Second summit with Kim ‘soon’

Confronting the dangers of North Korea’s nuclear threat, US President Donald Trump arrived at the United Nations striking a far less ominous tone than a year ago, announcing he likely will hold a second summit with Kim Jong Un “quite soon”. Twelve months after Trump stood at the rostrum of the UN General Assembly and derided Kim as “Rocket Man,” the push to denuclearise the Korean Peninsula is a work in progress.

Sweden’s PM Lofven voted out

Sweden’s prime minister has lost a vote of confidence in parliament, meaning he will have to step down, though not immediately. Stefan Lofven, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, will continue as caretaker prime minister until a new government can be formed that has the command of the Riksdagen. Lawmakers voted 204-142 against Lofven, while three abstained. Lofven has been prime minister since 2014.

Frydenberg hails budget deficit

The federal government has delivered the smallest budget deficit in a decade in 2017-18. The deficit was $10.1 billion in the year, or 0.6 per cent of gross domestic product. That’s a $19.3 billion improvement on the deficit originally estimated for the period. Stronger-than-expected economic growth and more Australians in work contributed to the impressive improvement, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said.

China says US talks impossible

China cannot hold talks with Washington on ending their trade dispute while the United States “holds a knife” to Beijing by imposing tariff hikes, a Chinese official said. The warning came after the Chinese government released a report that accused President Donald Trump of bullying other countries. It dampened hopes for progress toward a settlement of their war over Beijing’s technology policy.

Labour Brexit plan for vote

Labour has a duty to prevent a no-deal Brexit, Sir Keir Starmer has said as the party appeared set to back the option of a fresh referendum on European Union membership. Delegates at the party’s conference in Liverpool are expected to back a plan that could lead to a fresh public vote which could include the option of ditching Brexit altogether. Sir Keir said he would vote to stay in the EU if that was an option.

Baby Neve sits in on UN meeting

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s baby daughter has made a splash at the United Nations, sitting in on a meeting with her mother. Ardern is among world leaders at the UN General Assembly in New York and has had daughter Neve, born in June, in tow. While the prime minister spoke at the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit, Neve got a front-row seat on father Clarke Gayford’s lap.
Rosenstein decision delay

The White House delayed a decision on the fate of Rod Rosenstein, the Justice Department official overseeing the Trump-Russia investigation, after chaotic hours of breathless and sometimes conflicting reports anticipating his imminent departure. The White House said Rosenstein and Trump would meet Thursday (local time), suggesting the deputy attorney general may be in his job for at least several more days.

US, South Korea sign trade deal

President Donald Trump and South Korean President Moon Jae-in have signed the first major agreement of Trump’s trade agenda. The leaders signed an update to an existing US-South Korea free-trade agreement in New York. Both leaders are attending an annual UN gathering. Trump calls it a “very big deal” and says the new agreement makes significant improvements to reduce the trade deficit between the countries.

EU, Iran set ‘vehicle’ to ease trade

Five world powers and Iran have agreed to establish a financial facility in the European Union to facilitate payments for Iranian imports and exports including oil, a key move sought by Tehran following the US pullout from the 2015 nuclear deal and its re-imposition of sanctions. The so-called “Special Purpose Vehicle” would “assist and reassure economic operators pursuing legitimate business with Iran”.

Payne steps into Bishop’s shoes

Australia’s new Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne has admitted she has received a few “where’s Julie?” questions since arriving at the United Nations in New York. Julie Bishop was a familiar face at the UN during her five years as foreign minister, but after the recent leadership spill in Canberra she stepped down and former defence minister Payne took up the role as Australia’s top diplomat.

Teenager survives 49 days at sea

An Indonesian teenager who survived 49 days adrift at sea after the wooden fish trap he was employed to mind slipped its moorings says he ran out of food within a week and survived on fish and seawater he squeezed from his clothing. Aldi Novel Adilang said he turned on a lamp every time he sighted another ship and couldn’t remember how many passed by “unaware of my ordeal”.

Contractors dump road rubble

New Zealand Transport Agency contractors have been caught dumping rubble from roadworks into a stream that feeds into Whangārei Harbour. The agency has been forced to clean up its act after a local MP raised the matter with Northland Regional Council. National MP for Whangārei Shane Reti was contacted by a constituent worried about several problems to do with roading near his house, which backs onto State Highway 1.
China says talks with Washington impossible

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The warning came after the Chinese government released a report that accused President Donald Trump of bullying other countries.

It dampened hopes for progress toward a settlement of their war over Beijing’s technology policy.

President Trump went ahead with a tax hike on $200 billion (£152 billion) of Chinese imports.

Beijing retaliated by imposing penalties on $60 billion (£46 billion) of US products.

The conflict stems from US complaints that Beijing steals or pressures foreign companies to hand over technology.

American officials say Chinese plans for state-led development of global competitors in robotics and other technologies violate its market-opening obligations and might erode US industrial leadership.

Beijing is open to negotiations but whether they proceed is up to Washington, deputy commerce minister Wang Shouwen said.

“Now that the United States has adopted such large-scale restrictive measures and holds a knife to another’s neck, how can negotiations proceed?” Wang said at a news conference.

“It would not be negotiations of equality.”

With no settlement in sight, forecasters say the conflict between the two biggest economies could trim global growth by 0.5 percentage points through 2020.

Business groups say American companies report Chinese regulators also are stepping up pressure on them by slowing down customs clearance and increasing environmental and other inspections.

Second summit with North Korea ‘soon’

Confronting the dangers of North Korea’s nuclear threat, US President Donald Trump arrived at the United Nations striking a far less ominous tone than a year ago, announcing he likely will hold a second summit with Kim Jong Un “quite soon”.

Twelve months after Trump stood at the rostrum of the UN General Assembly and derided Kim as “Rocket Man,” the push to denuclearise the Korean Peninsula is a work in progress, although fears of war have given way to dreams of rapprochement. The president’s bellicose denunciations of Pyongyang have largely given way to hopeful notes.

“It was a different world,” Trump said of his one-time moniker for the North Korean leader. “That was a dangerous time. This is one year later, a much different time.”

He added that preparations are underway by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for a second presidential meeting with Kim “quite soon”.

The meeting would come despite U.S. officials assessing that the North has not followed through on its commitments to take steps toward denuclearization. Pompeo defended Trump’s decision to seek another meeting despite the slow progress.

“We've been at this the other way an awfully long time and failed,” he said.

He added: “We tried to do details. We tried to do step for step. We tried to do trade for trade. Each of those failed.”

Pompeo said: “We're bringing the two senior leaders, the individuals who can actually make the decisions that will move this process forward” in hopes they can make a breakthrough.
Swedish's PM loses confidence vote

Sweden's prime minister has lost a vote of confidence in parliament, meaning he will have to step down, though not immediately.

Stefan Löfven, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, will continue as caretaker prime minister until a new government can be formed that has the command of the Riksdagen.

Lawmakers voted 204-142 against Löfven, while three abstained. Löfven has been prime minister since 2014.

The vote was mandatory after elections earlier this month delivered a hung parliament.

Neither the left-leaning bloc led by the Social Democrats nor the Moderates-led center-right opposition managed to secure a majority in the 349-seat parliament after the Sept. 9 vote. Both have refused to co-operate with the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats.

Labour has duty to stop a no-deal Brexit – Sir Keir

Labour has a duty to prevent a no-deal Brexit, Sir Keir Starmer has said as the party appeared set to back the option of a fresh referendum on European Union membership.

Delegates at the party's conference in Liverpool are expected to back a plan that could lead to a fresh public vote which could include the option of ditching Brexit altogether.

Sir Keir, who said he would vote to stay in the EU if that was an option, played down the divisions at the top of the party over the plan.

Under the terms of the motion set to be voted on at the conference, if Labour cannot force an early general election it will “support all options remaining on the table, including campaigning for a public vote”.

Shadow Brexit secretary Sir Keir said the scope of the motion was "wide enough to encompass the option of Remain" in any referendum.

His comments came after shadow chancellor John McDonnell signalled he would want any second Brexit referendum to be limited to choosing how to leave the EU.

But Sir Keir said: “There isn’t this difference of opinion between me and John McDonnell, and the whole Labour Party is united around the motion that is going forward this morning.”

Labour appears set to reject Theresa May’s Brexit plan, claiming it fails to meet the party’s tests for any deal.

“Looking at the state of the negotiations, which are frankly chaotic and failing, it looks like she is not going to meet those tests so in those circumstances we will vote against a deal that she brings back,” he said.

Sir Keir said if May's plan was rejected by parliament she should call an election but if that does not happen then Labour would keep all options open.
Smallest deficit in a decade – Treasurer

The federal government has delivered the smallest budget deficit in a decade in 2017-18.

The deficit was $10.1 billion in the year, or 0.6 per cent of gross domestic product, according to the final budget outcome.

That’s a $19.3 billion improvement on the deficit originally estimated for the period.

Stronger-than-expected economic growth and more Australians in work contributed to the impressive improvement, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said.

The amount of money coming in was $13.4 billion higher than expected, while total spending was $6.9 billion less than forecast, with the Future Fund earnings up $1.1 billion in net terms.

“That’s the result of a strong economy,” Frydenberg said.

“We are seeing more people in jobs than ever before, and that’s more senior Australians, more women, more younger people.

“We are seeing across the economy good growth, and in 2017-18 that’s been reflected in these better numbers.”

Real economic growth in 2017-18 was 2.9 per cent, slightly stronger than the forecast growth of about 2.75 forecast.

Frydenberg said the results meant the government was on track with its plan to bring the budget back to balance in 2019-20.

BY THE NUMBERS

- Budget deficit of $10.1 billion
- A $19.3 billion improvement on 2017-18 Budget estimate
- Real GDP grew by 2.9 per cent (2.75 in Budget)
- Employment grew 2.7 per cent (1.5 in Budget)
- Unemployment rate 5.4 (5.75 in Budget)
- Wage Price Index 2.1 (2.5 in Budget)
- Receipts were $13.4 billion higher than expected and payments $6.9 billion lower.

Baby Neve sits in on UN meeting in New York

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s baby daughter has made a splash at the United Nations, sitting in on a meeting with her mother.

Ardern is among world leaders at the UN General Assembly in New York and has had daughter Neve, born in June, in tow.

While the prime minister spoke at the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit, Neve got a front-row seat on father Clarke Gayford’s lap, catching the eye of cameras. She earlier watched proceedings with her mum.

Having become the second woman to give birth in elected office – and the first to take maternity leave – 38-year-old Ardern has drawn the attention of global media during the visit.

It marks the first time a female leader has brought an infant to a general assembly meeting.

Gayford – now a full-time dad travelling with the prime minister – showed off photos of a mock ID card that had been made up for Neve by staff at the UN, listing her title as “first baby” of New Zealand.

He also had a story to tell about Neve’s first diplomatic incident.

“I wish I could have captured the startled look on a Japanese delegation inside UN yesterday, who walked into a meeting room in the middle of a nappy change,” he said.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg. - AAP

Jacinda Ardern’s partner Clarke Gayford with Neve at the UN General Assembly. - EPA

Jacinda Ardern's partner Clarke Gayford with Neve at the UN General Assembly. - EPA
President Donald Trump and South Korean President Moon Jae-in.

**US, South Korea sign trade deal**

President Donald Trump and South Korean President Moon Jae-in have signed the first major agreement of Trump's trade agenda.

The leaders signed an update to an existing US-South Korea free-trade agreement in New York. Both leaders are attending an annual UN gathering.

Trump calls it a “very big deal” and says the new agreement makes significant improvements to reduce the trade deficit between the countries and create new opportunities to export American products to South Korea. He said US automobiles, pharmaceuticals and agricultural products will gain better access to Korean markets.

Moon said companies from both countries will be able to do business under more stable conditions. The South Korean leader also said he hopes the revised agreement with the US will help solidify their co-operation in other areas.

**Rosenstein keeps job, meeting set**

The White House delayed a decision on the fate of Rod Rosenstein, the Justice Department official overseeing the Trump-Russia investigation, after chaotic hours of breathless and sometimes conflicting reports anticipating his imminent departure.

His future hanging in the balance over revelations he had discussed possibly secretly recording the president, Rosenstein expected to be fired as he headed for the White House for what was later described as a prescheduled meeting.

Instead, the White House said Rosenstein and Trump would meet Thursday (local time) after the president's return to Washington, suggesting the deputy attorney general may be in his job for at least several more days.

Any termination or resignation would have immediate implications for special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation of possible collaboration between Russia and the Trump campaign before the 2016 election. Rosenstein appointed Mueller and oversees his investigation.

Rosenstein and Trump, who is in New York for a UN meeting, had an extended conversation to discuss recent news stories about negative comments Rosenstein was reported to have made last year about the president, said White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders. The deputy attorney general was reported as having discussed possibly secretly recording the president and invoking the Constitution to have the Cabinet remove him from office.

The Justice Department issued two statements from Rosenstein denying the remarks and released a separate statement from someone who said he recalled the recording comment but insisted it was meant sarcastically.

Though Trump has mostly spared Rosenstein from some of the harsher and more personal attacks he has directed at Attorney General Jeff Sessions, he has occasionally lashed out with angry tirades at the Justice Department’s No. 2 official, including after FBI raids in April targeting the president’s former personal lawyer, Michael Cohen.
 Indonesian teenager Aldi Novel Adilang on his wooden fish trap. - AP

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini. - AP

REST OF THE WORLD

Indonesian teenager survives 49 days at sea

An Indonesian teenager who survived 49 days adrift at sea after the wooden fish trap he was employed to mind slipped its moorings says he ran out of food within a week and survived on fish and seawater he squeezed from his clothing.

Aldi Novel Adilang said he turned on a lamp every time he sighted another ship and couldn't remember how many passed by "unaware of my ordeal".

The Indonesian Consulate in Osaka, Japan, said the 18-year-old was rescued by a Panamanian-flagged vessel off Guam on August 31, about 1200 miles (1920 kilometers) from his original location, and returned to Indonesia with officials earlier this month.

He was employed since age 16 in one of the world’s loneliest jobs: lamp lighter on a rompong – a wooden raft with a hut on top that is lit at night to attract fish – moored about 125 kilometers (78 miles) off the coast of North Sulawesi.

The coastline is not visible from the fishing rafts and the numerous rompong are miles apart, said Adilang’s mother, Net Kahiking. Supplies including food and fuel for a generator are dropped off about once a week. The minders, who earn $130 a month, communicate with fishing boats by hand-held radio.

"I was on the raft for one month and 18 days. My food ran out after the first week," Adilang said. When it didn’t rain for days, "I had to soak my clothes in the sea, then I squeezed and drank the water".

The rafts are anchored with ropes and the teenager said strong friction caused them to break.

Adilang’s portable radio – known as a handy-talky, or HT, in Indonesia – would prove to be a lifesaver.

"It was early morning on August 31 when I saw the ship and I lighted up the lamp and shouted ‘help’ using the HT," he said.

"The ship had passed about one mile but then it turned to me. Might be because I used the English word. Then they talked on the HT."

Five world powers and Iran have agreed to establish a financial facility in the European Union to facilitate payments for Iranian imports and exports including oil, a key move sought by Tehran following the US pullout from the 2015 nuclear deal and its re-imposition of sanctions.

Foreign ministers from Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China and Iran said in a joint statement the so-called “Special Purpose Vehicle” would “assist and reassure economic operators pursuing legitimate business with Iran”.

The nuclear agreement is meant to prevent Tehran from developing nuclear weapons, but US President Donald Trump announced in May he was unilaterally pulling out because he felt it wasn’t strong enough and didn’t cover other issues of concern to the US and its allies, such as Iran’s military influence in the Middle East and ballistic missile program.

The US has also accused Iran of promoting international terrorism, which Tehran vehemently denies.

Iran’s economy is suffering from the sanctions Washington re-imposed after walking away from the nuclear agreement, and the US has threatened to punish companies from other nations that continue doing business with Iran.

In sharp contrast, the five other world powers who signed the nuclear deal remain strongly committed to it, and the new financial facility is almost certain to anger the Trump administration.

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said after the closed-door ministerial meeting that the financial facility was also aimed at preserving the nuclear agreement.

The EU and Iran say the deal is working, and the joint statement noted the International Atomic Energy Agency had certified 12 times that Iran was in compliance with its obligations.

She said the agreement followed extensive exchanges and announced a meeting of technical experts would be held to “operationalize” the new financial facility.

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini. - AP

REST OF THE WORLD

EU, Iran set ‘vehicle’ to ease trade

Five world powers and Iran have agreed to establish a financial facility in the European Union to facilitate payments for Iranian imports and exports including oil, a key move sought by Tehran following the US pullout from the 2015 nuclear deal and its re-imposition of sanctions.
New Zealand Transport Agency contractors have been caught dumping rubble from roadworks into a stream that feeds into Whangārei Harbour.

The agency has been forced to clean up its act after a local MP raised the matter with Northland Regional Council.

National MP for Whangarei Shane Reti was contacted by a constituent worried about several problems to do with roading near his house, which backs onto State Highway 1, about 15 minutes from the city.

The resident showed the MP the Oakleigh River Bridge, which had two-metre wide expansion strips cut out across it. About 30 pieces of road had been cut off the highway and pushed straight into the stream underneath, Reti said.

“They still had fluorescent markings on them,” he said. “They were on both sides of the dropline so they’d clearly been pushed off the bridge directly into the stream below.”

Reti and the local who raised the problem were angry with the situation.

“At best it’s lazy, at worst it’s environmental vandalism,” he said. “It wasn’t hard to put a drop sheet or a gatherer on either side of the bridge, but no, it seemed the most convenient thing is just to brush it off and brush it into the stream below.”

Roading was a pollutant in the stream that feeds directly into the harbour, he said.

Reti immediately contacted Northland Regional Council which got on to the transport agency.

The council told him the rubble was promptly removed, and the agency made it clear to its staff and contractors that the situation was unacceptable.

Ngātiwai Trust Board chairperson Haydn Edmonds said the dumping by NZTA contractors was not good enough. “It shouldn’t have happened, a sub-contractor should have been monitored by at least a sign-off from NZTA,” Edmonds said.

Staff at the transport agency refused to be interviewed, but said in a statement the contractors did not follow process. The situation had since been rectified, the agency said.