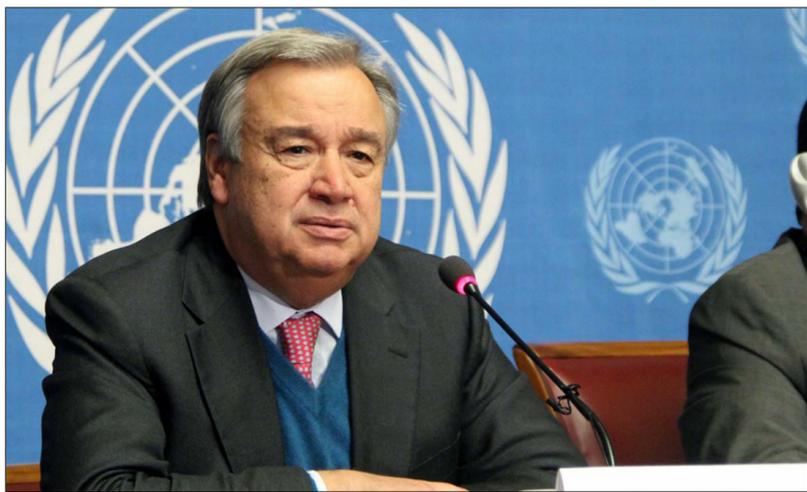


UN Chief Urges to Address Root Causes of Crisis in Central Asia

UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres Friday urged parties concerned to address the root causes of crisis in Central Asia and build peaceful societies resilient to terrorism and violent extremism. Addressing the Security Council meeting of "Building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development," the UN chief said that "only by addressing the root causes of crisis, including inequality, exclusion and discrimination, will we build peaceful societies resilient to terrorism and violent extremism." "Sustainable development is a fundamental end in itself,



enabling people, communities and societies to flourish and fulfil their potential," he said, adding that "sustainable and inclusive development is also an important factor in preventing and ending conflict, and in sustaining peace." The United Nations development system is engaged in supporting governments throughout the region to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to invest in sustainable economic growth, including greater opportunities for young people, women and girls, he said. "Education, vocational training and jobs must be an absolute priority in national and regional development cooperation," he added. (Xinhua)

Macron, Merkel Show Unity to Push Eurozone Reforms

PARIS - French President Emmanuel Macron and visiting German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Friday showed their unity, justifying their common efforts to come out with joint position on the single-currency bloc's reforms. "What I can simply say is that the ambition we carry can not come alone and that it needs to be combined with the German ambition," Macron told reporters. "To me, the priority is knowing where we want to go and we share that vision," he said. "We want to advance together to have a Europe that is better organized regarding migration, more sovereign," the presi-

dent said. For her turn, the German chancellor asked more act "to better build a Europe able to overcome the challenges." On Thursday, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said the eurozone leading two powers were working to reach common position on eurozone reforms between March and June. He added the two countries had "an immediate priority which is the completion of the banking union, the completion of the capital markets union and tax convergence..." Le Maire said at a news conference with his German counterpart Peter Altmaier. (Xinhua)

U.S. Government Shuts Down as Senate Fails to Pass Spending Bill

WASHINGTON - The U.S. government is shutting down as the Senate failed to pass a stop gap spending bill. Negotiations between congressional lawmakers continue. Last-minute negotiations fell apart as Senate Democrats blocked a four-week short-term spending bill in a late night vote. It led to the fourth government shutdown over the past 25 years. The White House accused the Democrats of the shutdown. "Senate Democrats own the Schumer Shutdown.

Tonight, they put politics above our national security, military families, vulnerable children, and our country's ability to serve all Americans," White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders said in a statement before Friday midnight. The White House blamed Senate Democratic leader Charles Schumer for standing in the way for the Senate to pass the stopgap spending bill which was already been approved by the House of Representatives on Thursday. Sanders said in the state-



ment that the White House will not negotiate the status of young immigrants known as "Dreamers" brought to the United States as children "while Democrats hold our law-

Russia, U.S. Likely to Discuss North Korea in Moscow: Minister to TASS



MOSCOW - Diplomats from Russia and the United States are likely to hold their next round of con-

sultations on North Korea in Moscow on a date yet to be decided, TASS news agency quoted Russian

Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov as saying on Saturday. He also said a delegation

from North Korea might visit Moscow before the start of next month's Olympic Games. Morgulov told the news agency that he has sent an invitation for talks to Joseph Yun, the U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy. The talks about North Korea's missile program and nuclear aspirations are taking place amid accusations from U.S. President Donald Trump that Moscow was helping Pyongyang evade international sanctions. Russia denies the allegations. (Reuters)

U.S. Outlines National Defense Strategy, Admits Losing Military Advantage

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Department of Defense on Friday released a synopsis of its 2018 National Defense Strategy, saying that U.S. military advantage has been eroding and is facing strong competition from other countries. "The central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition," the 11-page unclassified synopsis said in its assessment of the country's strategic environment. "For decades the United

States has enjoyed uncontested or dominant superiority in every operating domain," the synopsis said. "We could generally deploy our forces when we wanted, assemble them where we wanted, and operate how we wanted." To reverse the unfavorable trend, the report proposed boosting the power of its military, including strengthened alliances to broaden its support, and streamlining its commanding structure to increase cost-efficiency. (Xinhua)

Turkey's Erdogan Announces Start of Military Operation in Syria's Afrin

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on Saturday the military operation in Syria's Afrin has "actively" started. "The Afrin operation has actively begun on the field. The Manbij operation will follow," he said during a televised speech in the Aegean province of Kutahya. Erdogan said that Turkey is determined to ensure its national security and to clear its borders of the People's Protection Units (YPG), which is considered as the Syrian affiliates of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) by Ankara. The PKK, listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the European Union and the United States, has been conducting armed violence against Ankara since July 2015 after a brief reconciliation period. (Xinhua)

Central European Countries Urge Start of Free-Trade Talks Between EU, Australia

BUDAPEST - The Visegrad countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) support the start of free-trade talks between the European Union (EU) and Australia, Hungarian Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Peter Szijjarto said Friday. "We support the Bulgarian presidency of the Council of the EU to make a decision by the end of February and to start negotiations in

spring," Szijjarto said. According to the Hungarian minister, Central European Countries (CEE) are the economic engine of the EU, shown by the fact that Australia's interest has turned towards Central Europe. "Cooperation with Australia would give a competitive edge to the Visegrad Countries, which are stepping up cooperation in the fields of innovation, education and research and development," Szijjarto under-

lined. Australia's Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment Steven Ciobo said that his country wishes to develop investments and trade relations with Europe and the Visegrad countries in particular, underlining that a strong Central European diaspora lived in Australia. The main areas of cooperation could be in the fields of research and development and innovation, according to him. (Xinhua)

Britain Able to Have Bespoke Deal with EU: Macron

LONDON - French President Emmanuel Macron said on Saturday Britain would be able to have a bespoke deal with the European Union after Brexit, one of Prime Minister Theresa May's objectives. But in an interview with the BBC, Macron said London's financial center could not enjoy the same level of access to the EU under May's current Brexit plan, which envisages Britain leaving the EU's single market and customs union. Macron has said in the past Britain could have pacts with the EU along the lines of those with Canada or Norway but not its own, special deal. But asked in the interview whether that was fair, given how long Britain had been part of the EU, Macron said: "No, it's not a question to be fair or unfair. I take that as a reference. But for sure, you will have your own solution."

Asked whether there would be a bespoke, special solution for Britain, he replied: "Sure, but you will ... I take these two references because this special way should be consistent with the preservation of the single market and our collective interests. "And you should understand that you cannot by definition have the full access to the single market if you don't tick the box." Macron insisted Britain would not get full access to the EU's single market without accepting its basic principles of freedom of movement and willingness to abide by EU jurisdiction. (Reuters)

Germany's Social Democrats Consider Opening Govt Talks

BERLIN - The leaders of Germany's Social Democrats are making a final push to try and convince party members to approve opening talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives on forming a new coalition government. The center-left party, which has governed with Merkel since 2013, was battered in September's election, falling to a post-war low of 20.5 percent support. Leader Martin Schulz had vowed not to enter another coalition, saying his party would regroup in opposition. But he reconsidered after Merkel's attempts to form a coalition with two smaller parties failed. Now it's up to a party vote Sunday whether to open negotiations. (AP)

Egypt's Sisi to Run for President in 2018 Elections

CAIRO - Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi announced on Friday that he will run for re-election in the presidential elections scheduled in March. Sisi made the announcement during the final day of "Story of a Nation" conference, where he presented his achievements over the past four years. Egypt will hold its 2018 presidential race from March 26 to 28. The 10-day candidate registration will start on Jan. 20, while electoral campaigns will kick off on Feb. 24 and the result of the first round will be announced on April 2, according to the country's National Election Authority (NEA).

Sisi said that he shouldered responsibility when he was elected as a president, noting that he exerted great efforts for the sake of the country. The Egyptian president vowed transparent elections, urging voters to go to ballot boxes to choose the next president of Egypt. A pro-Sisi non-official campaign called "So That You Can Build It (Egypt)" said last December that it collected over 12 million signatures of Egyptians, more than 11 percent of the population, supporting Sisi to run for a second presidential term. Egyptian constitution limits the president's number of terms to two. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

China, Russia Outpace Terrorism as Top National Security Priorities: Mattis

WASHINGTON - Countering China's rapidly expanding military and an increasingly aggressive Russia are now the US military's top national security priorities, outpacing the threat of terrorism, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Friday. He said competition with those adversaries has threatened America's military advantage around the world. Laying out a broad new strategy for the Defense Department, Mattis warned that all aspects of the military's competitive warfighting edge have eroded. He said building a force that can deter war with established and emerging military powers in Moscow and Beijing,

and US enemies such as North Korea and Iran, will require increased investment to make the military more lethal, agile, and ready to fight. "We will continue to prosecute the campaign against terrorists that we are engaged in today, but great power competition - not terrorism - is now the primary focus of US national security," Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said, in remarks at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He said the Islamic State group's "physical caliphate" in Iraq and Syria had been defeated, but that IS, al-Qaeda, and other extremists still pose threats across the globe. (AP)

Iran, Pakistan to Run Joint Railway Line

TEHRAN - Iran and Pakistan have reached an agreement to cooperate on tourism industry through building a railway system between the two countries. Director General for Iran's South-Eastern Railway System Majid Arjouni attended the two day joint experts meeting on railway transportation between Iran and Pakistan which was held in Islamabad on Thursday and Friday (January 18 and 19). Arjouni discussed the meeting and the achievements made in the committee, adding "Iran and Pakistan have reached an agreement to launch a railway system between the two countries for the transportation of passen-

gers and pilgrims from Pakistan to Iran and Iraq and vice versa, thereby contributing to tourism." Arjouni said that Zahedan-Quetta passenger trains will resume offering services soon, pointing out that the said passenger trains had ceased transportation due to security issues. Elsewhere in his remarks, Arjouni said that the 1959 agreement reached between the governments of the two countries will be revived at Iran's suggestion. The said meeting was held on Thursday and Friday in Islamabad with the Iranian delegation headed by Majid Arjouni in attendance, concluding in a joint statement. (MNA)

Parliament, Media On-Board at Every Stage of CPEC's Development: Ahsan

ISLAMABAD - Minister of Interior and Planning, Development and Reforms Prof Ahsan Iqbal travelled to Gwadar along with a delegation of 20 senior economic journalists from Islamabad on Friday. The purpose of the visit was to provide journalists a chance to witness developments in Gwadar in different sectors under the framework of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other government projects, a press release said. The delegation of the journalists visited Gwadar Port Authority, Gwadar Free Zone, Water Desalination Plant, Venue for Gwadar Expo and Summit 2018 and Operative portion of Gwadar Sea Port. During the visit, the minister gave a detailed presentation to the journalists on CPEC. He said that

the government has kept parliament and media on board at every stage of CPEC's development because it believes in transparency and media's role in highlighting Rising Pakistan narrative to the outside world. He explained that he calls CPEC a fate-changer because it came at a time when Pakistan was struggling to actualise its true potential due to infrastructural and energy bottlenecks and adverse security situation in the country. He clarified the journalists that CPEC is not a product of any favorable policy towards China instead it is a result of alignment between Pakistan's Vision 2025 and China's One Belt One Road Vision with focuses on building inter and intra regional connectivity in order to spur socioeconomic growth. (Monitoring Desk)

Iran's Nuclear Deal Cannot Survive if US Withdraws: Russia

TEHRAN - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has warned that Iran's nuclear deal with world powers will collapse if the US withdraws from the agreement. "It cannot keep alive in a re-negotiated form, especially regarding the demands by the United States. It would not be acceptable for Iran and it is clear now, I believe, that the Europeans do understand this danger right now," Lavrov told reporters at the UN on Friday. "This agreement cannot

be implemented if one of the participants unilaterally steps out of it. It will fall apart, there will be no deal then," he noted. The Russian foreign minister said he believed Washington was "going to try to convince the European states to take the same position that Washington has taken." Lavrov said on Monday that Moscow will not back US attempts to change the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). (Presstv)