

Nearly 37,000 Migrants, Refugee Sea Arrivals in EU so far this Year: IOM

GENEVA - Some 36,899 migrants and refugees have reached European shores in the first three weeks of 2016, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported Friday. A breakdown of the figures shows that 35,949 sea arrivals have been registered in Greece until Jan. 20, meaning that some 1,800 individuals have reached Greek soil every day in 2016 to date. IOM warned earlier this week that current trends may suggest that sea arrivals in Greece for 2016 could surpass



the record 853, 650 individuals who reached the country over the course of last year. The agency further indicated that 950 maritime arrivals have been reported in Italy, a significant drop from 2015 when 3,528 migrants and refugees arrived in the country. Figures reveal that at least 113 people have lost their lives while crossing the Mediterranean this year, 95 on the Eastern Mediterranean route separating Turkey and Greece and 18 on the Central Mediterranean passage linking North Africa to Sicily. Official estimates indicate that at least 3,711 migrants died in 2015 while crossing the Mediterranean, up from 3,279 two years ago. (Xinhua)

nificant drop from 2015 when 3,528 migrants and refugees arrived in the country. Figures reveal that at least 113 people have lost their lives while crossing the Mediterranean this year, 95 on the Eastern Mediterranean route separating Turkey and Greece and 18 on the Central Mediterranean passage linking North Africa to Sicily. Official estimates indicate that at least 3,711 migrants died in 2015 while crossing the Mediterranean, up from 3,279 two years ago. (Xinhua)

Nieghbor News

Senior Chinese, U.S. Diplomats Meet in Beijing

BEIJING - Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken met in Beijing on Thursday. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei told a regular press briefing that Zhang and Blinken had a frank and extensive exchange of views on "major strategic and security issues," without more elaboration. Hong said they agreed to continue to use the Strategic and Economic Dialogue, under which the meeting took place, to control differences between the two countries. In response to a separate question, Hong said dialogue and negotiation remain the best way to resolve the nuclear issue of the Korean Peninsula. He called for a resumption of the six-party talks as soon as possible to realize long-term peace and security. (Xinhua)

OIC Silence on Challenges Facing Muslims Regrettable: Iran

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian official has criticized the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for remaining silent on the main issues facing the Muslim world. "It is regrettable that this organization [OIC] is silent about the major challenges of the Muslim world, particularly [the issue of] Palestine, but hastily reacts to the attack on Saudi Arabia's embassy in Tehran," Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Abbas Araqchi said in an address to an emergency meeting of the OIC in Jeddah on Thursday. He added that Iran has condemned the attacks on Saudi missions in Iran and launched a thorough investigation into the incidents to identify and punish the perpetrators. Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic relations with Iran on January 3 following demonstrations held in front of the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in the northeastern city of Mashhad by angry protesters censuring the Al Saud family for the killing of prominent cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in Riyadh on January 2. (PressTV)

Syria Opposition Rules out Talks before End to Air Raids

BEIRUT - The Saudi-backed Syrian opposition ruled out even indirect negotiations with Damascus before steps including a halt to Russian air strikes, contradicting U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's insistence that talks will begin next week. With the five-year-old Syrian war showing no signs of ending, it looks increasingly uncertain that peace talks will begin as planned on Jan. 25 in Geneva, partly because of a dispute over the composition of the opposition delegation. Peace efforts face huge underlying challenges, among them disagreements over President Bashar al-Assad's future and tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Russia on Friday denied a report that President Vladimir Putin had asked Assad to step down last year. The Syrian government has said it is ready to take... (More on P4)...(26)

UN Works for Intra-Syrian Talks to Start on Jan. 25

GENEVA - Head of the UN information office at Geneva Ahmad Fawzi told reporters on Friday that though "it is likely that the date of Jan. 25 may slip simply for practical reasons, we are still aiming for that date." Fawzi explained that the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, will assess developments over the weekend and may take a decision as late as Sunday. "The talks are intra-Syrian talks, talks between Syrians. The International Syria Support Group (ISSG) will be present in the side-lines, not in the meeting rooms," said Fawzi, who was unable



to comment on the format the talks will take. The Special Envoy has been in contact with members of the ISSG in an effort to find an agreement on the list of participants to the meeting so that official invitations can... (More on P4)...(27)

Russia Voices Anger at U.S. Treatment of Honorary Consuls

MOSCOW - Russia's foreign ministry said on Friday it was angered by a U.S. government decision to withdraw the credentials of five out of the six Russian honorary consuls in the United States. In a statement, ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the United States was spreading anti-Russian propaganda and U.S. intelligence was conducting "provocations" against Russian diplomats in the United States and elsewhere.



The statement said the honorary consuls affected were based in Utah, Florida and Puerto Rico. California, Minnesota, (Reuters)

Refugees Represent both Challenge, Opportunity for Europe: ECB President

DAVOS - European Central Bank (ECB) President Mario Draghi on Friday said refugees were both a challenge and an opportunity for Europe. However, it was tough to say how long it would take to transform the challenge into opportunity, he added. "It's a challenge for sure. It would be foolish to ignore the size, the extent of the challenge. Our society will be changed by this. In which direction, we can only guess," Draghi told the World Economic Forum. He pointed out additional expenditure would be necessary by governments to cope with the refugees, which could spark some recovery in the euro area. Expenditure in large public investment projects, together with an accommodative monetary policy as well as the broadly neutral and even a slightly expansionary fiscal policy, could ensure the continuation of the eurozone recovery, Draghi said. Addressing the Greek debt crisis, Draghi said "... (More on P4)...(28)

Rahmon Says 'Certain States' have 'Evil Plans' for Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - According to Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon, international "evil plans" are a greater threat to Tajikistan's well-being than decimated remittance rates or the country's cratering currency. Indeed, if you listened to Rahmon's address to parliament earlier this week, you may well come away with the impression that Tajikistan's fiscal footing - on the backs of Rahmon's claims of strong GDP growth, decreasing poverty rates, and increased stipends - remains firm. And if you ignore the fact that, as EurasiaNet wrote, some of Rahmon's economic claims were "embellished, not to speak of outright wrong," the fiscal outlook, in Rahmon's view, remains bright. But according to the president - who was recently named the "Leader of the Nation" and "Founder of Peace and Accord" - external forces are still bent on ruining Tajikistan's otherwise healthy future. As Rahmon railed, "there are certain countries and forces abroad that have not abandoned their malicious intentions against the Tajik people and hoped to realize their evil plans using traitors of the nation." (Agencies)

Kevin Rudd Candidate for U.N. Chief

CANBERRA - Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is being considered for the role of secretary-general for the United Nations (U.N.), media reported. Australian media reported on Friday that Rudd has been flagged as a potential replacement for outgoing secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, who will finish his term at the end of this year. Ban Ki-moon was elected to the role in 2006. Member countries of the U.N., including Australia, the United States and France, are expected to announce their nominations for the position in coming weeks as the contest to select the new secretary-general gathers momentum. This means Australia's federal government, and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, must decide whether they will support Rudd in his quest to succeed Ban Ki-moon. At the moment, he is not considered one of the... (More on P4)...(29)

US to Push for Expanded Admittance of Refugees: Kerry

DAVOS - The United States Secretary of State John F. Kerry disclosed on Friday that the United States would push more admittance of refugees. Speaking at the World Economic Forum (WEF) here, Kerry said U.S. President Barack Obama would host a summit at the United Nations this fall on refugees, during which the United States would make efforts to rally the world community on several fronts. It aims to increase the number of countries admitting refugees by 10 and the response to humanitarian funding appeals by 30 percent. It will also call for countries accepting refugees to double the number they resettle. Earlier this week, German President Joachim Gauck argued that the responsibility of the European countries to help refugees is humanitarian at a speech delivered here at the WEF. However, putting a cap



on the number of refugees entering Europe would not be unethical, he said. Kerry slammed at government corruptions in his speech and said it contributed to the global refugee crisis. Last year, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad... (More on P4)...(30)

N. Korea Leader Responsible for Rights Abuses: UN Envoy

TOKYO - Harsh human rights conditions in North Korea have barely changed and its leader, Kim Jong Un, should be held criminally responsible, the top U.N. envoy on North Korea said Friday. Marzuki Darusman said in Tokyo that his repeated requests to visit North Korea during six years as the U.N. special rapporteur have never been accepted. He said global efforts to improve human rights in North Korea, officially called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, must continue. "In addition to continuing political pressure to exhort the DPRK to improve human rights, it is also now imperative to pursue criminal responsibility of the DPRK leadership," he said. He said various institutions, civil groups and governments, as well as the U.N. are collecting information "to identify the perpetrators, and to trace all these actions (of abuse) to the highest leadership in the country." Judicial proceedings have not started, and he declined to identify the perpetrators. "There is a need to build up a strong case so that accountability is not compromised," he said. "When the moment comes, the judicial processes are made possible." Darusman was in Japan to assess North Korean human rights developments. He talked with Japanese police and legal experts, as well as relatives of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea decades ago. His visit follows a North Korean nuclear test earlier this month. (AP)

Poland Clouds NATO's Nuanced Russia Plan

BRUSSELS/WARSAW - Poland's defense minister on Thursday seized on Britain's announcement that it is sending troops for exercises in the country, telling local radio that London would station 1,000 military personnel in Poland from next year. Britain's defense ministry declined to comment, ... (More on P4)...(31)

Iran-IAEA Cooperation Should Not be Marred by Politics: Russia

TEHRAN - Russia has expressed hope that the Islamic Republic's cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will not be affected by politics as a nuclear agreement between the Islamic Republic and six world powers is being implemented. "Work in IAEA has started. In the framework of Tehran's compliance with additional protocols on guarantees, we hope that it will not be politicized and that all sides will do everything possible to fulfill them," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday. Work on implementing... (More on P4)...(32)

Pakistan Lifts Ban on Hunting Rare Bird after Government Protests

SLAMABAD - Pakistan's Supreme Court lifted a ban on hunting a rare bird on Friday, after the government argued it hurt relations with Gulf states whose wealthy hunters traditionally travel to Pakistan to pursue the endangered species with falcons. The court ruling overturns a ban introduced last year on hunting the houbara bustard, pending new hearings of petitions by both the government and conservationists. Conservationists say the bird is at risk of extinction. Wealthy Arabs used to be granted special licenses to travel to Pakistan, with falcons worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, to hunt the bustard. Some believe the bird's meat is an aphrodisiac. The government last year asked the court to review the ban because it was damaging Pakistan's relations with Gulf states, key investors in the country. It argued that sustainable hunting of the bustard was the best means of conservation. (Reuters)