

# US Sees Assad Staying in Syria Until March 2017

WASHINGTON - The Obama administration's best-case scenario for political transition in Syria does not foresee Bashar Assad stepping down as the country's leader before March 2017, outlasting Barack Obama's presidency by at least two months, according to a document obtained by The Associated Press. An internal timeline prepared for U.S. officials dealing with the Syria crisis sets an unspecified date in March 2017 for Assad to "relinquish" his position as president and for his "inner circle"



to depart. That would be more than five years after Obama first called for Assad to leave. The timeline is based on a broad U.N.-endorsed plan that was initially laid out at an international conference

in Vienna in November. Syria, according to that strategy, would hold elections for a new president and parliament in August 2017 - some 19 months from now. In the interim, Syria would be run by a transitional governing body. Countless hurdles lie ahead for this latest blueprint for ending five years of conflict that has killed more than a quarter-million people, created the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II and allowed the Islamic State group to carve out a ...*(More on P4)...(20)*

## Senior UN Official to Visit Nepal Amid Escalating Political Tensions

KATHMANDU - Amid political tensions escalating in Nepal, UN Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman will be arriving in Kathmandu Thursday on a three-day visit, officials said. Tara Prasad Pokharel, spokesman of Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told Xinhua Wednesday that the high-level UN official is scheduled to hold meetings with Nepal's leaders. The visit comes at a time when ruling and the agitating Madhesi



parties are intensely engaged in negotiations to end the anti-constitution protests. The protests have been on for three and a half months in

the southern plains of the Himalayan country bordering India. Over 50 people including ten police personnel were killed during the anti-constitution protests launched by Madhesi parties in Nepal in recent months. Earlier, the United Nations had expressed concern over the political tensions in Nepal. In a press release in November last year, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on all sides to lift border obstruction without further delay. The UN chief had also underlined Nepal's rights of free transit as a landlocked nation as well as for humanitarian reasons.*(Xinhua)*

## Security Beefed Up in New Delhi Ahead of India's Republic Day

NEW DELHI - Indian authorities have sounded an alert in New Delhi and asked Delhi Police to remain vigilant to foil any possible terror attempt in the capital city, India's official broadcaster All India Radio (AIR) said Wednesday. The broadcaster quoting its sources said the directive based on intelligence inputs has come in the wake of attack at Pathankot airbase. Seven Indian troops and six gunmen were killed in the four-day stand-

off inside the Pathankot airbase, about 430 km north of Indian capital city of New Delhi. Authorities have beefed up security at domestic and international terminal of Indira Gandhi International airport. "Staff of several airlines have been sensitised about the alert, asking them to report any suspicious movement or object," the broadcaster said. "The paramilitary troops of Central In ...*(More on P4)...(21)*

## Erdogan Arch Foe, Police Chiefs on Trial over Turkey Graft Claims

ISTANBUL - A US-based Turkish preacher who has emerged as an arch-enemy of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan went on trial in absentia Wednesday along with several former police chiefs charged over the corruption allegations that hit the Turkish leader in 2013. Fethullah Gulen, a former ally of Erdogan turned chief foe, was not present at the start of the proceedings in Istanbul, with Washington failing to grant Turkish requests for his extradition from

his secluded compound in Pennsylvania. He is being tried along with dozens of former police officers, including the former head of Istanbul police Yakup-Saygili and the city's ex-deputy criminal police chief Kazim Aksoy, both of whom are said to have ordered the graft probe. The pair have been held in detention since September 2014 and were both in court at the start of the trial. A total of 69 people including Gulen are on ...*(More on P4)...(22)*

## Britain's 'Shoddy' Security Under Fire after Militant Slips Away to IS

LONDON - Six weeks after a British militant who is suspected of being an Islamic State executioner slipped out of the country, police sent a letter asking him to surrender his passport, a security bungle that has drawn criticism from opposition lawmakers. "The system has failed because it allowed him to abscond to Syria," Andy Burnham, the home affairs spokesman for the opposition Labour Party, said in parliament on Tuesday. "Even if the correct procedures were followed, I

have evidence that they were far too weak," he said. Britain's independent reviewer of terrorism laws said the main failing in the Dhar case was not asking him to hand



over his travel papers immediately. Burnham cited a police letter to Dhar dated Nov. 7, 2014 setting out bail conditions, includ ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

## S. Korea Says to Maintain Close Cooperation with U.S. after DPRK's Nuke Test

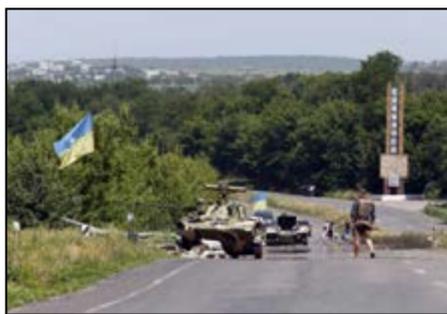
SEOUL - South Korea and the United States plan to maintain a close cooperation after the fourth nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Seoul's foreign ministry said Wednesday. South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se met at the ministry's headquarters in Seoul with U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Mark Lippert and Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, commander of the United States Forces Korea (USFK). During the meeting, they discussed how to counter what the DPRK claimed was its first hydrogen bomb test. Yun said during the meeting that the two allies will maintain a solid, strong joint defense readiness, while closely cooperating between foreign and defense authorities of the two countries. The foreign minister also noted that Seoul and Washington will closely cooperate ...*(More on P4)...(24)*

## Indonesia Expresses Deep Concern over DPRK's Nuclear Bomb Test

JAKARTA - Indonesian government expressed its deep concern on the testing of hydrogen bomb carried out by Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on Wednesday. "The test was against the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the spirit contained in the agreement and was a violation of DPRK's obligations on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions No. 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009) and 2087 (2013)," a statement released by Indonesian Foreign Affairs Ministry said. Indonesia called on all parties to pay respect to the UNSC resolutions that advise to restrain and ...*(More on P4)...(26)*

## Rebels in E. Ukraine Say Ready to Release Hostages

KIEV - Representatives of pro-independence insurgents in eastern Ukraine said on Wednesday they stand ready to free government soldiers from their captivity. Igor Plotnytsky, the self-styled leader of the self-proclaimed Lugansk republic, said he has ordered the release of all prisoners held on the territory controlled by Lugansk rebels by Jan. 7, when Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas. Plotnytsky has put no conditions for the release, saying that his decision to free the captives is just a goodwill gesture on the Christmas Eve. "We



are ready to resolve all the differences at the negotiating table, without bloodshed, without the tears of mothers and children," Plotnytsky wrote in a statement. Meanwhile, Daria Morozova, the self-styled

## China Welcomes Destruction of Syria's Chemical Weapons

BEIJING - China on Wednesday lauded the complete destruction of Syria's declared chemical weapons. The UN-backed Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) said on Monday that Syria's declared chemical arms arsenal has been one hundred percent destroyed. This is a successful attempt to solve Syria's crisis through peaceful means, and is the result of joint efforts by the Syrian government, OPCW, the United Nations, and the international community, foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said at a press briefing on Wednesday. China supports the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and has made a positive contribution to this end. It will continue to work for a political settlement of the Syria issue, Hua said. *(Xinhua)*

## Myanmar's Next Term of Parliament Sessions to Begin in February

YANGON - The next term of sessions of the House of Representatives (Lower House) and the House of Nationalities (Upper House) of the parliament, produced through Nov. 8 general election 2015, will begin in Nay Pyi Taw on Feb. 1, parliament sources said Wednesday. The current term of the parliament, which was produced through the 2010 general election and ran from 2011, will

expire on Jan. 30, 2016. Current speaker of the House of Representatives U Shwe Mann has called for doing preparatory work to transfer parliamentary duties to the freshers. Myanmar held a general election to elect representatives on Nov. 8, 2015. In accordance with the election result, the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won the ...*(More on P4)...(27)*

## UN to Reduce Peacekeeper Number in DR Congo

KINSHASA - UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in a report released Tuesday, proposed reduction of the number of peacekeepers deployed under the UN Mission for Stabilization of Congo (MONUSCO). The reduction of about 1,700 military personnel, the second in the last two years, will be possible without com-

### Neighbor News

#### Xi Warns Officials Against Abuse of Power

CHONGQING - Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged officials to work in earnest, have courage to tell the truth and never abuse power in exchange for personal gains. Xi made the remarks during his first inspection tour of 2016 in southwest China's Chongqing municipality from Monday to Wednesday. Leading cadres at all levels constitute the backbone of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) governance force and should take the lead in implementing the "three stricts and three earnestness" requirement, the President said. The "three stricts and three earnestness" is a series of requirements for officials to improve their lifestyles and work, urging them to be strict

in morals, use of power and self-discipline, as well as honest in their work and behavior. "Ideals and belief should not be regarded as slogans that officials just pay lip service to... Instead, they should be converted into strength that encourages officials to take action," Xi said. Rigid implementation of discipline and rules not only requires a set of thorough, effective regulations, but also a process of obeying them hundred percent, he said. The right exercise of power can be achieved through acting by law, Xi said, urging officials to always bear in mind the principle of acting in accordance with the law and never abuse power in exchange for personal gains. *(Xinhua)*

#### Iran President Urges Probe into Saudi Missions Attack

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has called for an urgent investigation into the recent assaults on Saudi Arabia's diplomatic missions, saying the perpetrators must be "brought to justice." Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic relations with Iran on Sunday following demonstrations held in front of the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in the northeastern city of Mashhad by angry protesters cursing the killing of the top Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr. Some people mounted the walls of the consulate in Mashhad while incendiary devices were hurled at the embassy in Tehran. Some 50 people were detained over the transgression. In a letter to Iran's Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amol-Larijani on Wednesday, President Rouhani denounced the attacks as a breach of the Islamic Republic's security. He said that the Judiciary must prosecute those involved in this "evidenced offense" in a bid to bring a halt to such attempts against the standing of the Islamic Republic's establishment. *(PressTV)*

#### Pakistan Asks Bangladeshi Diplomat to Leave Country

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan has ordered a senior Bangladeshi diplomat to leave the country in what appears to be a tit-for-tat move nearly two weeks after Bangladesh had asked Pakistan to withdraw a diplomat. Sources said Wednesday that Pakistan had asked Bangladesh to recall Moushumi Rahman, the counselor and head of chancery at the Bangladesh mission in Islamabad. Bangladesh had earlier asked Pakistan to withdraw its diplomat Farina Arshad on Dec. 23 after the Bangladeshi authorities accused her of terror financing. Arshad was the second secretary at the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka. Pakistan had rejected the allegation and claimed harassment of its diplomat. Sources said the Pakistan Foreign Office summoned Bangladesh High Commissioner to Pakistan Suhrab Hossain on Tuesday and informed him of the decision. Media in Bangladesh reported that Pakistan had not cited any reason for the expulsion. Relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh have been tense for some time over the execution of leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami for the alleged war crimes during the country's war of independence in 1971. *(Xinhua)*

#### Russia, Allies to Start New Military Exercises in Tajikistan

MOSCOW - Russia and other allies will hold a military intelligence exercise, the first of its kind, in Tajikistan in April. A source in Tajikistan's security services told the newspaper Asia Plus that the Collective Security Treaty Organization will hold the exercise in a military training area in the Khatlon province, which borders Afghanistan. About 800 soldiers from CSTO member states Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan will take part. The source told Asia Plus that it's the first time the CSTO has held an exercise specifically devoted to intelligence. Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan has become Russia's prime security concern in Central Asia as the Taliban has become more and more active in neighboring northern Afghanistan. Russia is also looking at bilateral Russia-Tajikistan military action in case of a deteriorating security situation in Tajikistan, a senior Russian foreign ministry's department in charge of ex-Soviet states, in an interview Sunday with the news agency Interfax. He said the issue was discussed at a recent meeting of the CSTO in Moscow. *(Agencies)*