

Climate Change "No Longer a Matter of Opinion": Italy PM

ROME - The dangers of climate change are no longer just a matter of opinion, Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni told an environmentalist conference in Rome on Saturday.

The day-long event titled "Pact for Climate - Together for Italy" was organized by Insieme (Together), a new coalition between the Green Party, the Italian Socialist Party, and supporters of former center-left prime minister Romano Prodi.

"The risks are no longer a matter of opinion, they are present risks," Italian news agency ANSA quoted



Gentiloni as telling participants, including a number of current and former government ministers, MPs, and representatives from leading environmentalist NGOs.

"The issue of climate change must be considered as one of the central issues of our economic, strategic, and international policies," Gentiloni said.

"The fact that the United States have withdrawn from the Cop21 framework does not diminish, but rather multiplies the responsibilities of other countries," the Italian leader said. (Xinhua)

Turkish, Russian Chiefs of Staff Discuss Syrian, Iraqi Files

ANKARA - Russia's chief of staff made a surprise visit to Ankara on Friday during which he held talks with his Turkish counterpart, local media reported.

Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov and his Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar focused during their discussions on Friday on the situation in Syria and Iraq and the necessary measures needed to combat terror organizations, said a statement from the Turkish military.

The meeting was preceded by talks Akar held on

Thursday with his Iraqi counterpart Othman al-Ghani, US European Command Command Curtis Scaparrotti and US Central Command Commander Joseph Votel on regional security and counter-terrorism.

Turkish sources said that Akar and Gerasimov's talks also addressed the S-400 missile system agreement signed between Ankara and Moscow. Turkey has repeatedly criticized NATO for failing to provide it with a defense system it believes is necessary to ensure its security. (Agencies)

UN Council Weighs Measure Rejecting US Jerusalem Decision

UNITED NATIONS - The UN Security Council is considering a draft resolution affirming that any change to the status of Jerusalem has no legal effect and must be reversed, in response to the US decision to recognize the city as Israel's capital.

Egypt circulated the draft text on Saturday, and diplomats said the council could vote on the proposed measure as early as Monday.

Breaking with the international consensus, US President Donald Trump this month announced

that he would recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the US embassy there from Tel Aviv, sparking protests and strong condemnation.

The draft resolution obtained by AFP stresses that Jerusalem is an issue "to be resolved through negotiations" and expresses "deep regret at recent decisions concerning the status of Jerusalem," without specifically mentioning Trump's move. "Any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the charac-



ter, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded," it said. Diplomats said they ex-

pected the United States to use its veto power to block the measure while most, if not all, of the 14 other council members were expected to back the draft resolution. (AFP)

Brexit Deal Proves Critics Wrong: UK's May



LONDON - British Prime Minister Theresa May has hit back at critics of her handling of Brexit, writing in the Sunday Telegraph that she had "proven the

doubters wrong" after securing an interim deal. Pressure lifted on the embattled leader after she struck a deal with the European Union over Britain's divorce terms last

Friday, enabling talks to turn to the country's future trading relationship after months of fraught negotiations.

"We have proven the doubters wrong and are making progress towards a successful exit from the EU," she wrote in the centre-right broadsheet, calling the agreement "a watershed" in negotiations.

"Amid all the noise, we are getting on with the job," she added. "We will not be derailed from this fundamental duty to deliver the democratic will

of the British people." The prime minister said it was important to work out the exact terms of an implementation period, designed to soften the effects of Brexit after the March 2019 leave date, "as soon as possible... to provide invaluable certainty for employers." She also played down fears of Brexit voters that Britain would end up being bound by EU rules, insisting that the country would regain "control of our borders, and set our own laws". (AFP)

Erdogan Says Turkey Aims to Open Embassy in East Jerusalem

ISTANBUL - Turkey intends to open an embassy in East Jerusalem, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday, days after leading calls at a summit of Muslim leaders for the world to recognize it as the capital of Palestine.

It was not clear how he would carry out the move, as Israel controls all of Jerusalem and calls the city its indivisible capital. Palestinians want the capital of a future state they seek to be in East Jerusalem, which Israel took in a 1967 war and later annexed in a move not recognized internationally. The Muslim nation summit was a

response to U.S. President Donald Trump's Dec. 6 decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. His move broke with decades of U.S. policy and international consensus that the city's status must be left to Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. Erdogan said in a speech to members of his AK Party in the southern province of Karaman that Turkey's consulate general in Jerusalem was already represented by an ambassador. "God willing, the day is close when officially, with God's permission, we will open our embassy there," Erdogan said. (Reuters)

N. Korea 'Agent' Charged with WMD Sale Plot in Australia

SYDNEY - A Sydney-based "loyal agent of North Korea" has been charged with trying to sell missile parts and technology on the black market to raise money for Pyongyang in breach of international sanctions, Australian police said Sunday.

The 59-year-old naturalised Australian citizen of Korean descent, named in local media as Chan Han Choi, was attempting to broker illicit deals that could have generated "tens of millions of dollars" for North Korea, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) said. Choi was involved in discussions to set up a ballistic missile production facility and the supply of missile construction plans in addition to components, software and the transfer of technical expertise from Pyongyang, police alleged.

AFP Assistant Commissioner Neil Gaughan told reporters the case was "like nothing we have ever seen on Australian soil", alleging that the man was in contact with high-ranking North Korean officials. "This man is a loyal agent of North Korea, believing he was acting to serve some higher patriotic purpose."

The alleged agent's plans did not involve other governments or officials, police said. Authorities did not reveal which individuals or entities the man was allegedly trying to trade with. North Korea is under tough United Nations sanctions aimed at choking off revenue to Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes. "This is a very important arrest, the charges laid are of the greatest nature," Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull told reporters in Sydney.

"North Korea is a dangerous, reckless, criminal regime threatening the peace of the region. It supports itself by breaching UN sanctions. (AFP)

European Summit Ends in Disagreement on Migration Policy

BRUSSELS - The Summit last week adopted conclusions on security and defense, social dimension, education and culture, climate change, and Jerusalem but not on migration policy although the issue was on the agenda. The discussion which was described as frank and sober focused on refugee allocation quotas, an issue where member states still are divided.

In 2015, the Council of the European Union adopted a decision to help Italy and Greece cope with the massive influx of migrants. It provided for the reloca-



tion of 160,000 persons in need of international protection to other EU member states. Distribution quotas were put in place but several countries have systematically refused to respect them.

In 2016, the Commission proposed a reform of the Dublin Regulation, the

cornerstone of the European asylum system, to make permanent relocation of refugees mandatory for all member states. However, the positions of the member states for and against relocation have hardly changed since then. (Agencies)

North Korea Threat on Agenda When South Korean Foreign Minister Visits Japan

SEOUL - South Korea's foreign minister will visit Japan this week to meet her Japanese counterpart, the foreign ministry said on Sunday, with Seoul and Tokyo seeking to boost cooperation over the handling of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. The need to confront the threat posed by North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear tests comes despite lingering tension over the issue of sexual slavery during Japan's wartime occupa-

tion of Korea. Kang Kyung-wha will arrive in Tokyo on Tuesday and meet Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono during her two-day visit, her first trip to Japan as South Korea's top diplomat, the foreign ministry in Seoul said in a statement. "The two ministers will exchange views on issues of common interests focusing on bilateral relations and North Korea-related issues, including its nuclear programme," the ministry statement said. (Reuters)

Italy's Ruling PD Party Slips Further in Polls

MILAN - Italy's ruling Democratic Party (PD) has lost further ground over its rivals after political infighting and fallout from a banking scandal, an opinion poll showed on Sunday.

The poll comes just weeks before parliament is expected to be dissolved before elections early next year.

The PD share of the vote fell 1 percent, from eight days ago, to 23.4 percent, its lowest level in five years, according to the Ipsos poll in the newspaper Corriere della Sera.

Support for the PD, headed by former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, has fallen steadily in recent months, with the group damaged by deep schisms and personality clashes.

The party has also come under fire over allegations cabinet undersecretary Maria Elena Boschi took steps to save Banca Etruria, a local bank based in her home town of Arezzo. Boschi has repeatedly denied exerting any political pressure in deciding the future of Banca Etruria.

The Ipsos poll said growing support from smaller allies had raised the center-left bloc's share of the vote to 26.2 percent, as of Dec. 14, from 24.8 percent. That was well short of the 36 percent polled by the center-right bloc led by former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. It was also behind the 28.2 percent share of the 5-Star anti-establishment party. The 5-Star Movement is predicted to emerge as the largest single party in the next parliament, but it has repeatedly ruled out joining any coalition. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

9th UK- China Economic and Financial Dialogue Held in Beijing

BEIJING - China's Vice Premier Ma Kai and the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Phillip Hammond concluded the ninth UK- China Economic and Financial Dialogue in December 2017. The two sides reached a number of agreements in various areas.

The UK has signed a "Contribution Agreement" with ASIA Infrastructure Investment Bank, formalizing its commitment to provide 50 million US dollars to the AIIB's special Fund for Project Preparation, matching China's commitment of the same amount.

On infrastructure and energy, the two countries agreed to facilitate the construction of the Hinkley Point C project.

They will continue to promote China's participation in the UK's high-speed railway 2 and deepen cooperation in multiple areas including railway construction, design and equipment supply.

In addition, they agreed to further expand air traffic rights arrangements by increasing the capacity entitlement to 150 flights per week between China and UK.

On the front of RMB internationalization, the two countries agree to host a jointly U.K.- China RMB International Dialogue in London next year to promote London's premier role as a Western Hub for the Chinese yuan and encourage greater use of the yuan in the international market. (Agencies)

Iranian Missile Program "Aggressive": UAE Minister

DUBAI - A senior official of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) said on Saturday through his Twitter account that Iran is "a serial missile exporter in the region."

Anwar Gargash, UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, said the defensive nature of Iran's missile program has been exposed for being "a blatant lie."

Gargash stated in English (he usually tweets in Arabic) as "jittery Iranian reactions to evidence showing its culpability in the missile attacks on Saudi Arabia expected." "Iran's missile program is both aggressive and exportable," added the minister, who regularly comments on geopolitical issues in the Middle East through social media channels.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia accuse Iran of providing and operating ballistic missiles for the Shiite Houthi rebels which they have been fighting militarily in a pan-Arab coalition since March 2015 in order to restore Yemen's President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who was ousted by Houthis in September 2014.

Earlier the week, the UAE called on international community "to more forcefully address Iran's threat."

On Nov. 23, the chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps said that the Islamic republic provides "advisory assistance" for Houthi militants, Tasnim news agency reported. (Xinhua)

Pakistan has 'Defeated' Terrorism: Abbasi

KOHAT - Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Saturday paid his respects to the martyrs of the devastating attack on the Army Public School (APS) that took place three years ago in Peshawar.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the Women's University in Kohat, Abbasi said,

"When the APS Peshawar attack took place three years ago, all our political parties and all our armed forces came together to fight terrorism in the country. As a result of this fight, we have defeated terrorism and today, our schools and mosques are safe," he

added. "Everyone is free to visit markets and live freely in this country."

He said the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government firmly believed in serving the masses with concrete steps instead of paying mere lip service to the public.

He said the PML-N always talked about Pakistan and stood for the unity of the country and never divided the brothers. He said a dictator had ruled over the country for eight years, followed by PPP government but no tangible development work could be initiated in the country. (Monitoring Desk)

Turkmenistan Approves State Program for Archaeological Research for 2018-2021

ASHGABAT - Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov approved the state program for 2018-2021 implying archaeological research of monuments located on the country's territory along the Great Silk Road, the Turkmen Dowllet Habarlarly state news agency reported.

The document was prepared by the country's Academy of Sciences together with the National Directorate for the Protection, Study and Restoration of Monuments of History and Culture.

The state program envisages cooperation with foreign research centers. The surveys on various issues of archeology, architecture, ethnography and history on the basis of archaeological values discovered during the study of monuments of ancient and medieval history of Turkmenistan are planned to be carried out. Besides excavations, archaeological, cultural and historical monuments located along the route of the Great Silk Road are planned to be restored. (Trend)