

Trump Calls for US to "Move on" from Russian Hacking Allegations

WASHINGTON - U.S. President-elect Donald Trump on Thursday downplayed the escalating tensions between Washington and Moscow over alleged Russian hacking activities targeting the United States.

"It's time for our country to move on to bigger and better things," he said in a statement, adding he will meet with U.S. intelligence agencies next week to gather facts about the situation.

Trump's remarks came after Washington introduced a series of actions against Russia Thursday that included imposing sanctions



on Russia's intelligence agencies, expelling 35 Russian agents and shutting two Russian compounds inside the United States. U.S. intelligence had concluded that the hack and release of Democratic Party and Hillary Clinton staff emails was ordered by the Kremlin and was designed to put the Republican real estate mogul in the Oval Office. But Moscow denied the accusations. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused the Obama administration of trying to "definitively destroy U.S.-Russia relations which have... (More on P4)...(23)

Russia Not to Expel Anyone Despite U.S. Sanctions: Putin

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday that Russia will not expel anyone despite Washington's latest sanctions, according to the Kremlin press service.

"We will not create problems for American diplomats. We will not expel anyone," Putin said in a statement.

Moscow will not prohibit their families and children to use their usual vacation spots during the New Year's holidays, Putin said, adding that he would invite all children of Ameri-

can diplomats in Russia to New Year's and Christmas celebration in the Kremlin. Earlier in the day, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov proposed expelling 35 U.S. diplomats and block the access of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow to a vacation house and a warehouse in response to a similar move by Washington.

On Thursday, the U.S. Department of State ordered the expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats suspected of... (More on P4)...(24)

Syria Says Russia's Guarantees behind Reaching Syria Ceasefire

DAMASCUS - Syria's Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem said Thursday that Russia's strong guarantees to the Syrian government were behind the government acceptance of the imminent cease-fire in Syria. In an interview with the state TV, just hours ahead of the commencement of the cease-fire, al-Moallem said the recently-reached nationwide cessation of hostilities in Syria is a real chance for ending the Syrian war and bringing an end to the

bloodletting in the war-torn country.

Earlier in the day, the Syrian army declared that a nationwide cessation of hostilities will go into effect as of midnight Friday. The Syrian army's declaration of cease-fire reflects an agreement reached Wednesday between Russia and Turkey for a nationwide cease-fire in Syria, with both countries acting as guarantors to rein in their respective allies in the country. The... (More on P4)...(25)

Russia Ready to Cooperate with New U.S. Administration on Anti-Terror: Russian FM

MOSCOW - Russia is ready to cooperate with the new U.S. administration in various fields, including the fight against terrorism, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Thursday. "We are open to dialogue at any time in a variety of formats, but we are not forcing events," Lavrov was quoted as saying in an interview with the RIA Novosti news agency.

He explained that Moscow has no intention to speed up events, as U.S. President-elect Donald Trump is currently pre-

occupied with forming his administration.

Lavrov said Moscow reacted positively to Trump's position in favor of establishing normal cooperation with Russia, which has been declared during his election campaign and in an earlier phone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Russia is ready to cooperate with Trump in the fight against terrorism in Syria and beyond, he



added. He also said that a possible meeting between Trump and Putin required meticulous preparation and would only be possible after Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, 2017, when "all the dialogue channels with the Republican administration start working to the full." (Xinhua)

Syria's New Cease-Fire Hailed, Uncertainties Remain

DAMASCUS/MOSCOW - A new cease-fire agreement reached between the Syrian government and the opposition were welcomed by related parties on Thursday, but at the same time uncertainties remain over whether the truce will definitely end the nearly six-year-old civil war. The chronic conflicts in Syria have killed more than 300,000 people and displaced nearly 11 million others.

NEW CEASE-FIRE The new cease-fire went into force at midnight

Thursday as declared by the Syrian army.

The nationwide truce was brokered by Russia and Turkey and agreed upon by the Syrian government and rebel groups, while terrorist organizations such as the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front and the Islamic State (IS), were excluded.

At a meeting with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that the trilateral format involving Russia, Tur-



key and Iran will monitor and provide guarantees to the peace process. Contacts between him and leaders of Turkey, Iran and Syria would coordinate further steps on Syrian agree-

ments, he added. Putin, however, said the cease-fire agreement was quite fragile and required special attention and patience. The previous two Syria... (More on P4)...(26)

Turkish Committee Clears Draft Expanding Erdogan's Powers

ANKARA, Turkey - A Turkish parliamentary commission on Friday cleared a set of draft constitutional amendments that would greatly expand the powers of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The constitutional commission approved the reforms at the end of a 17-hour session that lasted into the early hours of Friday, opening the way for deliberations and a vote in the full assembly in January, with a possible referendum in the spring.

The proposals would turn the largely ceremonial presidency into one



where the president enjoys full executive powers. Erdogan, who was prime minister before becoming president in 2014, has long advocated a presidential system, arguing it would give the head of state flexibility to make Turkey one

of the top 10 powers in the world by 2023, when the Turkish Republic marks its centenary. Critics fear the proposals would allow Erdogan, who is increasingly accused of authoritarian behavior, to rule with limited... (More on P4)...(27)

China Urges Proper Resolution of U.S.-Russia Disagreements

BEIJING - The Chinese Foreign Ministry on Friday called on the United States and Russia to properly handle disagreements through friendly negotiation.

Spokesperson Hua Chunying made the remarks when asked to comment on a possible improvement in U.S.-Russia ties following Donald Trump's upcoming presidential inauguration.

The question, which was raised at a routine press briefing, came after the U.S. government's announcement on Thursday about tough sanctions against Russian entities and ejection of 35 Russian officials. Hua said the Chinese side expects "smooth development" of relations between the United States and Russia, and stressed the two countries have major responsibilities in promoting world peace and development. Enhancing cooperation and facilitating sound interaction... (More on P4)...(28)

Iraqi Forces Regain Ground, Kill 200 IS Militants

MOSUL, Iraq - Iraqi security forces on Thursday recaptured a neighborhood and two villages, killing up to 200 militants of extremist Islamic State (IS) group, as troops launched the second phase of offensive to drive out IS militants from their major stronghold in the city of Mosul, the Iraqi military said.

Members of the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) attacked the front lines of IS militants in several neighborhoods in eastern side of Mosul, and managed to retake control of al-Quds neighborhood, while heavy clashes continued in other nearby neighborhoods, a statement by the Iraqi Joint Operations Command said.

In northern front, the soldiers of the army's 16th Division freed the villages of al-Sada and Tawiyala and raised the Iraqi flag over their main buildings after fierce clashes with IS militants, the statement said. In southeastern Mosul, the federal police teamed up with the soldiers of the 9th armored Division and attacked the front lines of IS militants in the three neighborhoods of al-Entisar, al-Salam and al-Shaimaa, sparking heavy clashes with IS militants during the day, the statement added.

The troops made limited progress inside the three neighborhoods, which already were battleground of fierce clashes between the troops and IS militants in the past weeks, according to the statement. On the other side, the extremist group carried out several counter-attacks against the attacking troops in an attempt to foil the troops' operations and to inflict heavy casualties among them. (Xinhua)

Nieghbor News

China Urges Implementation of Syrian Ceasefire

BEIJING - China on Friday welcomed a nationwide ceasefire agreement signed by the Syrian government and major opposition groups Thursday, adding that implementation of the ceasefire was of key importance.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying made the remarks at a press briefing. She said China supports the positive efforts made by concerned parties in reaching the truce. The agreement, bro-

kered by Russia and Turkey and agreed upon by the Syrian government and major opposition groups, came into force at midnight local time Thursday, as the latest attempt to end nearly six years of civil war.

Hua stressed that the ceasefire is an important guarantee for pushing forward a political settlement to the Syrian crisis. It will also help ease humanitarian tension and step up the fight against terrorism in Syria, she added. (Xinhua)

Pak Senate Committee Clears Benami Transactions Bill 2016

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistani Senate Standing Committee on Finance approved on Thursday Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Bill of 2016 aimed at prohibiting people from holding assets and properties under others' or fake names.

The Senate committee, chaired by Senator Saleem Mandviwalla, decided to amend the draft by including reward provisions for whistleblowers.

The proposed bill gives stringent powers to the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) as it allows the authorities to raid and have full access to any premises, place, account, documents or computer, etc with prior notice to inquire the accused.

During the proceedings, an official of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) expressed reservations that such a law would create panic among banks. The SBP official said that they had no objection to the powers of seeking information from a banking company, but they would object to any action beyond that level.

However, Secretary Finance Dr Waqar Masood and FBR chairman Nisar Muhammad Khan insisted that such powers were needed to implement the law. They clarified that the section related to the banking company in the bill was similar to the provisions in Income Tax and Customs Law. The... (More on P4)...(30)

Syria Ceasefire as 'Major Achievement': Iran FM

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign minister has praised the Syria-wide ceasefire deal, brokered by Russia and Turkey, as a "major achievement" on the diplomatic front, saying the world must now work to target terrorism at the roots.

"Ceasefire in Syria is a major achievement. Let's build on it by tackling the roots of extremist terror," said Mohammad Javad Zarif on a post on his Twitter page on Thursday.

The remarks came after the Syrian army an-

nounced a nationwide ceasefire, which took effect at midnight, adding that the deal does not apply to the Takfiri Daesh and Fateh al-Sham (formerly known as al-Nusra Front) terror groups as well as their affiliates.

The countrywide ceasefire came one week after the Syrian army announced full control over Aleppo when the last remaining militants were evacuated along with civilians from the eastern sector of city under a truce deal mediated by... (More on P4)...(31)

Turkmenistan Gas Policy will Harm its Interests: MP

TEHRAN - Turkmenistan gas policy towards Iran will harm its interests, a member of Majlis (parliament) energy commission said on Friday.

Speaking to IRNA, Ali Golmoradi referred to Turkmenistan's demand for illogically high prices for its exported gas to Iran's northern regions and said Ashgabat is expected to oblige with international trade norms and not take advantage of the harsh winter conditions here to demand high

prices from the country. Countries should not misuse their partners' need in special conditions to propose illogical demands and prices, the MP added.

He said that his colleagues in the parliament firmly believe that Iran should not permit Turkmenistan to continue with this kind of policy towards Iran as irrational decisions could cause really serious problems. Such policy has already... (More on P4)...(32)

Britain, Edging Towards Trump, Scolds Kerry over Israel

LONDON - Britain scolded U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry for describing the Israeli government as the most right-wing in Israeli history, a move that aligns Prime Minister Theresa May more closely with President-elect Donald Trump.

After U.S. President Barack Obama enraged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by refusing to veto a UN Security Council resolution demanding an end to Israeli settlement building, Kerry's public rebuke of Israel has unsettled some allies such as Britain.

Amid one of the United States' sharpest confrontations with... (More on P4)...(29)

UN Envoy Welcomes Announcement of Nationwide Ceasefire in Syria

GENEVA - UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura on Thursday welcomed the announcement of a nationwide ceasefire between the Syrian government and the country's armed opposition groups, which is to come into effect at 00:00 hours on Friday.

The special envoy, through a statement issued by his spokesperson, noted that a comprehensive cessation of hostilities remains a "cornerstone" for the peace process in the war-torn country. He wished that the implementation of the agreement will save civilian lives, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance across Syria, and pave the way for productive talks

in Astana. "These developments should contribute to inclusive and productive intra-Syrian negotiations to be convened under UN auspices on February 8 of 2017," he added. Earlier this month, the spokesperson of de Mistura announced that the UN intends to convene the Syrian peace talks in Geneva on Feb. 8, 2017.

The Syrian government and the core groups of the so-called moderate opposition reached a ceasefire agreement and expressed their readiness to start intra-Syrian talks on Thursday. The Syrian army then declared that a nationwide cessation of hostilities will go into effect as of midnight Friday. (Xinhua)

Tajikistan Invites Uzbek President

DUSHANBEH - Tajik President Emomali Rahmon invited his Uzbek counterpart Shavkat Mirziyoyev to come to Tajikistan on an official visit at a time convenient for him, the press service of the Uzbek government said in a message.

Emomali Rahmon made the invitation during a meeting with the Uzbek delegation, which took part in the fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade

and Economic Cooperation held in the city of Dushanbe Dec. 27-28.

The message said that Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have big plans to further develop fruitful cooperation, implement joint projects of an economic nature, develop cultural and interethnic dialogue. "A wide range of topical issues of bilateral cooperation, including the basic parameters of interaction in the fields of economy and... (More on P4)...(33)