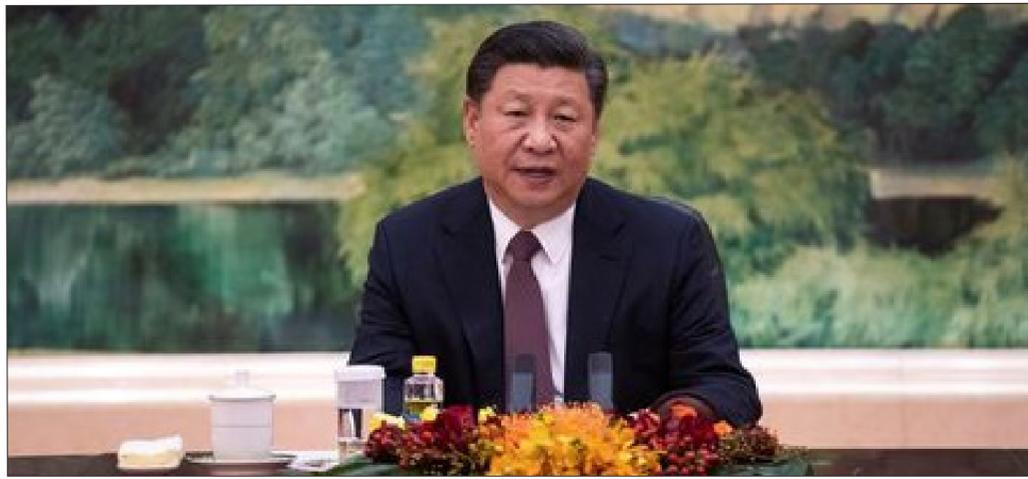


China's Xi to Address Key Reform Anniversary on Tuesday: Xinhua

BEIJING - President Xi Jinping will make a major speech on Tuesday to mark the 40th anniversary of China's reform and opening up, state news agency Xinhua reported. Xi will speak at a conference to be held at the Great Hall of the People from 10 a.m. (0200 GMT) on Tuesday, Xinhua said on Sunday. The report was in line with what diplomatic sources had previously told Reuters. Former leader Deng Xiaoping initiated China's historic reform and opening up in 1978, followed by a series of capitalist experiments that lifted much of China out of poverty and turned it into an economic powerhouse.

China's trade war with the United States is spurring



some Chinese entrepreneurs, government advisers and think tanks to call for faster reforms in the world's second-largest economy and the freeing up of a private sector stifled by state controls. (Reuters)

Mexico Aims to Boost Crude Output by 45 Percent before 2025

MEXICO CITY — Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador detailed plans Saturday to "rescue" the national oil industry by boosting crude production at the state-owned oil company by 45 percent before 2025. Speaking from Ciudad del Carmen, a Gulf coast city 50 miles (85 kilometers) from an oil field that sustained Mexican public finances for decades, Lopez Obrador said the goal is for Petroleos Mexicanos to raise crude output to 2.4 million barrels per day, from the current 1.65 mil-

lion barrels per day. "We are going to invest where we know there's petroleum and where it costs us less to extract it," he told a jubilant crowd of oil workers. Lopez Obrador previously announced plans to invest 75 billion pesos (\$3.65 billion) of savings from a government austerity program into Pemex. The company has struggled to come up with funds in recent years amid mounting pension obligations, high tax rates, rampant fuel theft and inefficiencies. (AP)

Gandhi Statue Removed from African University over Claims of Racism

GHANA - After a wave of opposition and a petition drive that cited views deemed racist and offensive against Africans, a statue of Indian independence leader Mohandas K. Gandhi was removed this week from a university campus in Ghana, reports said. Gandhi was one of the most celebrated figures of the 20th century for his peaceful protests in his quest for Indian sovereignty. However, in Africa, some remember him as someone who thought of Africans as savages

who were beneath the British and Indians, the Washington Post reported. A petition to remove the statue from the University of Ghana in Accra used his early writings during his two decades as a lawyer on the continent to give weight to critics' arguments. "Having his statue means that we stand for everything he stands for and if he stands for these things [his alleged racism], I don't think we should have his statue on campus," law student Nana



Adoma Asare told the BBC. In one argument for Indian empowerment, Gandhi appeared to believe the British treated Indians "little better, if at all, than the savages or the Natives of Africa." It also said Gandhi spoke of the "half-heathen Native." (Fox News)

British Government Is Not Planning for Second Brexit Vote: Minister

BRUSSELS - British education minister Damian Hinds said on Sunday the government was not planning for a second referendum, denying reports that ministers were looking at such a vote to break the deadlock over Brexit.

Asked if the government was preparing for a vote, Hinds told Sky News: "No, a second referendum would be divisive. We've had the people's vote, we've had the referendum and now we've got to get on with implementing it." He described



Prime Minister Theresa May's deal to the leave the European Union as a "balanced" agreement that lawmakers should support. (Reuters)

North Korea Marks 7th Anniversary of Kim Jong Il's Death

PYONGYANG, North Korea - North Koreans are marking the seventh anniversary of the death of leader Kim Jong Il with visits to statues and vows of loyalty to his son and successor, Kim Jong Un. As snow fell Sunday, tens of thousands of people offered flowers and paid respects to the late leader at Mansu Hill in central Pyongyang, the location of huge bronze statues of the "Dear Leader" and national founder Kim Il Sung. The anniversary observations

were expected to continue through Monday across the country. The death of Kim Jong Il on Dec. 17, 2011, thrust his son into power when he was still in his late 20s and a virtual unknown figure outside of the North. With attention focused on the anniversary, there was little mention in the state media of the issues that have gotten the most attention elsewhere, including a flurry of speculation in South Korea that Kim might visit Seoul by the end of the year. (Fox News)

Jailed Catalan Official Brought to Hospital after 2 Weeks of Hunger Strike

CATALONIA - Jailed Catalan leader Jordi Turull has been transferred to an infirmary, after his health deteriorated 14 days into the hunger strike he and a colleague began, to demand a fair trial over their role in the independence referendum. The former spokesman for the regional Catalan government of Carles Puigdemont was relocated to the infirmary inside Lledoners prison in Catalonia. "There are no worrying signs, this is part of a medical protocol," his doctor Jaume Padros wrote on Twitter, noting that his patient remains in stable condition. A day after being admitted to the hospital on Saturday, Turull reassured his supporters that, besides feeling weaker and "lazier," nothing too "serious" is happening with his health so far. (Russia Today)

Nations Agree on Global Climate Pact Rules, but They Are Seen as Weak

KATOWICE, Poland - Nearly 200 countries overcame political divisions late on Saturday to agree on rules for implementing a landmark global climate deal, but critics say it is not ambitious enough to prevent the dangerous effects of global warming. After two weeks of talks in the Polish city of Katowice, nations finally reached consensus on a more detailed framework for the 2015 Paris Agreement, which aims to limit a rise in average world temperatures to "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees



Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels. "It is not easy to find agreement on a deal so specific and technical. Through this package you have made a thousand little steps forward together. You can feel proud," Polish president of the talks Michal Kurtyka told delegates. After he struck the gavel to signal agreement had been reached, ministers joined him on the stage, hugging and laughing in signs of relief after the marathon talks. (Reuters)

After Rare Misfire, Kremlin Set to Win Regional Vote

MOSCOW - A Kremlin-backed candidate is on track to be governor of a region on Russia's Pacific coast, initial voting results showed on Sunday, after an election process in which the opposition had threatened the Kremlin's usually tight grip on power. Sunday's vote in Primorsky region, which includes the port city of Vladivostok, was a re-run of a Sept. 16 election in which a Communist Party challenger claimed he was the rightful winner over the Kremlin's nominee. But that election was annulled by election officials, citing voting irregularities. Hundreds of people took to the streets at the time, saying the decision robbed the opposition of a rare election win. Some political commentators said the September election showed fading public support for the Kremlin, the result of a weak economy and an unpopular proposal - since put on hold - to make people work for longer before they receive their state pension. After the election re-run was announced, the Kremlin ditched its candidate from the September vote. Russian President Vladimir Putin installed as acting governor Oleg Kozhemyako, the governor of a nearby region with chiselled good looks and none of the political baggage of his predecessor. Kozhemyako entered the election race, while the Communist challenger from the first round was disqualified from running on the grounds he failed to reach the threshold for winning endorsements from regional lawmakers. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

IMF Ties Pakistan's Debt Transparency to Bailout Deal

KARACHI - Pakistan's debt transparency is an utmost prerequisite for a possible bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a spokesperson of the Washington-based lender said, adding the talks with the country continue to reach understanding on the economic policy priorities. IMF Communications Department Director Gerry Rice said discussions with Pakistan are active and "they continue toward reaching an understanding on the policy priorities and reform to stabilise the economy, lay the foundations for sustainable, inclusive growth".

Rice was addressing a presser on Thursday, according to a transcription made available on the IMF's website on Saturday. "When a program is agreed by staff with the authorities, it goes forward to the board. And the board representing our membership, including the United States, of course, makes the final decision on whether that program should go ahead," he said, responding to a question whether or not IMF considers the US insistence that any of IMF loan to Pakistan should not be used to repay the country's debt to China. (Agencies)

Khalid Bin Faisal Al-Sahli, Saudi Ambassador to Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - Khalid bin Faisal Al-Sahli has been the Saudi ambassador to Turkmenistan since 2014. Before his appointment as an envoy, Al-Sahli served as minister plenipotentiary at the Foreign Ministry. He also served as an adviser at the office of the deputy minister of foreign affairs, and a consultant at the Foreign Ministry's undersecretary for protocol affairs. His career as a diplomat began in 1993 with his appointment as a diplomatic attaché in the Foreign Ministry. He has also served at the ministry's general directorate of administrative communications and as a second secretary at the protocol division.

Moreover, he served at several positions in different Saudi embassies including Ashgabat (Turkmenistan), Ottawa (Canada), Bangkok (Thailand), and Kuwait. Al-Sahli holds a bachelor's degree in political science from King Saud University in Riyadh, and a postgraduate diploma in political science from the Diplomatic Studies Institute in Riyadh. He has participated in many international, regional and local conferences, forums and meetings as a representative of Saudi Arabia or as part of the Kingdom's delegation. He is fluent in Arabic, English, French, and Russian. (Agencies)

Son-In-Law of Iran President Faces Nepotism Claims

TEHRAN - The appointment of President Hassan Rouhani's son-in-law as head of Iran's geological survey has renewed accusations of nepotism and led on Sunday to the resignation of a senior official, according to conservative media. The appointment of Kambiz Mehdizadeh, in his early thirties and reportedly married to Rouhani's daughter in a low-key wedding this August, was widely criticised by Iranians on social media. It also triggered the resignation of Jafar Sargheyni, head of the mining section in the industries ministry, who

criticised "unprofessional appointments" without directly naming Mehdizadeh, the conservative Tasnim news agency reported. Mehdizadeh is a PhD student in petroleum engineering, who has also served as an advisor to Iran's oil ministry, taekwondo federation and national youth organisation, Tasnim said. Iranians on social media renewed criticism of nepotism that had spread last year with the hashtag "#good-genes" - a reference to the son of a prominent reformist politician who attributed his business success to inheriting "good genes" from his parents. (AFP)

US Sanctions Will Fail to Change Iran Policies: FM Zarif

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says economic sanctions imposed by the United States against Iran will fail to have any impact on the policies of the Islamic Republic at home or abroad. "It's obviously the case that we are facing economic pressure because of the US sanctions. [The] US is a major global power and it can actually create painful conditions for other countries. But would that lead to a change of policy? I can assure you that it won't," Zarif said in an address to the Doha Forum 2018 in Qatar on Saturday. "If there is an art, we have perfected in Iran and can teach to others for a price, it is the art of evading sanctions," he added. Although the US has put so much pressure on Iran over the past 40 years,

the Islamic Republic has managed to survive, he said. "We've survived against the United States, against the will of the United States for the last 40 years, and I believe we will survive for the next 40 years," the top Iranian diplomat pointed out. US President Donald Trump withdrew his country in May from the multilateral Iran nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and decided to re-impose unilateral sanctions against Tehran. Under the deal, reached between Iran and six major powers - the US, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China, Tehran agreed to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for the removal of nuclear-related sanctions. (Press TV)

OIC Welcomes Outcome of Yemeni Peace Talks in Sweden

JEDDAH - The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) welcomed the progress achieved by the Yemeni sides during talks in Sweden, on 13 December 2018, as they have agreed to a ceasefire in the port city of Hodeidah and the withdrawal of Houthis.

The OIC Secretary General, Dr. Yousef Al-Othaimeen, confirmed the Organization's support for a comprehensive peaceful solution that preserves Yemen's integral territory and stability, based on UN Security Council resolution 2216, the Gulf Initiative and the Yemeni national dialogue output. Dr. Al-Othaimeen congratulated the Yemeni people on the ceasefire agreement that will allow access of humanitarian aid for the citizens affected by the conflict. He also affirmed the continuation of the Organization's firm and principled position in support of the legitimate Yemeni authority and the Yemeni people in all circumstances, joining in the international effort to reach a comprehensive peace agreement on the agreed terms of reference. (PR)