

As Talks with North Near, South Korea Sees Familiar Hurdles Ahead

SEOUL - With the specter of two past summits that failed to blunt North Korea's nuclear ambitions, South Korean officials planning talks next month now face the thorny task of overcoming familiar sticking points with the threat of war looming over any failure.

A South Korean delegation returned home on Tuesday from a first-ever meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, to announce the agreement on a North-South summit next month, the first since 2007.

Seoul officials see the talks as the starting point of President Moon Jae-in's initiative to denuclearize and build lasting peace on the peninsula, beginning with a freeze



in the North's nuclear program and ending in its complete abolishment.

"While pursuing a fundamental resolution of the standoff, we need to take some initial denuclearization steps, putting a halt to further testing and returning to

dialogue," a senior South Korean government official said on condition of anonymity. "One could argue we would be deceived by the North as we have been for the last 20 years, but that's the past - we have different people and different

programs now," the official said.

Moon said on Wednesday he had suggested to the North a rough roadmap progressing from a nuclear freeze to denuclearization, an opposition party chair told reporters after meeting with him. But Moon said there won't be "many agreements" to come out of the summit, according to a ruling party lawmaker who took part in the meeting. Moon also called a 2005 deal of six-nation nuclear talks, under which Pyongyang agreed to give up its nuclear program in return for economic and energy aid and an end to its diplomatic isolation, a "failed model", the first politician said. (Reuters)

UK Ministers in Emergency Meeting over Russian Ex-Spy Case

LONDON - British government ministers are attending an emergency committee meeting Wednesday to discuss the mysterious collapse of a former Russian spy and his daughter, who were found slumped on a public bench in southern England after coming in contact with an unknown substance. Amid speculation about who is behind the suspected poisoning, Moscow said the case was being used to fuel an "anti-Russian campaign" and further strain ties with Britain. Britain's Home Secre-

tary, the minister responsible for public safety, called a meeting of the government's emergency committee, where senior officials will consider their response. Counterterrorism police are investigating the case, which has left Sergei Skripal, 66, and his 33-year-old daughter, Yulia, in critical condition. While police say they are keeping an open mind about the case, it has reminded Britain of the 2006 poisoning of former spy Alexander Litvinenko, which was blamed on the Russian state. (AP)

GENEVA - The U.N. human rights chief said on Wednesday he was shocked at repressive policies being pursued in the United States and Europe, especially the increasingly harsh treatment of migrants. In an annual report to the U.N. Human Rights Council, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini also took democracies to task for failing to respect basic rights. "In the United States,

I am shocked by reports that many migrants intercepted at the southern borders, including children, are detained in abusive conditions - such as freezing temperatures - and that some young children are being detained separately from their families," he said. "Detentions and deportations of long-standing and law-abiding migrants have sharply increased, tearing families apart and creating enormous hardship."

U.N Rights Chief Attacks EU and U.S Over Migrants And Dreamers



The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump had also ended the Central American Minors Refugee and Parole Programme, which offered adoles-

cents and children "a lifeline to safety", and ended Temporary Protected Status for hundreds of thousands of people. (Reuters)

EU Warns Of Brexit Trade 'Frictions' In Rebuff to May



BRUSSELS - The European Union on Wednesday rejected Britain's calls for completely free trade after Brexit, saying in its long-awaited guidelines for future ties that frictions were

inevitable. The draft negotiating guidelines released by EU President Donald Tusk warned that there would be "negative economic consequences" as a result of Britain's vote to leave.

The rebuff came just days after British Prime Minister Theresa May called for the "broadest and deepest possible agreement", and as her finance minister urged a special deal for the City. Tusk's draft red lines, which must now be adopted by the remaining 27 member states, said the EU was bound by Britain's self-imposed conditions for leaving the European Union. "Being outside the Customs Union and the Single Market will inevitably lead to frictions," said the draft guidelines seen by AFP. "This will unfortunately have negative economic consequences."

The EU guidelines added that "there can be no 'cherry-picking'" - Brussels jargon for getting free access in certain sectors including financial services without the obligations and costs of membership, including respecting freedom of movement of people from EU countries. They did not specifically mention London's call for its financial services industry to continue having unfettered access to European markets, but said that in "trade in services" Britain would be treated as a third country with different rules to the EU. (AFP)

Russian Ex-Spy, Daughter Still Critical After Suspected Poisoning In UK

SALISBURY - Russian former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia remain in a critical condition in intensive care in hospital, British police said on Wednesday as they appealed for witnesses to come forward with any information about the case. Skripal, 66, and Yulia, 33, were found unconscious on Sunday on a bench outside a shopping center in the southern English city of Salisbury after being exposed to an unknown substance. Police said they were keen to speak to anyone

who visited two venues in the city where Skripal and his daughter were thought to have been, the Zizzi pizza restaurant and the Bishop's Mill pub. "The focus at this time is to establish what has caused these people to become critically ill," said Mark Rowley, head of London's counter-terrorism police who are in charge of the investigation. Police cordons remained in place in several locations in Salisbury, with new cordons added near Solstice Park in the neighborhood of Amesbury. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

TAPI - Significant Step in Implementation of Turkmenistan's Energy Strategy

ASHGABAT - The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project is an important and effective step towards the implementation of Turkmenistan's energy strategy, Consul of the Embassy of Turkmenistan in Azerbaijan Batyr Rejepov said. Rejepov made the remarks at the round table entitled "Turkmenistan - the Heart of the Great Silk Road" in Baku March 7. He added that one of the key aspects of Turkmenistan's energy strategy is the creation of a diversified system for the transportation of energy resources to the world markets by ensuring the interests of producers, transit countries and consumers.

"Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimu-

hamedov's constructive initiatives are aimed at achieving the set goals, the relevance of which is evidenced by the unanimous adoption of the relevant resolutions by the UN General Assembly," Rejepov added. Speaking about the expansion of economic cooperation, the consul also stressed the importance of construction and commissioning of the Kerky-Ymannazar-Akina railway (among Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan) and Serhetabat-Turgundi railway, which are a huge contribution to Afghanistan's economic development and further strengthening of the country's ties with Turkmenistan by increasing the cargo turnover volume. (Trend)

China's Railway Giant Signs Deal to Supply Metro Cars to Iran

TEHRAN - China's CRRC Nanjing Puzhen Rail Transport on Wednesday signed a contract with Iran's IDRO Group to supply 450 metro cars for the Iranian cities of Ahvaz, Tabriz and Shiraz. The company, a subsidiary of China's railway giant CRRC Corps, undertook to provide funds up to 85% of the project as well as parts for assembly at Iranian train manufacturing company Wagon Pars, IDRO Managing Director Mansour Moazzami said. "In order to make maximum use of domestic capabilities in the field of rolling stock manufacturing, the con-

tracting party was required to cooperate with the Wagon Pars company of Arak," he said. "Hence, the production and supply of wagons needed compatible with world-class technology will be carried out for the first time at Wagon Pars in partnership with a foreign company with an investment of 25 million euros," Moazzami added. Another Chinese company signed a deal with Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development to build a railway between the cities of Shiraz and Bushehr in the country's south with \$700 million of investment. (Press Tv)

Germany, Tajikistan Interested In Developing Joint Business Projects

DUSHANBE - Representatives of Germany and Tajikistan expressed interest in the development of joint business projects, TajikTA agency reported. Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tajikistan, Sharif Said, met in Dushanbe with heads of the German Economy Representative Office in Central Asia, Robert Breiter and Jorg Hatch. The parties viewed the prospects of development of cooperation in the business sphere, the press center of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tajikistan said. Sharif Said noted that the German experience of small business development is important for Tajikistan. The country is interested in attracting German industrial, en-

ergy and environmental technologies, engineering products, motor vehicles, advanced medical equipment and diagnostics to the country. Robert Breiter, for his part, emphasized that the German business is ready to develop joint economic and business projects with Tajikistan and contribute in every way to the development of bilateral relations. The new head of the Representative Office assured that he will urge the business circles of his country to preserve and develop the trade and economic partnership with Tajikistan. Moreover, Breiter offered to develop cooperation with German trade and investment organizations that work in the field of marketing. (Trend)

"Operation Red Sea"

Tops Chinese Box Office

BEIJING - Chinese anti-terrorism action film "Operation Red Sea" led the Chinese film market in the week ending March 4, earning 868 million yuan (about 137 million U.S. dollars), according to China Film News. "Operation Red Sea" is loosely based on the evacuation of hundreds of Chinese citizens and foreign nationals from Yemen's southern port of Aden during the Yemeni civil war in late March in 2015. The film tells the story of the Chinese Navy's elite special forces, Jiaolong Assault Team, who saved Chinese and foreign nationals in the war and foiled a terrorist plot

to obtain nuclear materials to make dirty bombs. It has raked in nearly 3 billion yuan since its release on Feb. 16. "Detective Chinatown 2" came in second, making about 483 million yuan at the box office last week. It has sold 3.1 billion yuan in tickets since hitting Chinese screens on Feb. 16. The third place went to domestic adventure film "Monster Hunt 2," which took in 162 million yuan last week. Documentary "Amazing China" landed in the fourth place, generating about 92 million yuan last week. The film was released on March 2. (Xinhua)

Possibility of North Korea Detente Stirs Diplomatic Angst in Japan

TOKYO - An agreement between North and South Korea to hold a summit and signals about possible talks between North Korea and the United States are stirring concern in Japan about its diplomatic nightmare - being left out in the cold.

Signs of easing tension over North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, greeted in Tokyo with skepticism, come as Japan faces a possible trade feud with the United States over steel and rocky ties with South Korea over their bitter history, including Japan's 1910-1945 colonization of the peninsula.

"The main concern is that South Korea may have jumped too easily to a proposal by North Korea for a bilateral meeting," said a former senior Japanese diplomat who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the topic. (Reuters)

China to Build First Ultra High-Voltage Clean Power Line

XINING - China's first ultra high-voltage power superhighway for transmitting clean energy has been approved, with construction to start in the second half of the year.

The 800-kilovolt direct current transmission line will extend 1,600 km across five provinces, from the Qinghai plateau in the northwest to densely populated Henan in central China, according to the State Grid, Qinghai branch.

Qinghai has a large solar power capacity, reaching 9.53 million kilowatts at the end of 2017, accounting for 37.5 percent of its total power capacity.

ShuYinbiao, chair of the State Grid, said the power line will use Qinghai's advantage in clean energy resources for industrial upgrades and raise the amount of clean electricity used in Henan. (Xinhua)

Royal Welcome and Noisy Protests Await Saudi Crown Prince on UK Trip

LONDON - Britain's grand welcome for Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman begins on Wednesday with a lunch with Queen Elizabeth, as the two countries seek to widen longstanding defense ties into a far-reaching partnership.

Both sense an opportunity to broaden their existing relationship: Britain is looking for trading partners as it exits the European Union, and Saudi Arabia needs to convince skeptical investors about its domestic reforms.

But as Prince Mohammed and Prime Minister Theresa May meet, demonstrators will protest



test against both countries' roles in Yemen where war has killed an estimated 10,000 people and where 8.3 million people depend on food aid and 400,000 children have life-threatening levels of malnutrition. Foreign minister Boris Johnson led the wel-

coming party for Prince Mohammed on his arrival late on Tuesday. Wednesday's first official engagement is a trip to Buckingham Palace for talks and a meal with the British monarch - a rare honor usually reserved for heads of state.

EU Ready to Retaliate Over Trump's Proposed Tariffs

BRUSSELS - The European Union is ready to retaliate against the U.S. over President Donald Trump's proposed tariffs on steel and aluminum, the bloc's top trade official said Wednesday. Trump has long railed against what he deems unfair trade practices by China and others, and last week declared that his government would levy penalties of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum imports. The tariffs, he said, would remain for "a long period of time," but it was not clear if certain trading partners would be ex-

empt. EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom told reporters in Brussels that Trump's rationale appears to invoke the international legal right to protect national security. "We have serious doubts about that justification. We cannot see how the European Union, friends and allies in NATO, can be a threat to international security in the U.S.," she said. "From what we understand, the motivation of the U.S. is an economic safeguard measure in disguise, not a national security measure," Malmstrom added. (AP)