

# China Urges Resumption of Korean Peninsula Denuclearization Talks

BEIJING - China on Friday responded to an upcoming meeting between senior officials of the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, saying it hopes dialogue and contact can help promote an early resumption of the six-party talks.

The U.S. State Department said on Thursday that Sung Kim, U.S. special representative for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) policy, will have a trilateral meeting next Wednesday in Tokyo with his

Japanese and ROK counterparts. From Tokyo, Kim will head to Beijing and is scheduled to meet with senior Chinese government officials, including special representative for Korean Peninsula affairs Wu Dawei, said the department.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said it is in the common interests and responsibilities of concerned parties to forge ahead on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and safeguard the peace and stability of the peninsula. "Under the current situation, parties concerned

should work together to return to the track of dialogue and consultation to create conditions for the resumption of the six-party talks," Hua told a daily press briefing.

When asked to confirm the visit to China by Kim, Hua said China has been maintaining close contacts with relevant parties of the six-party talks. "We will release further information in due course," she said.

The U.S. State Department on Wednesday rejected the latest DPRK proposal for an unconditional resumption of the six-party talks, which



also involve Russia, reiterating a call for Pyongyang to abide by its past commitments. Ri Yong Ho, the DPRK's six-party

talks representative, met with Kim's predecessor, Stephen Bosworth, in Singapore early this week for two-day unofficial talks.

The six-party talks were initiated in Beijing in August 2003 but have been halted since December 2008. (Xinhua)

## Putin Accuses Kiev of Silence in Response to Moscow's Peace Proposals

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin criticized the Ukrainian government on Friday for being reticent about Russia's proposal for removing heavy weapons from the division line in the war-torn southeast Ukraine.

Speaking to the National Security Council, Putin said that Moscow has proposed that both sides of the Ukrainian conflict withdraw heavy weapons from the line agreed in Minsk last September. "Unfortunately, we didn't receive any clear response to our proposal but saw the opposite actions," the Interfax news agency quoted him as saying. The president accused Kiev of voicing hypocritical rhetoric



about its desire to find peaceful solution to the conflict, which has been raging for more than nine months, claiming more than 5,000 lives. Blasting the military operations by Ukrainian troops along the division line, he said those who have ordered indiscriminate use of artillery and warplanes

on densely populated areas bear full responsibility for the "criminal orders". "Those who made those orders must know that there is no other way to solve such conflicts except peace talks and political means," Putin said, adding that actions of Kiev contradict those principles. (Xinhua)

## Yemen Suffers Power Vacuum After President, Premier Quit

SANAA - Yemen drifted deeper into political limbo on Friday after President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi resigned in exasperation at a Houthis rebel takeover of the country, a move that appeared to catch the Iran-backed group off balance.

Hadi, a former general, blamed the Houthis' control of the capital Sanaa for impeding his attempt to steer Yemen toward stability after years of secessionist and tribal unrest, deepening poverty and U.S. drone strikes on Islamist militants.

His resignation on Thursday startled the Arabian Peninsula country of 25 million, where the Shi'ite Muslim Houthis emerged as the dominant faction by seizing Sanaa in September and dictating terms to a humiliated Hadi, whom they had held as a virtual prisoner



at his home residence clashes with security guards this week. Chanting "we are the revolution", a small group of activists gathered at Change Square, the focus of 2011 pro-democracy protests which forced long-ruling President Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down under a Gulf power transfer deal. "We're here in rejection of the events that are happening. We came out to build a state and our demand is still to have a state," said activist Farida al-Yareemi. "We went out against Ali Abdullah

Saleh and he had all the weapons." Washington, which has relied on Hadi's cooperation to stage the drone strikes on the Yemeni branch of al Qaeda, said it was concerned by the departures of the president and Prime Minister Khaled Bahah, who also quit on Thursday. "The United States is troubled by reports of President Hadi and his cabinet's resignation," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement. "At this time, it is critical that all sides avoid violence." (Reuters)

## Rebel Leader Warns of New Offensive Against Ukrainian Forces

KIEV - Alexandr Zakharchenko, leader of independence-seeking insurgents in eastern Ukraine, on Friday said that the rebel forces are going to step up their offensive on Ukrainian positions to capture more government-controlled territories.

"We would advance the offensive through to the borders of Donetsk region, but if I see a threat anywhere else, it would be eliminated," Zakharchenko was quoted by local media as saying during his meeting with students in Donetsk. The insurgent offensive is now underway near the towns of Majorsk,

Avdeevka and Ocheretyno in Donetsk region and near several urban communities in the neighboring Lugansk region, Zakharchenko said.

In addition, the rebel leader said that insurgents are not going to initiate new peace talks with Kiev.

"For our part, there will be no more attempts to talk about the ceasefire," Zakharchenko said. Over a dozen of cities and towns in Donetsk region and the same number in Lugansk region are now under the full control of insurgents, who have proclaimed "independence" from Kiev in April. (Xinhua)

## US-Led Coalition Hits Islamic State with 25 Air Strikes: Task Force

WASHINGTON - The United States and its coalition partners have launched another round of air strikes against Islamic State, conducting 25 strikes since early Thursday. In a statement on Friday from the Combined Joint Task Force leading the military operation, officials said 13 air strikes hit in Iraq, including eight near Mosul that struck four Islamic state fighter units and destroyed a variety of militant-owned equipment and infrastructure. Several Islamic State buildings in Mosul were destroyed as well as one of its bunkers, a heavy weapons system and seven vehi-

## Saudi Rights Still Urgent Issue after King's Death: Amnesty

Davos - As the world's powerful mourn the deceased Saudi King Abdullah, don't forget about the horrors inflicted on blogger Raef Badawi, Amnesty International head Salil Shetty told AFP in an interview Friday.

Shetty was speaking on the sidelines of the snow-covered World Economic Forum in Davos, where the programme for Friday was upended by the passing of the Saudi leader.

Jordanian King Abdullah II left Davos early, hours before a planned speech, and the late king's half-brother, Prince Turki Al Faisal Al Saud, also flew back ahead of schedule to the Middle East.

"He had been ailing for some time, all the leaders in Saudi Arabia are pretty senior, and this is not a surprise," Shetty told AFP.

The problem, he added, was that Western leaders, hooked on Saudi oil, turned a blind eye to a swathe of human rights violations in the



kingdom. "The Saudi regime seems insensitive to human rights and human dignity and unfortunately they are also protected by many western countries because they have oil and because they are seen as allies in the fight against terrorism," he said.

Amnesty International considers essential the fate of blogger Badawi, whose sentencing to 1,000 lashes for insulting Islam has sparked a world outcry, especially in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo massacre carried out in France by Islamists.

Under international pressure, the Kingdom delayed Badawi's flogging, set for Friday, cit-

ing medical reasons. "Nothing has changed as of now. Legally he is still going to be flogged every Friday and the only reason they are stopping is for his medical condition to improve so they can hurt him again," Shetty said.

This being Davos, Shetty turned his vision to the state of the world as a whole, the central purpose of the four day talk-fest, attended by 2,500 of the world's movers and shakers.

Shetty voiced concerns about an overreaction in France to the Charlie Hebdo attacks and feared the French government could overly tighten security and crimp on privacy. (AFP)

## Lebanese Troops Battle Militants near Syrian Border

BEIRUT - Lebanese army helicopter gunships and artillery pounded positions of Syria-based militants Friday after they attacked troops on the outskirts of a northeastern village, the Lebanese army and officials said.

The morning attack triggered heavy fighting on the tense border area leaving casualties on both sides, a military official said. He declined to offer specifics. Earlier Friday, an army statement said troops repelled the attackers on the outskirts of the northeastern Lebanese village of Ras Baalbek. (AP)

## EU, Kazakhstan Initial Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement



ASTANA - The European Union-Kazakhstan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was initiated in Brussels on January 20.

The new agreement will greatly facilitate stronger political and economic relations between Kazakhstan and the EU. It will increase the flow of trade, services and investment between the parties and will contribute to Kazakhstan's political and social development, the European External Action Service said.

The initialing of the Agreement is an important step towards its eventual signature and subsequent implementation.

On the EU side the agreement was initiated by chief negotiators Mr Gunnar Wiegand, Director for Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia, Regional Cooperation and OSCE at the European External Action Service, and Mr Luc Pierre Devigne, Head of Unit for Trade aspects of European neighbourhood policy, Trade relations with countries of the CIS and Balkans at

the European Commission's Directorate-General for Trade. On the Kazakhstan side it was initiated by Mr Alexei Volkov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Ms Zhanar Aitzhanova, Minister for Economic Integration.

Kazakhstan is the first Central Asian partner to have concluded an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU.

The new Agreement will replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in force since 1999, and will give EU-Kazakhstan relations a new up-to-date and stronger foundation.

Over the past decades, the EU has become Kazakhstan's first trading partner and first foreign investor, representing over half of total FDI in Kazakhstan. Bilateral trade amounts to above 31 billion euros, from which 24 billion euros is Kazakhstan's exports, notably oil, while about 7.5 billion euros is EU exports to Kazakhstan, mainly manufactured goods, machinery and equipment. (TCA)

## Neighbor News

### China to Build High-Speed Railway to Moscow Through Kazakhstan

ALMATY - China is going to build a \$242 billion worth high-speed railway connecting Beijing and Moscow through Kazakhstan, Beijing's municipal government announced on January 21.

China will build a 7,000-kilometer high-speed rail link from Beijing to Moscow at a cost of 1.5 trillion yuan (\$242 billion), Bloomberg reported with reference to Beijing's city government's announcement on the social networking site Weibo, China's equivalent of Twitter.

The rail line will facilitate travel across Europe and Asia, and the journey from Beijing to Moscow would take "two days" on a route passing through Kazakhstan, the post on Weibo said.

The Ministry of Transport of Russia, the state-

owned Russian Railways Company, China's State Committee for Development and Reform, and China Railway Construction Corporation in October 2014 signed a memorandum of understanding in the sphere of high-speed railway communication. The Russian Railways Company said that the document aims at developing a project of Eurasian high-speed railway corridor Moscow-Beijing, which will include a rail line from Moscow to Kazan.

Alexander Misharin, first vice president of the Russian Railways Company, said in a last November interview that the project would cost \$60 billion to reach Russia's border, and would reduce the time of the Beijing-Moscow journey from five days to 30 hours. (TCA)

### Gazprom Finds Unrecoverable Hydrocarbon Reserves in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Zarubezhneftegaz, a subsidiary of Russian gas giant Gazprom, has found large unrecoverable hydrocarbon reserves at the Sarikamysh field in Tajikistan, Avesta news agency reported citing Usmonali Usmonzoda, minister of energy and water resources of Tajikistan.

In his words, the Russian company has finished drilling at Sarikamysh and found eight potential oil and natural gas layers with unrecoverable reserves.

The minister refuted the rumors about Gazprom possibly leaving Tajikistan because of its drilling results at Sarikamysh. These results, he said, have showed that this field contains hydrocarbons.

"The company will continue work at this field, since it has spent there large funds that must be returned. Gazprom's representatives have confirmed their intention to work in Tajikistan," the Tajik minister said.

He also said that this year the Russian company is to start exploration work at Tajikistan's West Shokhambary oil and gas block.

Gazprom International (Zarubezhneftegaz) is currently carrying out Gazprom's investment project in Tajikistan for the prospecting and exploration of hydrocarbon deposits within the boundaries of two licensed blocks: Sarikamysh in the southwest of the country and West Shokhambary in the west. (TCA)

### Sharif Attends Funeral of King Abdullah

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Friday arrived in Saudi Arabia to attend late Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz's funeral.

Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif also accompanied the PM. Aziz's funeral prayers were offered at the Prince Turki Bin Abdul Aziz mosque in Riyadh. The Pakistani premier and President Mamnoon Hussain had expressed heartfelt condolences over the demise of the Saudi king and had termed it a big loss for the Ummah. In a condolence message, Nawaz expressed grief and sorrow over the King's demise, saying that being the custodian of the Holy Mosques he had a special place in the heart of every Pakistani. Extending condolences to the Saudi royal family as well as the

people of the Kingdom he said the whole Pakistani nation is with their Saudi brethren in this hour of grief. President Mamnoon also lauded the services of the late king for the betterment of the kingdom and the ummah as well.

Abdullah, said by the Saudi embassy in Washington to have been born in 1924, had ruled Saudi Arabia as king since 2005, but had run the country as de facto regent for a decade before that after his predecessor King Fahd suffered a debilitating stroke.

He was replaced by his half-brother Salman as the absolute ruler of the world's top oil exporter and the spiritual home of Islam. Salman, 79, had been defence minister and previously governor of the capital Riyadh. (Monitoring Desk)

### EU Lifts Sanctions on Bank Tejarat

TEHRAN - A top European Union court lifted EU's sanctions against Iran's Bank Tejarat, the banks' vice-president announced. "The EU General Court struck down the illegal sanctions that the 28 members of the European bloc had imposed against Bank Tejarat," Bank Tejarat Deputy Managing Director Ali Hosnani said on Friday. The court said that the EU has not presented any justification for freezing the assets and economic resources of the Iranian bank. The court, in a separate ruling, also annulled the bans on Ocean Capital

Administration, an Iranian shipping line, and a number of other companies linked to the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL).

The sanctions had been imposed on the Iranian bank and the companies over allegations that they had a role in the development of Iran's nuclear energy program and circumvented US-led sanctions against Iran.

In late 2014, the Luxembourg-based Court of Justice annulled restrictions imposed by the EU against the Central Bank of Iran (CBI). (FNA)