

# Germany to Elect New President; Steinmeier the Favorite

BERLIN - A German parliamentary assembly will elect the country's new president on Sunday, with a respected former foreign minister who last year called Donald Trump one of the world's "hate preachers" the overwhelming favorite to win. The German president has little executive power, but is considered an important moral authority. The new head of state will succeed Joachim Gauck, a 77-year-old former pastor and East German pro-democracy activist, who announced last year that he wouldn't seek a second five-year term because of his age. The president is elected by a special 1,260-member assembly



made up of the 630 lawmakers in parliament's lower house and an equal number of representatives from Germany's 16 states. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Germany's foreign minister until last month, has the support of Chancellor Angela Merkel's "grand coalition" of center-right and center-left parties. Between them, Merkel's conservative Union bloc and the center-left Social Democrats — her junior coalition partners — hold 923 seats, which should assure Steinmeier's election. Steinmeier, a Social Democrat, emerged as the government's candidate after Merkel was unable to...*(More on P4)...(22)*

## Assad Denies AI Report on Human Rights Violation in Syria

DAMASCUS - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said that the recent report issued by Amnesty International about mass hangings in a prison near the capital Damascus is biased and politicized. In an interview with the American Yahoo News issued Friday by state news agency SANA, the president said the report put the reputation of the organization into question. "We don't look at it as unbiased, it's always biased and politicized, and it's a shame that such an or-

ganization releases a report without any evidence whatsoever," Assad said. On Feb. 7, the Amnesty released a report stating that the Syrian authorities in Saydnaya prison near Damascus carried out mass hangings of as many as 13,000 people. The rights watchdog accused the government of a "policy of extermination," adding that its report is based on interviews with 84 witnesses, including guards, detainees, and judges. The executions...*(More on P4)...(23)*

## UN Chief Discusses Syria, Iraq Issues with Turkish President

ISTANBUL - Visiting UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Saturday discussed the situations in Syria and Iraq with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as Ankara is a key partner in returning peace to the war-torn Arab countries. Referring to the ongoing diplomatic efforts in ending the conflict in Syria, which has lasted almost six years, the UN chief said he was grateful that "the Astana conference was held in support of the Geneva process," according

to a press release issued by the world body after the meeting. "The secretary-general underscored the need to fight terrorism and extremists in Syria but that effort would not be successful without a political solution supported by the people of country," the press release said. Russia, Turkey and Iran have initiated a series of meetings since last month in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana, including one that brought together representatives of the Syrian government and armed



opposition groups for the first time after Syria was plunged into chaos in March 2011, paying the way for UN-led peace talks in Geneva now slated for Feb. 20. In his meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim in Istanbul a day earlier, Guterres laid emphasis on an "inclusive"...*(More on P4)...(24)*

## Syrian Opposition to Announce Delegates for U.N. Peace Talks: HNC

BEIRUT - The Syrian opposition will announce on Saturday its delegates for the next round of U.N.-based peace talks in Geneva planned for later this month, the main opposition umbrella group said. The choice of opposition delegates has been subject to disagreement and the U.N. envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, has said it would choose the opposition delegates if they could not agree, "to make sure that it can be as inclusive as possible." The Saudi-backed High Negotiations Commit-

tee (HNC), Syria's main opposition body which includes political and armed groups, has criticized Mistura's comment as "unacceptable". HNC spokesman Salim al-Muslit told Arabic news channel Arabiya al-Hadath on Saturday that following meetings in Riyadh, Syrian opposition officials would present the 20-member delegation they have chosen to attend the talks. The HNC represented the opposition in peace talks last year, but was not...*(More on P4)...(25)*

## Trump Seeks to Promote "Fair" Trade with Japan

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump said on Friday that his country will seek to promote a "fair and reciprocal" trade relationship with Japan. Trump made the remarks at a press conference after talks with visiting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the White House. Trump said the U.S. will seek a trading relationship with Japan "that is free, fair and reciprocal, benefiting both of our countries." During his presidential campaign last year, Trump had criticized Japan for its trade surplus with the United

States and accused Japan of manipulating currency markets to lower its currency. Upon taking office last month, Trump announced withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a sweeping trade deal between the United States and 11 other nations that included Japan. Asked to comment on Trump's decision on the TPP, Abe said, "We are fully aware of President Trump's decision. On economic issues, we will be discussing at the working lunch to follow." Abe said Japanese Deputy Prime Minister



Taro Aso and U.S. Vice President Mike Pence will create a new framework for economic dialogue, adding that "I am quite optimistic that the good results will be seen from the dialogue." The U.S. president also reaffirmed Washington's security ties with Tokyo. He said that the U.S. is committed to the security of Japan and pledged to further strengthen the "very crucial" alliance between the two countries. *(Xinhua)*

## NATO Deputy Chief Highlights Efforts to Protect Children in Armed Conflict

BRUSSELS - NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller on Friday highlighted efforts to protect children in armed conflict at the international conference on children and armed conflict here. Gottemoeller addressed serious threats against children in war zones at the meeting, which was hosted by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She stated: "Serious threats to children in war zones are far too numerous today, subjecting them to



indiscriminate attacks, sexual violence and recruitment as soldiers." "Conferences like this help to call attention to a problem that is still too often

overlooked and under-reported," she said, adding, "This attention puts pressure on countries and international organizations to...*(More on P4)...(26)*

## Iraqi PM Vows to Avoid Being Part of Regional Conflicts

BAGHDAD - Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said that Iraq will not be part of regional and international conflicts, an official Iraqi television reported on Saturday. Abadi's comment came after he received a phone call from the President of the United States Donald Trump, when they discussed the tensions in the Middle East region. "Iraq is keen to reserve its national interests and does not want to be part of any regional and international conflict, which would lead to disasters for the region and for Iraq itself," the state-run Iraqiya channel said. On Friday, Trump made his first phone call with Abadi since the inauguration of the U.S. president last month. Abadi asked Trump to remove his country from a travel ban list issued by Trump administration on...*(More on P4)...(27)*

## Turkish Forces, Rebels Enter IS-Held Al-Bab City in N. Syria

DAMASCUS - Turkish forces and allied Syrian rebels entered the city of al-Bab on Saturday, the last stronghold of the Islamic State (IS) group in northern Syria near the Turkish borders, a monitor group reported. The Turkish forces and the rebels it's backing under the umbrella of the Euphrates Shield succeeded to storm al-Bab after weeks of battles aiming to strip the IS of its largest remaining stronghold near the Turkish borders in the countryside of the northern province of Aleppo, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The UK-based watchdog group said the Turkish forces and allied militants were clashing with the IS in the northern and western part of the city, as the Syrian army is closing in on the city from its southern rim. While the Turkish forces were on an offensive on IS from the northern, western and eastern part of the city, the Syrian army succeeded recently to besiege al-Bab from its southern edge, a move to prevent IS fighters to withdraw toward other stronghold in the eastern province of Deir al-Zour, or the northern city of al-Raqqqa, the de facto capital of the terror-designated group. A military source told Xinhua on Saturday that the Syrian army is a few kilometers away from al-Bab, adding that IS militants have executed 40 civilians in the city over the past 24 hours, for unclear reasons. Observers said the attacks on al-Bab were coordinated between the Russians and the Turks...*(More on P4)...(28)*

## India Successfully Testfires Interceptor Missile

NEW DELHI - India successfully test-fired an interceptor missile on Saturday from an island off the coast of the eastern state of Odisha, sources said. The interceptor missile that can hit an incoming ballistic missile was test-fired from Abul Kalam Island and the test-firing over Bay of Bengal was successful, sources said. The interceptor missile is part of India's two-layered Ballistic Missile Defense System which is being developed. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has congratulated scientists of the state-owned Defense Research...*(More on P4)...(29)*

## Heads of UN Agencies Stress Need for Comprehensive Approach to Address Libyan Migrants Issue

GENEVA - The heads of several UN agencies, who met here on Friday, underscored the need for a comprehensive approach to address the situation of migrants and refugees in Libya. The high-ranking UN officials gathered here included the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration William Lacy Swing, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, and the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of the UN Support Mission in

Libya (UNSMIL) Martin Kobler. They said in a joint statement issued Friday that along with many Libyans, migrants and refugees are heavily impacted by ongoing conflicts and the breakdown in law and order in Libya. They added that untold numbers of migrants and refugees, particularly those smuggled or trafficked into Libya and those in detention, are subjected to grave human rights abuses and violations. "Migrants and refugees in detention are held outside of any legal process and in conditions which...*(More on P4)...(30)*

## Neighbor News

### China, South Sudan Strengthen Cooperation in Health Sector

JUBA - China and South Sudan have agreed to boost cooperation in the health sector by enhancing knowledge sharing, capacity building, and hospital to hospital collaboration. The deal which was sealed in Juba on Friday will also allow Chinese health specialists to set up experimental operations and management units in the East African nation. The pacts were reached during a meeting between senior South Sudanese government officials and a team of 15 Chinese health experts led by Wang Yuming, Associate Counsel of Health and Family Planning Commission of Anhui Province, east China. South Sudan's Health Minister RiekGai Kok told Xinhua on Satur-

day that the cooperation agreements were part of a 33 million U.S. dollar medical assistance pledged by the Chinese government to improve South Sudan's health sector. Kok described relations between the two countries as excellent and beneficial to the people of both countries, adding that his ministry has already received a donation of 600 bicycles and communication gadgets from the Chinese government to support health in the grass root level. "The relationship between the peoples of South Sudan and China is excellent. The provision of this world-class diagnostic equipment is going to reduce foreign travel for medical attention," Kok said. *(Xinhua)*

### Pakistani Senate Not to Welcome U.S. Congressmen, Diplomats: Chairman

ISLAMABAD - Chairman of the Pakistani Senate Mian Raza Rabbani said Saturday that no U.S. delegations, Congressmen or diplomats will be welcomed after the U.S. embassy in Islamabad delayed visas to two Pakistani senators. Rabbani has further directed that no Senate delegation will visit the United States unless an explanation to the delay in issuance of visas is given by the U.S. govern-

ment and the its embassy in Pakistan. Deputy Chairman of the Pakistani Senate Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri and Senator Salahuddin Tirmizi had been scheduled to travel to the United States as part of a delegation to attend inter-parliamentary hearings at the UN headquarters in New York on Feb. 13-14. The visit has been cancelled due to the delay in issuance of visas to the Senators. *(Xinhua)*

### Iran, Sweden Sign Five Documents of Cooperation

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani says the European Union should buttress the bloc's banking relations with Iran so as to optimize the opportunities provided by the country's 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran. He made the remarks in Tehran on Saturday at a joint press conference with visiting Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven. The Iranian chief executive also said the country favored better banking transactions with Sweden. The comments came as fear of potential US punitive measures continue to dissuade European banks and firms from

fully availing themselves of the chances created by the agreement. The nuclear deal, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was signed in 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries, namely the US, the UK, France, Russia, China, and Germany. It lifted nuclear-related sanctions on Iran, offering big opportunities for foreign businesses. The previous American administration had "verbally" encouraged the European institutions to restore their monetary ties with Iran, but Washington's far-reaching clout over the international economy has largely...*(More on P4)...(31)*

### Turkmenistan's Leader Set to Win Re-Election

ASHGABAT - The authoritarian president of Turkmenistan is set to sail to victory in Sunday's election where eight other candidates are on the ballot, but all praise his policies. President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov has been the overwhelmingly dominant figure in the former Soviet republic since late 2006, when

he assumed power after death of his eccentric predecessor, Saparmurat Niyazov. Berdimukhamedov has made small reforms of the single-party system imposed by Niyazov and some aspects of the latter's cult of personality, which included naming the months of the year after his family members...*(More on P4)...(32)*

### Uzbekistan's President Looks at Silk Joint Venture Project

TASHKENT - The President acquainted himself with the Huashen Silkworm Pro LLC joint venture project to be implemented in Angor District in cooperation with China. This new enterprise is to be put into operation this year, specializing in silkworm growing. More than 3 thousand 700 jobs will be created there. Surkhondaryo Region has extensive experi-

ence in the country's silk production sector. In the year 2016, 3 thousand 394 farms there produced 1 thousand 553 tonnes of cocoons. The Head of State looked at this project and said that the Surkhon valley's natural climate and convenient conditions are good enough for productive silkworms to grow. The new enterprise is of important significance to...*(More on P4)...(33)*