

Japan PM to Make Historic Address to Congress, Talk Trade

WASHINGTON - Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will seek support for a trans-Pacific trade pact that has divided U.S. lawmakers as he makes the first address by a Japanese leader to a joint meeting of Congress. Abe will be promoting his staunch support of an even-tighter relationship between former wartime adversaries in both trade and defense as the allies contend with a rising China, and can expect a warm reception Wednesday morning. But the Japanese leader, who has faced opposition at home to the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership, lands in the midst of a bruising battle



in Washington over legislation that would give President Barack Obama the authority to negotiate

a deal that is a cornerstone of his second-term agenda. In a reversal of politics-as-usual, it's Obama's

own Democratic base that opposes him, and Republicans who support the deal. After an Oval Of-

fice meeting with Abe on Tuesday, where the two leaders declared progress in bilateral trade talks that

are critical for completing a wider TPP agreement among nations accounting for 40 percent of global GDP, Obama conceded to reporters: "It's never fun passing a trade bill in this town." Abe, who called for an "early conclusion" of TPP, may play a small part in trying to tip the balance in what is viewed as a strategic push to shape the economic future of Asia-Pacific. His ambassador to Washington, Kenichiro Sasae, told reporters last week that he expected Abe "would appeal to Congress that we need to work together to make this TPP a success." (AP)

N. Korea's Kim Ordered 15 Executions This Year: South's Spy Agency

SEOUL - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered the execution of 15 senior officials this year as punishment for challenging his authority, South Korea's spy agency told a closed-door parliament meeting on Wednesday. A vice minister for forestry was one of the officials executed for complaining about a state policy, a member of parliament's intelligence committee, Shin Kyung-min, quoted an unnamed National Intelligence Service official as saying. "Excuses or reasoning doesn't work for Kim Jong Un, and his style of

rule is to push through everything, and if there's any objection, he takes that as a challenge to authority and comes back with execution as a showcase," Shin said. "In the four months this year, fifteen senior officials are said to have been executed," Shin cited the intelligence official as saying, according to his office. In 2013, Kim purged and executed his uncle, Jang Song Thaek, once considered the second most powerful man in Pyongyang's leadership circle, for corruption and committing crimes damaging to the economy... (More on P4)... (19)

Japan Considering Joint U.S. Air Patrols in South China Sea - Sources



TOKYO - Japan's military is considering joining the United States in maritime air patrols in the South China Sea in response to China's increasingly assertive pursuit of territorial claims, a Japanese and a U.S. source familiar with the discussions said. News of the deliberations came as Japan and the United States unveiled new defense guidelines during a visit to Washington by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, reflecting his plans for Japan to take on a wider security role beyond the direct defense of its home islands.

While no concrete plans had yet been formulated, Japan could join U.S. patrols in the South China Sea, or operate patrols in rotation from the Japanese island of Okinawa on the edge of the East China Sea, the Japanese source said, speaking on condition of anonymity. So far the discussion is within the Japanese military, but any move to begin patrols would need civilian approval. Japanese air patrols in an area where China is pushing disputed territorial claims, including through a massive program of land reclamation... (More on P4)... (20)

Hungary PM Revives Death Penalty Debate, Draws EU Concern

BUDAPEST - Prime Minister Viktor Orban's Fidesz party, under pressure from a eurosceptic right, said on Wednesday it wanted to raise the question of a possible reintroduction of the death penalty with its European Union partners. A European Parliament member dismissed the idea as barbaric. Hungary scrapped the death penalty shortly after the fall of Communism, in 1990. Orban raised the matter anew after the recent murder of a young tobaccoist in southern Hungary that stirred anger in the country. Fidesz's parliament caucus leader said the party was aware European rules precluded capital punishment but a debate was still necessary. "Even in an EU member state, if that country's public wants to have the death penalty... then a substantial debate can be raised on the EU level," caucus leader Antal Rogan told public radio. (Reuters)

King's Powerful Son: Saudi Arabia's Future Crown Prince

RIYADH - Saudi King Salman's youthful son Prince Mohammed, appointed Wednesday as second in line to the throne, wields enormous power and is leading a war against rebels in neighbouring Yemen. Defence Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in his 30s, was named deputy crown prince thanks to his "massive capabilities which became evident to everyone through

all the missions he had been assigned with," said a statement by his father, King Salman, 79. Just weeks after taking charge of the kingdom's armed forces Prince Mohammed assumed huge responsibility when a Saudi-led coalition on March 26 began an air war against Iran-backed rebels in Yemen. His nomination on Wednesday gained "support from the vast majority of members of the Council of Alle-

giance," a committee of 35 descendants of the kingdom's founder Abdul Aziz bin Saud. The council was formed in 2006 to decide on succession. Prince Mohammed also retains his position as head of the economic and development council, a coordinating body, and was named as second deputy prime minister. But he will no longer hold the crucial position of head of the royal

court, a type of gatekeeper to the king. "He is the strong man in Saudi Arabia," a Western diplomatic source said before the reshuffle. "He oversees everything important which is going on in this country. The exact age of Mohammed, who sports a full dark beard, is uncertain. Analysts and local media have reported various ages but none higher than 35. (AFP)

Dutch Peacekeeper Not Prosecuted

ARNHEM, Netherlands - A Dutch high court has ruled that a retired general who commanded Dutch peacekeepers in the Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica when Bosnian Serb fighters overran the town and massacred some 8,000 Muslim men should not be prosecuted for involvement in the slayings. The military chamber of the Arnhem court ruled on Wednesday that Gen. Thom Karremans could not be held criminally liable on grounds of command responsibility. Relatives of three victims of the worst massacre in Europe since World War II wanted Karremans and two other members of the Dutch peacekeeping force to face charges, arguing their family members were turned over to the Serbs on July 13, 1995 when they should have been offered protection. Court spokesman Mark Boekhorst Carrillo said the ruling specifically had to assess the actions of the three on the day the victims left the compound and not assess the whole Dutchbat (Dutch battalion) peacekeeping mission. "The court has said that it is very unlikely that the Dutch judges would convict these soldiers and then the prosecution doesn't have to prosecute," said Boekhorst Carrillo.

At the time, Bosnian Serb forces separated the Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica from women and the elderly and then transported them to remote sites in the hills surrounding the town and summarily executed them before plowing their bodies into mass graves. The Dutch government already accepted "political responsibility" for the mission's failure and contributes aid to Bosnia, much of which is earmarked for rebuilding in Srebrenica. (AP)

Syrian Rebels Battle Islamic Militants near Golan Height

BEIRUT - Mainstream Syrian rebels are battling Islamists suspected of links to the Islamic State group in a southern province near the Israeli-held Golan Heights, with at least 29 people killed in days of clashes, a spokesman and activists said Wednesday. The IS group is not known to have a significant presence in southern Syria. However, Isam al-Rayess, spokesman for the Free Syrian Army's Southern Front, said a group known as Jihad

Units ambushed some of his fighters in the Quneitra province who were on their way to join an offensive against forces loyal to President Bashar Assad. He said the Southern Front, a rebel coalition, has long suspected the Jihad Units of being loyal to the Islamic State group. After the ambush, the Islamic militants raised black flags similar to those carried by the IS group. Six of the Southern Front fighters were killed in the ambush, al-Rayess said. Soon after,

another ambush resulted in the kidnapping of two fighters, he said. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 29 people, including at least nine from the Jihad Units and two Saudi nationals, have been killed in the fighting since Monday. The rebels have vowed to clear the Jihad Units from the province, and al-Rayess said his men are currently besieging about 200 Jihad Units fighters in a village south of Quneitra... (More on P4)... (16)

Nepal Quake Toll Tops 5,000 as Aid Reaches Area near Epicenter

GUMDA - Hands pressed together in supplication, the Nepalese women pleaded for food, shelter and anything else the helicopter might have brought on an in-and-out run Wednesday to this smashed mountain village near the epicenter of last weekend's mammoth earthquake that killed more than 5,000 people. Unlike in Nepal's capital, where most buildings were spared complete collapse, the tiny hamlets clinging to the remote mountainsides of Gorkha District have been ravaged. Entire clusters of homes were reduced to piles of stone and splintered wood. Orange plastic tarps used for



shelter now dot the cliff sides and terraced rice paddies carved into the land. "We are hungry," cried a woman who gave her name only as Deumaya, gesturing toward her stomach and opening her mouth to emphasize her desperation. Another woman, Ramayana, her

eyes hollow and haunted, repeated the plea: "Hungry! We are hungry!" But food is not the only necessity in short supply out here beyond the reaches of paved roads, electricity poles and other benefits of the modern world. These days, even water... (More on P4)... (17)

Forest Fire near Ukraine's Chernobyl Nuclear Zone under Control: Prime Minister

KIEV - Ukrainian fire fighters have contained a large forest fire that threatened to spread toward the abandoned Chernobyl nuclear power plant and radiation levels in the area are normal, Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk said on Wednesday. The blaze in woodlands, parts of which are still

contaminated by radioactive particles from the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, had raised fears of increased radiation as high winds pushed it toward the plant about 20 km (12 miles) away. Yatseniuk, speaking at a government meeting, said: "As of 12:45 (05:45 EDT) the fires has been localized and

contained. The radiation levels are normal." Emergency services deployed more than 300 firefighters, three planes and one helicopter to tackle the fire which Yatseniuk said was the largest in Ukraine since 1992. An explosion followed by a fire at Chernobyl's... (More on P4)... (18)

Neighbour News

Iranian Revolutionary Guards Seize Cargo Ship in Gulf

DUBAI/WASHINGTON - Iranian patrol boats intercepted a cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz on Tuesday and forced it into Iranian territorial waters by firing shots across its bow, prompting the U.S. Navy to send a destroyer and reconnaissance plane to monitor the situation. Iranian Revolutionary Guard boats confronted the MV Maersk Tigris, a Marshall Islands-flagged vessel, as it was traversing one of the world's most important oil shipping channels and forced it to divert toward Larak Island near Bandar Abbas, where it was boarded by Iranian

forces, U.S. officials said. The Iranian action occurred amid heightened tensions over the conflict in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition supported by Washington has been bombing Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, who have seized much of the country and sidelined the U.S.-backed president. Saudi jets bombed the airport in Yemen's capital on Tuesday to prevent Iranian planes from landing. The ship seizure also came at a sensitive time as Tehran is inching toward a final deal with major powers on its nuclear programme. (Reuters)

Tajikistan Ranked 179th in Terms of Freedom of the Press

DUSHANBE - Freedom of the Press 215, released by Freedom House on April 28, ranks Tajikistan 179th among 199 countries and territories in terms of freedom of the press. Kyrgyzstan is ranked 149th, Russia is ranked 181st and Kazakhstan is ranked 185th. The report notes that conditions for the media deteriorated sharply in 2014 to reach their lowest point in more than 10 years, as journalists around the world encountered more restrictions from governments, militants, criminals, and media owners. The report found that the main factors driving the decline were the passage and use of restrictive laws against the media—often on national security grounds—and limits on the ability of local and foreign journalists to report freely within a given country, or even to reach it. In a time of seemingly unlimited access to infor-

mation and new methods of content delivery, more and more areas of the world are becoming virtually inaccessible to journalists. While some parts of the world are rendered inaccessible mostly by chaotic violence, others are deliberately barred to most reporters by repressive governments, the report says. Prime examples include China's Tibet and Xinjiang regions, Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, Russian-occupied Crimea, and certain ethnic minority areas in Myanmar. Citizen journalists, activists, and ordinary residents have managed to disseminate some information about conditions in these regions, but it is no substitute for unfettered reporting by professionals, and it is often easier to send news to the outside world than to reach audiences within the affected area. (AP)

Chinese Investment neither Loan nor Grant: Nawaz Sharif

LONDON - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has said the money being spent by China in Pakistan is not a loan or grant but an investment, according to the state-run Radio Pakistan website. Talking to reporters, before leaving for Islamabad from London, the premier said that China's investment in Pakistan under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project covers construction of motorways and installation of energy projects. He said new Gwadar city will be built with the cooperation of China and its benefits will be reaped by the entire country. On the end of his five-day visit to the United Kingdom Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said Britain is a friend country which plays an important role in the field of education in Pakistan. "Relations between the United Kingdom and Pakistan are very good," he said adding that Britain appreciates Pakistan's efforts against terrorism. He said a neck-and-neck contest is expected during the upcoming elections in Britain. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had reached London on April 24 on the

invitation of Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron where he held meetings with British leaders and business executives. He also held official talks on bilateral, regional and global issues with his British counterpart. Answering a question about the recently held local government elections in cantonment areas he said, "The results of have been good." He added that he expected a much better result in the next general elections. Responding to another question about Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's (PTI) allegations of poll-rigging the premier said, "If the proof of rigging is in the ballot bags then what do the accusers have with them." He also referred to the increase in the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz's lead over the PTI after the opening of ballot-bags in a constituency of Lahore, where poll-rigging had been alleged. Talking about the murder of Sabeen Mehmud in Karachi, he said it was a deplorable act and that the government was making all efforts trace and apprehend the culprits behind the incident. (Agencies)