

Ukraine Hopes for Political Solution to Crisis After Minsk Deal

KIEV - Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on Friday voiced his hope that the new peace agreement reached in Minsk will pave the way for a political settlement of the crisis in his country's east.

"The agreement gives a hope that the events in Donbass (eastern Ukraine) will turn from the hot-phase crisis into a state of political settlement," Poroshenko told reporters during a visit to a military training center. Although expectations for peace are high, the prospects of full implementation of the cease-



fire deal are still fragile, Poroshenko noted. "There is no firm belief that all conditions for

peace prescribed in the agreement would be fully observed," said the Ukrainian leader.

Poroshenko, Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and

French President Francois Hollande reached an agreement Thursday in Minsk, capital of Belarus. The deal calls for a ceasefire from Feb. 15 and withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front-line, and also covers election timelines, border control and prisoner exchange.

If all parties involved in the confrontation in eastern Ukraine implement the Minsk agreement effectively and comprehensively, it could end the 10-month-old conflict, which has claimed more than 5,300 lives. (Xinhua)

Fighting Rages in Run-Up to Ukraine Ceasefire

DONETSK - Ukraine and rebels fought fiercely across the east of the country on Friday despite a new peace deal brokered by Germany and France.

A ceasefire is due to come into effect from Sunday under the agreement, which also envisages a withdrawal of the heavy weapons responsible for many of the 5,000 casualties in the conflict that broke out almost a year ago. Kiev said pro-Russian rebels had built up their forces across separatist-held zones since the deal and both sides accused each other of killing civilians. Two people ... (More on P4)...(28)

Neighbor News

Sharif Hails Strong China-Pak Relations

ISLAMABAD - In a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Mr Wang Yi on Friday, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said Pakistan looks forward to welcoming Chinese President Xi Jinping. "We believe this important visit would further strengthen the all-weather strategic partnership between the two countries," the premier said, adding that the Chinese president's visit will bring them closer to achieving the dream of building a "Pak-China community of shared destiny". The premier underscored Pakistan attaches high importance to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and expressed

confidence that President Xi's expected visit would help fast-track CPEC early harvest projects.

The Chinese foreign minister also informed PM Nawaz that the purpose of his visit is to prepare for President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan. Welcoming Mr Wang Yi on his first official visit to Pakistan, PM Nawaz also said that friendship with China is the cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy, emphasizing that China has always been a sincere friend of Pakistan. PM Nawaz further said security for Chinese nationals working in Pakistan is a matter of high priority for Pakistan and special arrangements are being made for this purpose. (Monitoring Desk)

Assad Must Be Part of Solution for Syria Crisis: UN Envoy

VIENNA - The United Nations' special envoy to Syria says President Bashar al-Assad must be involved in any peaceful solution to the crisis in the Arab country. "President Assad is part of the solution," de Mistura said in a joint press conference with Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz in Vienna on Friday. The UN official added that he had held talks with Assad in the Syrian capital city of Damascus last week and "will continue to have very important discussions with him." De Mistura noted

that only a political solution can put an end to the ongoing deadly conflict in the strife-torn country, saying if no solution is found, "the only one who takes advantage of it is ISIS (ISIL) Daesh." He also denounced ISIL Takfiri terrorist group as a "monster waiting for this conflict to take place in order to be able to take advantage." Syria has been grappling with a deadly crisis since March 2011. The violence fuelled by Takfiri groups has so far claimed the lives of over 200,000 people, according to reports. New figures show



that over 76,000 people, including thousands of children, lost their lives in Syria last year. Over 7.2 million Syrians have also become internally displaced due to the ongoing crisis, according to the UN. The Takfiri terrorist group, with members

from several Western countries, controls swathes of land in Syria and Iraq, and has been carrying out horrific acts of violence such as public decapitations and crucifixions against all communities such as Shias, Sunnis, Kurds, and Christians. (Press TV)

Europe Warns Russia over Ukraine Deal



KIEV - European powers warned Russia it risked fresh sanctions if a ceasefire deal aimed at ending the 10-month war between Ukraine troops and pro-Moscow rebels was not implemented. The agreement to end the nearly year-long conflict, which has killed thousands and ratcheted East-West tensions to highs not seen since the Cold War, was reached early Thursday after marathon talks in the Belarussian capital Minsk between the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany. Kiev and the West accuse Russia of stoking the war in ex-Soviet Ukraine by pouring arms and troops to help the pro-Russian rebels fighting Kiev government troops in Ukraine's industrial east. Moscow denies the charges.

French President Francois Hollande, who along with Merkel attended the 17-hour talks in Minsk that also included Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, agreed. If the ceasefire deal was not respected, "we would return to a process... of sanctions that would be in addition to those already in place." Hollande also said that the conditions were not yet right for France to resume with the delivery of two Mistral warships to Russia, a 1.2-billion-euro sale that Paris was forced to suspend over the Ukraine crisis. Under the deal reached in Minsk, a ceasefire is to take effect at midnight Kiev time on Sunday (2200 GMT on Saturday) and heavy weapons are to be withdrawn from the frontlines of the conflict, which has killed at least 5,300 people and driven a million people from their homes since erupting in April 2014. Poroshenko described the 17-hour talks as "very difficult" and said he expected the implementation of the deal would not be easy. Brussels first imposed targeted sanctions on individuals after Russia's ... (More on P4)...(29)

Chinese Vice-Premier Meets Gazprom Head

BEIJING - China-Russia natural gas cooperation has become more practical, efficient and mutually beneficial, Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli said here Friday as he met with Alexei Miller, head of Russian gas giant Gazprom. Zhang said natural gas is a key area of bilateral energy cooperation. He said both countries' heads of state had helped advance the cooperation to achieve major breakthroughs. He said as the two countries will continue to develop their strategic partnership, the project of the East Route of the China-Russia natural gas pipeline should be earnestly implemented. The West Route cooperation should also be accelerated and cooperation should be expanded to the upper-end of

the industry, construction and equipment manufacturing, Zhang said. China and Russia signed an agreement last May on the China-Russia East Route natural gas pipeline. The 30-year contract will see the pipeline providing China with 38 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually from 2018. During Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Beijing last November, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the construction of a second natural gas pipeline between China and Russia, known as the West Route project. Miller said Russia is willing to continue to cooperate with China in energy sector and tap into the huge potential. (Xinhua)

Climate Pact Blueprint Ready for Adoption in Geneva

GENEVA - Negotiators in Geneva are geared to adopt a climate blueprint Friday, a symbolic milestone in the fraught UN process that must culminate in a universal pact in Paris in December. Assembled over the past six days, the 86-page draft plan for limiting manmade global warming is due to be adopted at a closing session that starts at 1400 GMT. "We have now agreed on a negotiating text," Elina Bardram, head of the EU delegation, told AFP. "It provides us with the basis for moving



forward." Ever since the 2009 Copenhagen conference failed to deliver a world agreement, the 195 nations gathered under the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) have been working on a new

project for adoption by the end of this year. Set to be inked at the November 30-December 11 UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP) in Paris, the pact must enter into force by 2020 to further the UN goal of limiting

warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-Industrial Revolution levels. Scientists warn that at current greenhouse gas emission trends, Earth is on track for double that, or more -- a recipe for catastrophic droughts, storms, floods and rising seas. Negotiators emerged from the last COP in Lima last December, with a hard-fought framework text that remained hotly contested. The February 8-13 Geneva talks, one of three special sessions added to this ... (More on P4)...(27)

Saudi Arabia Evacuates Staff from Yemen Embassy

RIYADH - Saudi Arabia has suspended the activities of its embassy in Yemen after the United States and a number of European countries shut their embassies in the Arab country where the Ansarullah revolutionaries have taken control of the capital, Sana'a. "Due to the deteriorating security and political situation in the Yemeni capital, Saudi Arabia has suspended all embassy operations in Sana'a," the Saudi Foreign Ministry said in a statement carried by the official SPA news agency. The statement further noted that Saudi Arabia, as the first Arab country, has "evacuated all its staff" from the embassy and that its diplomats "have arrived safely in the kingdom." Earlier in the day, Italy and Germany temporarily shut their embassies in Yemen after a similar move by the US, Britain and France over what they call security concerns. On Friday, the Italian Foreign Ministry issued a statement, saying the country's ambassador and staff are returning home from Italy's embassy in Yemen. (Press TV)

Kurds Recapture More Villages in Kobani from ISIL

KUBANE - Kurdish Peshmerga fighters have succeeded in wresting control of dozens more villages around Syria's border town of Kobani from the ISIL Takfiri terrorists, says a UK-based group. According to the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) have so far recaptured 156 villages around Kobani following clashes with the ISIL militants. The opposition source added that the YPG forces now control territory ranging from 25 to 40 kilometers from Kobani to the east, west and south. The ISIL withdrew from villages east and south of Kobani mostly without resistance, but fought hard to keep control of villages to the west, said Rami Abdel Rahman, the director of the UK-based monitoring group, on Sunday, adding that the Kurds had recaptured 128 villages out of some 350 over two weeks. Kurdish fighters seized the town on the border with Turkey on January



26 and battles have since continued for the recapture of nearby villages. Syria has been grappling with a deadly crisis since March 2011. The violence fuelled by Takfiri groups has so far claimed the lives of over 200,000 people, according to reports. New figures show that over 76,000 people, including thousands of children, lost their lives in Syria last year. Over 7.2 million Syrians have also become internally displaced due to the ongoing crisis, according to the United Nations. (Press TV)

At Least 20 Killed in Nigeria Village Attacks

ABUJA - At least 20 people were killed in early morning attacks on two separate villages in northeastern Nigeria's state of Borno, where the insurgency of Boko Haram is yet to dissipate, a local security source and witness said on Friday. Bilal Mustapha, a member of the civilian joint task force formed by local people, said he witnessed the attack on Mbuta and Alkideow villages, located 30 km away from Maiduguri, the state capital early Thursday. According to him, suspected Boko Haram fighters stormed the two villages on motorbikes and shot indiscriminately at distraught local people. "They shot dead nine people at Mbuta Village and 11 other people at Alkideow Village. (Xinhua)

12 Killed, 150 Injured in Train Derailment in India

NEW DELHI - At least 12 people were killed and more than 150 others injured in a train derailment in the southern Indian state of Karnataka on Friday, a senior police officer said. "The mishap happened when nine coaches of an express train derailed near state capital Bengaluru in the morning. While 12 people have died, those injured have been admitted to nearby hospitals where the condition of some are said to be serious," he said on condition of anonymity. The Bangalore City-Ernakulam Intercity Express was going from Bengaluru to the city of Kochi in the neighboring state of Kerala when the incident took place. Local TV channels showed footage of the mangled coaches and rescuers trying to pull out those still trapped inside. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has

wished the injured a speedy recovery. "Railway Minister (Suresh Prabhu) and officials are closely monitoring the situation and ensuring timely relief," he said. Meanwhile, Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu has said the mishap happened as a boulder fell on the track and the train hit it. "I am personally monitoring it and in touch with state and local administration," he tweeted. The Indian Railways has also announced a compensation of two lakh rupees (4,000 U.S. dollars) to the family of each deceased and 50,000 rupees (1,000 U.S. dollars) for those grievously injured in the incident. The state-owned Indian Railways, one of the world's largest train networks, runs hundreds of trains daily, crisscrossing the country from north to south, but its safety record is poor. (Xinhua)

Turkmenistan Seeking to Boost Gas Export

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan's natural gas export in the coming years may reach 160 billion-170 billion cubic meters per year with the possibility of annual increase by 10 billion cubic meters, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) reported citing the country's Ministry of Oil and Gas Industry and Mineral Resources. According to the ministry, in 2014 Turkmenistan produced more than 76 billion cubic meters of gas and exported over 45 billion cubic meters. In 2015, Turkmenistan plans to produce more than 80 billion cubic meters. Turkmenistan

possesses the world's fourth-largest natural gas reserves, and currently exports gas to Russia, Iran, and China. The Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline, put into operation at the end of 2009, is increasing its throughput capacity. The capacity of the first two branches of the pipeline by the end of 2010 reached 30 billion cubic meters. The end of 2014 saw completion of the pipeline's third branch with a capacity of 25 billion cubic meters of gas per year. In 2015, the capacity of the Turkmenistan-China pipeline will reach 55 billion cubic meters per year. (Agencies)

Iran's Assistance to Iraq Not Limited to Military Aid: Minister

TEHRAN - Iraqi Minister of Human Rights Mohammad Mahdi Al-Bayati appreciated Iran for supporting his country in different fields, and said Tehran does not help Baghdad only in defense and military areas. "Iran's assistance to Iraq is not confined to military aid," Al-Bayati said on Thursday. He pointed to Iran's assistance to the other countries, and said, "Iran has dispatched the best advisors to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon to help those countries in their anti-terrorism campaign." Iran and Iraq have enjoyed growing ties ever since the overthrow of the former Iraqi dictator,

Saddam Hussein, during the 2003 US invasion of the Muslim country. In relevant remarks in November, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi lauded Iran for its support and assistance to Baghdad in fighting terrorism, and said he would never be coaxed into destroying or undermining relations with Iran for some short-term benefits. "I will not spoil my ties with Iran for the sake of certain sides," Abadi said in an interview with al-Mayadeen news channel. "At present we are facing a life and death battle and Iran has stood beside us in this war," he added. (FNA)