

# No Serious Opposition to Trump's Cabinet Picks on Day One of Hearings

WASHINGTON - The U.S. congress on Tuesday held a hearing to examine the nominations of Jeff Sessions to be attorney general and John Kelly to be secretary of homeland security. Despite the hearing for Sessions' nomination will proceed Wednesday, people at the hearings say both men are likely to clinch their respective cabinet posts.

The hearing for Sessions, a senator representing Alabama, ran for more than 10 hours during which Sessions was questioned on a wide array of issues from his controversial past to future positions on a host of hot legal debates. Ses-



sions said his priorities as the attorney general will be improving relations between police and the communities they serve, especially in minority neighborhoods. He also listed cracking down on terror, stopping the inflow of drugs from the southern border, protecting the U.S. treasury from fraud, waste and abuse as important tasks. Sessions, a conservative, spoke in favor of the gun rights, saying "I do believe the Second Amendment is a personal right, a historical right that the Constitution protects." He also avoided promising anything concrete on global warming. (Xinhua)

## Trump Slams Russia Leaks Ahead of News Conference

NEW YORK - US President-elect Donald Trump on Wednesday furiously denied explosive claims that Russian intelligence has gathered compromising personal and professional information on him, hours before he faces the media for the first time since his election win. Intelligence chiefs last week presented America's incoming 45th president, as well as current President Barack Obama, with a two-page synopsis on the potentially embarrassing but unsubstantiated allegations, according to CNN and The New York Times, who cited multiple

unnamed US officials with knowledge of the meeting. The Kremlin has dismissed the dossier - drawn up by a former British intelligence agent hired to do "opposition research" on Trump during the presidential campaign and published by US media outlet BuzzFeed - as a "total fake" aimed at damaging bilateral ties. Trump called it more evidence of a political witch hunt to delegitimize his November victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton, with nine days to go before the 70-year-old billionaire takes office. (AFP)

## Turkish Parliament Begins Debating Constitutional Change

ANKARA - The Turkish Grand National Assembly began debating constitutional change which would grant wide-ranging powers to the president, state-run Anadolu Agency reported. As many as 338 of the assembly's 550 lawmakers voted in favor of the motion to launch the debate on 18 constitutional articles, which was drafted by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The opening debate saw

lawmakers discuss the proposal as a whole as well as the separate articles. A second session will address proposed amendments to the bill. During the discussions, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said that "the regulations outlined in the offer would solve the problems that Turkey will face in the future." The AKP has been seeking to replace the current par-



liamentary system with a presidential one, saying there are flaws in the system that are holding back Turkey's development.

The government plans to put the amendments to a public referendum after the parliament's approval. (Xinhua)

## New UN Chief Demands Strategy Changes to Prevent War

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday demanded the UN and member states to make corresponding changes to their strategy and operations to prevent war and sustain peace. In his first address to the Security Council after taking office, Guterres highlighted the need to rebalance the approach to world peace and security by avoiding conflict beforehand instead of responding to conflict. Guterres told the 15-nation council that he has set in

motion reforms within the UN system for early detection and action to prevent conflict worldwide. He also asked for reform of the UN development system to support the efforts to build and sustain peace from prevention, conflict resolution and peacekeeping to peacebuilding and long-term development. The Security Council held an open debate on Tuesday morning to discuss visions on conflict prevention and sustaining peace when conflicts in South ...*(More on P4)...(22)*

## German Ministers Agree on Stricter Security Measures Against Terrorism

BERLIN - German ministers of interior and justice agreed Tuesday on more rigorous actions against potential terrorists in the country. The package of measures could be launched within weeks, according to the ministers, with the Justice Minister Heiko Maas saying "the armed state will be the best answer to the act and hatred of terrorists." The asylum seekers who pose dangers to Germany's interior security would face easier and longer detention before

pending deportation. Electronic tracking ankle bracelets for criminals would also be introduced, according to the package. The Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said that these measures would increase the security of citizens "without disproportionate restrictions on freedom." In the wake of Berlin's Christmas market attack last year, which claimed



12 lives, de Maiziere from the CDU party proposed to centralize the country's domestic se-

curity services. But the SPD party, which Maas is affiliated to, disagreed. (Xinhua)

## Kerry Warns Against Scraping Iran Nuclear Deal

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Tuesday warned the incoming administration against upending the Iran nuclear deal, saying that such move could cause conflict and damage U.S. credibility. Speaking at an event at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, Kerry said he is "absolutely confident" that Tehran's route to building a nuclear weapon has been blocked after the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal reached in 2015. "Now, if that were just ar-



bitrarily undone, we're going back to a place of conflict almost immediately," Kerry warned. "We'll also reduce our credibility in the world, because I suspect the

Russians and the Chinese and the French and the Germans and the British will just continue the deal," he said. "Then you're right back where ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

## Temperature Rise Could Damage Insects' Reproduction Ability: Study

LONDON - Global warming is bad news for insects as rising temperature could negatively affect their ability to reproduce, according to a study released Tuesday by the University of Sheffield. The conclusion of the study, led by researchers from the University of Sheffield, was based on the analysis of how fruit flies behave in the context of rising temperature. The team said that the findings will probably be the same for other insects. The team found that if juvenile insects are exposed to mild heat, their chances of producing offspring in the adult stage will be negatively affected. "The results show that even small increases in temperature may still cause (insect) populations to decline because - while these insects don't die because of the mild heat - they produce ...*(More on P4)...(24)*

## S. Korea Estimates DPRK's Nuke Warhead Holdings at 10

SEOUL - South Korea's defense white paper estimated the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) may hold 50 kg of plutonium, which can produce 10 nuclear warheads based on its technology. The DPRK's plutonium holdings increased by 10 kg in the past two years to 50 kg, Seoul's defense ministry said in its biennial defense white paper released on Wednesday. The white paper said Pyongyang secured the plutonium by reprocessing spent nuclear fuel rods several times and that its highly-enriched uranium (HEU) program has advanced to a significant level. The defense ministry first unveiled the white paper in 1967, and has since published the defense report every two years to explain security situations on the Korean Peninsula and its defense policy, according to the press release. Some of local media outlets speculated that the 10-kg increase in the DPRK-owned plutonium might have been exaggerated given that Pyongyang conducted its fourth and fifth nuclear tests in January and September. A nuclear test is known to cost the DPRK four kg of plutonium. Top DPRK leader Kim Jong Un said in his new year speech that his country entered a final stage in preparations to test-launch a long-range ballistic rocket. The January nuclear detonation was followed by the launch of a long-range rocket. (Xinhua)

## 1,000 People Forced to Flee Fighting in Iraq's Mosul Every Day: OCHA

GENEVA - After intense clashes in Mosul at the beginning of the year which forced 4,000 civilians to flee their homes in a single day, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said Tuesday that displacement from the northern Iraqi city now stands at an average of 1,000 people per day. "Newly displaced people are largely moving to the south and east, where camps run by government and humanitarian partners are taking in the new arrivals and providing humanitarian assistance," OCHA spokesman Jens Laerke said in a statement. "People ...*(More on P4)...(25)*

## EU Presidency Warns of Risk to Any Brexit Deal from European Parliament

VALLETTA - The prime minister of Malta, who will oversee the launch of Britain's negotiations to leave the EU, warned on Wednesday that the European Parliament could "scuttle" any Brexit deal and must be involved in talks. Joseph Muscat, whose government has the presidency of European Union ministerial councils until June, told a news conference he had rarely seen EU member states as united as they were in preparing to negotiate a deal he said must not leave Britain in a better position than it is in now as a member. Muscat, whose tiny country is a former British colony and traditional ally of London in Brussels, said he could not

see that unity among the other 27 breaking down once British Prime Minister Theresa May launches negotiations by March. But he warned that the parliament, whose members will be campaigning for re-election in mid-2019 by the time they are asked to ratify whatever agreement is struck among the member states, posed a risk to completion of the deal. "I do see it as a real concern that a parliament on the eve of a European Parliament election might be in a mood to scuttle the whole deal as good as that deal might be. So I would look forward to the European Parliament to be onboard and kept privy to some of the negotiations." (Reuters)

## Neighbor News

### Chinese Premier Announces Humanitarian Aid for Iraq

BEIJING - Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Tuesday sent a letter to Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, announcing an offer of 70 million yuan (about 10.1 million U.S. dollars) in humanitarian aid to Iraq. In the letter, Li said China and Iraq enjoy a traditional friendship, and that the Chinese government highly values the development of China-Iraq relations. The Chinese government is willing to work together with the Iraqi govern-

ment to continuously lift the strategic partnership between China and Iraq to a higher level, Li added. In order to help relieve the Iraqi people's current humanitarian difficulties, the Chinese government has decided to provide the Iraqi government with 70 million yuan in humanitarian aid, Li said. The Chinese government hopes that Iraq will achieve security and stability at an early date, said the Chinese premier. (Xinhua)

### Sharif Speaks out Strongly Against Religious Persecution

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday said the day is not far when Pakistan will be recognised as a "minorities-friendly country" and that his government is taking steps to improve the lives of under-represented religious groups. The premier said his government, through its actions, promotes the belief that 'to each his own faith', adding that humanity is what should bind the nation together. He was speaking at a ceremony at the Katas Raj temples complex in Chakwal. He further said followers of all religions have equal rights in Pakistan, noting that they had worked hand-in-hand to defend

the country and contribute to its peace and prosperity. The PM said he has advised his officials to spare no effort in hosting non-Muslim pilgrims and ensuring the protection and expansion of their places of worship. He also said he would lend his full support for the construction of the Baba Guru Nanak and Gandhara universities. The PM observed that Islam and all other religions preach peace, and those preaching otherwise were not doing a service to their religion, Radio Pakistan reported. PM Sharif made frequent references to Islamic history to stress that it was part of the Islamic faith to treat minorities equally. (Monitoring Desk)

### JCPOA Parties Recognizes US Assurance over Lifting of Iran Sanctions

TEHRAN - The Iran-P5+1 Joint Commission said the body "recognized the United States' assurance that extension of the Iran Sanctions Act does not affect in any way the sanctions lifting Iran receives under the deal or the ability of companies to do business in Iran consistent with the JCPOA." In a Tuesday press release that was issued following its sixth meeting in Vienna, Austria, the Joint Commission - tasked with monitoring the implementation of the 2015 nuclear deal - said "all sides reaffirmed their strong commitment to continued full and effective implementation of the JCPOA," using an acronym for the nuclear accord, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Press TV reported. The commission

emphasized the need for all relevant parties to honor their obligations under the accord, particularly those related to the lifting of anti-Iran sanctions. "The Joint Commission underscored the sanctions lifting commitments contained in the JCPOA, in particular as they relate to the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA)," read the statement, referring to the US sanctions law which has been in place against the Islamic Republic since 1996. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Abbas Araqchi on Tuesday said Iran explained Washington's violations of JCPOA to the commission. "Iran explained its concern on the extension of ...*(More on P4)...(26)*

### Turkmenistan and the Neutrality Trap

ASHGABAT - The Turkmen government has been proudly proclaiming its UN-recognized status as a neutral country for more than 20 years now. Ashgabat's policy of "positive neutrality" is, since September 2016, even part of the country's constitution. But the policy is not always positive for Turkmenistan, and the current gas spat with neighbor Iran might be a case in point. Turkmenistan has either greatly reduced or suspended entirely - depending on which country you believe - supplies of gas to Iran. Each side has its own version of the problem. I'll mention their claims later; that is not so much the issue in this article. The audience they are trying to reach to tell their

respective sides of the story, and in Turkmenistan's case those being kept in the dark, is the focus of this work. First, some necessary background. Turkmenistan's first post-independence president, Saparmurat Niyazov, was the architect of the policy of neutrality in the early 1990s. The policy was never articulated very clearly, and to this day it remains vague; but essentially it meant Turkmenistan would not take sides in anyone else's conflicts; nor would it join any alliances, excepting multinational economic organizations, but would act as a mediator or at least offer its territory as a neutral venue for feuding parties to meet and try to resolve their problems. (AP)