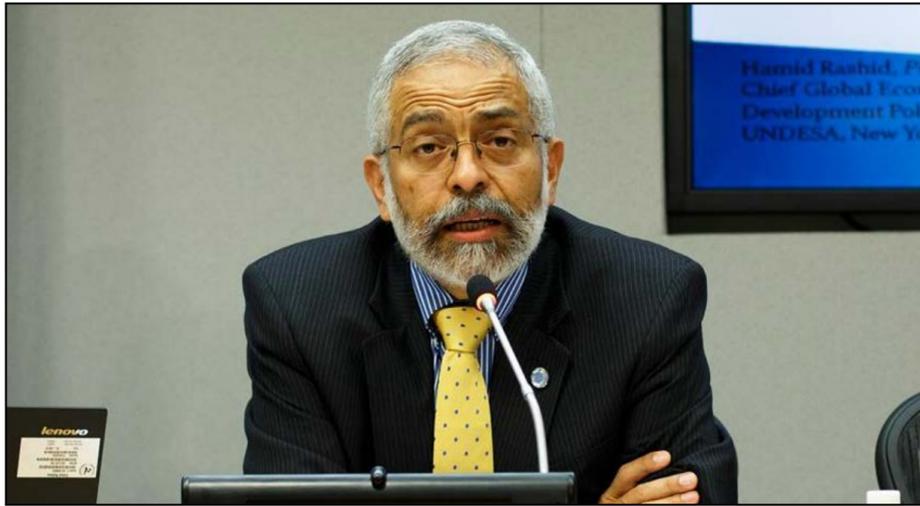


UN Predicts Modest Global Economic Growth over Next two Years

UNITED NATIONS - The world economy is projected to grow by 2.7 percent in 2017 and 2.9 percent in 2018, said a UN report launched here on Tuesday, pointing out that the global economy has not yet emerged from the period of slow growth. This modest recovery is more an indication of economic stabilization than a signal of a robust and sustained revival of global demand, said the UN annual economic report World Economic Situation and Prospects. It noted that in 2016, the world economy expanded by just 2.2 percent, the



slowest rate of growth since the Great Recession in 2009. "Underpinning the sluggish global economy are the feeble pace of global investment, dwindling world trade growth, flagging productivity growth and high levels of debt," said the report. The report noted that global economic prospects remain subject to significant uncertainties and risks that are weighted on the downside, with the potential to obstruct the modest growth forecast for 2017-18. It said among the uncertainties are interest rate rises... (More on P4)... (19)

Russia, Turkey Stage First Joint Air Strikes Against IS in Syria

MOSCOW - Russia and Turkey on Wednesday staged their first joint air strikes against the Islamic State jihadist group in Syria, the Russian defence ministry said. Nine Russian and eight Turkish planes took part in the "first joint air operation" in the area around the town of Al-Bab in the Aleppo region, Lieutenant General Sergei Rudskoi told a briefing. The announcement came less than a week after Russia said Moscow and Ankara had signed an agreement spelling out

mechanisms to coordinate their air forces in Syria when conducting strikes "on terrorist targets". Rudskoi said that "36 targets" had been destroyed. He said Syrian authorities had agreed to the operation that he hailed as "highly effective." Russia, Turkey and Iran are organising Syria peace talks that begin in the Kazakh capital Astana on Monday in a bid to bolster a frail truce brokered by Moscow and Ankara last month. The... (More on P4)... (20)

Merkel Welcomes May's Brexit 'Clarity', Vows European Unity

BERLIN - German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday welcomed the "clarity" provided by British Prime Minister Theresa May's speech laying out her plans for Brexit. After talks with Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni in Berlin, the leader of Europe's top economy said that the remaining EU member states would enter into the negotiations with London with a united front. Merkel said that May's keenly anticipated address Tuesday had provided a "clear impression of how

Britain wants to move forward". "However the negotiations would only begin when Article 50 is triggered," she told reporters, referring to the part of the EU's Lisbon Treaty under which a country officially declares its intention to quit the bloc. Looking to Gentiloni, Merkel said that Germany and Italy would "closely coordinate" with each other and with "our respective industrial sectors" as the Brexit talks progressed. "I am not worried that we won't stand together - the



most important thing is that Europe won't let itself be divided and we will ensure this with very close contact," she said. Gentiloni, speaking through an interpreter, said that May's speech had "put some meat on the bones" of the British position on leaving the European Union. (AFP)

Sri Lanka Should Comply with Int'l Conventions to Rejoin GSP Plus

COLOMBO - The European Union (EU) reiterated on Wednesday that the ratification and implementation of 27 international conventions signed by the Sri Lankan government is the only criteria for EU to assess Sri Lanka's application to rejoin the Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP Plus). The EU office in Colombo said the conventions are related to international human rights, labor rights, environmental standards and good governance. Benefiting from GSP Plus

requires Sri Lanka to make further progress in implementing the conventions and cooperation with the EU to monitor implementation and address shortcomings. More generally, the EU said it supports the leadership shown by the government in committing to address long-standing problems that have caused conflict and negatively affected the living standards of all Sri Lankans. The EU is Sri Lanka's biggest export market, accounting for... (More on P4)... (21)

British FM Warns over Brexit 'Punishment Beatings'

NEW DELHI - Britain's foreign minister warned Wednesday against World War II-style "punishment beatings" after France indicated it would not accept improved conditions for the UK outside the single market. Boris Johnson said it would not be in anyone's interest to penalise Britain for exiting the European Union, comparing proposed trade tariffs to punishments meted out to escaped prisoners in World War II movies. His comments came a day

after Prime Minister Theresa May confirmed Britain would leave Europe's single market and warned the EU against imposing harsh terms on its divorce from the bloc. "I think that if Monsieur Hollande wants to administer punishment beatings to anybody who chooses to escape, rather in manner of some sort of World War II movie, than I don't think that is the way forward," he told delegates at a political conference in New Delhi. "I think it's actually not in



the interest of our friends and our partners." May said on Tuesday that Britain would look to strike a new customs agreement with the EU, which accounted for 44 percent of the country's exports in 2015. But French President Francois Hollande has consistently said Britain... (More on P4)... (22)

Kerry Asks Europe to Believe in Itself

DAVOS, Switzerland - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Tuesday urged Europe to "believe in itself" and to remember the reasons why the European Union (EU) was founded. "Europe's got to remember why we have been on this 70-year journey," Kerry said at the World Economic Forum (WEF) here, referring to the long period of peace that has held throughout most of the continent since the end of World War II. He celebrated the historic effort, saying: "On the face of the planet, no region, no



assembly of countries has grown as significantly or as powerfully as Europe has." Kerry joined the WEF in the final days of his role as U.S. Secretary of State, as

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump is due to be sworn into office on Friday, bringing with him a new administration. Even as his work as secretary... (More on P4)... (23)

Troops have 'Full Control' of Eastern Mosul: Iraq Military

BAGHDAD - U.S.-backed Iraqi government troops announced on Wednesday they were in "full control" of eastern Mosul after routing Islamic State militants from that part of the northern city, three months since the major operation started. The achievement was a "big victory," said Iraqi Army Lt. Gen. Talib Shaghatai, who commands the counter-terrorism forces, describing the success of the Iraqi forces as "unprecedented." Shaghatai, who spoke to reporters in the town of Bartella, just east of Mosul, said plans were now being drawn up to retake the western part of the city. He did not elaborate on when that part of the operation would begin. Wednesday's advance came after Iraq troops over the past... (More on P4)... (24)

Russia Extends Asylum for Snowden

MOSCOW - Russia has extended its asylum for U.S. whistleblower Edward Snowden for "a couple of years," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Wednesday. The decision was made in defiance of a recent statement by former CIA deputy director Michael Morell saying that Russian President Vladimir Putin had a great opportunity to extradite Snowden as a "perfect inauguration gift" to U.S. President-elect Donald Trump. "The essence of what the former CIA man is offering is the ideology of betrayal," Zakharova said on Facebook. "What you have leaked, Mr. Morell, makes now clear to everybody that for your office it is normal to present gifts in the form of people and extradite those seeking protection," she added. Snowden's residence permit has been extended until 2020 and soon he will have all legal grounds to apply for Russian citizenship, the whistleblower's lawyer Anatoly Kucherena was quoted as saying by RIA Novosti news agency Wednesday. According to Russian law, one has to live in the country for no less than five years to apply for citizenship. Snowden, a computer professional who had done contractual work for the U.S. National Security Agency, fled to Russia in 2013 after revealing thousands of classified documents to the press. He was wanted by Washington on charges of espionage. Russian authorities initially granted him asylum for one year before a three-year extension. (Xinhua)

Obama Commutes Chelsea Manning's Sentence

WASHINGTON - Outgoing U.S. President Barack Obama on Tuesday commuted the sentence of Chelsea Manning, the former Army intelligence officer who was sentenced 35 years for giving classified material to Wikileaks. Manning will be freed in May this year, according to a statement from the White House. She was originally set to be released in 2045. She was arrested in 2010 after leaking 700,000 military files and diplomatic cables to Wikileaks. The 35-year sentence Manning received was the longest ever imposed for a leak conviction in the United States. "I... (More on P4)... (25)

Rouhani Optimistic about "Real Start" of Peace Talks on Syria

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani expressed optimism on Wednesday that the upcoming meeting concerning Syria will be a real start for the peace process for Syrians, reported the official IRNA news agency. "We hope the conclusion (of the talks) will be satisfactory for the Syrians," Rouhani remarked during a meeting with visiting Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis. "Today, we need to seize this unique opportunity to fight terrorism effectively," Rouhani said referring to the upcoming peace talks between Syria's government and opposition groups in Astana, Kazakhstan, on January 23. He further reiterated Iran's opposition to the participa-

tion of the United States in the talks, saying that "there is no justification for the United States to attend the meeting. Iran sees no role for the United States in the talks," he said. On Tuesday, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Iran opposes the United States' participation in the approaching Syria peace talks. "We have not invited the United States and we oppose the U.S.'s presence" in Kazakhstan next week, the minister was quoted as saying by Tasnim news agency. Following Russian, Turkish and Iranian extensive diplomatic efforts, the Syrian government and opposition groups reached a ceasefire agreement earlier in January. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

China Hopes Britain, EU Reach Win-Win Agreement through Negotiation

BEIJING - China hopes Britain and the European Union (EU) can reach a win-win agreement through negotiation, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on Wednesday. Hua Chunying's remarks came after British Prime Minister Theresa May said in her speech on Tuesday that Brexit would produce a new and equal partnership between her country and the EU. Noting China always firmly supports the process of European integration, Hua told a regular press conference that China believes a prosperous,

stable and open Europe is in the interest of all parties concerned. China is ready to continue building China-Europe partnerships for peace, growth, reform and civilization, Hua added. This is May's first important speech on her government's guiding principles on Brexit since the Britons voted to leave the EU in a referendum in June last year. May said she wants Britain to remain as a "best friend and neighbor" to Europe, but also reach out to the rest of the world as a global trading nation, to countries such as China, ... (More on P4)... (26)

Iran Opposes U.S. Participation in Syria Peace Talks

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Tuesday his country is opposed to the participation of the United States in the imminent peace talks about Syria, Tasnim news agency reported. "We have not invited the United States ... and we are opposed to the U.S. presence" in Kazakhstan next week, the minister was quoted as saying. The remarks came after Zarif and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov exchanged views on the Syrian peace talks in

a phone call on Monday, the report said. Following the intense diplomatic effort by Russia, Turkey and Iran, Syrian government and the opposition groups reached an agreement on a ceasefire earlier this month. Later, it was announced that a new round of peace talks between the Syrian government and the opposition groups will be resumed in Astana of Kazakhstan on January 23. Russia and Turkey have invited the United States to join the talks. (Xinhua)

Pakistani Forces Kill Top Militant Leader: Official

ISLAMABAD - Anti-terrorism forces in Pakistan's Punjab province had killed the chief of a banned militant group and three others, officials said Wednesday. Rizwan alias Asif Chotu, chief of the banned sectarian "Lashkar-e-Jhangvi" (Lej) and three members of the group, who were blamed for series of attacks on the security forces and Shiite Muslims, were killed in a clash with the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) near Sheikhpura, a main town near Lahore, the capital of Punjab, a spokesman for the CTD said. Lej was involved in the recent attacks on

a crowded shrine and Shiite Muslims in Balochistan province that killed dozens of people. Security officials believed that the group was now coordinating with Daesh (the Islamic State) to carry out attacks. The CTD spokesman said in a statement that Chotu was wanted in over 100 murder cases and that the government had announced a head money of 3 million rupees. He said the terrorists were planning an attack on staff and offices of a security agency in Lahore. "They were heading to Lahore for the terrorist attack from... (More on P4)... (27)

Uzbekistan to Partake in SCO Consultations on Security Issues in Moscow

TASHKENT - The delegation of Uzbekistan on January 20 will take part in the consultations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's member states in Moscow. The stability and security of the Organization and promotion of economic and humanitarian cooperation in the region will

be on the agenda. The deputy foreign ministers of Russia, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the SCO Secretary-General and Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure will attend the consultations. (AKI)

Tajikistan's Manufacturers are not Ready for Competition in EEU

DUSHANBEH - Tajikistan is not ready to ship the products which meet the standards of the single market of the Eurasian Economic Union and able to withstand the competition, reports the Tajikistan Telegraph Agency (TajikTA). "The products of Tajikistan are not ready to withstand the competition at the single market within the frameworks of the Eurasian Economic Council," said Abdurakhmon Karinzoda, first

deputy chairman of the customs service. He said before joining any union it is necessary to learn the terms and rules. "We should know which products we can offer on this single market. I doubt, that, for instance, our agricultural products meet the standards of this market. Now we are not ready to ship the products which meet the EEU standards," he said. (Monitoring Desk)