

Obama's Final State of the Union Speech: Much Talk, few Proposals

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Barack Obama on Tuesday night made his final State of the Union speech predominated by political talk instead of specific proposals as the United States enters an election year. "For my final address to this chamber, I don't want to talk just about the next year. I want to focus on the next five years, ten years, and beyond," said Obama, mindful of the fact that the remaining time of his presidency is too limited for him to achieve more specific goals in the year ahead. In broad terms, Obama put forward "four



big questions" that he thinks the United States has to answer in the future.

First, Obama said the United States has to give every citizen "a fair shot at opportunity and security in this new economy." "What is true -- and the reason that

a lot of Americans feel anxious -- is that the economy has been changing in pro-

found ways," said Obama, after mentioning several economic achievements in his tenure, including reduced unemployment and a narrowed deficit. To help Americans prepare for the new economy, he called for a continued reform of the U.S. education and training system, strengthening social security and medicare, as well as adjusting the role of government to make sure the system is not rigged in favor of the wealthiest and biggest corporations. Second, Obama said the United States has to reignite the spirit of innovation to meet urgent challenges. (Xinhua)

Security Forces Regain New Ground from IS in Iraq's Ramadi

BAGHDAD - Iraqi security forces on Wednesday continued fighting Islamic State (IS), clearing new areas in the city of Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's western province of Anbar, while 11 terrorists were killed in an airstrike by Iraqi aircraft on IS meeting near the border with Syria, security sources said. Security forces and allied Sunni tribal fighters covered by Iraqi and U.S.-led coalition aircraft in the early morning made significant advance in Soufiah district in the eastern

part of Ramadi, some 110 km west of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, and managed to take control of the district after heavy clashes with IS militants, a provincial security source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity. The liberation of Soufiah came after a two-day cease-fire in the district which aimed at giving an opportunity for families to leave their homes, as security forces on Monday declared that civilians had 48 hours to leave raising white flags and ... (More on P4)...(20)

Denmark Extends Border Controls on German-Danish Border

COPENHAGEN - The Danish government on Wednesday extended its temporary border controls on the German-Danish border for 20 days as the country is struggling to contain the influx of refugees. The border controls, introduced on January 4 shortly after neighboring Sweden put in place an ID checks upon passengers from Denmark, will be extended until February 3, according to a statement by the Ministry of Integration and Housing. The Danish



government said the provisional border controls were ushered in out of concerns of significant

accumulation of illegal residents in the metropolitan area. In a letter to the European Commis-

sion, Integration Minister Inger Stoejberg said Denmark faces a serious ... (More on P4)...(21)

Turkish Army Hits PKK Targets in Northern Iraq

ANKARA - Turkish warplanes launched airstrikes against the outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) militant targets in northern Iraq overnight, local NTV broadcaster reported on Wednesday. Turkish F-16 jets reportedly hit targets in the Metina, Gare, Zap and Avasin, Baysan areas of northern Iraq, targeting storage units and shelters for the militants. The group has hideouts in Qandil Mountains of the northern Iraq where

thousands of PKK militants are taking shelter. Tensions between Turkish security forces and the PKK are increasing after an Islamic State (IS) suicide bombing on July 20 killed 32 people and injured 104 others in the town of Suruc in the Saniurfa province bordering Syria. Turkey has re-lapsed into clashes since the collapse of a cease-fire with the PKK in July. The PKK has been carrying attacks against the Turkish security forces almost every day since



then. The assaults triggered military operations by the Turkish Armed Forces against the group after two years of de facto truce between the PKK

and the government. Renewed conflicts led to the suspension of the peace process launched in 2012 between the ... (More on P4)...(22)

EU Provides Euro 2 Mln for Bhutanese Refugees Based in Nepal

KATHMANDU - The European Union (EU) has provided 2 million euros for the protection and sustainable solutions for the refugees from Bhutan sheltered in eastern part of Nepal, the European Union Delegation to Kathmandu said on Wednesday. The funds will be used by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) over the next three years to resettle Bhutanese refugees to third countries and to care for those who opt to remain in Nepal. "The

latter support will include physical and legal protection as well as services including shelter, education, health, sanitation, access to sustainable energy and support in addressing psychosocial and other specific needs," read a press statement issued by the European Union Delegation to Kathmandu. Nepal is currently home for over 17,000 Bhutanese refugees in two camps in eastern Jhapa District. The European ... (More on P4)...(23)

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Azerbaijani Humanitarian Aid Reaches Tajikistan

BAKU - Azerbaijan's Ministry of Emergency Situations said on Wednesday that 11 trucks carrying humanitarian aid have arrived in Tajikistan. Azerbaijani Emergency Situations Ministry sent a humanitarian aid to Tajikistan in accordance with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's instructions. The aid was sent in connection with a strong earthquake that hit Gorno-Badakhshan

Autonomous Province of Tajikistan on December 7, 2015. The humanitarian aid valued at 800 000 manats includes 9.5 tons of sugar, 9.5 tons of granulated sugar, 15 tons of rice, 3 tons of tea, 16 tons of vegetable oil, 19 tons of flour, 19 tons of spaghetti, more than 18 tons of vermicelli, 2000 sets of bed linen, 50 generators, 110 tents, 6,000 square meters of iron slate and 30 cubic meters of boards. (APA)

15 Killed as Blast Targets Anti-Polio Drive in SW Pakistan

ISLAMABAD - At least 14 security personnel and one civilian were killed and 25 others injured when a blast targeted an anti-polio drive in Quetta city of Pakistan's southwest Balochistan province on Wednesday. Home Minister of Balochistan Sarfraz Bugti confirmed that the blast killed 13 policemen and a paramilitary Frontier Corps man. Local Urdu TV channel Express reported that a civilian is also among the killed. Talking to media, Deputy Inspector General Police of Balochistan Syed Imtiaz Shah said the blast was of a suicide nature and an estimated 7 to 8 kg of explosives were used in it. He said

the attack happened near a polio office and the bomber targeted the security personnel who were providing security to the staff in a three-day anti-polio campaign launched in the Balochistan province on Monday. A total of 2.4 million children including over 55,000 children of Afghan refugees under the age of five had to be immunized under the campaign, he added. Shah said the campaign in Quetta has been suspended following the blast. The injured people, including nine policemen, have been shifted to hospital where at least seven of them are in critical condition, he added. (Xinhua)

Iran Releases U.S. Sailors Held over Entering Territorial Waters

TEHRAN - Iranian authorities on Wednesday released 10 U.S. sailors held a day earlier over violating the country's waters, Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said. Technical investigations proved that the entrance of the two U.S. navy boats into Iran's waters was unintentional, the IRGC said in a statement on its website. The sailors were set free and were sent to the international waters in the Persian Gulf, the statement read. They vowed not to repeat the mistake of entering Iran's territorial waters, it added.

Earlier in the day, the IRGC said that two U.S. navy boats with 10 crew members on board -- nine men and one woman -- illegally entered Iran's territorial waters on Tuesday at 16:30 local time (13:00 GMT). The IRGC naval forces sent them a warning message and then they were detained and sent to Iran's Farsi Island. Earlier on Wednesday, navy commander of IRGC Ali Fadavi said that the 10 U.S. sailors would be "probably" released since their entry to Iran's waters was due to technical problems in their naval system. (Xinhua)

EU Opens Case Against Poland over New Media, Court Laws

BRUSSELS - The European Union on Wednesday escalated its standoff with Poland over the rule of law under the new government, deciding to open a case over legislation on the constitutional court and media that has been criticized as running counter to the bloc's fundamental principles. EU Commissioner Frans Timmermans said his executive will carry out a preliminary assessment -- the first step in a drawn-out procedure that could ultimately lead to suspending Polish voting rights in the 28-nation bloc. Timmermans said he wanted specific explanations about changes in procedures at the constitutional tribunal "which could potentially limit the leeway for action in the court and increase political influence on the workings of the tribunals." The debate is seen in Poland as undue meddling in national affairs and in Brussels as a potential danger that democratic standards ... (More on P4)...(24)

Hamas Warns Israel of Escalation in Gaza over Air Strikes

GAZA - Islamic Hamas movement on Wednesday warned Israel of "military escalation" on the Gaza Strip following two earlier Israeli strikes on the enclave that killed one militant and wounded four others. Sami Abu Zuhri, Hamas spokesman in Gaza, said in an emailed press statement that "the Israeli occupation is fully responsible for the recent aggression on the Gaza Strip that killed one and wounded four others." "Hamas movement warns the Israeli occupation of escalating this aggression," said Abu Zuhri, that his movement reached a truce with Israel in 2014,



brokered by Egypt and ended 50 days of fighting during the summer. Earlier on Wednesday, Ashraf al-Qedra, spokesman of the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza told reporters that Musa Zuhri, 23 years old, was killed and five others injured in an Israeli airstrike on northern

Gaza Strip. According to Israel's Public Radio, the Israeli army targeted a group of Palestinian militants were planting a roadside bomb close to the fence of the border between northwest Gaza Strip and Israel. Security officials in Gaza said the militant who ... (More on P4)...(25)

China Ready to Strengthen Security Cooperation with Arab Countries

BEIJING - China is ready to strengthen anti-terrorism exchanges and cooperation with Arab countries to establish a long-term security cooperation mechanism, according to the China's Arab Policy Paper issued on Wednesday. "We support the efforts of Arab States in countering terrorism and support their counter-terrorism capacity building," the paper said. In addition to establishing long-term security cooperation mechanism, the paper said China is ready to strengthen policy dialogue and intelligence information exchange, and carry out technical cooperation and personnel training to jointly address the threat of international and regional terrorism. The Arab Policy Paper, the first of its kind issued by the Chinese government, illustrated China's position that counter-terrorism needs comprehensive measures to address both the symptoms and root causes, and counter-terrorism operations should comply with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international norms, and respect sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries. In addition to the security field, the paper elaborated China's policies to strengthen China-Arab Cooperation in the political field, trade and investment, social development, culture and people-to-people exchanges. (Xinhua)

Syrian Troops Seizemore Territory from Rebels in Northwest

BEIRUT - Syrian troops and allied militiamen on Wednesday expanded their area of control around a major insurgent stronghold in the northwestern province of Latakia, a day after seizing a key rebel-held town in the region, the government and opposition activists

said. The insurgents in the opposition-held area known as Jabal al-Akrad were collapsing after the key town of Salma fell to government loyalists late Tuesday. Salma's fall marked one of the most significant military achievements by the Syrian ... (More on P4)...(26)

UN Seeks Global Support as 4.9 Mln Somali People Need Humanitarian Aid

MOGADISHU - The UN agencies working in Somalia said they will launch an appeal next week, seeking 885 million U.S. dollars to provide humanitarian aid in the Horn of Africa nation in 2016. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said About 4.9 million people are in need of humanitar-

ian assistance in Somalia and that the funds will enable the agencies to reach some 3.5 million people this year. "This includes 1 million people who face food insecurity, while 3.9 million remain highly vulnerable to shocks," the UN said ahead of next Tuesday's launch of the 2016 Humanitarian Response ... (More on P4)...(27)

US Military Intervention in Asia-Pacific only to Escalate Regional Tensions: China

BEIJING - The legalization of a military deal signed by Manila and Washington in 2014, a move seen as to make the Philippines a launching pad for U.S. military intervention in the Asia-Pacific, will only escalate tensions and undermine peace and stability in the region. The deal will allow U.S. troops to build facilities to store equipment for maritime security and humanitarian and disaster response operations, as well as provide broad access to Philippine military bases. It seems very peculiar that the Philippines, which stopped hosting two of the largest overseas U.S. military bases in the early 1990s, invit-

ed the U.S. troops home again, despite strong domestic criticism, at a time when the situation in the South China Sea has stabilized. It is easy to deduce that Manila, which has long been involved in a dispute with Beijing over claims on some South China Sea islands, appears to be now turning to Uncle Sam to back its ambition to counter China. It is contradictory that the United States, which has repeatedly called for peacefully solving the South China Sea issue, increased its military presence in the region that only will aggravate regional tensions and could push the situation to the brink of war. (Xinhua)