

# Koreas Will Meet for Talks Next Week in Small Breakthrough

SEOUL, South Korea - The rival Koreas will sit down for their first formal talks in more than two years next week to find ways to cooperate on the Winter Olympics in the South and to improve their abysmal ties, Seoul officials said Friday. While a positive sign after last year's threats of nuclear war, the Koreas have a long history of failing to move past their deep animosity. The announcement came hours after the United States said it will delay annual military exercises with South Korea until after the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, next month. The exercises in-



riate North Korea, which claims they are an invasion rehearsal, although South Korea and the United States have repeatedly said they are defensive in nature. On Friday morning, North Korea sent a message saying it would accept South Korea's offer to meet at the border village of Panmunjom next Tuesday to discuss Olympic cooperation and how to improve overall ties, according to South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles North Korean matters. Panmunjom is where a North Korean soldier dashed across the border into the South in November. (AP)

## Spanish Supreme Court Rejects Bail Appeal from Former Catalan Deputy Leader

MADRID -- The Spanish Supreme Court on Friday rejected the appeal made by former Catalan deputy leader Oriol Junqueras on releasing on bail as he awaits trial on charges of rebellion, sedition and misuse of public funds. Junqueras made his appeal on Thursday after spending over two months in prison. He said that after being reelected to the Catalan assembly in December 21 regional elections, he should be allowed to represent his voters.

However, the Supreme Court judges unanimously rejected Junqueras' appeal, arguing there was no evidence he would abandon the idea of unilateral independence for Catalonia and saying the leader of Esquerra Republicana (ERC) had "risen up against the Spanish state, against the Constitution, against the Catalan Statute and against the remainder of judicial order." The Supreme Court said it was an "illegitimate" and "very serious" act. (Xinhua)

UNITED NATIONS - At Washington's request, the UN Security Council will hold an emergency meeting Friday to discuss the wave of protests in Iran. US Ambassador Nikki Haley warned ahead of the meeting that the demonstrations could escalate into full-blown conflict, drawing a comparison with Syria. "The world has witnessed the horrors that have taken place in Syria, that began with a murderous regime denying its people's right

to peacefully protest," Haley said in a statement late Thursday. "We must not let that happen in Iran." A total of 21 people have died and hundreds have been arrested since December 28 as protests over economic woes turned against the regime as a whole, with attacks on government buildings and police stations. The United States formally requested the meeting on Thursday, but Russia and some of the other council members are not



convicted that the top UN body should discuss the unrest in Iran, diplomats said. Russia has criticized the US push for Iran to be discussed at the Security Council and accused Washington of interfering in Iran's domestic affairs after President Donald Trump backed the anti-government protests. (AFP)

## Neighbor News

### Xi Emphasizes Upholding, Developing Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday asked senior officials to consistently uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics and promote the "great new project of Party building." Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks at the opening of a workshop attended by newly-elected members and alternate members of the CPC Central Committee, as well as provincial and ministerial-level officials. The workshop is focused on the study and implementation of "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" and the spirit of the 19th CPC National Congress. "Socialism with Chinese

characteristics in the new era must be upheld consistently as it is both the achievement and continuation of the people's great social revolutions led by the CPC," Xi said. "Both history and reality have proved that a long historical process is needed when a social revolution is declared a final victory." "We can grasp the essence of many problems only by looking back the path we have taken, comparing it with others, looking to the road ahead, as well as understanding where we came from and where are going. Socialism with Chinese characteristics does not drop from the sky, but comes out of the practice of 40 years of reform and opening up and the practice of exploration since the establishment of the People's Republic of China nearly 70 years ago, he said. (Xinhua)

### Iran, Pakistan Discuss Defense Ties amid U.S. Threats

TEHRAN - The Iranian and Pakistani defense ministers held talks on defense cooperation amid U.S. President Donald Trump's recent Twitter spree against both nations, Press TV reported on Friday. Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ali Hatami hailed growing defense cooperation between Tehran and Islamabad in a telephone conversation with his Pakistani counterpart Khurram Dastgir-Khan on Thursday. The latest developments in the region and in the Islamic world necessitate more interactions among officials of Iran and Pakistan, as two major countries in the Muslim world, Hatami was quoted as saying. "The Americans always blame the others over their own failures in different parts of the world and they

pursue the strategy of the Zionist regime (of Israel) to destabilize the region," Hatami said. The "evil and stupid policies of the United States" are the root cause of deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan and the deaths of innocent civilians in Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq and Syria, he said. The two countries should utilize such capacity to enhance their economic growth and security, Hatami said, pointing to the potentials for military cooperation between Iran and Pakistan. The Pakistani defense minister welcomed the promotion of military cooperation with Iran with regard to the regional issues, noting that the two countries should further enhance such cooperation given the rapid pace of changes and regional developments. (Xinhua)

## Macron's Upcoming China Visit "of Great Significance"



BEIJING - French President Emmanuel Macron's upcoming visit to China, from January 8 to 10, is of great significance to bilateral ties, Chinese

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said at a daily press briefing. "This is his first state visit to China," Geng said here Friday, noting it has great

significance for China-France ties. During the visit, Chinese President Xi Jinping will hold a series of events for Macron's state visit. The two heads of state will review the past achievement of bilateral ties, outline the direction for future cooperation in political, economic, and cultural fields, so as to further strengthen bilateral ties, according to Geng. Xi and Macron will also exchange opinions on major international and regional issues, and discuss strengthening co-

operation to safeguard multilateralism, build an open world economy, improve global governance, and work jointly to tackle global challenges, said Geng. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and top legislator Zhang Dejiang will also meet with Macron, Geng said. Macron will visit the Forbidden City in Beijing. He will also visit Xi'an, capital city of northwest China's Shaanxi Province, which is home to the famous Terracotta Warriors. (Xinhua)

## Bulgaria, Ireland Want Strong Europe: PMs

SOFIA - Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and his visiting Irish counterpart Leo Varadkar said here on Friday they wanted a strong and secure Europe. "We are for a stable, united and strong Europe," Borissov said after bilateral talks. He believed that all difficulties would be overcome by will and desire. Borissov also said his country would have Ireland as its good friend and supporter during Bulgaria's six-month rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) which began

on Monday. "I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate PM Borissov on his ambitious Presidency Programme, the preparations to date and to assure him of Ireland's commitment to working with you and your team in making it a success," Varadkar said in turn. The slogan of Bulgaria's EU Presidency, "United We Stand Strong", and the key themes of "Consensus, Competitiveness and Cohesion" captured very well the essential needs of the EU at this time, Varadkar said. (Xinhua)

## New Austrian Leader Rejects Talk of Eastern EU Alliance

SEGGAUERBERG, Austria - Austria's new chancellor on Friday rejected suggestions that his government will align with eastern European Union nations that have clashed with the bloc over migrants and other issues. Chancellor Sebastian Kurz leads a coalition with the traditionally euroskeptic Freedom Party that took office just before Christmas. Both Kurz' conservative People's Party and the Freedom Party have taken a hard line against migration. The position has generated speculation that Austria could move closer to the Visegrad group of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia than to its western EU allies. Kurz, who at 31 is Europe's youngest leader, warned Friday against "over-interpreting things." "There are measures and initiatives where we have goodwill in western European countries," he told reporters after a meeting of the new Cabinet. "There are others where we will perhaps get applause from the Visegrad countries, and still others where we agree with all other 27 EU member states."

Kurz plans to visit Paris and Berlin in the coming weeks. He said he expects a "good exchange" with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, stressing that "Germany is our biggest neighbor, our most important economic partner." Of French President Emmanuel Macron, who has championed efforts to reform the EU, Kurz said: "It is clearly positive for all of us in the European Union that there is a French president who aspires to change something in the European Union." (AP)

## EU to Bolster Ties with Cuba Amid U.S. Hostility: Official

HAVANA - The European Union's top diplomat Federica Mogherini said Thursday that the EU is a reliable ally of Cuba and announced a series of agreements, in the face of the reversal in U.S.-Cuban relations under President Donald Trump. Mogherini said at the end of a two-day official visit to Havana that the EU is a "solid, firm and reliable partner" of Cuba and despite differences, it remains "consistent" in its foreign policy. She said cooperation agreements in renewable energy, sustainable agri-



culture, culture and expertise valued at 49 million euros (52.04 million U.S. dollars) would be signed shortly. To these can be added another 9 million euros (9.56 million dollars) recently donated by the bloc to help support the reconstruction efforts

in the wake of Hurricane Irma, which caused economic losses of more than 13 billion dollars. France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and 19 other EU members have also made enormous investments in Cuba, especially in its tourism industry. (Xinhua)

## Erdogan to Meet France's Macron for Thawing Turkey-EU Ties

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will pay a visit to France on Friday and meet his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron amid Ankara's efforts to ease strained ties between the European Union and Turkey. If Turkey wants "hands of a friend" to energize the long-stalled ties with the EU, Macron is the right European leader, Uluc Ozulker, a retired diplomat and Turkey's former ambassador to France, told Xinhua. The meeting between Macron and Erdogan will be the first high-level one of

the Turkish president with a prominent European leader long after Ankara engaged war of words with several European capitals and the EU over the Turkey's post-coup attempt measures. Turkey and the EU have been engaged in a diplomatic spat since 2016 after Brussels strongly criticized Ankara for mass arrests in the country linked to the failed coup in July 2016. The Turkish government declared a state of emergency after the coup attempt and launched a huge crackdown on state institutions. (Xinhua)

## Migrant Arrivals into Europe by Sea Halved in 2017 to Reach 171,635: IOM

GENEVA - The UN migration agency IOM said Friday that the number of migrants and refugees entering Europe by sea during 2017 more than halved from the preceding year with the tally standing at 171,635. IOM said that just under 70 percent of those migrants and refugees arrived in Italy and the remainder divided between Greece, Cyprus and Spain, the migration agency's spokesperson Joel Millman said at a regular UN briefing, noting that the statistics are still preliminary. This compares with 363,504 arrivals across the region through the same period last year. "IOM's Missing Migrants Project reported 3,116 deaths in the Mediterranean during 2017, not including at least two deaths recorded in late December, when one body was recovered on the coast of Libya and an 18-month-old child reportedly drowned off Turkey," said Millman. For 2016, the migration agency had recorded 5,143 during Mediterranean crossings into Europe. IOM Rome had reported on Thursday that, according to Ministry of Interior figures, 119,310 men, women and children arrived by sea as irregular migrants to Italy last year, the lowest total in four years, or since the Mediterranean migrant emergency began, said Millman. IOM has been compiling arrival data across the Mediterranean since 2014. Millman cited IOM Athens as reporting Thursday that over the last 12 days of 2017, the Hellenic Coast Guard reported at least 10 incidents requiring search and rescue operations off the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios and Rhodes. (Xinhua)

## CPEC to Create Huge Opportunities, Transform Regional Peace, Prosperity

ISLAMABAD - Minister for Planning, Development and Reform, Prof. Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday said China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) would create huge opportunities for the people of the two countries and would transform the region into a hub of peace and prosperity. "We want to build a peaceful and prosperous society to improve quality of lives of billions living in the region and to connect them with global market," he said while addressing a launching ceremony of CPEC quar-

terly magazine and website by Centre for Excellence, CPEC here. Ahsan Iqbal said CPEC, Centre for Excellence was taking knowledge based steps and it would become a source of propagating research. "It will integrate and coordinate the institutions engaged in implementing CPEC by ensuring excellent research, utilizing modern techniques to help us in policy making and achieving our goals of sustainable growth and development", Ahsan Iqbal said. (Monitoring Desk)

## Turkmen President to Pay Official Visit to Uzbekistan

ASHGABAT - President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has sent a letter of congratulations to President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of establishment of the two countries' diplomatic relations, the Turkmen government said in a message. The Uzbek president said in his letter that he looks forward President Berdimuhamedov's upcoming visit to Uzbekistan, which, undoubtedly, will become a

historic event, will serve the fullest disclosure of the enormous potential of comprehensive Uzbek-Turkmen relations. The letter says that joint efforts have given momentum to cooperation in trade, production cooperation, transport and transit, energy, and intensified cultural and humanitarian exchanges. "We have opened a very important and promising direction of bilateral relations - there is a direct dialogue between our border regions," noted the Uzbek president. (Trend)