

UN Chief Reports No Sense of Optimism for Middle East Peace Process

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Friday reported to the UN Security Council for the last time on the situation in the Middle East, saying it saddened him that his last such briefing brought no sense of optimism for the future. The outgoing secretary-general called on the 15-nation Security Council to reaffirm without reservations that there is no alternative to the two-state solution, which means a secure Israel to live in peace with an independent State of Palestine. The solution is widely backed by the in-



ternational community. The status quo entrenches a one-state reality of perpetual occupation and conflict, he warned, adding that "we must not give up on the right of Palestine to exist, just as we must protect the right of Israel to exist in peace and security with its neighbours." Ultimately, Ban said, "it is up to the Israelis and Palestinians to make peace -- we cannot do it for them." "They must rebuild trust in each other, as the only way to address the fears and suspicions that have led to the deep ... (More on P4)...(20)

US Intelligence Leaders Agree on Russian Intervention in Election to Help Trump

WASHINGTON - Major U.S. intelligence leaders have expressed support for an assessment by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that Russia intervened in the 2016 U.S. presidential election partly to help Donald Trump win the White House, local media reported Friday. In a message to the agency's workforce, CIA Director John Brennan said that he met separately with Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation James Comey and Director of the National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper earlier this week, and "there is strong

consensus among us on the scope, nature, and intent of Russian interference in our presidential election." "The three of us also agree that our organizations, along with others, need to focus on completing the thorough review of this issue that has been directed by President Barack Obama and which is being led by the DNI," the Washington Post quoted Brennan's message as saying. However, the U.S. intelligence community didn't think Russia had a "single purpose" by doing so, said ... (More on P4)...(21)

Russia Supports China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project: Envoy

ISLAMABAD - Russia says it "strongly" supports the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project as it is crucial for Pakistan's economy and regional connectivity. According to an interview on Radio Pakistan, this was stated by Russian Ambassador to Pakistan Alexey Y Dedov. Dedov pointed out that CPEC is a component of China's Silk Road and his country was also working on a similar Eurasian Economic Union. He added that China and Russia are

holding discussions to merge the two projects. Asked about Pakistan's North-South gas pipeline project, the Russian Ambassador said they are eager to finalise the project at the soonest. The ambassador said the two countries are closely cooperating in different areas but there is a need to enhance the volume of bilateral trade. About the MI-35 gunship helicopter deal between the two countries, he said the ... (More on P4)...(23)

Obama Says Clinton Not Treated Fairly by Media During Election

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Barack Obama said Friday that Democratic Presidential nominee Hillary Clinton was not treated fairly by the media surrounding the Russian hacking incident. "I don't think she was treated fairly during the election, I think the coverage of her and the issues was troubling," Obama told his last White House press conference.

The outgoing president expressed his grievances to the journalists who packed the White House

briefing room, saying "I'm finding it a little curious that everybody is suddenly acting surprised that this looked like it was disadvantaging Hillary Clinton."

"I do think it's worth us reflecting how it is that a presidential election of such importance, of such moment, with so many big issues at stake and such a contrast between the candidates came to be dominated by a bunch



of these leaks. What is it about our political system that made us vulnerable to these kinds of potential manipulations?"

Obama's words echoed earlier remarks by Clinton, who said Thursday that Russia hacked into the ... (More on P4)...(22)

IOM Records Highest Yearly Migrant Deaths Worldwide

GENEVA - The International Organization for Migration (IOM) said on Friday that the organization had recorded the highest yearly migrant deaths worldwide since the statistics started, with 7,189 migrants and refugees have died or remain missing on their migratory routes. IOM registered an average of 20 deaths per day, suggesting the deaths of another 200 to 300 may be recorded worldwide by the end of 2016.

By comparison, the fig-

ures recorded by IOM in 2014 and 2015 stood at 5,267 and 5,740 respectively.

As in the previous two years, over 60 percent of the deaths occurred on the three principal Mediterranean routes linking North Africa and the Middle East with Europe. According to IOM, the number of migrants recorded as dead or missing and presumed dead appears to be rising across all regions, including the Mediterranean, Northern and Southern



Africa, as well as in Central America and in the United States-Mexico border region. Each has already sur-

passed those recorded in these regions throughout 2015, IOM data showed. Meanwhile IOM reported ... (More on P4)...(24)

350,000 Migrants Arrived in EU this Year So Far: Frontex

BERLIN - The head of the European Union border control agency says that about 350,000 migrants have arrived in the EU so far this year.

Fabrice Leggeri, executive director of the Frontex border agency, was quoted Saturday by German daily Ruhr-Nachrichten as saying about 180,000 people arrived via Turkey and the eastern Mediterranean, while 170,000 reached the continent across the central Mediterranean route from Libya and

Egypt. That's a sharp decline from 2015, when more than 1 million people arrived.

Leggeri said a deal between the EU and Turkey reduced the number of migrants coming from the East, but migration from northern Africa rose 30 percent. The International Organization of Migration said Friday that 4,812 people died on the Mediterranean this year so far. That about 1,200 more than last year between January to the end of November. (AP)



Turkey to Set up 10,000 Tents for Aleppo Refugees

ANKARA - Turkey will set up 10,000 tents for Aleppo refugees at camps in the Syrian city of Idlib, state-run Anadolu Agency reported on Friday.

The president of the Turkish Red Crescent Kerem Kinik said that Turkey had begun building the tent city and the first phase of the camp will be completed within three to four days.

The camp near Hatay province of Turkish border would host rest areas,

school, health center, mobile toilets and bath facilities.

A total of six to seven kilometers heavy-construction equipment from Hatay is being used during building the camp. Turkey is preparing to increase the capacity of the refugee camps to 50,000 people.

The evacuation of rebels and their families started on Thursday, and over 8,000 have already left toward the western country-



side of Aleppo. The situation in Aleppo worsened rapidly after a truce accord collapsed in Septem-

ber, with months of heavy fighting driving the city to the brink of a humanitarian crisis. (Xinhua)

Iran, Turkey, Russia FMs to Meet in Moscow on Syria: Spokesman



TEHRAN - Foreign ministers from Iran, Russia, and Turkey will likely meet in the Russian capital of Moscow on Dec. 27 to discuss the situation in Syria following the recent developments in the Arab state, local media reported on Saturday quoting Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying. "Our Foreign Minister has done his utmost effort to finalize the meeting of Foreign ministers of Iran, Russia, and Turkey in Moscow on Dec. 27," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qasemi according to official IRNA news agency.

The meeting would seek to find effective ways to deal with the ongoing situation in Syria, he said, adding that Iran has been the first to propose ceasefire in the Arab state, relief aid transfer to the civilians, and dialog among the Syrians, said Qasemi.

Iran announced Friday that the Islamic republic is ready to send humanitarian aid to Syria. Es'haq Jahangiri, Iran's First Vice President, made the remarks in a phone conversation with Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, urging for Tehran-Ankara cooperation to diplomatically resolve the crisis in Syria.

Over 8,000 rebels and their families have been evacuated from their last strongholds in Syria's northern city of Aleppo since the announcement of truce on Thursday. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

China Regrets U.S. Challenge at WTO

BEIJING - China's Ministry of Commerce (MOC) on Friday expressed "regret" over a U.S. government challenge to China's tariff rate quotas for agricultural products. An official with the ministry said in a statement that China has received a request for consultation from the U.S. and will properly handle the dispute in accordance with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. The U.S. government announced Thursday the complaint against China and said it was trying to hold China to its commitment to

allow set quantities of grain and corn to enter the country at a lower tariff rate. The MOC official said the tariff rate quotas of agricultural products were clearly acknowledged in China's agreement to the terms when it joined the WTO, and the tariff rate quotas of wheat, grain and corn were in line with China's commitment. The official noted that China has always respected WTO rules in managing its foreign trade of agricultural products with the aim of maintaining stability in international trade. (Xinhua)

Russian Companies Plan to Swap Iran's Oil: Minister

TEHRAN - Iran's Petroleum Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said Saturday that two Russian companies are in talks with Iran to swap the latter's oil, official IRNA news agency reported.

The swap plan is followed by the Russian Lukoil and Gazprom companies and they are considering some measures to swap the oil jointly with Iran, Zanganeh was quoted as saying.

The remarks by Iranian petroleum minister did not provide further details, however, IRNA said that based on the initial talks, 150,000 barrels

per day of Iranian oil will be swapped which eventually will rise to 500,000 barrels per day. Zanganeh said Saturday that the Russian Rosneft Company is also seeking partnership and development of four Iranian oil fields, including South Azadegan field. On Tuesday, Gazprom and Iran's Petroleum Ministry signed a major deal in the capital Tehran to cooperate in the development of two oil fields in western Iran.

Based on the agreement, studies will be carried out for the development of Cheshme Khosh and Changouleh oil fields. (Xinhua)

Nisar Responds to Critics: 'I Told PM Nawaz I can Resign but he Declined'

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar responded to growing criticism against him on Saturday, saying the report on the inquiry into the attack on lawyers in Quetta is "one-sided".

"I went to the prime minister yesterday, told him if my expression embarrasses the government then I would resign to set the record straight. He said that is unacceptable to him, which is why I am standing here in front of you today to tell you the other side of the story," Nisar said at a press con-

ference in Islamabad.

Nisar's remarks come days after an inquiry report into an Aug 8 attack on lawyers in Quetta slammed government inaction against militants. "I read this report in the papers, spiced up, thanks to the media," he said. "I am not a lawyer but I fail to understand how a report was created without the interior ministry's narrative in it, it is one-sided."

"It hurt me to see the papers the next day. They accused me of lying to the public," he added. (Monitoring Desk)

India, Tajikistan to Expand Defence, Security Ties

NEW DELHI - India and Tajikistan have decided to expand their defence and security ties even as they vowed to jointly address issues concerning terrorism and extremism during the visit of President of the Central Asian country Emomali Rahmon.

"The two leaders reviewed the bilateral defence and security co-operation and decided

to further extend and expand existing cooperation," stated the joint statement that was issued after a bilateral meeting between Rahmon and Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Saturday. Both sides also lauded conclusion of the Foreign Office Consultations on November 17 and the meeting of the Joint Working Group on ... (More on P4)...(25)

UK Says Ready to Expand Dialogue with Uzbekistan

BAKU - Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev received Alan Duncan, the UK minister of State for Europe and the Americas at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on Saturday the Uzbek Foreign Ministry's Jahon news agency reported.

Duncan congratulated Mirziyoyev on his victory in the recent presi-

dential election and noted that the British side is ready to work with the new Uzbek leadership to strengthen and expand further the interstate dialog.

During the meeting, the sides noted that it is getting more important to activate the bilateral co-operation in trade, economic and investment spheres. (Trend)