

Russian FM Blasts U.S. Attempt to Dominate World

MOSCOW - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday blasted the United States for its attempt to dominate the world as well as its confrontational approach. "The U.S. has taken a course toward confrontation and they are absolutely not critical of their own moves," he told a press conference, commenting on the annual State of the Union address delivered by U.S. President Barack Obama on Tuesday.

"The address delivered by President Obama proves that the (U.S.) philosophy has only one central point: We are number one, and everyone else has to admit it," Lavrov said. "Obama demon-



strated that the U.S. actually wants to dominate the world rather than be the first amongst equals," Lavrov said, pointing at Washington's efforts to form coalitions for operations in Iraq, in the fight against the Islamic State

and in anti-Russian sanctions. Lavrov said the U.S. mindset is "kind of old-fashioned" and fails to meet modern realities. "They will come to understand this position cannot be maintained for-

ever," he said. Lavrov urged Washington to resume constructive dialogues with Moscow on an equal footing, saying the two countries bear special responsibilities for world affairs. (Xinhua)

Major Offensive Underway Against ISIL in North Iraq

NINEVEH - Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, backed by government forces, have launched a large-scale operation against the ISIL Takfiri terrorists in Iraq's Northern Province of Nineveh. According to the Kurdish Regional Security Council, Peshmerga fighters initiated the major offensive against ISIL in southeast and southwest of Mosul early Wednesday. The operation is mainly aimed at stopping ISIL terrorists from transferring forces and weaponry from their stronghold in Syria into the Iraqi territory. Iraqi News reported that the offensive led to the liberation of four villages north of Mosul in the early hours. Video footage released by Kurdish officials showed heavy artillery as well as air



raids being carried out in the operation. Hundreds of Kurdish fighters have been deployed in the operation that may also weaken ISIL's position in Tal Afar. However, Kurdish commanders declared that they will not advance into the city as the diverse population in Tal Afar may see the move as an invasion by Kurds. Iraqi security forces, backed by volunteers and Peshmerga fighters have gained considerable progress in push-

ing back ISIL terrorists in various parts of the country. International coalition's fighter jets have also backed the offensives, although many are skeptical about the usefulness of the costly US-led air strikes. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said Wednesday that he continues to hear many countries pledging to provide military support against ISIL, but what has been offered on the ground is close to nothing. (Press TV)

Oil Prices Have Reached 'Bottom': Says Iraqi Minister

Kuwait City - Iraqi Oil Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi predicted Wednesday that world prices would not fall much further after a plunge of nearly 60 percent since June. "Our estimate is that the prices have reached the bottom. It is very difficult to drop lower than this," Abdul Mahdi told a conference in Kuwait. "We do not find any real justification for the big and persistent drop in oil prices," said the Iraqi minister whose country is the second largest OPEC producer after Saudi Arabia. "A number of factors will work to correct oil prices upward." Oil rebounded in Asia Wednesday, with international benchmark Brent North Sea crude for March, adding 44



cents to \$48.42, as traders bought the commodity at cheaper prices following a slide to near six-year lows. But analysts do not expect the rebound to last, as weakening global demand and a supply glut show no signs of abating, especially after the latest gloomy IMF forecast for the global economy. The Iraqi minister said current low prices will knock out part of the high-cost production, especially shale oil. This is likely to reduce the amount of surplus

production, currently estimated at 2.5 million barrels per day, and support prices, he said. The world's biggest miner BHP Billiton said on Wednesday that it was cutting back its operating US shale oil rigs by 40 percent because of the price slump, but still expected output to rise for the financial year. World prices have been falling since June but the pace of the slide accelerated in November when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) decided to maintain its production unchanged at 30 million barrels per day. OPEC's top producer Saudi Arabia has said it will not cut production for fear of losing market share. Its close ally the United Arab Emirates has said the price slump was necessary to correct over-supply by shale producers. However, Abdul Mahdi said that other cartel members had been attempting to broker an output cut in coordination with the world's top crude producer, non-OPEC Russia, to shore up prices. (AFP)

Houthi Gunmen Guard Yemen Leader's Home, Deny Overthrowing Him

SANAA - Yemen's minority Shi'ite Houthi fighters took up guard at President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's home on Wednesday but said they had not toppled him, after two days of fighting which left little doubt that the enfeebled leader was now at their mercy. The Houthis, friendly to Iran, swept into the capital four months ago and have emerged as the dominant force in the country. For now at least they appear to have decided to stop short of overthrowing Hadi, possibly preferring to exert control over a weakened leader rather than take on the burden of power. Their defeat of the presidential guards in gunbattles and artillery duels in recent days adds

to disarray in a country where the United States is also carrying out drone strikes against one of the most powerful branches of al Qaeda. After clashes at the president's office and home on Tuesday, the Houthis' leader threatened in a speech overnight to take further "measures" unless Hadi bows to his demand for constitutional changes that would increase Houthi power. By early morning on Wednesday, Houthi fighters, accompanied by an armored vehicle, had replaced the guards at the president's residence. Presidential guard sentry posts were initially empty, however a few guards later appeared and were permitted to take up positions. (Reuters)

Nieghbor News

Terrorists and Abettors will Be Targeted: Sharif

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday said that the government will not only go after terrorists, but also those abetting them. He made these remarks while addressing a high-level meeting at the Prime Minister House to review progress on the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP). The premier added that there is no room for error in the fight against militancy and the government must succeed at all costs. "We are not only going after the terrorists but also those who are abetting them," said PM Nawaz. He further added that the government's seriousness to counter terrorism should not be doubted.

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Raheel Sharif also briefed the participants about establishment of military courts and other measures being taken to implement NAP.

Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah, KP Chief Minister Pervez Khattak and Balochistan Chief Minister Dr Abdul Malik Baloch attended the meeting along with COAS Gen Raheel Sharif, Director General Inter-Services Intelligence Major Rizwan Akhtar and other army officials. KP Governor Sardar Mehtab Abbasi, Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan and Defence Minister Khawaja Asif were also present. (Monitoring Desk)

China's "New Normal" of Investment Brings New Opportunity for Win-Win

BEIJING - For the first time in its history, China has become a net capital exporter with outbound direct investment outnumbering foreign direct investment in 2014, presenting new opportunities for win-win cooperation with the rest of the world.

At the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) scheduled for Jan. 21-24 in Davos, Switzerland, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang will expound on the Chinese economy's "new normal." Chinese investors channeled capital into 6,128 overseas firms in 156 countries and regions in 2014, with outbound investment reaching 102.89 billion U.S. dollars, up 14.1 percent from a year earlier, according to a

press conference by the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) on Wednesday. Growth was much faster than the 1.7 percent gain recorded in foreign direct investment, which was 119.6 billion dollars. This is the first time the two-way nominal capital flows have been near a balance.

"If the Chinese firms' investment through third parties were included, the total ODI volume would reach about 140 billion dollars, which means China is already a net outbound investor," said Shen Danyang, spokesman with MOC. Chinese investors are investing in real estate, businesses and other assets overseas while growth at home is slowing. (Xinhua)

Iran Invites All Yemeni Groups to Self-Restraint

TEHRAN - The Iranian foreign ministry urged rival groups and parties in Yemen to exercise self-restraint and implement the agreements which have been made during the national talks in the crisis-hit country.

"Full implementation of the approvals made in the national talks and the Peace and Partnership Agreement can bring tranquility and stability back to Yemen," Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Marziyeh Akhram said on Wednesday. "We again want all signatories of the agreements to remain committed to what they have undertaken," she added. Akhram expressed the hope that partnership of all the Yemeni political-social groups, parties and streams in the political process and implementation of all the approvals of the national talks as a comprehensive political document would lead to the

establishment of stability and tranquility in the country. Tensions ran high in Yemen's capital Sana'a on Tuesday but a ceasefire appeared to be holding after heavy clashes between the Ansarollah Movement and the presidential guard threatened the US-backed government's fragile grip on power.

The Ansarollah were surrounding the prime minister's residence and had deployed not far from the entrance to the presidential palace.

Pitched battles erupted near the presidential palace and in other parts of Sana'a on Monday, in the biggest challenge yet to President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi's rule.

A ceasefire was announced after several hours of clashes between presidential guards and the Ansarollah (formerly known as the Houthis), who overran Sana'a in September. (FNA)

Rahmon Meets Newly Appointed Officials of Power-Wielding Structures

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon on Wednesday met with a group of newly appointed officials of the country's power-wielding structures. According to the Tajik president's official website, chiefs of the Police Academy of the Ministry of Interior and the Military Lyceum of the Ministry of Defense were replaced. Heads of some departments of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior as well as commanders of some military units and the chief of the Khorog border unit were also replaced, the source said. (Asia-Plus)

EU Court Upholds Syria Sanctions against Assad Relative

BRUSSELS - A top European Union court has upheld sanctions imposed on the uncle of Syrian President Bashar Assad, including an asset freeze and visa ban. The EU's General Court in Luxembourg on Wednesday dismissed

the Syrian's appeal to have his name removed of a list of close associates against whom the 28-nation EU imposed sanctions in 2011. The court said the EU succeeded in proving that Mohammad Makhlof "is a member

of the ruling economic class in Syria" while it cannot be denied he "has a decisive influence, as a principal adviser, over all the primary circle of rulers of the Syrian regime." More than 200 people are subject to EU sanctions related to Syria. (AP)

Iraq War Inquiry Report Delayed Until After Election

LONDON - The report of an inquiry into Britain's role in the Iraq war will be delayed until after a national election in May, its chairman said, provoking dismay from politicians of all parties Wednesday. Sir John Chilcot, a former senior civil servant who is heading an inquiry that began in 2009, wrote to Prime Minister David Cameron saying that the report was being delayed because individuals mentioned in it need a chance to respond. "Until we have received and evaluated responses from all those who have been given the opportunity to respond, I cannot give an accurate estimate for how long it will then take to complete our work, but it is still clear that will take some further months," Chilcot said in the letter, released Wednesday.

"I therefore see no realistic prospect of delivering our report to you before the General Election in May 2015." Britain's participation in the U.S.-led invasion was deeply controversial at the time, and became more so when there proved to be none of the weapons of mass destruction, which had been the key argument for deposing Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. The inquiry had its last evidence session in 2011, but the release has been stalled by wrangling over the inclusion of classified material - including conversations between then-Prime Minister Tony Blair and President George W. Bush. Blair's office issued a statement "for the sake of clarity," rejecting the idea that he was responsible for the delay. "He regrets this delay in its publication," the statement said, adding that "incorrect allegations and politically motivated speculation do nothing to shine a light on the issues involved." Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg said "the public have waited long enough" and that further delay in publication could undermine public trust in its conclusions. (AP)

Moscow Expects Progress in Resolving Ukraine Crisis: Lavrov

MOSCOW - Russia hopes the upcoming contacts aimed at resolving the Ukraine crisis will bring about positive results, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Wednesday. "We hope the contacts to be held in the foreseeable future at various levels will help to move ahead toward the settlement of the crisis in Ukraine," he told a press conference. Lavrov proposed maintaining direct contacts between Kiev and the two self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk republics. "All other formats involving so-called external players, including the Normandy Format and activities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, should be aimed at promoting this sustainable direct dialogue on all issues," he noted. Lavrov

also demanded that shelling of populated areas in Ukraine's restive southeastern regions be ceased immediately.

"It is necessary to stop trying to win back one populated area or another and, most importantly, immediately stop the shelling of populated areas, including Donetsk and other major cities in the region from the air and with heavy weapons," Lavrov said. Moscow has secured consent of the pro-independence insurgents to withdraw heavy weapons from the contact line as demanded by Kiev, he said, adding that the ball is now in Kiev's court. Meanwhile, Lavrov dismissed allegations that Russia has sent troops and weapons to southeastern Ukraine, saying nobody can present the proof of such presence. (Xinhua)

France Beefs Up Security Measures in Counter-Terrorism Operations

PARIS - The French government on Wednesday unveiled tough and "exceptional" anti-terror measures worth 425 million euros (492 million U.S. dollars) in a bid to ensure the country's security. "Zero risk does not exist and our duty is to act with the utmost firmness," French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said, adding that "action against terrorism is a long fight." During a press meeting, Valls announced the creation of 2,680 new jobs over the coming three years in the interior and justice ministries. In addition, a total of 122,000 French policemen, gendarmes and soldiers will be deployed to protect "sensitive places" such as mainly religious centers. Valls pledged to improve the monitoring of jihadist networks by creating a special file of people already convicted of terrorism. To this effect, the government will pump 233 million euros and 181 million euros in its inte-

rior and justice services respectively in the next three years to support its counter-terrorism mission.

"It's a massive effort crucial to guarantee French security. We are taking exceptional measures worthy of the menaces we are facing," Valls stressed.

On Jan. 7, two gunmen stormed offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, known for mocking radical Islamists. The two brothers, Cherif and Said Kouachi, killed 12 people and wounded several others in the shooting.

Cherif had previously been tried on terrorism charges and served 18 months in prison. Amedy Coulibaly, who killed a policewoman and four others in a Jewish supermarket, said he coordinated his shootings with the Kouachi brothers. The three men were members of the same Paris jihadist cell that a decade ago sent young French volunteers to Iraq to fight U.S. forces. (Xinhua)

Car Bomb Killed, At Least Seven Dead

DEMASCUS - A car bomb attack has rocked Syria's third-largest city of Homs, leaving at least seven people dead and 30 others injured. According to provincial governor, Talal Barazi, who condemned the bombing as a "cowardly terrorist act," the attack was carried out on a shopping street in the Akrameh neighborhood on Wednesday. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, but such attacks have been frequently committed by al-Qaeda-

linked Takfiri groups that are fighting against the government of President Bashar al-Assad. Akrameh has so far seen multiple attacks, as well as mortar fire, as its population is mostly made up of Alawites, the sect to which President Assad belongs. Last October, 54 people, including 47 children, were killed when a twin car bomb attack occurred in front of a school in the neighborhood. Syria has been grappling with a deadly crisis since March 2011. (Press TV)