

Showman Trump Abandons Cautious Obama Approach to North Korea

WASHINGTON - When President Barack Obama counseled his successor Donald Trump on the global threats he should expect to face once he assumed office last year, a nuclear North Korea and its unpredictable leader were at the top of the list. But while the meticulous Obama practiced caution in handling Kim Jong Un, the blustery Trump succumbed to his own penchant for reality TV showmanship, culminating with his shock decision on Thursday to agree to meet with North Korea's leader and become the first sitting U.S. president to do so.

Trump's move is a sharp departure from 60 years of largely arms-length U.S. diplomacy when it comes to North Korea, not to mention his own previous bellicose rhetoric against



Pyongyang. It also represents another instance in which the Republican Trump, a businessman who promised to shake up Washington, took a completely different direction than his Democratic predecessor. Trump's willingness to take that dramatic step

is a reflection of his showboat style, throwing out the diplomatic playbook and putting himself in the spotlight, in addition to what aides say is his desire to resolve the North Korea crisis before it spins out of control. "It's hard to know whether this is just his su-

preme confidence that he can get a deal done with his own business experience, or whether he is calculating that he wins either way," said Jim Steinberg, who served as deputy secretary of state under Democratic President Bill Clinton. "It's always hard to know with Trump how well thought through this is." Obama, like his immediate predecessors, took a far more deliberate approach. As a presidential candidate he famously suggested meeting with U.S. enemies, and ended up relaunching Washington's relationships with Cuba and Iran as president. But he did not take that same step with North Korea, once warning Pyongyang that "you don't get to bang your spoon on the table and somehow you get your way." (Reuters)

Singapore Makes World's Largest Flower Basket to Usher In Garden Festival

SINGAPORE - Singapore has made the world's largest flower basket to usher in the perennial Singapore Garden Festival (SGF) to be put on in July. The basket was made from over 27,000 flowers in 50 varieties of plants by more than 150 community gardeners, volunteers, students and staff from the National Parks Board during a timespan of over 12 days, organizers of the festival said Saturday. he gardeners were joined by Desmond Lee, Singapore's Minister for Social and Family De-

velopment and Second Minister for National Development, who put the final touches to the display. The basket was presented Saturday at the downtown Takashimaya Singapore Ltd to publicize the news for the 2018 Singapore Garden Festival, which will be put on from July 21 to August 3 this year. Having achieved recognition at home and overseas for six editions, SGF will grow into three complementary flower and horticultural shows instead of only one main show. (Xinhua)

In State Media, China Presents Itself as Crucial To U.S.-North Korea Talks

BEIJING - China helped bring about a dramatic easing of tensions between the United States and North Korea, according to state media outlets, adding evidence that the government sees itself as a central player in any agreement despite largely sitting on the sidelines so far. The commentary seeks to cast the planned talks between the two Koreas - and a meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un - as the result of Chinese efforts. The Communist Party's official People's Daily cited China's plan for North Korea to suspend nuclear and missile tests, and South Korea and the United States to suspend military drills as leading to this moment. "It should be understood that these easing of tension signals are actually an effect brought about by the 'dual suspension' proposal, the paper



said on Saturday. The paper cited Trump as telling Chinese President Xi Jinping in a telephone call on Friday that China's position that the United States should talk to North Korea was the correct one. (Reuters)

Modi, Macron Sign Key Security Deal with an Eye on China



NEW DELHI - French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday said defence ties with India had reached a new high after the two nations signed a key security accord

for the Indian Ocean to counter China's growing influence in the region. "Defence cooperation between the two countries now has a new significance," Macron said as a

gushing Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood by his side. Under the deal, India and France will open their naval bases to warships from each other, a move seen as an attempt to undermine China's territorial ambitions. "A strong part of our security and the world's stability is at stake in the Indian Ocean," Macron said. "The Indian Ocean, like the Pacific Ocean, cannot become a place of hegemony," he added in an apparent reference to

China. Modi, who welcomed Macron with a bear hug on his arrival Friday, said the accord was crucial as the Indian Ocean region would play a "very significant role" in the days to come. The comments from the leaders followed a slew of agreements signed by the two countries in the spheres of defence, space and clean energy. "From the ground to the sky, there is no subject on which India and France are not working together," said Modi. (AFP)

Clinton Warns Of 'Diplomatic Danger' In N. Korea Talks

THE HAGUE - Hillary Clinton has warned that the Trump administration "was not recognising the danger" in discussing nuclear disarmament with Pyongyang, and said Washington lacked experienced diplomats to handle the talks. "If you want to talk to Kim Jong Un about his nuclear weapons you need experienced diplomats," Clinton was quoted as telling Dutch tabloid Algemeen Dagblad in an interview published Saturday. "These are people familiar with the dossiers and

who know the North Koreans and their language," Trump's presidential rival said in an interview conducted in Amsterdam and published in Dutch. The former secretary of state said however that the US State Department was "being eroded" and that experienced diplomats on the North Korean issue were in short supply, with many having left. "You cannot have diplomacy without diplomats," she said, adding "the danger is not being recognised by the Trump government." (AFP)

Bhutan Awarded World's Sustainable Destinations' Earth Award

THIMPHU - Bhutan was awarded the Sustainable Destinations' Earth Award at the International Tourismus-Borse Berlin, Germany, this week. This was Bhutan's first win at the world's leading travel trade show. The award was in recognition of Bhutan's commitment to responsible tourism and preservation of nature. Bhutan's approach to tourism development and management is also in line with its philosophy Gross National Happiness.

The destinations were recognized and chosen by Green Destinations - an agency recognizing destinations around the world for championing sustainability in terms of nature and culture. (Xinhua)

Energy Giant BP Plans To Triple Gas Stations in Mexico

MEXICO CITY - British oil giant BP is planning to have 500 gas stations in Mexico in 2018, which would more than triple the current amount it operates in the Latin American country, the company announced Friday. The company has 161 gas stations in the Mexican market after one year of operation, said Alvaro Granada, its director general of fuels. "The Mexican market represents for BP a big opportunity to continue our expansion plans at a global level," Granada told a press conference, without specifying the amount of investment required. Last year, BP became the first international company to enter the Mexican gas station sector after it was opened up to competition. BP is planning to operate 1,500 gas stations in Mexico by 2021, eyeing a market share of 15 percent.

"Half of the global growth for BP in the gas stations business will happen in Mexico," said Granada. "This sends a very clear message about the confidence and interest BP has in Mexico." (Xinhua)

Putin on Alleged US Election Interference: I Don't Care



MOSCOW - Vladimir Putin says he doesn't care about alleged Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election because the actions weren't connected to his government. In an interview with the US TV network NBC, the Russian president was asked if he condoned the

interference by 13 Russian nationals and three Russian companies detailed in a US indictment. "I do not care at all, because they do not represent the government," he said, according to the interview transcript posted Saturday by the Kremlin. "Maybe they are not even

Russians but Ukrainians, Tatars or Jews but with Russian citizenship, which should also be checked; maybe they have dual citizenship of a green card; maybe the US paid them for this. How can you know that? I do not know either," he said. (AP)

Catalan Parliament Postpones Vote on New Leader

BARCELONA - Catalonia has postponed until further notice the election of a new regional president after Spain's Supreme Court ruled that candidate Jordi Sanchez would not be allowed to leave jail to attend a parliamentary session planned for Monday. Sanchez is in jail awaiting trial on charges of rebellion and sedition relating to Catalonia's illegal referendum last October and its unilateral declaration of independence.

The speaker of the Catalan parliament, Roger Torrent, said late on Friday that the session would be postponed while separatist groups challenge the court ruling at the European Court of Human Rights. Pro-independence parties won a slim majority in elections in December but have so far been frustrated by court rulings in their attempts to elect a regional president as Madrid insists any candidate must not be in jail or under judicial investigation. (Reuters)

Japan's Finance Ministry to Admit Altering Land Sale Documents: Kyodo

TOKYO - Japan's Ministry of Finance will admit altering documents involved in a controversial sale of state-owned land, Kyodo News reported on Saturday, the latest in a scandal that threatens to erode Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's popularity.

The ministry will report to parliament on Monday that it found several cases where content present in the original versions of the documents was removed later, the news agency said, citing multiple unidentified government sources. Telephone calls seeking ministry comment went unanswered. An admission would deal a fresh blow to Abe, who has struggled for months to draw a line under suspicion that a school operator used ties with Abe's wife to get a discounted deal on land in the western city of Osaka. It would also ratchet up the pressure on Finance Minister Taro Aso, who said he had no intention to step down over the affair which led to the resignation on Friday of the National Tax Agency chief, Nobuhisa Sagawa.

On the day of Sagawa's resignation, media said police were investigating as a possible suicide the death of an official at a finance ministry bureau that handled the land deal. The government's chief spokesman said he had been notified about the death but declined to give details. The scandal regained fresh momentum last week with opposition parties turning up the heat after the Asahi newspaper said some documents about the land sale might have been doctored. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

Iran Agriculture Weathers Drought to Keep Humming

GILAN - Iran's agricultural exports in the nine months since March 2017 totaled more than \$4.5 billion, the country's agriculture ministry said on Saturday. Horticultural products such as fruits, vegetables and nuts constituted more than 48% of the exports worth more than \$2.2 billion, deputy agriculture minister Abdolmahdi Bakshandeh was quoted as saying. Iran's grain and feed exports during the period totaled \$1.1 billion, which accounted for 24.7% of the whole. The country also exported \$754 million worth of livestock, poul-

try and dairy as well as fish, Mehr news agency quoted him as saying. Iran's prized pistachio nuts were the top foreign exchange earner among the agricultural exports at \$972 million. The country is the world's biggest pistachio exporter, a position it has maintained thanks to the premium quality of its crop in the face of stiff rivalry from the US. According to head of the Iran-China Chamber of Commerce Asadollah Asgaroladi, 250,000 tonnes of pistachio nuts are produced a year, of which 150,000-160,000 tonnes are exported. (Press TV)

Uzbek, Tajik Presidents

Launch Restored Key Railway

DUSHANBE - Presidents of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan launched the restored part of the Galaba-Amuzang-Khoshadi interstate railway, which was closed back in 2011, Uzbek media reported. The launch ceremony was broadcast live by the Tajik state TV channels.

Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon launched the train line by pressing a symbolic button on March 9. The heads of state observed the departure of the first train. Up until today, the two countries were connected by the Kudukli-Bekabad railway. The Amuzang railway sta-

tion will now become a new linking point. For that purpose, all the required conditions were created at the station for the border and customs service workers. The railway will serve interests of the two countries and play an important role in development of transit traffic, creating new possibilities for access to Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. It will also promote development of passenger transit, opening new destinations.

The new railway line between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will also help further increase the trade turnover, import and export, and strengthen the interstate relations. (Trend)

Ashgabat, Ankara Hold Political Consultations

ASHGABAT - Ashgabat hosted political consultations between the foreign ministries of Turkmenistan and Turkey, the Turkmen ministry said in a message March 10. Turkey's delegation was headed by Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador Umid Yardim, who arrived in Turkmenistan for a working visit. The sides discussed topical issues of interstate cooperation, stressing mutual interest in further development of the high-level political dialogue.

Discussing the implementation of the earlier reached agreements, the sides exchanged views on development of the

bilateral relations in the political and diplomatic spheres.

The sides further voiced interest in intensifying cooperation within international organizations, among which the parties noted the UN, UNESCO and OIC. The sides voiced proposals on integration of peace-keeping initiatives to fight such international challenges as terrorism and extremism.

Regarding the trade and economic areas of cooperation, the sides noted a need to activate Turkmenistan's export potential as well as increase the trade between the two countries, the ministry said. (Trend)

Senators Elected Thru Unfair Means, Do Not Represent People's Will: Pm

TARBELA - Stressing the need for clean politics, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi Saturday expressed his resolve to confront those who had allegedly resorted to unfair means to get themselves elected in recent Senate election.

He said the PML-N always strove for clean politics for the future of the country and was resolved to confront all dirty ploys in politics. Addressing a gathering after inaugurating 1410 MW Tarbela 4th Extension Hydropower Project, the prime minister said those, who had used unfair tactics in the Senate election, did not deserve to represent the will of the people.

He said the PML-N had never encouraged such tactics and was once again emerged as the only party whose candi-

dates were elected without spending a single penny.

The prime minister said: "On oath, PML-N senators-elect can say that they had not lured members of assemblies through such unfair tactics. The party never used abusive language against anyone as it stood for decency and order in the political arena."

He said the PML-N was ready for a consensus candidate in the Senate elections and was willing to support RazaRabbani. He said the PML-N always strove for a clean leadership as the clean politics was sine qua non for the progress and prosperity of the country. "The PML-N will confront such evils in politics as it did not want to bring bad name to the country and the politics" he added. (Monitoring Desk)