

China Stands Ready to Further Promote Ties With Pacific Island Countries

PORT MORESBY - China stands ready to work with Papua New Guinea (PNG) to inject impetus into the overall development of relations between China and the Pacific island countries, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said here on Wednesday.

Wang made the remarks at a joint press conference with PNG Foreign Minister Rimbink Pato after their talks. Calling PNG a good friend and partner of China in the South Pacific region, Wang said since the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and PNG, the two countries have always supported and helped each other, and forged profound friendship and strong mutual trust. In 2014, the leaders of the



two countries announced the establishment of a strategic partnership between their two countries, Wang said, adding that since then, bilateral cooperation has witnessed a series

of important developments. Wang said China-PNG relations have now become an exemplary model for the ties between China and the Pacific island countries as well as the

South-South cooperation.

He said that as both China and PNG are developing countries, China is willing to enhance strategic coordination with PNG and jointly support multilateralism and free trade at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and other international arenas so as to safeguard the common interests of developing countries and other countries as well. Noting that in two weeks, PNG will host the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, which is a great event for PNG and the Pacific islands region, Wang said China has provided assistance to PNG within its capacity and believes that the meeting will be a success. (Xinhua)

New Brexit Vote may Hamper Independence Goal, Scottish Lawmaker Says

EDINBURGH - A senior member of the Scottish National Party has questioned his party's backing for a second vote on European Union membership, arguing that it could undermine its Scottish independence goal. In a rare public sign of dissent Pete Wishart, an SNP lawmaker in Britain's national parliament, said in a newspaper column that supporting a second "confirmatory" referendum could undercut

the SNP's goal of secession from the United Kingdom by inviting comparison. Infighting in Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservatives is complicating her efforts to reach a deal in time for Brexit day on March 2019. The SNP, Scotland's biggest party, said this month it would back a second referendum on the issue -- although Scotland already voted to keep its EU membership in 2016. (Reuters)

Saudi Arabia Executes Migrant Maid for Murder of Employer, Angers Indonesian Govt

RIYADH - Saudi Arabia's execution of a migrant maid has sparked diplomatic tension with Indonesia at a time when the kingdom is facing international condemnation for the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Saudi authorities executed Tuti Tursilawati on Monday without informing the Indonesian government, Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. It's the third time in three years that the kingdom has executed an Indonesian citizen

without informing their government in advance. Tursilawati was charged with premeditated murder after she beat her employer's father to death with a stick in 2010, the Jakarta Post reports. She said she was acting in self-defense and that he had been sexually abusing her. The woman ran away after the killing and was reportedly raped by nine Saudi men before she was taken into custody. She was sentenced to death in 2011 and was one of 18 Indonesians on death row in Saudi Ara-



bia. "Tuti's execution was carried out without [prior notification]," Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told reporters Tuesday. "I also summoned the Saudi ambassador in Jakarta to meet me in Bali." Tursilawati was charged with premeditated murder after she beat her employer's father to death with a stick in 2010, the Jakarta Post reports. (Russia Today)

Saudi Prosecutor Met with Turkish Intelligence on Khashoggi



ISTANBUL - Saudi Arabia's chief public prosecutor met members of Turkey's intelligence agency overnight as part of an investiga-

tion into the murder of journalist and Riyadh critic Jamal Khashoggi, local media reported Wednesday. Attorney General

Sheikh Saud al-Mojeb, who travelled to Istanbul this week, left his hotel around 2110 GMT on Tuesday escorted by a convoy and went to the regional head offices of the Turkish Intelligence Organisation (MIT), the private DHA news agency reported. There was no immediate information on what was discussed.

Khashoggi, a 59-year-old Washington Post contributor, was killed after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2 to obtain pa-

Towering Statue of India's Independence Leader Unveiled

NEW DELHI - India's prime minister on Wednesday unveiled a towering bronze statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a key independence leader being promoted as a national icon in the ruling party's campaign ahead of next year's general elections. Patel, who hailed from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's native Gujarat state, was also India's first home minister after the 1947 independence from Britain. He was known as the "Iron Man of India" for integrating various states

in the post-independence era, when the creation of Pakistan led to massive bloodshed between Hindus and Muslims moving between the two nations. The statue is part of a broader project by Modi to counter the opposition Indian National Congress Party's firm claim on India's history by way of the country's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, his mentor, peace activist Mahatma Gandhi, and his daughter, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who was assassinated by her guards in 1984. (AP)

First Flight Departs From Istanbul's New Airport

ANKARA, Turkey - The first flight from Istanbul's newly inaugurated airport has taken off bound for the capital, Ankara. The Turkish Airlines flight TK2124 with 340 people on board left the new airport, named Istanbul Airport, on Wednesday. It is expected to be followed by flights to northern Cyprus and Baku, Azerbaijan, later this week.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan inaugurated the gleaming new aviation hub on Monday - the 95th anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The airport is a megaproject that Erdogan has pushed to fulfill his dream of making Turkey a global player. (AP)

German Finance Minister Advocates Steep Rise in Minimum Wage

BERLIN - Germany's finance minister is advocating a steep increase in the country's minimum wage as his struggling center-left party tries to reverse a slump in its popularity. Germany has had a national minimum wage since 2015, when it was introduced at the insistence of the Social Democrats, Chancellor Angela Merkel's junior coalition partners.

Its level is reviewed regularly: it started off at 8.50 euros (\$9.65) per hour and rose to 8.84 euros in 2017. On Wednesday, the Cabinet was due to approve an increase to 9.19 euros in January, then 9.35 euros in 2020. Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, a Social Democrat who is also Merkel's vice chancellor, wrote in a piece for mass-circulation daily Bild: "I think that a 12-euro minimum wage is appropriate. (AP)

Damascus Slams Israel's 'Judaization Plans & Illegal Elections' in Occupied Golan Heights

DAMASCUS - Syria has condemned the "illegal elections" being held by Israel for the first time in the occupied Golan Heights, as an attempt to assimilate the Druze minority, who for their part have largely refused to take part in the polls.

Members of the Druze community residing under Israeli occupation for over half a century took to the streets on Tuesday in an effort to interfere in the municipal elections that Tel Aviv had introduced for the first time in the Golan Heights as part of the nationwide election process. Carrying Syrian and Druze rainbow flags, hundreds of members of the Muslim minority sect as-



sembled outside the gates of polling stations, trying to prevent other Druze community members from voting. "The Golan's identity is Arab and Syrian," they chanted. Amid sporadic clashes with police, religious elders wearing their distinctive white and red caps, symbolizing religious piety, urged the

youth not to confront the security forces, who in some instances used tear gas against protesters. The Israeli decision to introduce elections to the local councils in the territory, which it has held since 1967, divided the Druze community ahead of Tuesday's vote. (Russia Today)

Pacific Rim Trade Pact Goes Ahead after Australia Ratifies

BANGKOK - The Pacific rim trade pact abandoned by President Donald Trump will take effect at the year's end after Australia became the sixth nation to ratify it.

Australia announced Wednesday that it had completed procedures needed for the trade arrangement, the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, to progress. It will take effect Dec. 30.

The deal is aimed at streamlining trade and slashing tariffs to facilitate more business activities between member nations with a combined population of nearly 500 million people and GDP of \$13.5 trillion.

"Our ratification means we are guaranteeing maximum benefits for our farmers and businesses," Simon Birmingham, minister for Trade, Tourism and Development, said in a statement. (AP)

UK Conservatives should Not Try to Outspend Labour: Osborne

LONDON - Former British finance minister George Osborne warned the ruling Conservative Party they must not try to compete with the opposition Labour Party by committing to large increases in government spending ahead of the next election.

The government announced an end to Britain's long spending squeeze with tax cuts for households and the easing of some welfare curbs for poorer working families this week.

The Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn, a veteran socialist has won over many voters with his promises to re-nationalize services and increase public spending, is neck-and-neck with the Conservative Party in opinion polls, meaning they could form the next government.

"The Conservatism I think that works is socially progressive and fiscally conservative - and we lost in the election I wasn't involved in 2017 because we tried to out UKIP UKIP. We aren't going to win the next election by trying to out-Corbyn Corbyn," Osborne told the BBC. "The Conservatives should stand their ground for what I think still millions of people are, they want a progressive, successful country, you've got to live within your means... trying to outspend our political opponents won't help the Conservatives either."

Osborne, who unveiled spending cuts when he was finance minister between 2010 to 2016, admitted a series of "regrets" about his time in office, saying mistakes led to the Britain voting for Brexit in a referendum. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

Pakistan Holds Consultations on PM Visit to China

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Wednesday presided over a preparatory meeting for the upcoming prime minister's visit to China via video conference with the Ambassador of Pakistan in Beijing and senior officials of the Embassy, the foreign ministry said. Prime Minister Imran Khan is scheduled to visit China on his first official visit on Nov. 2-5. During his visit, the prime minister will meet the Chinese leadership and also visit Shanghai to participate in the first China Inter-

national Import Expo as a guest of honor. The visit of Prime Minister Khan to China will be instrumental in elevating the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership between Pakistan and China to new heights. The visit will further strengthen the close and warm ties between the two brotherly countries, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "The two countries are close friends, good neighbors and development partners. The bilateral relationship has withstood the test of times. (Xinhua)

Pakistan Islamists Protest as Christian Woman Cleared of Blasphemy

ISLAMABAD/LAHORE - Pakistan's Supreme Court on Wednesday freed a Christian woman from a death sentence for blasphemy against Islam and overturned her conviction, sparking angry protests and death threats from an ultra-religious party and cheers from human rights advocates. Asia Bibi, a mother of four, had been living on death row since 2010 when she became the first woman to be sentenced to death by hanging under Pakistan's draconian blasphemy laws, which critics say are too harsh and often misused. She was condemned for allegedly making

derogatory remarks about Islam after neighbors objected to her drinking water from their glass because she was not Muslim. Bibi has always denied blasphemy. The case outraged Christians worldwide and been a source of division within Pakistan, where two politicians who sought to help Bibi were assassinated. Chief Justice Saqib Nasir, who headed a special three-person bench set up for the appeal, cited the Koran in his ruling, writing "Tolerance is the basic principle of Islam" and noting the religion condemns injustice and oppression. (Reuters)

Rouhani Tells Iranians to Brace for Hard Times under U.S. Sanctions

GENEVA - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has warned Iranians they face hard times when new U.S. sanctions take effect on Sunday but said the government would do its best to alleviate them.

Washington reimposed a number of sanctions on Iran in May after pulling out of an international 2015 agreement intended to curb Tehran's nuclear program. U.S. officials have said they aim to reduce Iran's oil exports to zero. The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) news agency on

Wednesday quoted Rouhani as calling the move "a new injustice" which the government did not fear. But he added: "In the past few months our people have faced difficult times and it's possible that the next few months will be difficult. But the government will use all its power to reduce these problems." The cost of living has soared in recent months, leading to demonstrations against profiteering and corruption in which protesters have chanted anti-government slogans. (Reuters)

India, Iran, Russia Push Alternative to Suez Canal

TEHRAN - India, Iran and Russia will meet next month to discuss the operation of a 7,200 km trade and transport corridor that presents a cheaper and shorter alternative to the traditional route through the Suez Canal.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multimode network of sea and rail routes, will link the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf via Iran to Russia and North Europe.

The project comes in the backdrop of China's multi-trillion-dollar One Belt One Road initiative. Within Iran, the two routes overlap in a potential boon to future businesses. New Delhi has been actively courting Tehran, given the utmost im-

portance it attaches to the route and Iran has been receptive. Once operational, the corridor will allow India to send its goods to Bandar Abbas in Iran by sea, from where they will be transported to Iran's Bandar Anzali on the Caspian Sea by road. Next, they will be shipped to Astrakhan in Russia and transported into Europe by rail. The route will cut the time and cost of delivering goods by about 30 percent to more than 40 percent. Compared with the Suez Canal, the corridor will reduce the transport time between Mumbai and Moscow to about 20 days. The estimated capacity of the corridor is 20 to 30 million tonnes of goods per year. (Press TV)