

## Eurozone Inflation Falls Again Despite Decade-High Growth

LONDON — Inflation in the 19-country eurozone fell in February for a third month running even though economic growth is at a decade high, a trend that's likely to make the European Central Bank tread carefully in the months ahead as it mulls how to end its crisis-era measures. The EU statistics agency, Eurostat, said Wednesday that annual consumer price inflation eased to 1.2 percent in the year to February from 1.3 percent the month before. The fall, which takes inflation to its lowest level since December 2016, was anticipated by investors and was largely due to energy prices rising at a slower tick on an annual



basis. But even when stripping out volatile items such as energy and food, inflation held steady at a still-low 1 percent. Both measures are below the European Central Bank's goal of achieving inflation of just below 2 percent and will likely reinforce expectations that the bank won't announce any dramatic changes to its cheap and easy monetary policy at its meeting next week. The recent moderation in inflation is likely to disappoint many at the bank looking to bring an end to the crisis-era stimulus measures put in place over the past few years to help the eurozone economy back to health. (AP)

### Cyprus's Anastasiades Says No Peace Talks As Natgas Standoff Persists

ATHENS - An early resumption of peace talks on ethnically-split Cyprus was 'impossible', President Nicos Anastasiades said on Wednesday, accusing rival Turkey of violating international law in a row over offshore oil and gas exploration. Cyprus and Turkey are at odds in a race to tap hydrocarbons in the eastern Mediterranean, an area which has yielded some of the world's largest natural gas finds in the past decade but which has also brought

decades-old grievances to the surface. A vessel chartered by Italy's state-controlled Eni was unable to reach an area Cyprus has licensed for drilling because of Turkish military maneuvers in a two-week standoff in February. The two states do not have diplomatic relations, and Ankara maintains that Greek Cypriots, who run Cyprus's internationally-recognized government, are violating either Turkish or Turkish Cypriot rights. (Reuters)

TEHRAN - is a major threat to U.S. interests and the long-term stability of the Mideast, the head of U.S. military's Central Command warned U.S lawmakers Tuesday. "Iran is generating instability across the region, and the Iranian Threat Network continues to increase in strength, enhancing its capacity to threaten U.S. and partner nation interests," General Joe Votel said in a 45-page set of prepared remarks he presented to the House Armed Services Committee during a hearing on terrorism.

### US General: Iran Posing Long-Term Threat to Mideast Stability



Votel said the U.S.-led coalition fighting Islamic State has made significant gains over the last three years, and the terror group has lost control of more than 98 percent of territory it once controlled

in Iraq and Syria. With these gains, Votel said, the U.S. military's focus will be to "neutralize, counterbalance and shape the destabilizing impact that Iran has across the region"; complete

the campaign to defeat IS in Iraq and Syria; and enforce the implementation of the South Asia strategy in Afghanistan to help the Afghan government consolidate its control. (VOA)

### Trump Close Adviser Kushner Has Security Clearance Downgraded



WASHINGTON — his access to the most sensitive information. Kushner was one of several White House aides working with an interim security clearance downgraded, in a move that will limit

used for information that comes from sensitive sources and must have restricted access. Kushner, who is married to Trump's eldest

daughter Ivanka, will no longer have access to the Presidential Daily Briefing, the most valued U.S. intelligence report. The president has the ability to grant Kushner a permanent clearance, but Trump said Friday he was leaving the decision to his chief of staff, retired Marine General John Kelly.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders declined to comment on Kushner's clearance status at a briefing Tuesday.

### Germany Weighs Options to Avoid Diesel Bans after Ruling

BERLIN - Germany's government scrambled on Wednesday to find ways to avoid possible bans on heavily polluting diesel vehicles in cities, in a bid to reassure drivers and carmakers after a court ruled that local authorities were allowed to bar them. Tuesday's ruling to allow city bans embarrassed Angela Merkel's government, criticized for having cozy ties with the auto industry which employs some 800,000 people, and raises pressure on manufacturers to make costly

modifications to vehicles. In Germany, a nation of drivers who expect to drive powerful cars in cities and on motorways with no speed limits, any restrictions will be unpopular. Yet air quality is also a major concern, with green and consumer groups pushing for action. Merkel's government is bending over backwards to play down the prospect of widespread bans which, manufacturers say, could cut the resale value of up to 15 million vehicles in Europe's biggest car market. (Reuters)

### India Crowds Say Goodbye to Bollywood Star

MUMBAI - Bollywood superstar Sridevi was cremated in the Indian city of Mumbai on Thursday as thousands of fans gathered outside to pay their last respects. Earlier, crowds clutching roses queued outside the Celebration Sports Club in the city to bid farewell to the star. A specially decorated truck carrying her body took hours to travel the 7km (4.3 miles) to the cemetery. The actress was cremated with full state honours.

Her body was flown back to India on Tuesday night. Sridevi, 54, died "due to accidental drowning following loss of consciousness", police said. She was found in her hotel bathtub. Known simply as Sridevi, the actress was considered one of the very few Indian female superstars capable of huge box-office success without the support of a male hero. She appeared in nearly 300 films over five decades. (BBC)

### Lebanon PM in Saudi for First Visit since Diplomatic Crisis

BEIRUT — Lebanon's prime minister on Wednesday made his first trip to Saudi Arabia since he briefly resigned from office during a visit to Riyadh late last year, part of a bizarre series of events that strained relations between the two countries. Saad Hariri's office said he held a meeting with King Salman at the Yamama palace in Riyadh that was also attended by the Saudi interior and foreign ministers. Hariri is also expected to meet with Saudi Arabia's powerful crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. Hariri's resignation in November was widely seen as having been orchestrated by his Saudi backers to bring down Lebanon's government, which includes the Iran-supported Hezbollah. Hariri later reversed his decision upon returning to Beirut following French mediation. (AP)

### Trump Has Given No Specific Order to Combat Russian Meddling In 2018 Election

WASHINGTON — A top U.S. intelligence official said Tuesday that President Donald Trump has given him no specific instructions to combat Russian meddling in the 2018 congressional elections that mirrors Moscow's interference in the 2016 presidential contest aimed at helping Trump win. "I've never been given any specific direction to take additional steps outside my authority," Admiral Mike Rogers, director of both the U.S. Cyber Command and the National Security Agency, told lawmakers



ers. "I have taken the steps within my authority, you know, trying to be a good, pro-active commander," Rogers said at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. "I have not been granted any additional authorities." Rogers said he believes

that Russian President Vladimir Putin "has clearly come to the conclusion that there's little price to pay (for its U.S. election interference) and that therefore, 'I can continue this activity.' Clearly what we have done hasn't been enough." (VOA)

### EU Unveils Brexit Draft, Ramping Up Pressure on Britain

BRUSSELS — Concerned that time is fast running out, the European Union moved Wednesday to force Britain's hand in Brexit negotiations by publishing a draft text that provocatively distils into legal language what they have — and even what they have not — agreed so far about Britain's departure. Britain officially leaves the EU on March 29 next year but Brexit talks must conclude this fall so that parliaments have time to ratify the final withdrawal agreement. The new text summarizes all aspects of the talks so far, but takes a tough

line on issues where British input is lacking. "If we want to succeed in these negotiations, and I want to succeed, we must accelerate," EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said Wednesday as he unveiled the document. "In 13 months the U.K. will no longer be a member of the European Union. That's what it wanted." While a rumor about the document's content has already angered some on the other side of the English Channel, Barnier told reporters that "this draft text contains no surprises for our British friends." (AP)

## Neighbor News

### Shifting Alliances As Pakistan Manages Relationship with US

ISLAMABAD — As Pakistan navigates its troubled relationship with the United States and scrambles to avoid being blacklisted for doing too little, too late to stop terror funding, regional alliances are shifting and analysts ponder whether a cozier relationship with countries like Russia will complicate efforts to move toward peace in neighboring Afghanistan. Russia, analysts say, is motivated by fears of a growing presence of Islamic State militants in neighboring Afghanistan and has warmed up to Pakistan as well as to Taliban insurgents battling the

upstart Islamic State group affiliate known as Khorasan Province, the ancient name of an area that once included parts of Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia. In the latest move to strengthen ties, Russia last week named an honorary consul to Pakistan's Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province, which borders Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan, where IS has established its headquarters. The IS is also present in northern Afghanistan's border regions with Central Asia, causing further consternation in Moscow. (Monitoring Desk)

### Russia, Turkmenistan to Jointly Fight Against Drug Trafficking

ASHGABAT - An agreement on cooperation between Russia and Turkmenistan in the fight against drug trafficking has come into force, according to the official legal information website of the Russian Federation. Under the five-year agreement, the parties will exchange information on crimes related to drugs, as well as people and organizations suspected of involvement in drug traf-

ficking. The sides will also cooperate as part of activities aimed at preventing and detecting such crimes, as well as exchange experience and provide assistance in the training of personnel. The document was signed by President of Russia Vladimir Putin and his Turkmen counterpart Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in Ashgabat in October 2017. (Trend)

### Uzbekistan Airways to Establish Own Lowcoster

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan Airways, the flag carrier of Uzbekistan, will create its own lowcoster. The subsidiary company may appear already this year, Uzbek media reported referring to Deputy Chairman of the company Umidkhusanov. He voiced belief that the issue will be resolved already this year. "Now the national air carrier is studying the world experience, including the experience of the Russian Aeroflot and its lowcoster "Victory", he said. Speaking about pricing, he noted that the ticket prices will depend on many factors, including airport dislocation, a set of services on

board and others. Khusanov noted that the main directions of the lowcoster will be Russia, Turkey and Egypt. Uzbekistan Airways is wholly owned by the state and has 11 airports located on the territory of Uzbekistan, six of which are international. The company has representative offices in 25 countries. Recently, Uzbekistan Airways was granted a right to sell air tickets for international flights below the prime cost. This is stipulated in a resolution "On measures for development of inbound tourism" signed by Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. (Trend)

### Rouhani Says Iran 'Ready' To Talk to Arab Neighbours

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday said Iran is ready to discuss regional security issues with its Gulf Arab neighbours as long as foreign powers are kept out of any potential talks. "We don't need foreigners to guarantee the security of our region," Rouhani said in a speech broadcast on state television.

"When it comes to regional security arrangements, we are ready to talk to our neighbours and friends, without the presence of foreigners," he added. "We are, have been and always will be good neighbours," Rouhani said, addressing Gulf Arab countries including Iran's regional rival Saudi Arabia. Rouhani was speaking in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas overlooking the Gulf — a flashpoint of tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The two powers, who severed diplomatic ties in January 2016, have

taken opposing sides in wars in Syria and Yemen. Shiite-dominated Iran is the main regional backer of the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against Sunni rebels supported by Saudi Arabia. In Yemen, a Saudi-led coalition has been bombing since 2015 Iran-backed Shiite Huthi rebels opposed to the internationally recognised government. Western powers and their Gulf Arab allies say Iran is a destabilising influence in the Middle East. Tehran, however, has regularly called for dialogue with its neighbours free of any foreign interference. Rouhani's comments came a day after the United States and three European allies condemned Iran after the United Nations found Tehran had violated the arms embargo on Yemen by failing to block supplies of missiles and drones to Huthi rebels. (AFP)