

Barack Obama Leaves Oval Office for Last Time

WASHINGTON - Outgoing US President Barack Obama on Friday left the Oval Office for the last time, before welcoming his successor Donald Trump to the White House.

Obama walked into the Oval Office holding a letter, which he left on the Resolute desk, a 19th century gift from Queen Elizabeth that is made from the timber of a British arctic vessel.

It is customary for the outgoing president to leave a personal note for his successor.

Obama was to have morning tea with Trump before they make their way to the



Capitol for the inauguration ceremony.

As Obama walked along the West Wing colonnade, when asked if he was feeling nostalgic, "Of course" was the reply.

Asked for last words for the American people, he offered a simple "Thank you."

When Obama arrived in the Oval Office eight years ago he found a note from his predecessor, George W. Bush. "Very few have had the honor of knowing the responsibility you now feel. Very few know the excitement of the moment and the challenges you will face," it read. (AFP)

US-Led Airstrikes Kill 100 Al-Qaida Militants in Northern Syria

DAMASCUS - At least 100 militants with the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front and allied rebels were killed Friday, by U.S.-led airstrikes on their positions in countryside of the northern province of Aleppo, pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV reported.

The rebels with the Nusra Front and the Nour Ad-dien Zunki were killed when the airstrikes by the U.S.-led anti-terror coalition targeted a training camp in the town of Dar Izzeh in the western countryside of Aleppo, said the report.

The report said that the Nusra Front was amassing forces to make attacks in Syria after the upcoming Syria talks in Astana, from which it was excluded due to being designated as a terrorist group by the UN.

It added that fighting Nusra will be on the agenda of the talks, which are sponsored by Russia and Turkey.

Both powers were said to will form local force to fight the Nusra in its stronghold in the northwestern province of Idlib. ...*(More on P4)...(15)*

Germany Says U.S. under Trump Must Abide by Trade Deals

BERLIN - The United States must stick to international agreements under the presidency of Donald Trump, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble said on Friday, adding he did not expect a major trade war despite Trump's attack on German car makers. Trump, taking office on Friday, has vowed to make sweeping changes to U.S. trade policy and economists see his protectionism as the biggest risk to U.S. growth. "The United States also signed in-

ternational agreements," Schauble told magazine Der Spiegel. "I don't think a big trade war will break out tomorrow, but we will naturally insist that agreements are upheld." Schauble told the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland: "I am quite optimistic that even the U.S. and the rest of the world as a whole will not (abandon) the defence of free trade." He said the German economy would feel the effects of any ...*(More on P4)...(16)*

World Leaders Discuss Fresh Approaches to Connecting Next Billion

DAVOS, Switzerland - Global leaders must urgently accelerate progress toward universal and affordable access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) if the world is to meet the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

This was the view of the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, which met this week in Davos, Switzerland, during a special session co-organized with the World Economic Forum. The high-level meeting

attended by government ministers, UN leaders and industry executives called on governments around the world to prioritize broadband connectivity in countries and regions under their influence.

"We need fresh investment models to unlock the power of ICT connectivity that fuels growth in today's digital economy," said Houlin Zhao, secretary-general of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). "Without more innovative public-private partnerships and leadership, we will miss our opportunity



to fast-forward progress on the SDGs. We will miss the chance to improve lives for everyone, no matter who they are or where they live." The leaders in attendance identified and addressed several key areas including: new financing models for broadband infrastructure, new last-mile business models, new country partnership models; and new approaches to ending the gender digital divide. (Xinhua)

G20 Ministers Call for Inclusive Growth, Rejecting Protectionism

DAVOS, Switzerland - Ministers of G20 member nations at the World Economic Forum here have called on the international group of major economies to continue aiming for inclusive growth and free trade, and rejecting protectionism.

"If you want to get more inclusive growth, you need more free trade," said Wolfgang Schauble, the federal minister of finance in Germany, which currently holds the G20 presidency. Schauble argued the G20 should redouble

efforts to promote inclusive growth as a part of free trade.

Inclusive growth is development that creates opportunity for all segments of the population, and which sees benefits of increased prosperity distributed more equally.

Nicolas Dujovne, Argentina's treasury minister, said that Argentina's closure to international trade would end as his country embraced globalization. He said the new administration was "opening the economy and wants to



open up and receive the benefits of globalization to generate more inclusive growth." Dujovne admitted that avoidance of competition and openness had not been good for Argentina, which will take over the G20 presidency in November 2017. Inclusive growth had ...*(More on P4)...(17)*

German Finance Minister Optimistic about Eurozone Economy

DAVOS - Wolfgang Schauble, Federal Minister of Finance for Germany, have expressed cautious optimism Friday about euro area economies at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Speaking during a panel session on the global economic outlook for 2017, Schauble admitted that Europe was seeing economic improvement.

"It's true that the eurozone is doing a little bit better," the German Finance



Minister admitted, while reminding listeners that many uncertainties remained.

He called a strong Ger-

many economy as a major factor to improvement in the euro area, saying that it was "driven this year by ...*(More on P4)...(18)*

Lebanese PM Seeks International Help for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

BEIRUT - Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri called on the international community on Thursday to help his country handle the Syrian refugee crisis.

His speech came at the launching ceremony of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, in the presence of Sigrid Kaag, the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, and Philippe Lazzarini, the United Nations Coordinator for humanitarian issues. "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 is a joint, multi-year plan between the Government of Lebanon and its international and national partners that aims at responding to the challenges associated with one of the most severe and protracted crisis Lebanon has ...*(More on P4)...(19)*

Iraq Withdraws Ambassador to Portugal over Sons' Assault on Portuguese Teenager

LISBON - Iraq has decided to withdraw its ambassador to Portugal Saad Mohammed Ridha, whose twin sons were accused of attacking a Portuguese teenager in August last year, Portuguese Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva said on Thursday.

At a press conference held at the Foreign Ministry, Santos Silva said that the decision to replace Saad Mohammed Ridha was taken by the Iraqi authorities and the legal process in Portugal has been closed.

The announcement of the Iraqi ambassador's withdrawal came a day after the Portuguese Foreign Ministry announced in a statement that it had received from the Attorney General's Office additional information on the case. Santos Silva said that the legal proceedings, involving the then 17-year-old twins Haider and Ridha Ali, sons of the Iraqi ambassador, who were accused of attacking 15-year-old Ruben Cavaco, will now continue in Iraq. Haider and Ridha Ali were accused of attacking Cavaco on Aug. 17 last year in the town of Ponte de Sor, about 180 km northeast of Lisbon. He was left in coma for five days at a hospital in Lisbon and was discharged in early September after treatment.

The twin brothers were at first detained by police but soon freed after discovering they were Ridha's sons, as they have diplomatic immunity from prosecution. (Xinhua)

Nieghbor News

NBS Chief Expects Stronger China-U.S. Economic Cooperation

BEIJING - A senior Chinese official on Friday voiced expectations for stronger economic cooperation between China and the United States after U.S. President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

China and the United States have the world's largest-scale bilateral trade and investment cooperation, which benefits both nations, Ning Jizhe, head of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), told reporters ahead of Trump's inauguration scheduled for Friday.

"I personally believe President-elect Trump will consider issues from the perspective of developing mutually beneficial bilateral ties and advance

the long-lasting cooperation between the two major countries," Ning said. "I have hopes for that."

Sino-U.S. trade volume reached 519.6 billion dollars in 2016 while mutual investment exceeded 170 billion dollars by the end of 2016, according to Ministry of Commerce figures. Ning said China's economy will continue to maintain a medium-high growth rate after the new U.S. administration takes the reins.

China's economic growth in the fourth quarter of 2016 came in at 6.8 percent, accelerating from the 6.7 percent in the third quarter, putting the annual growth rate at 6.7 percent, NBS data showed Friday. (Xinhua)

Zardari Witnesses Pre-Inauguration Oath Ceremony of Trump

ISLAMABAD - Former Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday attended the pre-inauguration oath ceremony of President-elect of US, Donald Trump in Washington DC.

He was accompanied by Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) Senator Rehman Malik and Senator Sherry Rehman, a press release issued on Thursday said. The former president,

while addressing the event said that he was pleased to be in Washington to witness the transition of power.

He said the PPP delegation was honoured to be invited to participate in those moments.

The event was attended by a large number of US senators, congressmen, republican members and dignitaries. (Monitoring Desk)

Iran Summons Danish Ambassador over Embassy Assault in Copenhagen

TEHRAN - Iran has summoned Danish Ambassador to Tehran Danny Annan to express the Islamic Republic's strong condemnation of an assault on Iran's embassy in the Scandinavian country.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi announced on Thursday evening that the ministry's director for Northern and Eastern Europe affairs had called in Annan to roundly criticize the attack on Iran's diplomatic mission in the Danish capital Copenhagen by "four anti-revolutionary elements," and state that such an act had taken

place in violation of international regulations.

The senior Iranian Foreign Ministry official further censured the Danish government's laxity in ensuring the security of the Iranian Embassy and its staff members, calling on Danish officials to seriously and responsibly deal with the perpetrators and report the results.

Annan, for his part, voiced regret over the attack, describing the incident as "unacceptable." He pledged to relay Iran's protest to his government as soon as possible, and notify Iranian authorities of the outcome. (Presstv)

Uzbekistan's FM, EU Special Representative for Central Asia Discuss Cooperation

TASHKENT - Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov on Friday received EU Special Representative for Central Asia Peter Burian, reports the press service of the Uzbek Foreign Ministry.

The two discussed important issues of bilat-

eral relations in political, trade-economic, cultural-humanitarian and other spheres.

Regional and international issues, including the new strategy of partnership between the European Union and Central Asia were touched upon other issues. (AKI)

Russian Forces on the Territory of The 201st Military Base in Tajikistan

MOSCOW - Russian troops deployed at the 201st military base in Tajikistan carried out counterterrorist drills, the press service of the Russian Central Military District said in a statement on Friday.

"At the 201st military base located in the Republic of Tajikistan the troops liberated a military facility from a simulated enemy during counterterrorist drills," the statement said. The troops blocked and killed simulated terror-

ists under cover of military vehicles and trained search and clearance of improvised explosives.

The drills focused on the speed of the decision-making process and coordination of activities aimed at blocking and targeting the simulated enemy as well as demining the facility. Russia's outpost in Tajikistan houses the largest ground force of the Russian Army outside the country. The current lease contract expires in 2042. (Sputnik)

Russia Plans to Replace Aircraft Tu-154

MOSCOW - Head of Russian Defense Ministry Sergei Shoigu ordered to explore the possibility of decommissioning passenger aircrafts Tu-154, Tu-134 and Il-62M, local media reported Friday.

Russian military forces passenger aircrafts Tu-154, Tu-134 and Il-62M could be replaced by modern Tu-214 and Sukhoi Superjet 100 (SSJ-100), according to the Russian newspaper "Kommersant".

The issue was raised after a Russian Tu-154 plane, en route to its Hmeimin air base in the Syrian port city of Latakia, crashed on Dec. 25, 2016, killing all 92 on board. Russian Defense ...*(More on P4)...(20)*

Russian Parliament Ratifies Major Gas Pipeline Deal with Turkey

MOSCOW - Russia's State Duma, or the lower house of parliament, approved a "Turkish Stream" pipeline deal Friday to deliver its natural gas to Turkey and European markets through the Black Sea. Russian President Vladimir Putin initiated the Turkish Stream project in 2014, and sealed the agreement with his Turkish counterpart in Istanbul in October 2016 envisioning the construction of two underwater legs of the gas pipeline.

The project, put on hold after Turkey downed a Russian warplane in November 2015 near Turkish-Syrian border, was brought back to agenda in June 2016 when Moscow and Ankara agreed to re-

vive their relations. The Turkish Stream pipeline will serve as an alternative to the South Stream onshore project, which would pass through the Balkan Peninsula but was abandoned in late 2014 mainly due to the Crimea crisis.

The annual capacity of the Turkish Stream pipeline is estimated at 31.5 billion cubic meters with half of it to go to Turkey, according to an explanatory note by the State Duma.

The construction of the pipeline, with 920 km to be laid on the seabed and another 200 km onshore, is expected to start later this year and be completed by Dec. 30, 2019, said the explanatory note. (Xinhua)