

Ukraine Peace Summit Overshadowed By Surge in Fighting

MINSK/DONETSK - The leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine were due to attend a peace summit on Wednesday, with Ukraine's pro-Moscow separatists tightening the pressure on Kiev by launching some of the war's worst fighting in an assault on a government garrison. The Kiev army said 19 of its soldiers were killed in a day of pro-Russian separatist assaults at a single location near the railway hub of Debaltseve, some of the worst losses it has reported in nine months of war. Rebels who tore up a



five-month-old truce in January are trying to encircle government forces in Debaltseve, a strategic location that would let them link up their main

strongholds. Fighting has already killed more than 5,000 people, and Washington is now openly talking of arming Ukraine to de-

fend itself from "Russian aggression", raising the prospect of a proxy war in the heart of Europe between Cold War foes. The summit is being held

in neighbouring Belarus under a Franco-German proposal to try to halt the fighting. Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Francois Hollande will meet Ukraine's Petro Poroshenko and Russia's Vladimir Putin. Hopes for a breakthrough appear slim and would depend on Ukraine making most of the concessions, with advancing rebels unlikely to agree to halt and go back to previous positions. A surge in fighting in the 24 hours before the leaders were to gather, including a rocket at ...*(More on P4)...(27)*

Greece PM Invited to Visit China

ATHENS - Greece's new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has been invited to visit Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, a government source said Wednesday. Li Keqiang called Tsipras to congratulate him on his electoral victory and say "he would work to deepen and widen the historic ties between the two countries", the source said. It comes a day after a minister in Athens's radical leftist government said the country may look to Beijing for support if the EU refuses to play ball on a bid to overhaul Greece's loathed bailout commitments. Defence Minister Panos Kammenos warned ...*(More on P4)...(28)*

Nieghbor News

President Xi to Visit US in September

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday held phone talks with his US counterpart Barack Obama and accepted the latter's invitation to pay a state visit to the United States in September. Both sides agreed to make full preparations to ensure the success of the trip. Exchanging New Year greetings, the two leaders agreed to work together to facilitate a steady and healthy growth of China-US relations while pro-

moting a greater development in building their new type of major-country relationship. During the conversation, Xi said "over the past year, we have had a series of in-depth talks, reaching important consensus on China-US ties as well as significant issues concerning regional and international peace and development." "I looked forward to continuing strategic dialogues with President Obama," Xi added. ...*(More on P4)...(29)*

Iran Marks Revolution Anniversary, Urges West to Lift Sanctions

TEHRAN - The West should lift "inhumane and illegal sanctions" against Iran as they try to reach a comprehensive nuclear deal with Tehran, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday as the country celebrated the 36th anniversary of the Islamic revolution. While addressing a large crowd celebrating the occasion in Tehran's Azadi square, he advised the West "to seize the proper opportunity" in order to reach the agreement. It is the second time in the past few days that the Iranian leader urged the West to take actions over the nuclear deal. "Those claiming Iran came to the negotiation table because of the sanctions are lying," Rouhani said, adding that "Iran is

at the negotiation table to help enact worldwide peace and security." To this end, the West should lift "inhumane and illegal sanctions" against Iran," Rouhani said. As the country kicks off its nationwide celebrations marking the anniversary, hundreds of thousands of people in Iran's major cities swarmed to the streets, carrying flags, banners and images of the late founder of the Islamic republic Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, and his successor, incumbent Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In capital Tehran, people were also waving banners with anti-US and anti-Israel slogans, shouting support of Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear power.

Obama Seeks War Authorization from Congress to Fight IS

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Barack Obama sent Congress his text on Wednesday for an authorization to use military force in the campaign against Islamic State, limiting operations against the militants to three years and barring use of U.S. troops in "enduring offensive ground combat." According to the text, Obama also wants to repeal the 2002 measure that authorized the Iraq war. But his proposal leaves in place a 2001 authorization, passed shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks, for a campaign against al Qaeda and its affiliates. Obama said he remained committed to working with Congress to "refine, and ulti-

mately repeal" the 2001 AUMF. He said enacting a measure specific to the campaign against Islamic State fighters could serve as a model for revamping the 2001 measure. "I have directed a comprehensive and sustained strategy to degrade and defeat ISIL," Obama wrote in a letter accompanying the draft, using an acronym for the Islamist militant group. "Local forces, rather than U.S. military forces, should be deployed to conduct such operations," he said. The White House said Obama would make a statement on his request at 3:30 PM EST (2030 GMT). Obama's proposal must be approved by



both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, where it is expected to provoke strong debate between Democrats, who are generally wary of another Middle East war, and Republicans, many of whom have been pushing for stronger measures against the militant fighters. Obama has

defended his authority to lead an international coalition against Islamic State since Aug. 8 when U.S. fighter jets began attacking the jihadists in Iraq. But he has faced criticism for failing to seek the backing of Congress, where some accuse him of breaching his constitutional authority. (Reuters)

EU Parliament Advocates Beefing Up Anti-Terror Protections



BRUSSELS - On the eve of a European Union summit, European Parliament members are demanding new measures to protect citizens against terror attacks. In a resolution adopted 532-136 Wednesday, lawmakers called for stepping up immigration checks on travelers entering the 26-nation Schengen area and investment in education and social programs to address the root causes of radicalization. They also said that under certain conditions, they could support an

EU-wide program to exchange airline passenger data. A previous plan for such a program died in the parliament in 2013 due to civil liberties concerns. European lawmakers now say they could approve the program if EU member nations agree in parallel on new standards for data collection and sharing. EU leaders meet Thursday in Brussels, with proposed counter-terrorism measures high on the agenda. (AP)

U.S. Firms Optimistic About China despite Challenges: Survey

BEIJING - A slowing economy combined with factors such as higher labor costs continue to stifle U.S. enterprises operating in China, but optimism remains over the economic outlook and potential for a bilateral investment treaty. According to a survey conducted by American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) China in partnership with Bain & Company, U.S. company revenues continued to grow in 2014, but not at the breakneck pace of previous years. More than 70 percent of respondents identified their organization as "profitable" or "very profitable." "AmCham China member companies are committed to the market but continue to weather the challenging business environment," said AmCham China chairman James Zimmerman. "Our companies appreciate the complexities and difficulties that the Chinese leadership is confronted with

as it balances its economy and implements reforms. Nevertheless, much work lies ahead for all of us in 2015 and beyond as the Chinese economy continues to mature," Zimmerman added. AmCham China member companies remain optimistic about the Chinese market because of sustained economic growth and an increase in domestic consumption, the survey, which was released on Wednesday, showed. China's growing middle class and urbanization are also positive beacons for businesses. This year's report also reveals differences by sector, with service companies more optimistic than resource and industrial, it added. Reforms such as the U.S.-China Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) present a potential boon to business in China as companies look to overcome regulatory issues. More than two-thirds of respondents believe that the BIT would cut redtape, it showed. (Xinhua)

Egypt Economy to Grow 4.3 Percent in Next Fiscal Year: IMF

CAIRO - The International Monetary Fund says Egypt's economy will grow 4.3 percent in the fiscal year 2015/2016. In a statement issued on Wednesday after its executive board reviewed consultations held late last year, the IMF said Egypt's economy is starting to make a turnaround despite its current difficulties following years of instability. It also confirmed its forecast of 3.8 percent growth for the current fiscal year, which

ends on June 30, compared to 2.2 percent in the previous period. The IMF says that as Egyptian "authorities implement policy initiatives, prospects for growth, employment, and macroeconomic stability will improve." Political unrest since the 2011 ouster of longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak has battered Egypt, leaving the vital tourism industry in tatters and making it difficult to attract foreign investors. (AP)

France Opposes Arming Ukraine to End Deadlock: FM

PARIS - French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius on Wednesday reiterated France's opposition to arm Ukrainian forces, hoping to halt violence in Ukraine by a diplomatic initiative.

Asked by France Inter Radio about whether France would send weapons to Kiev after Britain said it reserved the right to arm Ukraine government forces, Fabius said



"(sending weapons) is not among our plans." "We think arming is not the solution in the case

of Ukraine. We believe the solution is a political one," Fabius added. Despite a new round of violence in Ukraine and "a number of problems which remain to be resolved", the meeting between the leaders of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia "is very likely to go ahead". "It is really a last-chance negotiation," Fabius said. (Xinhua)

Syrian Troops Advancing South of Damascus

BEIRUT - Syrian troops and fighters from Lebanon's Hezbollah group seized several towns and villages south of Damascus on Wednesday, state media and activists said, advancing in a region bordering the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

The government counter-offensive aims at recapturing areas seized by Syrian rebels and the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front, whose recent advances had brought them closer to embattled President Bashar Assad's seat of power. The government late last year lost large parts of the Quneitra region on the edge of the Golan. State television said troops gained control of the town of Deir al-Adas and the village of Deir Makker, as well as the nearby areas of Tal al-Arous and Tal al-Sarjeh. "The operations are being led by Hezbollah's special forces," said Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. "Their aim appears to be to eventually reach areas bordering the occupied Golan and set up a border zone under Hezbollah's control." (AP)

Libyan Factions Start U.N.-Backed Peace Talks

TRIPOLI - United Nations negotiators on Wednesday restarted talks with delegates from Libya's warring factions, meeting separately with rival parties in an attempt to end the political crisis and reach a ceasefire.

U.N. special envoy Bernardino Leon met in the Libyan city of Ghadames with representatives from the two rival governments who are competing for power in the North African state in a conflict Western powers fear will slide into broader civil war. The U.N. mission in Libya's Twitter account



posted pictures of Leon with delegations and said the U.N. envoy held "separate meetings with the parties as political dialogue" began. Representatives from both factions at the talks could not immediately be reached for details. Nearly four years after

veteran leader Muammar Gaddafi was ousted, Libya is caught in a struggle between an internationally recognized government and a rival government set up in Tripoli after an armed faction took over the capital in the summer. (Reuters)

Central Asian Labor Migrants Leaving Russia

BISHKEK - Problems of Kyrgyz labor migrants related to the introduction of new rules in Russia that require obtaining job patents have been discussed at the Kyrgyz Embassy in Russia. Due to lack of time available to perform the necessary formalities to obtain new patents, and because of the rise in prices for newly established migra-

tion services, many labor migrants risk to fall into the category of illegal immigrants and to be blacklisted by the Federal Migration Service of Russia (FMS) with subsequent expulsion from the country. About 200 thousand Kyrgyz citizens working in Moscow and the Moscow region may be included in this list because of inability to pay for im-

migration services. Kyrgyz authorities are negotiating with the Russian side to solve the problem. According to civil society activists of the Central Asia in Motion program, Kyrgyzstan should be ready for the return of a large number of labor migrants, because social tensions may occur in the country with a huge unemployment. (ICA)

JICA Expected to Help Tajikistan Mitigate Negative External Effects

DUSHANBE - Tajik President Emomali Rahmon yesterday received visiting Vice-President of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Mr. Kiyoshi Kodera. According to the Tajik president's official websites, state and prospects of bilateral cooperation between Tajikistan and Japan were a major topic of the meeting. Rahmon reportedly appreciated Japan's support for economic development of Tajikistan and expressed hope for further expansion of economic cooperation between the two countries.

To-date, Japan has provided more than 300 million U.S. dollars in grants and 60 million U.S. dollars in technical assistance to Tajikistan for implementation of investment projects and institutional development. Japan has supported enhancement of social, energy, transportation and agrarian sectors in the country and development of remote mountain areas. Two new projects aiming to enhance water supply in Khatlon's Panj district and improve conditions of Dushanbe International Airport were signed last year. (Asia-Plus)