

# Angela Merkel Calls for European Unity

VALLETTA - German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on the European Union to stay united and hailed the plan to stem illegal migration from Libya to Europe endorsed by the 28 EU leaders at their informal summit in the capital of Malta on Friday.

"The work on immigration is still ongoing," Merkel said. "The EU is drawing lessons on migration from years 2015 and 2016. It is clear that people smuggling networks have to be tackled. You have to remember how many people perished in the Mediterranean Sea." Over 181,000 migrants and refugees, most of whom use Libya as a springboard, arrived in EU nations in 2016 through the central Mediterranean route. As the deadliest route for migrants last year, the central Mediterranean



route claimed the lives of 4,576 people, according to the International Organization for Migration. Referring to the EU-Turkey deal agreed in March last year, which sought a dramatic decline in the flows of immigration along the Aegean route, Merkel said migrants to Europe cannot go through smugglers, but through agreements. The best policy for immigrants would be to stay close to their countries, by creating "safe heavens" in areas near their country of origin, she insisted.

Merkel highlighted the gap between the European position and U.S. President Donald Trump's migration policies. Trump has faced criticism after issuing a ban on refugees and entry into the United States of citizens from seven Muslim-majority nations. (Xinhua)

## France, U.S. Reaffirm Alliance Against Security Threats

PARIS - France and the United States reaffirmed on Friday the France-U.S. alliance against security threats and the shared desire to fight the Islamic State (IS) group, particularly in Iraq and Syria. During a phone conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault stressed the importance of the "historic ties" between France and the United States characterized by "crucial cooperation in the area of security, in particular in

the fight against terrorism," the French foreign ministry said in a statement. "Ayrault and Tillerson reaffirmed the strength of the Franco-American alliance against the threat and the shared desire of the two countries to eradicate, in particular in Iraq and Syria where our two countries are fighting together Daesh (IS)'s barbarism," said the statement. This relationship is "fundamental in helping to resolve regional crises, ... (More on P4)...(25)

## French President Calls on European Leaders to Refuse "Pressure" from US

VALLETTA - French President Francois Hollande called on European Union leaders to refuse any "pressure" from the U.S. administration and to reflect in a united way and in complete independence on its future, particularly on defence, trade and its relations with Russia. Hollande did not rule out the possibility of a "multi-speed" Europe when addressing the press during the European Union informal summit here. A plan was endorsed at the summit to stem illegal im-

migration along the central Mediterranean route and prepared for the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome to be celebrated on March 25. "There may be different opinions within the 28, even judgments on the Trump administration can be nuanced among us, but there needs a unity of the European Union to take the full account of what is taking place," said the French president. Hollande also warned against relying solely on the U.S.-dominated alli-



ance for Europe's military defence. Europe must organize its own defence within the framework of the NATO alliance, he said. "We must ultimately

have strategic autonomy." The French president stressed that the EU should assert its interests especially when a country, the ... (More on P4)...(26)

## EU Hails "Sensible Ways" to Migration, Cautious on Transatlantic Ties

VALLETTE - The European Union (EU) hailed the measures of more cooperation with Libya adopted Friday at its Malta informal summit as "sensible ways" to address migration. In the meantime, EU leaders stayed cautious when commenting on the transatlantic relations, which was rattled by openly hostile pronouncements by the new U.S. administration. "This is the first time all member states have managed to achieve important progress and uni-

ty," said Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat whose country hosts the current EU presidency. "Management of migration is not about black and white, doing nothing or resorting to extreme measures, but sensible ways in which we can move ahead," he said. After a work session on external dimension of migration, European leaders agreed on an action plan to stem the migration flow into Europe along the Central Mediterranean ... (More on P4)...(27)

## WH in Chaos after US Judge Blocks Trump's Travel Ban

WASHINGTON - The White House is plunged into chaos on Friday after a U.S. judge ruled against President Donald Trump's executive order of temporarily banning global refugees and nationals of seven Muslim countries from entering the United States. U.S. District Judge James Robart in Seattle, Washington, ruled Friday that Trump's order would be suspended nationwide, effective immediately. In response, the Trump administration vowed to overturn the court ruling "at the earliest possible

time" to rescue the controversial executive order, which has sparked nationwide protests and criticism since it was issued on Jan. 27. It's unclear how the judge's ruling will affect the operations of the federal government in the coming days. "The Department of Justice intends to file an emergency stay of this outrageous order and defend the executive order of the president, which we believe is lawful and appropriate," the White House said late Friday in a statement. Yet within 10 minutes, it



sent out a new edition removing the word "outrageous." "The president's order is intended to protect the homeland and he has the constitutional authority and responsibility to pro-

tect the American people," said the statement. Robart ruled that the two states of Washington and Minnesota had standing to challenge Trump's order, which government lawyers disputed. (Xinhua)

## BRIC Economist Calls Globalization "Global Benefit"

LONDON - The economist who invented BRIC as a grouping acronym for Brazil, Russia, India and China has said that globalization is a global benefit. At the beginning of the 21st century, British economist Jim O'Neill coined the acronym BRIC nations to describe the four economies whose growth in the coming years he saw was phenomenal and also central to the global economy of the 21st century. He believed the heft of these four nations would alter the gravity of the world economy, the tra-



ditional West and its advanced economies would be less dominant, and the connections of economic influence and power would be increasingly linked to these nations. This phenomenon would

be intimately linked with the process of globalization, a process that was already well underway at the end of 2001, when O'Neill, as chief economist at U.S. banking giant Goldman ... (More on P4)...(28)

## Nearly 30,000 Demands for Asylum Filed in Hungary Last Year

BUDAPEST - A Hungarian official in charge of immigration told reporters here on Friday that a total of 29,432 people applied for asylum in the country in 2016, a large drop compared with 177,000 filed the year before. And as many as 18,236 have been registered as illegal immigrants in 2016, said Zsuzsanna Vegh, the director of the Immigration and Asylum Office. The director said that the decrease in the number is due to the agreement between the European Union (EU) and Turkey. But he rejected any illusion of a thorough settlement of the migrant issue. "Last year, the number of illegal immigrants and asylum-seekers has dropped significantly, but we cannot have the illusion that the problems will solve themselves," said Vegh. ... (More on P4)...(29)

## Mattis Pledges to Strengthen Alliance with Japan

TOKYO - U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis wrapped up a two-day visit to Japan on Saturday, during which he reiterated his country's defense commitment to Japan and pledged to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance with his Japanese counterparts. Mattis said after his meeting with Japanese Defense Minister Tomomi Inada on Saturday the new U.S. administration under Donald Trump places a high priority on the Asia-Pacific region, and "specifically on long-term allies like Japan." Mattis's remarks have been considered by some Japanese media as aiming to ease concerns from the Japanese side, as certain remarks by the U.S. President Donald Trump about Japanese currency valuations and the cost the U.S. incurs in posting its troops to Japan have perplexed the government here. During the election campaign, Trump has been quoted by media as saying that he might withdraw U.S. forces from Japan if Tokyo did not shoulder the entire cost burden. Inada said the issue did not come up in her meeting with Mattis, while Mattis, for his part, said that Japan is a "model" regarding cost-sharing with the United States. He also noted Japan's growing defense budget since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took office in 2012, saying that it was "on the right track." Regarding the controversial Futenma relocation plan, the two defense chiefs agreed that the plan to move U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to less-populated Henoko area within the prefecture is the only solution, though the plan has been strongly opposed by the Okinawa people. (Xinhua)

## UN Secretary-General Calls for Ceasefire Observation in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "deeply concerned" about the on-going tensions and intensification of fighting in eastern Ukraine, the UN chief's spokesman Stephane Dujarric said here on Friday. Dujarric said at the daily news briefing that Guterres appealed to all parties in the conflict to fully observe the ceasefire and allow for immediate humanitarian access. The UN Human Rights Office on Friday also "expressed its serious concern" over the dire humanitarian and human right situation in the country's east, according to Dujarric. According ... (More on P4)...(30)

## US Not Weighing Middle East Troop Hikes over Iran Concerns: Mattis

TOKYO - U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said on Saturday he was not considering hiking the number of U.S. forces in the Middle East to address Iran's "misbehavior" at this time, but warned that the world would not ignore Iranian activities. President Donald Trump has vowed a more aggressive policy against Tehran and his administration is warning of concrete action if Iran does not curb its ballistic missile program and continues support in regional proxy conflicts. The United States announced new sanctions on Friday, just two days after the Trump administration put Iran "on notice" following a ballistic missile test.

Mattis said putting Iran on notice was worthwhile, given its behavior. "As far as Iran goes, this is the single biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world and I think it is wise to make certain that Iran recognizes that what it is doing is getting the attention of a lot of people," Mattis told a news conference in Tokyo in his most detailed remarks on Iran since taking over the Pentagon. Still, he firmly played down the idea of any military buildup. "I don't see any need to increase the number of forces we have in the Middle East at this time. That's not in the cards right now," he said. "We always ... (More on P4)...(31)

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### Iran Vows 'Roaring Missiles' if Threatened, Defies New Sanctions

DUBAI - A Revolutionary Guards commander said Iran would use its missiles if its security is under threat, as the elite force defied new U.S. sanctions on its missile programme by holding a military exercise on Saturday. Tensions between Tehran and Washington have risen since a recent Iranian ballistic missile test which prompted U.S. President Donald Trump's administration to impose sanctions on individuals and entities linked to the Revolutionary Guards. Trump's national security adviser Michael Flynn said the Washington was putting Iran on notice over its "destabilising activity", and Trump tweeted Tehran was "playing with fire" "We are working day and night to protect Iran's security," head of

Revolutionary Guards' aerospace unit, Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajzadeh was quoted as saying by Tasnim news agency. "If we see smallest misstep from the enemies, our roaring missiles will fall on their heads," he added. Despite the heated words, U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said on Saturday he was not considering raising the number of U.S. forces in the Middle East to address Iran's "misbehavior", but warned that the world would not ignore Iranian activities. Iran's Revolutionary Guards is holding the military exercise in Semnan province on Saturday to test missile and radar systems and to "showcase the power of Iran's revolution and to dismiss the sanctions," according to the force's website. (Reuters)

### A US Travel Ban on Pakistan to be Counterproductive: Minister

WASHINGTON - Pakistan's Federal Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal has said that putting Pakistan on a list of countries whose citizens have been temporarily barred from visiting the United States will be counterproductive. Mr Iqbal, who met several US officials and lawmakers during his five-day stay in Washington, said he did not notice any intention to place Pakistan on the list of banned states but "if it were to happen, it would be counterproductive". Pakistan, he said, was an important country with a large middle class spread across the globe and the Pakistan diaspora was making a major contribu-

tion to global development. "Singling them out like this would be a mistake," said the minister while pointing out that only a tiny fraction of the estimated 1.6 billion Muslims around the world were involved in terrorist activities. "The overwhelming majority of Muslims lives peacefully and pursues its goals like other religious groups and nations," he said. The minister was talking to the Pakistani media on Thursday evening after addressing a seminar on Kashmir at the Pakistan Embassy where he reminded the international community of its responsibility to help resolve the Kashmir issue. (Monitoring Desk)

### Turkmenistan, Indonesia Ready to Co-Op in Energy, Tourism

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan and Indonesia considered the opportunities of cooperation in the spheres of energy, tourism and education during an official meeting in Ashgabat, the Turkmen Foreign Ministry said in a message. The Indonesian delegation was represented by the country's Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador to Turkmenistan (with a residence in Tehran) Octavino Alimudin. Discussing the trade and economic cooperation, the sides noted the importance of organizing the meetings of the two countries' businessmen. Meanwhile, the sides expressed interest in establishing inter-parliamentary and inter-party relations. Indonesia has a

long-standing interest in the Turkmen market. In the mid-1990s, Indonesia Petroleum Ltd. (INPEX) obtained shares in the gas pipeline consortium of the pipeline project from Turkmenistan to Pakistan. However, the project was suspended due to the unstable transit issues through Afghanistan's territory. In recent years, Ashgabat and Islamabad revived this project. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) financed its feasibility analysis and India joined the project as an interested buyer of the Turkmen gas that increased the chances of implementation of the transnational project. The construction of the Turkmen section of this gas pipeline started in December 2015. (Trend)

### Belarus Ready to Strengthen Cooperation with Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - Belarus is ready to strengthen cooperation with Uzbekistan, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko said at the meeting with the members of the public, representatives of the Belarusian and foreign mass media, BelTA informs. "We hope to establish very good relations with the new leadership of Uzbekistan," the head of

state stressed. Alexander Lukashenko spoke in positive terms about the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who was elected after the death of Islam Karimov and about his team. "We hope to strengthen cooperation with Uzbekistan, they are prepared for it," the Belarusian President said. (AP)