

Trump Not to Immediately Reject Iran Nuclear Deal: Corker

WASHINGTON - A top Republican Senator said Friday that he didn't expect U.S. President-elect Donald Trump to abruptly "tear up" the Iran nuclear deal after taking office on Jan. 20. "To tear it up on the front end, in my opinion, is not going to happen," Bob Corker, Chairman of Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told reporters in Washington. Corker, who was opposed to the nuclear accord when it was finalized in 2015, said the Iran deal was "flawed", but to abruptly abandon the agreement backed by



major countries would create an international crisis. "In spite of all the flaws in the agreement, nothing bad is going to happen relative to nuclear development in Iran over the next few years," he said, adding that the U.S. should now vigorously enforce the agreement. During his campaign, Trump repeatedly criticized the Iran nuclear deal, calling it "the worst deal ever negotiated." He also suggested that he would force Iran to return to the negotiation table or risk the accord being dismantled. (Xinhua)

French FM Reiterates "Emergency" to Find Political Solution to Syrian Conflict

PARIS - French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault has reiterated "the emergency" to find a political solution to the Syrian civil war within the framework of the United Nations. According to a statement issued by the French Foreign Ministry on Friday, Ayrault told his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov via telephone all the efforts to seek a political solution are welcome, pro-

vided that they are within the UN framework and that the Syrian opposition is represented in peace talks. Speaking about the conference on Middle East conflict, scheduled for January 15, the two officials stressed the need to energize diplomatic efforts to implement the two-state solution to end hostilities between Palestinians and Israeli forces, the statement added. (Xinhua)

Migrants to EU by Sea Fall by Two-Thirds in 2016: Frontex

BRUSSELS - The total number of migrants reaching Europe by sea in 2016 fell by nearly two-thirds in comparison with 2015, Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency said Friday. According to a Frontex statement, some 364,000 migrants arrived in Europe last year. The number is a sharp drop from the more than one million migrants who entered the EU in 2015. Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis accounted for the largest share of the arriving migrants. The decreasing flow on the sea route was in large part due to the EU-Turkey

deal, which came into effect in last March. The deal led to tighter border control by the Turkish authorities and readmission of migrants from the Greek islands to Turkey, Frontex said. The drop was also influenced by tighter border controls in the Western Balkans, as the people who crossed over the Mediterranean Sea to Greece tried to make their way via the the Western Balkan route towards western Europe. The number of migrants across the Western Balkans in 2016 fell sharply to 123,000 from 764,000 in 2015. (Xinhua)

Trump Reiterates Mexico to Pay Back Border Wall Cost

WASHINGTON - U.S. President-elect Donald Trump on Friday stressed again that Mexico will ultimately burden the cost of building a border wall, but hinted that the U.S. government will finance the wall initially for "sake of speed." "The dishonest media does not report that any money spent on building the Great Wall (for sake of speed), will be paid back by Mexico later!" Trump told his 18.8 million tweeter followers. The fiery words were likely in response to me-



dia reports Thursday that Trump's team had asked congressional Republicans to fund the project as early as April, raising eyebrows that this may break Trump's campaign prom-

43 Killed in Car Bomb Attack in Northern Syrian City

DAMASCUS - A car bomb was detonated on Saturday in the rebel-held city of Azaz in northern Syria, killing at least 43, a monitor group said. The car was detonated near the a rebel-run courthouse in Azaz in the northern countryside of Aleppo province in northern Syria, near Turkey, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Meanwhile, other activists placed the death toll at 50. Azaz has changed hands among rebel groups including the Islamic State several times since falling out of the government control in 2012. ... (More on P4)... (15)

UN Chief Sees 'Historic Opportunity' for Cyprus Breakthrough

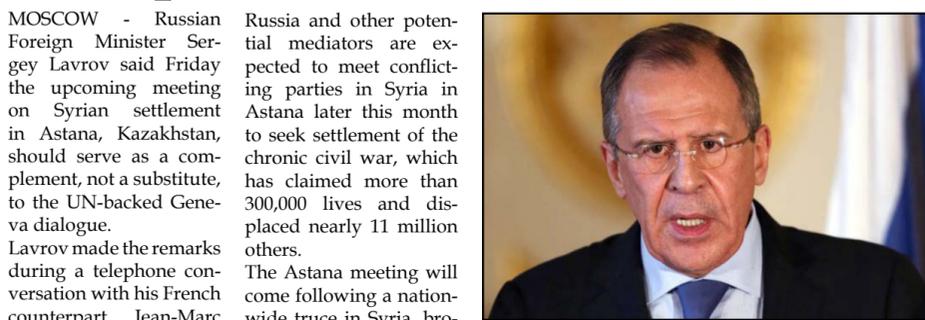
UNITED NATIONS - Secretary-General Antonio Guterres believes there is "a historic opportunity" for a breakthrough in upcoming negotiations that would reunite the divided Mediterranean island of Cyprus after more than four decades, the United Nations said Friday. The new U.N. chief will be opening and chairing a conference that starts Jan. 12 with the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders and Cyprus' three guarantors - Britain, Greece and Turkey - that will be seeking agreement on post-settlement security arrangements, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. The Geneva conference will follow three days of talks

between the island's Greek Cypriot president, Nicos Anastasiades, and breakaway Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci starting Jan. 9 to try to reach a settlement. "We're at a very decisive phase in the Cyprus peace talks," Dujarric said. "At this point it's really about being supportive of the process and seeing how the parties can finally bridge the final gaps." The island was split into a Greek Cypriot south and a Turkish Cypriot north in 1974 when Turkey invaded after a coup by Cypriot supporters of union with Greece. Turkish Cypriots declared an independent state in 1983, but only Turkey recognizes it and keeps 35,000 troops there. (AP)

Syrian Solution Meeting in Astana to Complement Geneva Talks: Lavrov

MOSCOW - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Friday the upcoming meeting on Syrian settlement in Astana, Kazakhstan, should serve as a complement, not a substitute, to the UN-backed Geneva dialogue. Lavrov made the remarks during a telephone conversation with his French counterpart Jean-Marc Ayrault, according to a brief statement published on the website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Russia and other potential mediators are expected to meet conflicting parties in Syria in Astana later this month to seek settlement of the chronic civil war, which has claimed more than 300,000 lives and displaced nearly 11 million others. The Astana meeting will come following a nationwide truce in Syria, brokered by Russia and Turkey last week, between the Syrian government and major opposition groups.



Russia attaches great importance to the forthcoming Astana meeting, which should bring together who really con-

control the situation "on the ground" and are able to perform their obligations, according to Lavrov. (Xinhua)

Turkish PM Arrives in Baghdad for Talks to Solve Dispute

BAGHDAD - Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim arrived Saturday in Baghdad on an official visit to hold talks with the Iraqi leaders to end the diplomatic crisis between the two countries, the Iraqi official television reported. Yildirim is expected to meet with his Iraqi counterpart Haider al-Abadi and other top Iraqi officials to discuss the fight against Islamic State (IS) terrorist group and means to enhance bilateral relations, the state-run Iraqiya channel said. Yildirim, who is accompa-

nied with a delegation of Turkish ministers and top officials, is also expected to visit Erbil, capital of the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan to meet with the Kurdish leaders, including the region's President Masoud Barzani. Hundreds of Turkish soldiers have deployed since 2015 in Bashiqa camp, some 30 km northeast of Mosul. The presence of the Turk-



ish troops led to a dispute between Iraq and Turkey, as Baghdad repeatedly said that Turkish forces entered Iraq without the

knowledge of the Iraqi government, which views their presence as a violation of the country's sovereignty. (Xinhua)

Transfer of Refugees from Greek Islands to Mainland Must be Expedited: UNHCR

GENEVA - The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) urged authorities on Friday to accelerate the relocation of asylum-seekers from the Aegean islands of Samos, Chios and Lesbos to the Greek mainland in light of the poor conditions on many of the islands' reception centers. "Even with recent efforts to improve matters, conditions at many sites on the islands remain very poor," the UN agency said in a statement. "The need for better protection will become all the more acute this week-end when temperatures on the islands are expected to drop. We are worried," it added. According to figures, some 700 individuals including young children are currently living in unheated tents in Samos' Reception and Information Centre. UNHCR said that together with partners it has been providing much needed relief on the islands of Chios and Lesbos where similar conditions prevail. According to the agency, asylum-seekers are only allowed to move on to the Greek mainland once they have completed the registration process or in cases of particular vulnerability. (Xinhua)



WASHINGTON - US Secretary of State John Kerry has said that Pakistan was among the key countries where the United States has constructed state-of-the-art tactical security operations centres. In a 21-page exit memo, the outgoing top US diplomat also named Afghanistan and Iraq among the countries where the Obama administration has built such centres. The document does not say where these centres were built or who operated them and how. The memo only says that "we have constructed state-of-the-art tactical secu-

Trump Says Hacking Had 'No Effect' on His Election

WASHINGTON - Donald Trump asserted that hacking did not sway the US election, after a briefing on an intelligence report that blamed Russia's Vladimir Putin for a cyber campaign to keep Hillary Clinton out of the White House. While the president-elect held fast to his rejection of the intelligence community's conclusion that Russia interfered in the election, he accepted the possibility that Moscow was involved in hacking US targets including the Democratic National Committee. After meeting four top intelligence chiefs, Trump acknowledged that cyber attacks by Russia, China and other countries threaten US institutions, political parties and businesses. But he offered no direct acceptance of the intelligence chiefs' conclusion that ... (More on P4)... (14)

US Built Tactical Operations Centre in Pakistan: Kerry

WASHINGTON - US Secretary of State John Kerry has said that Pakistan was among the key countries where the United States has constructed state-of-the-art tactical security operations centres. In a 21-page exit memo, the outgoing top US diplomat also named Afghanistan and Iraq among the countries where the Obama administration has built such centres. The document does not say where these centres were built or who operated them and how. The memo only says that "we have constructed state-of-the-art tactical secu-

Uzbekistan Names First Deputy State Adviser

TASHKENT - Ruslanbek Davletov has been appointed Uzbekistan's first deputy state adviser on control and coordination of work with appeals of individuals and legal entities. Davletov, who previously served as the first deputy justice minister, has been appointed to his new position under the decree of the country's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, said a message posted on the Justice Ministry's website. As it was reported earlier, President Mirziyoyev has determined the development of a permanent dialogue

Nieghbor News

China Hopes Astana Talks will Bear Fruit for Syria's Political Process: Chinese Envoy

GENEVA - Special Envoy of the Chinese Government on the Syrian Issue Xie Xiaoyan on Friday said that both the UN and China welcome the upcoming Astana talks, with the hope that the talks will bear some fruit for the political process of the war-torn country. Xie, now in Geneva in an effort to help working on a political solution to the Syrian crisis, said it is unclear which sides will take part in the talks scheduled on Jan. 23, but surely "Chinese representatives will be present." "We hope the Astana meeting will be carried out in the same manner as those peace talks in the past, being representative and tolerant," he said. After Geneva, Xie will travel to the European

Union, Turkey and Russia. His journey is aimed at enhancing communication with the parties concerned, supporting global efforts in promoting peace and pushing forward a political solution at an early date. Recently, the Syrian government and major opposition groups reached a nationwide ceasefire deal and agreed to start peace talks, which brought new opportunity for a political solution to the Syrian issue. The UN Security Council last Saturday unanimously adopted a resolution supporting the Syria ceasefire arrangement brokered by Russia and Turkey, as well as new peace talks among conflicting parties set to be held in Astana, capital of Kazakhstan. (Xinhua)

Iran, Lebanon Determined to Boost Ties in Various Sectors: Senior Iranian MP

TEHRAN - Iran and Lebanon are resolved to take new steps to further enhance relations in different fields, particularly in economic, trade and security sectors, a senior Iranian lawmaker says. "High-ranking officials of the two countries are determined to strengthen mutual relations and take new steps [in this regard]," Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy Alaeddin Boroujerdi told IRNA after a meeting with Lebanese President Michel Aoun in Beirut on Saturday. On December 28, Lebanon's national unity government, headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, won a vote of

confidence in parliament. Lebanese lawmakers approved the new cabinet, nearly two months after the country's parliament elected Aoun, a strong Hezbollah ally, as president. Aoun's election ended a 29-month-long political stalemate in Lebanon. Boroujerdi, who is in Beirut at the head of a parliamentary delegation, said that during his meeting with Aoun he underlined the importance of the Syrian developments to both Iran and Lebanon in terms of security. He added that Aoun has called on Iran to help his country tackle the issue of a large number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. (Press TV)

US Built Tactical Operations Centre in Pakistan: Kerry

WASHINGTON - US Secretary of State John Kerry has said that Pakistan was among the key countries where the United States has constructed state-of-the-art tactical security operations centres. In a 21-page exit memo, the outgoing top US diplomat also named Afghanistan and Iraq among the countries where the Obama administration has built such centres. The document does not say where these centres were built or who operated them and how. The memo only says that "we have constructed state-of-the-art tactical secu-

operations centres in key countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan." The Obama administration completes its second and final term on Jan 20, when President Barack Obama will hand over power to President-elect Donald Trump. Secretary Kerry noted in the memo that Afghanistan and Pakistan were Al Qaeda strongholds when the Obama administration took charge but in the last eight years, the group's core leadership in these two countries had "decimated" and its chief, Osama bin Laden, eliminated. (Monitoring Desk)

Uzbekistan Names First Deputy State Adviser

TASHKENT - Ruslanbek Davletov has been appointed Uzbekistan's first deputy state adviser on control and coordination of work with appeals of individuals and legal entities. Davletov, who previously served as the first deputy justice minister, has been appointed to his new position under the decree of the country's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, said a message posted on the Justice Ministry's website. As it was reported earlier, President Mirziyoyev has determined the development of a permanent dialogue

with the population, studying and implementation of its legitimate demands, requests and suggestions as the priority of Uzbekistan's leadership. Reception centers will be created for people in every district and city of Uzbekistan for unimpeded appeals of citizens to the heads of all-level state structures, prosecutor offices and others. Moreover, heads of ministries and departments have to provide virtual reception opportunities for appeals of individuals and legal entities. (Trend)