

# Syrian Opposition Groups will Lose Out By Missing Talks: Russia

MOSCOW - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday Syrian opposition representatives would risk losing influence in peace efforts if they do not attend planned talks in Moscow. The refusal of prominent opposition figures to attend the Jan. 26-29 meeting, intended to bring together representatives of President Bashar al-Assad and some Syrian opposition groups, has dealt a blow to Russian efforts to find a solution to the Syrian

conflict. "Those who decide not to take part in this event, they will lose in terms of their positions in the peace talks process as a whole," Lavrov told a news conference. Moscow, one of Assad's top allies, says it still hopes the Western-backed National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces will be represented at the talks. Some 200,000 people have been killed in the conflict in Syria, which started with street protests against

Assad in March, 2011, and then descended into a civil war in which radical Islamist groups have gained the upper hand. In rejecting the invitation to Moscow, the Western-backed opposition Syrian National Coalition said on Jan. 7 it would sit down to talks only if they would lead to Assad giving up power. Moscow says the emphasis should be on fighting Islamist militants and that Assad's exit should not be a precondition to peace talks. (Reuters)



## States, Donors Must Do More to Tackle Rising Disaster Risk: U.N

BARCELONA - As economic losses from disasters rise around the world, more effort is needed to reduce the risks from extreme weather and earthquakes in every area, from infrastructure to health, the United Nations disaster prevention chief said. Margareta Wahlström, head of the U.N. Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), said in an interview that a new global plan to protect people and assets from disasters, due to be approved in March, aims to ensure "a much stronger link than we have had in the past between development and disaster risk." "There is progress, but it is not wide and speedy enough to re-

ally tackle the increasing disaster losses in many parts of the world," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation from Geneva, where negotiations on the agreement are taking place this week. Governments are mulling ways to measure improvements, including global targets for lowering deaths and economic losses from disasters, and how well key infrastructure like schools and hospitals is protected. The world's existing 10-year disaster risk reduction plan, launched after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, did not include numerical indicators of progress. But Wahlström said it had played a major role in pushing governments to set up insti-

tutions, laws and policies for dealing with disasters, and strengthening early warning systems. "There is such an awareness now about how quickly risk is increasing," she said. But many countries still feel "they are moving very slowly" to manage it, she added. One problem has been a shortage of funding to plan and implement disaster risk reduction efforts, whether during post-crisis reconstruction or in long-term development projects. Most of what has been achieved has come from national budgets, Wahlström noted. According to a 2013 report from the London-based Overseas Development Institute, the

international community spent \$13.5 billion on reducing the risk of damage from disasters in the past two decades - just 40 cents for every \$100 of aid. Wahlström said the new plan - due to be agreed at a conference in Sendai, Japan, in two months' time - was unlikely to contain a goal for the percentage of aid that should be spent on disaster risk reduction. Nor did she expect "huge new funding streams globally." But she hoped the Sendai framework, which will not be legally binding, would lead to greater commitment among donor governments to manage and reduce the risk of disasters to all their development investments. (Reuters)

## Germany to Change ID Law to Combat Terrorism

BERLIN - The German cabinet agreed Wednesday to make necessary changes to Germany's identity card law to combat international terrorism. The new law is aimed at stopping people from leaving Germany to fight for terror groups in conflict regions. Potential extremists affected by the law would have their ID card confiscated and replaced with a new one

that does not allow them to travel outside Germany. German authorities are already allowed to confiscate the passports of people suspected of having terrorist connections. But many German citizens who have gone to fight in conflict zones have reportedly traveled via Turkey using only their national ID card to cross borders. German officials esti-

mated that more than 500 Germans had made their way to Syria and Iraq since 2012 to fight alongside terror groups, including the Islamic State, raising fears of attacks on home soil when they return. "At least 180 people have returned to Germany from Syria and Iraq," Hans-Georg Maassen, head of German Federal Office for Protection of the Constitution,

told German media on Sunday. "A large part of them may have been radicalized and brutalized." The chief of Germany's domestic intelligence agency warned of the continuing risk of terror attacks in Germany and called for closer cooperation among intelligence services in order to achieve an effective monitoring of those returnees. (Xinhua)

## S.Korea Urges DPRK Again to Respond to Dialogue Offer

SEOUL - South Korea on Wednesday urged the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) once again to respond to its dialogue offer, saying the government will deliver voices of concern to civic groups about their plans to scatter anti-DPRK leaflets. The South Korean military said it will sternly retaliate against any DPRK

provocations though the provocations are caused by the leaflet dispersion. Unification Ministry spokesman Lim Byeong-cheol told a press briefing that the ministry has no plan to send an additional proposal to the DPRK for inter-Korean talks and is to wait for response from the DPRK. The ministry sent a dialogue overture to Pyong-

yang on Dec. 29 and said Seoul is open to all forms of dialogue to discuss all issues of mutual concern. Lim urged Pyongyang once again to rapidly respond to Seoul's proposal for holding inter-Korean talks in January. Top DPRK leader Kim Jong Un said in his New Year's speech on Jan. 1 that there is no reason not to hold summit with

South Korean President Park Geun-hye if a right atmosphere is formed. In her New Year's press conference, Park said in response that she can hold summit with Kim if it promotes inter-Korean relations, but she noted that the DPRK should show sincerity toward resolving issues through dialogue. South Korea has called

## Italian President Quits Before End of Second Tenure

ROME - Italian President Giorgio Napolitano resigned on Wednesday after almost nine years at the helm of the country and before the natural end of his second tenure. A letter of resignation signed by the 89-year-old president was taken by his secretary general to the heads of the two chambers of parliament and Prime Minister Matteo Renzi for a formal view. Senate speaker Pietro Grasso, the second executive of state, will take the temporary presidency. Within 15 days, Laura Boldrini, the head of the Chamber of Deputies, or lower chamber, will have to convene the parliament which will vote for a new president.

Napolitano, who will serve as a senator for life after his resignation, had made it clear several times that he would not complete his second seven-year term, explaining that he could not underestimate the signs of fatigue of his age. On Dec. 31, 2014, he confirmed his will in a year-end address to the nation, and reiterated on Tuesday that he was looking forward to stepping down. Napolitano, first elected in May 2006, reluctantly agreed to be reappointed for an unprecedented second term in April 2013 to break a two-month long political stalemate in parliament brought about by inconclusive elections. (Xinhua)

## Japan's Cabinet Ok Record \$814 Bln Budget

TOKYO - Japan's Cabinet approved a record 96.34 trillion yen (about 814 billion U.S. dollars) government budget for fiscal 2015 beginning in April to accommodate rising spending for social security and defense, local media reported Wednesday. The budget draft, the third since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took power, marks a rise from this fiscal year's initial 95.88 trillion yen, said Kyodo News Agency. Rising revenues following the sales tax increase last April enabled Abe to raise spending without increasing the proportion financed by new government bonds, though the total national debt is still

about twice the annual gross domestic product, the highest level in major industrialized countries. According to the budget draft, Japan's policy spending will reach a record-high 72.89 trillion yen, up 2.79 trillion yen from the fiscal 2014 original budget, suggesting Abe's administration has failed to streamline expenditures, mainly those for social security programs. As Japan's population ages quickly, social security spending, including swelling on pensions and medical costs, will rise 3.3 percent from the previous year to a record 31.53 trillion yen in fiscal 2015. (Xinhua)

## US Hopes Russian Effort on Syria Will Succeed: Kerry

GENEVA - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry voiced support Wednesday for a Russian effort to bring Syria's warring factions together for talks to end the four-year conflict. Meeting in Geneva with the UN and Arab League envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, Kerry said he hoped the Russian initiative "could be helpful." Russia is trying to bring members of Syrian President Bashar Assad's government and opposition figures together in Moscow to discuss a possible political solution to stop the war that has killed thousands and displaced nearly three-quarters of the country's population. Kerry also said he wished de Mistura well in his bid to organize local ceasefires in embattled Syrian towns, starting with Aleppo. He stressed that despite the press of world events, the situation in Syria remains on the "front burner" for the U.S. He added that it was time

for the Syrian government to put the interests of its people ahead of its survival and end what he termed a "continued catastrophe." "It is time for President Assad, the Assad regime to put their people first and to think about the consequences of their actions which are attracting more and more terrorists to Syria, basically because of their efforts to remove Assad," Kerry said. Although de Mistura's efforts for an Aleppo ceasefire have not yet succeeded, de Mistura said he would not give up. "I will continue, I can tell you, pushing for Aleppo, because Aleppo has become an iconic example of where things could start sending the best signal, in other words that bombing, shelling, barrel-bombing, mortar-shelling would stop, and bring some humanitarian aid, which means giving some hope to the Syrian people," he said. (AP)

## Ukraine Summit Still Possible, But Unclear When: Merkel



BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel says she isn't giving up hope of organizing a summit with the Russian and Ukrainian leaders, but she can't say how long that might take after tentative plans for a meeting this week were scrapped. Foreign ministers from Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine failed on Monday to achieve enough progress for a

proposed summit of the country's leaders in Kazakhstan to go ahead. Merkel said Wednesday that the idea of a summit remains on the table but "there must be enough hope of real results." She said: "We're not there yet but we are working on it with all our energy. However, I don't know how long that could take ... it depends on all parties involved." (AP)

## Fighting Terrorism Needs Good Policies: Assad

DAMASCUS - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said the killing of civilians in Paris attacks is a terrorist act, the state news agency SANA said Wednesday. "When you talk about terrorism, about killing civilians, and regardless of the political position, agreement or disagreement with the people who have been killed, this is a case of terrorism; and we are against killing innocent people anywhere in the world. This is our principle," Assad responded to the recent attacks in France, during an interview with Czech paper Literarni Noviny. France was plunged into a spree of terrorist attacks in Paris in the past days with 17 people killed in separate attacks. In a job

at the Western policies in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, Assad said "They (the Western countries) didn't listen to us. Western politicians were short-sighted and narrow-minded," he remarked. "What happened in France recently proved that what we said was true. At the same time, this incident brought European policies to account, because they are responsible for what happened in our region, for what happened in France, and maybe what happened earlier in other European countries." As for the best way to fight terrorism, Assad said "We need to fight terrorists because they are killing innocent people, and we have to defend these people. (Xinhua)

## Nieghbor News

### Iran Says Possible Sanctions to Jeopardize Ongoing Nuclear Talks

TEHRAN - Any possible sanctions against Iran will jeopardize ongoing nuclear talks between the Islamic republic and the world powers, Iranian spokeswoman Marziyeh Afkham said here on Wednesday. "Any new sanctions means to stop the ongoing talks and this is very obvious," Afkham told reporters in her weekly press briefing. "In our eyes, using the outdated tool of sanction will not be helpful," she said, adding that some of the U.S. officials should cease to think that the sanctions have forced Iran to the negotiation table. The Iranians have not quit their economic and development programs in spite of the western sanctions, and

Iran's new annual budget has less reliance on oil revenues, she said. As a counter-measure vis-a-vis the western sanctions against Iran's energy sector and the falling trend of oil prices in the market, Iran has managed to reduce its dependence on oil revenues and only one third of the government's income is expected to come from oil sales in the budget for the next Iranian year, starting on March 21, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday. Although 33 percent of the government's revenues are expected to be met via oil sales, "we have also predicted how to compensate" the possible deficit due to the oil market weakening, he said. (Xinhua)

### COAS Visits London on Three-Day Official Visit

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Gen. Raheel Sharif, on Wednesday reached London on a three-day official visit. Pakistan's High Commissioner to UK Syed Ibne Abbas and senior British defence officials received the army chief upon his arrival. During his visit to London, the COAS will meet senior British political and military leadership and will also interact with think tanks and strategic institutions. Sources told Dawn that Gen Raheel will take British military and political leadership into confidence over Pakistan's perspective on the regional security situation, with particular reference to Afghanistan and eastern borders.

Operation Zarb-i-Azb. Pakistan's military in mid-June had launched an all-out operation, named 'Zarb-i-Azb', against Taliban militants in the region which is still under way. Moreover, months into Zarb-i-Azb, the army also launched Khyber 1, an operation to clear out militant strongholds in the tribal region of Khyber. The operation in Khyber saw an escalation since the attack on Peshawar's Army Public School that claimed the lives of over 140 people - most of them children. After the attack, army chief General Raheel Sharif also secured assurances from Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) commander General Joseph Dunford over complete cooperation in security-related matters. (Monitoring Desk)

The COAS is also expected to brief British leaders on Pakistan's war against terror and the ongoing

### Corruption Fight Needs Public Support: CCDI

BEIJING - China's top anti-graft authority has called for more public participation in the fight against corruption but said it will not tolerate anything that disrupts social order. Stopping the spread of corruption is the top task at the moment, according to the communique issued after the fifth plenary session of the 18th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which convened from Monday to Wednesday. The session reviewed the anti-corruption work in 2014 and said that the achievements were made with the Party's firm leadership, joint efforts by all Party organizations and members, the public's support and the hard work of

discipline inspectors. The communique said the campaign required political composure, restraint and patience, but stressed that it was not just a "whirlwind campaign" and efforts should not spur "mass movements" that disturb social order. "The anti-corruption campaign should continue forward steadily, step by step," the document said. Combatting corruption needs public support and participation and more "positive energy" from the public and media would be of great benefit. Acts of defiance toward countercorruption measures and actions that spark intense public criticism will be "cleaned up", according to the document. (Xinhua)

### Tajikistan to Build Six New Cement Plants in Two Years

DUSHANBE - Six new cement plants will be put into operation in Tajikistan in 2015 and 2016, Tajikistan's Ministry of Industry and New Technologies said, Avesta news agency reported. Tajik-Chinese joint venture Tajchina has already started the construction of a cement plant with annual capacity of 1.2 million tons. The plant is expected to be put into operation this year. New cement plants will also be built in Dangara, Bobojon Gafurov, and Isfara districts, as well as in Istiklol city. Another cement plant, with annual production capacity of 1 million tons, will be constructed

in the Yovon district in two years. Today there are 10 cement plants in Tajikistan. The country's largest cement plant is Huaxin Gayur Cement Co., Ltd, with the participation of China's HuaXin Cement Co. Ltd. The plant has a capacity of 1 million tons. HuaXin signed an investment agreement with the government of Tajikistan in September 2014. According to the agreement, HuaXin will invest \$250 million to construct a second and third cement production line in Tajikistan, which will be put into operation in 2015 and 2016, respectively. (ICA)