

UN Chief, Security Council Members Warn Against Military Action on Korean Peninsula

UNITED NATIONS - UN chief Antonio Guterres and several representatives of the UN Security Council on Friday expressed concern about the risk of military confrontation on the Korean Peninsula. "Any military action would have devastating and unpredictable consequences," said the UN secretary-general. "The situation on the Korean Peninsula is the most tense and dangerous peace and security issue in the world today. I am deeply concerned by the risk of military confrontation, including as a result of unintended escalation or miscalculation," said Guterres. While all concerned seek to avoid an accidental escalation that may lead to conflict, the risk is being multiplied by



"misplaced over-confidence," dangerous narratives and rhetoric, and the lack of communication channels, he warned. "It is time to immediately re-establish and strengthen communication channels, including inter-Korean and military-to-military channels. This is critical to lower the risk of miscalculation or misunderstanding and reduce tensions in the region." Diplomatic engagement is the only pathway to sustainable peace and de-nuclearization, said Guterres. "We must do everything we can to reach that objective - and avoid a level of danger that would be unpredictable in its trajectory and catastrophic in its consequences." (Xinhua)

U.S. Secretary of State Urges DPRK to Abandon Nuclear Weapons Programs

UNITED NATIONS - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Friday told the UN Security Council that the ultimate goal of solving the Korean Peninsula crisis must be the "complete, verifiable and irreversible abandonment of its nuclear weapons programs." Tillerson, who did not repeat his Tuesday stance that there are no preconditions to having talks, urged the Demo-

cratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to enter negotiations and give up its nuclear weapons. "The international community remains firm in our determination that we will not accept a nuclear North Korea (DPRK)," he noted. The Security Council meeting was called amid rising concerns that the world is on the brink of nuclear conflict. (Xinhua)

May Wins Brexit Boost, but Bigger Battles Await

LONDON - After a turbulent few months when some predicted she could be gone by Christmas, British Prime Minister Theresa May finally has some good news with a deal on Brexit - but any reprieve will likely be short-lived. The EU's decision Friday to move to the next stage of negotiations with Britain was a much-needed success for May, whose leadership has been dogged by doubts since a disastrous snap election in June. The approval followed an

11th-hour deal struck last week by the prime minister and European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker on the terms of the divorce, including Britain's financial settlement. It drew rare support from across all sections of May's frequently divided Conservative party, and was agreed despite concerns in the Northern Irish party which props up her minority government. But some key issues were left unresolved, while Britain is yet to set out what it wants from the fu-



ture relationship with the European Union. Cabinet ministers are due to discuss the subject formally next week. A parliamentary defeat on the eve of the EU sum-

mit was a timely reminder of the opposition May faces to her Brexit strategy at home, as the negotiations enter what is likely to be the most challenging phase. (AFP)

Syrian Gov't Rejects Claims of Hindering Geneva Talks



DAMASCUS - The Syrian Foreign Ministry on Friday slammed claims that the Syrian government delegation was responsible for the failure of the latest round of intra-

Syrian talks in Geneva, state news agency SANA reported. In a statement, the ministry deplored what it called the "allegations" of the UN special envoy to Syria,

Staffan de Mistura, and France, which blamed the administration of President Bashar al-Assad for the failure of the eighth round of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva. On Thursday, Mistura said the two weeks of talks failed to yield the intended results despite great efforts, which he described as a "missed golden opportunity." Mistura accused the Syrian government delegation of setting preconditions that he had warned against, saying the government delegation refused to discuss anything

other than "terrorism." French ambassador to the U.S. Gerard Araud also accused Syria of doing nothing to reach a peace agreement. "The Assad regime never entered into any negotiation since the beginning of the civil war. They don't look for a political compromise but for the eradication of their enemies," Araud said on Twitter. Alexandre Giorgini, France's deputy foreign ministry spokesman, said the attitude of the Syrian government is deplorable. (Xinhua)

Merkel's Bavarian Ally Re-Elects Horst Seehofer as Leader



BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Bavaria-only sister party has re-elected Horst Seehofer as its leader, but with his weakest support so far following a dismal performance in September's election. The Christian Social Union on Saturday elected Seehofer with 83.7 percent support. The lowest result previously since his first

election as party leader in 2008 was in 2015 with 87.2 percent. Seehofer has been under pressure since the CSU performed poorly in September's German election. It took 38.8 percent of the vote in Bavaria, 10.5 percentage points fewer than in 2013, rattling nerves in the party, which faces a state election next fall. (AP)

India's Rahul Gandhi Takes over as Opposition Congress Party Chief

NEW DELHI - India's Nehru-Gandhi scion Rahul Gandhi Saturday took over as the country's main opposition Congress party chief, days after being elected unopposed. The 47-year-old assumed the reins of the Congress from his mother Sonia Gandhi, who had been the president of the 132-year-old political party since 1998, at a grand function in Delhi. The elevation took place at 11:00 a.m. local time when Gandhi was given a formal certificate of being elected the Congress president unopposed from the party's central election authority. Gandhi was in fact elected to the top post Monday after no one else in the Congress challenged him in the party's internal election that was held a week earlier. Till his elevation, Gandhi held the post of Congress vice-president for over three years. (Xinhua)

Fatah calls for protests against US VP Jerusalem visit

RAMALLAH - The Fatah faction of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas on Saturday called for demonstrations next week when US Vice President Mike Pence visits Jerusalem, after Washington's policy shift on the holy city. Breaking with decades with US policy, President Donald Trump announced on December 6 his decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and that he would move the US embassy to the city. The move has stirred global condemnation and sparked angry protests across Arab and Muslim countries, as well as deadly clashes in the occupied territories between Palestinians and Israeli forces. (AFP)

Pence Trip to Middle East Overshadowed by Trump's Jerusalem Decision

WASHINGTON - U.S. Vice President Mike Pence will underscore the U.S. partnership with Israel during a trip to the Middle East next week while seeking to shore up U.S. relations with the Arab world after President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.



Pence, a strong supporter of Trump's decision, will spend three days in the region with stops in Israel and Egypt, the first high-level official to visit after the president reversed decades of U.S. policy and announced

the United States would start the process of moving its embassy from Tel Aviv. The status of Jerusalem, which holds Muslim, Jewish and Christian holy sites, is one of the thorniest obstacles to a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, who were furious over Trump's move and have declined to meet with Pence. The international community does not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the full city. (Reuters)

UK-Japan Seek Closer Defense Ties in Response to Trump, Brexit

LONDON - Japan has sought closer ties with Britain out of fear that the U.S. Trump administration will give the Asia-Pacific region a lower priority, a leading British academic said Friday. Professor Ian Neary, a Japan expert at Oxford University, told Xinhua that the three-year defense cooperation plan signed by Britain and Japan Thursday serves the interests of both sides. "There is a feeling in Japan that the present U.S. administration, and possibly future ones, do not and will not give the Asia Pacific region priority. Meanwhile

the UK is reassessing its options as it goes through the process of leaving the European Union (EU). Thus this agreement serves the interests of both sides," said the expert. Britain's newly appointed Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson said here Thursday that the year 2018 will see British and Japanese military forces work even more closely together. Williamson and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson met their Japanese counterparts at Greenwich Naval College to strengthen security and defense cooperation between the two countries. (Xinhua)

Tillerson Urges Long Halt to North Korea Weapons Tests before Any Talks

UNITED NATIONS - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Friday urged North Korea to carry out a "sustained cessation" of weapons testing to allow the two countries to hold talks about Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs. Tillerson's remarks were a retreat from his position earlier this week when he offered to begin direct talks with North Korea without preconditions, backing away from a key U.S. demand that Pyongyang must first accept that giving up its nuclear arsenal would be part of any negotiations. But the White House distanced itself from those remarks by Tillerson and said now is not the time for negotiations. "North Korea must earn its way back to the table. The pressure campaign must and will continue until de-nuclearization is achieved," Tillerson told a meeting of the United Nations Security Council on North Korea's weapons programs. He did not specify how long the lull should last. He told reporters after the meeting that the United States would not accept any preconditions for talks with North Korea. Tillerson had raised hopes this week that the United States and North Korea could negotiate to resolve their standoff when he said that the United States was "ready to talk any time North Korea would like to talk."

North Korea's ambassador to the United Nations on Friday made no mention of Tillerson's call for a halt to testing when he addressed the same U.N. meeting. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

China, Britain Pledge Cooperation as UK Leaves EU

BEIJING - Britain and China pledged Saturday to promote London as a center for offshore use of Beijing's currency and cooperate in clean energy research and promoting trade as the United Kingdom prepares to leave the European Union. Officials announced the agreements following an economic dialogue led by Britain's finance minister, Philip Hammond, and a senior Chinese economic official, Vice Premier Ma Kai. The event was attended by a delegation of British business leaders and economic officials. British leaders are looking to China for trade and investment as they try to fashion a new global role and offset reduced access

to the other 27 nations of the European common market. The two sides agreed to promote international use of China's tightly controlled yuan and develop yuan-based business in London. That could help to shore up the British capital's status as a global financial center outside the EU. "The two sides will discuss future trade arrangements and push for the conclusion of a China-EU investment agreement," Ma said at a joint news conference. The economic dialogue is an annual event, but this year's gathering at a government guesthouse in Beijing took on special significance following Britain's 2016 vote to leave the EU. (AP)

PM For Building Society with No Tolerance for Religious Extremism, Violence

ISLAMABAD - Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi has urged the nation to make a pledge to build a democratic society with zero tolerance for violence and extremism in name of religion, sect, ethnicity or race. In his message to the nation on the anniversary of the tragedy of Army Public School (APS) Peshawar to be observed on Saturday (December 16), the prime minister said the day would be remembered as black day in country's history when barbaric elements had targeted the innocent children of the APS. He said the children who had gone to school for study, returned either in coffins or severely injured. He said the Pakistani nation had rendered unprecedented sacrifices in

war against terrorism, more than any other nation in the world. The prime minister viewed that the APS tragedy had led to the historic national unity and promoted the nation to make a firm resolve for unanimously launching a decisive action against terrorists. He said the valiant security forces of Pakistan defeated the terrorists under the National Action Plan and broke their back consequent to their tireless efforts. The blood of the innocent people has come to fruition making the Pakistani nation the only nation across the world that had defeated the terrorists. Prime Minister Abbasi said the memory of the APS victims would continue disturbing us. (Monitoring Desk)

Iran's Position as Strongest Regional Power Being Strengthened: Velayati

TEHRAN - Ali Akbar Velayati, an international adviser to Leader of the Islamic Revolution, praised Iran's growing influence in the Middle East and said the country's position as the strongest power in the region is being strengthened. Speaking at a televised program entitled "Iran", Velayati pointed to the plots hatched by some Western and regional countries against the Islamic Republic and said the Westerners had plotted to disintegrate the region so that all of the Iranian borders become engulfed in tension. They were seeking to undermine Iran, the top adviser said, adding that their main target in the

region was the Islamic Republic. However their plots have gone nowhere, Velayati said, referring to the latest developments in the Middle East and Iran's growing power in the region. "Iran's (position) as the strongest regional power is being strengthened day by day..." he noted. Iran is considered by many experts as the "island of stability" in a region which faces many security challenges. In August 2016, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei highlighted the strong security in Iran despite crises and insecurity in the region. (Tasnim)

Uzbekistan, US Consider Issues of Economic Interaction

TASHKENT - Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov and US to Tashkent Pamela Lora Spratlan held a meeting on Dec.15, the foreign ministry reported. The sides exchanged views on the results of Uzbek-American cooperation in 2017 and discussed prospects for further development of bilateral cooperation in 2018. In particular, the sides discussed issues of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the United

States in the political, trade-economic, investment, cultural, humanitarian and other spheres. The volume of mutual trade between Uzbekistan and the United States by late 2016 amounted to \$453.8 million, which is 70 percent more than in 2015. In 2016, 164 enterprises with participation of American companies operated in Uzbekistan, including 122 joint ventures and 42 enterprises with 100% foreign capital. (Trend)