

# Egypt, Qatar Plan Reconciliation Summit: Diplomat

CAIRO - Egyptian and Qatari intelligence officials have met to arrange talks between leaders of the two countries to end a row over the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi, a diplomatic source said Wednesday. The planned summit is part of reconciliation efforts brokered by Saudi Arabia after Qatar this month pledged its "full support" for Egypt. Qatar's earlier backing of Morsi and his blacklisted Muslim Brotherhood movement left it isolated in the region. "Talks are under way to organise a meeting between the Egyptian president and the emir of Qatar," an Arab diplomatic source told AFP.



"The talks took place in Cairo over the past two days between the head of Qatari intelligence and his Egyptian counterpart for arranging such a meeting in Riyadh." He said there was a possibility that a meeting between President Abdel

Fattah al-Sisi and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani "could be held on Sisi's way back from China". Sisi, who overthrew Morsi in July last year, is expected to return from China on Wednesday after a two-day trip.

A foreign ministry official when contacted said he had no idea that intelligence officials of the two countries had met in Cairo. Ties between Cairo and Doha deteriorated after then-army chief Sisi toppled Morsi, whose Muslim Brotherhood

movement was backed by Qatar. Since Morsi's ouster, a crackdown overseen by Sisi against the Brotherhood has left hundreds dead. Qatar repeatedly denounced Sisi's overthrow of Morsi and it still provides shelter for some Brotherhood leaders who fled Egypt. The crackdown led to a diplomatic spat pitting Qatar against Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, which all supported the ouster of the Islamist president. But at a regional summit in November hosted by Riyadh, Qatar joined its Gulf neighbours in supporting Egypt under Sisi. (AFP)

## Suicide Bomber Kills 33 People South of Baghdad



BAGHDAD - A suicide bomber killed 33 people and wounded 55 others in Madaen, about 25 km (15 miles) south of Baghdad, on Wednesday, Iraqi police and medical officials said. The bomber blew himself up near a line of Sunni pro-government fighters waiting for their salaries, the officials said, adding they expected the toll to rise. The dead were mostly pro-government fighters, but included at least three soldiers. "The attacker was wearing an Iraqi army uniform, and an explosive vest packed with ball bearings," a police officer said. (Reuters)

## Nieghbor News

### Bold Steps Required to Rid Country of Terrorism: Sharif



ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister (PM) Nawaz Sharif has said that we are facing an unusual situation and if strong measures are not taken it would be unacceptable for the nation. Addressing a session of the national parliamentary leaders, the PM was pleased with the fact that all leaders were on the same page concerning the Peshawar carnage. He said the way children were targeted in Peshawar, it was unprecedented in the history of mankind.

The PM further said that terrorism was a disease and history would

be unforgiving if right measures were not taken to counter it. Prime Minister Sharif said the nation was looking up to them to make necessary decisions no matter how difficult, to rid the country of this menace once and for all. Appreciating everyone for these assurances to cooperate in solving these problems, he said that bold steps need to be taken against people who are trying to destabilize and weaken the roots of Pakistan. Finally he welcomed all the participants and applauded the responsibility showed party leaders. (Monitoring Desk)

## Abe Takes Office for 3rd Term As Japan's Leader

TOKYO - Shinzo Abe took office Wednesday for a third term as Japan's prime minister, appointing a former military officer as his defense minister but keeping the other members of his previous Cabinet. Parliament re-elected Abe after his Liberal Democratic Party won a renewed mandate in a Dec. 14 snap election that the prime minister said was needed for him to carry out further economic and political reforms. Abe said economic recovery is vital to achieving his key policy goals such as stronger national

security and carrying out the most drastic reforms of the economy since World War II. "My commitment to protecting public safety, lives and happiness is unchanged," Abe said in a late night news conference. "We must, of course, deal with many issues, but nothing can be accomplished without a strong economy." Gen Nakatani, Abe's new defense minister, headed the Defense Agency in 2001-2002 under former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, before it won full-fledged ministry status. A graduate of the



National Defense Academy, he attained a rank of first lieutenant before leaving the military. Nakatani favors a stronger role for the military, which is constrained by the country's commitment to pacifism under the constitution drafted by the American occupation forces following Japan's defeat in World War II. Nakatani said Abe specifically asked him to tackle "national security in order to protect Japanese territory, the people's lives and properties." (AP)

## U.S.-Led Forces Launch 17 Air Strikes in Syria, Iraq

WASHINGTON - The U.S.-led campaign against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq included 10 air strikes in Syria on Wednesday and seven in Iraq, the U.S. military said. Eight of the strikes in Syria were centered around the contested border town of Kobani near the Turkish border, the Combined Joint Task force

said. It said two other strikes hit a crude oil collection point near Dayr az Zawr and an Islamic State weapons stockpile near Raqqa, in the province where a Jordanian pilot was taken captive in northeast Syria. The strikes in Iraq targeted Islamic State units and property in al Qaim, Sinjar, Falluja and Tal Afar. (Reuters)

## NATO Turning Ukraine into 'Frontline of Confrontation': Russia

MOSCOW - Russia said on Wednesday NATO was turning Ukraine into a "frontline of confrontation" and threatened to sever remaining ties with the Atlantic military alliance if Ukraine's hopes of joining it were realized. The Kiev parliament's renunciation of Ukraine's neutral status on Tuesday in pursuit of NATO membership has outraged Moscow and deepened the worst confrontation between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War.

"NATO countries pushed Kiev to this counterproductive decision, trying to turn Ukraine into a front line of confrontation with Russia," Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov told the Russian news agency Interfax. "If this decision in the future takes on a military character (accession to NATO), then we will respond appropriately. Then there will be a complete severing of ties with NATO, which will be practically impossible to repair," Antonov said. It is likely to take years for Ukraine to meet the technical criteria for accession to NATO and, even then, there is no certainty that the alliance is ready to take on such a political hot potato. Yet Russia has made

clear it would see the NATO membership of such a strategic former Soviet republic with a long common border as a direct military threat. A NATO official, who asked not to be named, said it was solely up to Kiev to decide on its foreign policy. "Should Ukraine decide to apply for NATO membership, NATO will assess its readiness to join the alliance in the same way as with any candidate. This is an issue between NATO and the individual countries aspiring to membership," the official said. NATO has already boosted its military presence in eastern Europe this year, saying it has evidence that Russia orchestrated and armed a pro-Russian rebellion in eastern Ukraine that followed the overthrow of a Kremlin-backed president in Kiev. Moscow denies supporting the rebellion, and is currently trying, along with Kiev and the rebels, to renew efforts to find a political solution to the crisis in eastern Ukraine. A so-called "contact group" is expected to meet in Minsk on Wednesday to try to reinforce a shaky ceasefire and de-escalate the conflict, in which more than 4,700 people have been killed. (Reuters)

## Israel, Hamas Trade Accusations over Growing Tension in Gaza

GAZA - Israel and Islamic Hamas movement had on Wednesday traded accusations over a growing tension between the two sides after a local Hamas commander was killed and an Israeli soldier was injured in a short gun-battle near the southeast borders of the Gaza Strip with Israel. Earlier, Hamas said a local commander of its armed wing, known as al-Qasam Brigades, was killed in an exchange of fire with an Israeli army force in east of the southern Gaza Strip town of Khan Younis. Hamas officials, who spoke on condition of ano-

nymity, accused the Israeli army of sending a ground force backed by armored vehicles into the area, adding that a group of militants who guard the borderline area confronted the force and a gun-battle broke out in the areas between the two sides. Explosion and gunshots were heard by witnesses during the exchange of fire. Israeli tank fired two random shells into the area, killed the Hamas militant and wounded a civilian. Hamas movement said in an official emailed statement that it holds Israel responsible for the escalation in southern

Gaza Strip, adding that "this serious violation was made today after a series of Zionist (Israeli) provocations in the Gaza Strip." "Hamas warns of the danger of this Zionist escalation and its influence on the ongoing calm, therefore Hamas calls on all parties to halt any upcoming aggression in the Gaza Strip and on our people." The exchange of fire between Hamas militants and the Israeli army force is the first of its kind since the end of an Israeli large-scale air and ground operation that lasted for 50 days and ended on Aug. 26. (Xinhua)

## IS Downs Anti-Terror Coalition War Jet Over Syria

DAMASCUS - The Islamic State (IS) militants have downed a war jet that is believed to belong to the international anti-terror coalition near Syria's northern al-Raqqa province, a monitoring group reported on Wednesday. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the fate of the pilot remains unknown, spelling no further details. Meanwhile, the pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV cited IS reports as saying that they downed the plane over al-Raqqa and captured its Jordanian pilot. The U.S.-led anti-terror coalition has been striking IS positions in Syria since September. Many Arab countries, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have taken part in the coalition against the IS. Wednesday's incident, if true, would mark the first downing of a foreign war jet by the IS over Syria. (Xinhua)

## DPRK to Extradite Illegal Entrant from S.Korea

PYONGYANG - The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) said it will on Friday extradite a South Korean national who illegally entered the DPRK in late November through Panmunjom, the official KCNA news agency reported Wednesday. The 52-year-old South Korean man, who has admitted his illegal entry, said he has appealed to the DPRK for living in the country because South Korean authorities considered him as a psychopath and restricted his personal freedom, the KCNA said. (Xinhua)

## Curfew in India State after Rebels Kill 63

SHAMUKJULI, India - Hundreds of survivors of a brutal rebel attack that killed at least 63 people in northeastern India sought shelter Wednesday in a church and school while security forces imposed a curfew in a bid to contain the latest bout of ethnic violence. Long-simmering land and ethnic disputes in Assam state erupted in bloodshed Tuesday when authorities said rebels belonging to a faction of an indigenous separatist group called the National Democratic Front of Bodoland attacked tribal settlers known as Adivasi. Most of the Adivasi, whose ancestors migrated to Assam more than 100 years ago, have worked on tea plantations. At least 100 people, mostly women and children, sought refuge in a church in Shamukjuli village in Sonitpur district, where 26 of the victims



died. Another 200 people ran to a nearby school. The Adivasi are a mix of Hindus and Christians and many had been preparing for Christmas when the attack took place, survivors said. Bodo rebels have been fighting for a separate homeland for their indigenous tribe, which makes up 10 percent of Assam's 33 million people. They have staged attacks against both Adivasi and Muslim settlers in violence that has left at 10,000 people dead, most of them civilians, in the last three decades. In May, the same rebels

group shot and killed more than 30 Muslims. Many of the dead in Tuesday's attacks included women and children, police said. The rebels may have been provoked by heavy losses they suffered recently as police intensified operations against the group, Singh said. "We are trying to ensure that ethnic violence does not flare up," he said, adding that a curfew was imposed in two districts and police and paramilitary forces patrolled the area. There were concerns the violence could spill over. (AP)

## Ukraine Peace Talks Start in Minsk

MINSK, Belarus - The much-anticipated talks on a settlement of the Ukrainian crisis began in the capital of Belarus on Wednesday. Representatives of Ukraine, Russia, pro-Russian rebels and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe arrived at the venue in the early evening on Wednesday. Media haven't been allowed access, and another round of the talks is set for Friday. The negotiations are focusing on measures intended to ensure a sta-

ble cease-fire in eastern Ukraine, where the fighting between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian government forces has claimed more than 4,700 lives. The previous rounds of talks in September produced a cease-fire, which has often been violated. Heidi Tagliavini, the OSCE's lead figure since the talks began, has said the participants will discuss a pullback of heavy weaponry, a complete exchange of war prisoners and the delivery of humanitarian aid. (AP)

## European Bank Provides Funds for Tajik Road Maintenance

DUSHANBE - The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and international donors have provided a financing package of 5.08 million U.S. dollars for road maintenance in Tajikistan, the bank's country office said Wednesday. According to the office, a 2.54-million-dollar loan and a grant of the same amount from a multi-donor fund have been provided to expand an existing road maintenance project, which has

already received a 4-million-dollar loan from the bank and a 2-million-dollar grant from the Dutch government. The financing package will be used for purchase of equipment such as graders, excavators, trucks and laboratories. "In Tajikistan, with its mountainous terrain and extreme weather, keeping roads in a good condition requires a lot of work," said Richard Jones, head of the bank's resident office in Dushanbe. (Xinhua)



## Iranian FM Underlines Necessity for Removal of All Sanctions

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in separate letters to his counterparts in the world states reiterated that any nuclear deal with the world powers should include annulment of all sanctions against Tehran. "... lifting of all sanctions, is an essential component of any agreement. But some members of P5+1 (the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany) have become increasingly reluctant to abandon this counterproductive, illegal and inhuman instrument of coercion even at the expense of putting in jeopardy the entire process that provides certainty and assures transparency," Zarif said in separate letters to his counterparts in different world states on Wednesday.

He briefed his counterparts on the latest developments in the negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the P5+1 Group on Iran's peaceful nuclear program. "My delegation has engaged in these talks with the firm mandate and strong political will to reach a comprehensive agreement. We have clearly demonstrated that we are prepared to accept a rational and fair agreement based on mutual respect and interest, in the same manner as we resist and reject arbitrary, degrading and unlawful demands. We have tried to be creative and innovative and have offered solutions," he added. "In our Joint Plan of Action, we envisaged a common goal for these negotiations: (FNA)