, when she stressed the importance of holding the September election.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's term technically expires May 22, and his opponents have said his administration should make way for a caretaker government until presidential elections can be held.

The supreme court however has said he can remain in power until the next election.

The delayed elections come as the United States tries to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban, and some had speculated the polls were being deliberately stalled to create more space for those talks.

Negotiations however appear to be making slow progress, with the two sides at loggerheads over several key issues. (AFP)

(2) German Envoy...

leaders the Afghan peace process. Indonesia and Uzbekistan had also previously said they were ready to host the Afghan peace talks. (Pajhwok)

(3) Political Parties...

Officials from Jamiat-e-Islami party, meanwhile, said the election commission does not have the authority to remove the use of biometric system from the elections process and that it is a political move.

"The law has specified that biometric should be used for identification of voters. No one has the authority of making a decision in this regard unless the law is amended. An election cannot be started by violating the law that legitimizes the process," said Noor Rahman Akhlaqi, member of Jamiat-e-Islami party.

Abdullah Qaraloq, deputy head of the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan, also reacted to the IEC's decision and said there is no other alternative for ensuring transparency in election and that biometric system is the only option which should be used.

"They made the decision against the outlines, decisions and agreements made in the past," said Qaraloq.

Meanwhile, other political parties at a meeting entitled "the National Coalition of Political Parties" in Kabul on Friday discussed issues around peace and the presidential elections. "Our nation, our political parties and especially the National Coalition of Political Parties of Afghanistan want a transparent election," said Yasin Habib, head of Hizb-e-Bidar-e-Milli Falah Afghanistan.

The use of the biometric system has been advised by the election law which faced an amendment in February.

The election law has 109 articles and 17 chapters and according to sources, a number of these articles have been amended. (Tolo news)

(4) US Major to be...

when he killed the Afghan. After Golsteyn described the killing during the interview with the Central Intelligence Agency, the US Army launched a probe against him in September 2011.

As a result of the shooting, Golsteyn

was stripped of his Special Forces Green Beret tab and a Silver Star medal and expelled from the army in 2015.

But the army pulled him back into the service to face the homicide charge. (Pajhwok)

(5) India Delivers...

India which is one of the largest donors to Afghanistan has committed \$3 billion in aid to Afghanistan since 2001.

The four additional helicopters are expected to play a role in fighting between the Afghan forces and the Taliban, who have continued their attacks despite engaging the US in peace talks and have refrained to engage in direct talks with the Afghan government. (Tolo news)

(6) Court Verdict...

the judicial sector will make a decision regarding me," said Allah Gul Mujahid, an MP from Kabul.

"Afghanistan's legal and judicial centers, chairman of the Supreme Court, members of the Supreme Court and the Attorney General's Office exactly belong to them (the MPs). They (MPs) vote to them and they support the MPs in turn," said Ramazan Bashardost, an MP from Kabul.

Officials from the Ministry of Interior and Attorney General's Office meanwhile said they have not received any official letter from the courts based on which they should implement the verdicts on the two MPs.

The Attorney General Office spokesman Jamshed Rasuli said the verdicts will be implemented anytime they receive official letters from the respective courts.

Arash Shaheer, a lawyer, said the verdict should be implemented on the lawmakers.

"No one is above the law, even the MPs. In Article 102 of the Constitution, it has been clearly mentioned that if a member of the parliament commits a crime and the crime is evident, he or she will be arrested and will be deprived of freedom," he said. (Tolo News)

(7) Japanese Opposition...

up his Diet seat, which he refused to do. Now, Japanese legislators are preparing a resolution to make the legislator resign.

The territorial dispute over the South Kuril Islands has been one of the major stumbling blocks in Russian-Japanese relations since the end of World War II, resulting in the two countries still lacking a formal peace treaty. The islands were handed over to the USSR under the 1945 Potsdam Declaration, but since then Tokyo has been trying to reclaim them. (RT)

(8) Indian Airbases...

Srinagar base is the home to the No. 51 Squadron of the Indian Air Force. Its MiG-21Bison fighter jets clashed with Pakistan's F-16s during a dramatic flare-up of cross-border tensions in February.

Indian pilot Abhinandan Varthaman, who was shot down and later returned by Islamabad to India, was stationed at Srinagar until he was deployed to a different site last month.

The aerial combat happened a week after India had sent jets into Pakistani territory to strike what it said were camps of terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), which earlier claimed responsibility for attacks on

BEIRUT - In the event of war with the United States, Iran "will not be alone."

That message was delivered by the leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group to a mass rally in Beirut in February marking the 40th anniversary of Iran's Islamic Revolution. "If America launches war on Iran, it will not be alone in the confrontation, because the

Iran Could Rally Regional Proxies in Case of War with The US

fate of our region is tied to the Islamic Republic," Hassan Nasrallah said. From Lebanon and Syria to Iraq, Yemen, and the Gaza Strip, Tehran has significantly expanded its footprint over the past decade, finding and developing powerful allies in conflict-ravaged countries across the Middle East. Hezbollah is one of the most prominent members of the self-

styled "axis of resistance," armed groups with tens of thousands of Shiite Muslim fighters beholden to Tehran.

Iran has used such groups in the past to strike its regional foes, and could mobilize them if the latest tensions with the United States lead to an armed conflict - dramatically expanding the battlefield. (AP)

Indian security forces and civilians. New Delhi insists that Pakistan aids JeM and other militants to commit acts of terrorism against India. Pakistani officials strongly deny this. (RT)

(9) Trump Says He...

more information on the White House's claims of rising Iranian aggression. Top leaders in Congress received a classified briefing on Iran on Thursday, but many other lawmakers from both parties have criticized the White House for not keeping them informed.

Iran poses a particular challenge for Trump. While he talks tough against foreign adversaries to the delight of his supporters, a military confrontation with Iran could make him appear to be backtracking on a campaign pledge to keep America out of foreign entanglements. (AP)

(10) Ukraine Ruling...

the demand of the Ukrainian people. And for its implementation, a capable parliament is needed."

SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE Parliament has been dominated by an alliance between Poroshenko's faction and the People's Front since they came to power following street protests in 2014 that ousted Ukraine's previous pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich.

"We declare our withdrawal from the current coalition, the cessation of its activities ... and the initiative to form a new coalition with a new agenda," Maksym Burbak, the People's Front faction leader, told parliament earlier on Friday. (Reuters)

(11) Japan's Top Trade...

Japan had previously been in Trump's cross-hairs for its exports of automobiles and car parts to the United States, which were believed to be unfairly disadvantageous to the U.S. domestic industry and the two countries' trade balance.

Lighthizer's remarks will come as some relief to Japanese automakers, who have seen demand slump of late, particularly from their North American markets.

Lighthizer's assurances made to Motegi, however, run contrary to media reports that Washington could be gearing up to give Japan and the EU a 180-day deadline to reduce the amount of exports of automobile and related parts to the United States if new tariffs, slated to begin Saturday, are to be delayed.

Trump will visit Japan from May 25 to 28 as a state guest and again the following month for the G20 summit to be held in Osaka and hosted by Japan for the first time.

Trade and tariff issues are certainly to be high on the agenda, government representatives here have said. (Xinhua)

(12) Council of Europe...

stopped paying its membership fees in protest.

Senior Russian officials have threatened to pull out of the Council of Europe altogether. Such a move would mean that ordinary Russians would lose access to the European Court of Human Rights, which has become an important tool for those who have lost faith in Russian courts.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov welcomed the declaration and reaffirmed Russia's commitments including paying the fees. Lavrov said Russia values "the positive contribution" that the Council of Europe has made to resolving hu-

manitarian issues as well as improving Russia's justice system.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Russia is willing to cooperate with the Council of Europe only as long as it has "an equal say" in all of its decision-making mechanism.

Friday's declaration marks what could be the first major step by a European institution to roll back on restrictions and sanctions that were imposed on Russia following Crimea's annexation and its campaign to support for separatists in eastern Ukraine. It could also be viewed as a sign of a growing realization in Europe, in France and Germany in particular, that bringing Russia closer could be a better way to help resolve the Ukrainian crisis and other problems.

Ukraine's foreign minister unexpectedly cancelled his attendance of the meeting in Finland at the last minute, expecting the positive vote for Russia. (AP)

(13) UAE, Keen to...

Houthi said they carried out the drone strike on Saudi oil pumping stations.

The divergent approach by two crude-exporting heavyweights illustrates the complexities of dealing with Iran, which they see as a destabilizing force in the region.

Both have lobbied the United States to isolate Tehran, and the two spearhead a military coalition backing Yemen's internationally recognized government against the Houthis.

"Sometimes you need to be diplomatic, we can't destroy our economy's reputation. Others are looking to shake our reliability," said a UAE oil source when asked why the initial UAE statement mentioned commercial vessels and not oil tankers.

It was Saudi Arabia's energy minister who revealed that two Saudi tankers had been attacked.

As Washington and Tehran spar over sanctions and the U.S. military presence in the region, the UAE is balancing curtailing Iran with protecting its economic interests as the Middle East's tourism, financial and trading hub.

A Western diplomat said the UAE was taking a guarded approach because it does not want "trouble at its doorstep".

"The UAE is far more pragmatic and strategic, and has more to lose. Saudi Arabia is the bigger concern for Iran so there is messaging coming out," said another diplomat.

BUSINESS HUB

Western diplomats said the UAE, where expatriates are a majority of the population, shared Riyadh's goals but unlike the kingdom has a diversified economy more exposed to regional shocks.

"UAE authorities are trying to find a fine balance because this is a business hub. You don't want to prick the bubble," said a Dubai-based banker handling marine and energy business. "The right sounds are being made...no alarm bells."

Dubai, which lacks the oil wealth of the political capital Abu Dhabi, is more vulnerable. It has been pinched by a Saudi-led boycott on Qatar and U.S. sanctions on Iran, for which Dubai was a traditional trade hub. Free zones also depend

on unfettered access to Gulf maritime routes.

The emirate, whose economy is focused on tourism and international business services, is suffering a property downturn and a slowdown in retail as it gears up to host the World Expo trade fair in 2020.

"It doesn't pose many risks to Abu Dhabi...but a substantial risk to Dubai, which relies on international businesses and real estate buyers feeling safe there," said Steffen Hertog, associate professor at London School of Economics.

"Just tanker incidents are unlikely to affect tourism and business though; it would probably take an attack involving civilian casualties to substantially shift the mood," he added.

Analysts say the attacks appear designed to test the resolve of Washington and its Gulf allies without triggering war by exposing weaknesses in the security of a key oil-shipping route.

If push comes to shove the UAE has deep enough pockets to bail out the economy for months or years, said Jon B. Alterman, director of the Middle East programme at CSIS.

"In the view of many Emirati officials, the threat from Iran is serious and enduring. If it takes a little bit of pain to get to a more secure place, they're willing to make that investment." (Reuters)

(14) Architect I.M. Pei...

He created a futuristic 70-foot-tall (21-m) steel-framed, glass-walled pyramid as a grand entrance for the museum with three smaller pyramids nearby. It was a striking contrast to the existing Louvre structures in classic French style and was reviled by many French. A French newspaper described Pei's pyramids as "an annex to Disneyland" while an environmental group said they belonged in a desert.

Pei said the Louvre was undoubtedly the most difficult job of his career. When it opened in 1993 he said he had wanted to create a modern space that did not detract from the traditional part of the museum.

"Contemporary architects tend to impose modernity on something," he said in an New York Times interview in 2008. "There is a certain concern for history but it's not very deep. I understand that time has changed, we have evolved. But I don't want to forget the beginning.

A lasting architecture has to have roots." Other notable Pei projects include the John F. Kennedy Library in Dorchester, Massachusetts, the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado, the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Dallas City Hall. When Pei won the international Pritzker Architecture Prize in 1983, he used the \$100,000 award to start a program for aspiring Chinese architects to study in the United States.

Even though he formally retired from his firm in 1990, Pei was still taking on projects in his late 80s, such as museums in Luxembourg, Qatar and his ancestral home of Suzhou. Pei, a slight man who wore round, owl-ish glasses, became a U.S. citizen in 1955. He was married to Eileen Loo from 1942 until her death in 2014. They had four children, two of whom became architects. (Reuters)