

Hollande, Al-Sisi Urge UNSC Meeting on Libya

PARIS - French President Francois Hollande and his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Monday called for an urgent UN Security Council meeting on Libya's security situation and urged adequate measures to halt the ongoing Islamic State (IS) offensive.

Over a phone call, Hollande reiterated French support and solidarity with Egypt after the beheading of the 21 Egyptians in Libya by IS fighters. The two leaders discussed the situation in Libya and the extension of military operations against the IS in the coun-



try. They stressed the necessity of a Security Council meeting and adoption of new measures by the international community to cope with this danger, Hollande's office said in

a statement. Hollande and al-Sisi also affirmed their commitment to guaranteeing peace and ensuring stability in the region. The Egyptian military said it had conducted air

strikes on Islamic State targets in Libya on Monday, a day after the group released a video purporting to show the beheading of 21 Egyptians in the neighboring country. (Xinhua)

Iraqi PM Hails 'Acceleration of Support' Against IS

LONDON - Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi said Monday there had been a recent "acceleration of support" from the US-led coalition in the fight against the Islamic State (IS) group.

In an interview with the BBC, Abadi said there were enough fighters on the ground but they needed arms and equipment to defeat the jihadists.

"I was a bit frustrated in my first three months of being a prime minister because of the slowness of this support but I've seen in the last probably four weeks, five weeks,

there is an acceleration of the support," Abadi added.

"I think the air bombing and the air campaign has increased in its intensity and its quality." The IS group, a Sunni extremist group, has seized swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq and imposed an extreme interpretation of Islam in the areas under its control. The international air campaign against the IS group was launched in Iraq in August and expanded to Syria the following month. There have been over 2,000 air strikes on IS so far. (AFP)

Nieghbor News

Turkish PM in Pakistan for Maiden Visit

ISLAMABAD - Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu is due in Islamabad today (Tuesday) on a two-day official visit to Pakistan, accompanied by a high-level delegation. According to statement released by the Foreign Office, this will be first visit of Prime Minister Davutoglu to Pakistan since assuming office in August 2014.

The statement said that the programme for the Turkish premier's visit envisages tete-a-tete between the two prime ministers, a luncheon hosted by PM Nawaz Sharif, and a joint press stakeout. Prime Minister Davutoglu would call on President Mamnoon Hussain, who would also host a dinner in honour of the visiting dignitary

and the accompanying delegation," the statement added. The Foreign Office said that a number of MoUs and agreements are expected to be signed on the occasion.

The statement said that Nawaz and Davutoglu will co-chair the 4th meeting of the Pakistan-Turkey High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) while the two Prime Ministers will also attend the Pakistan-Turkey Business Forum 2015. "The HLSCC meeting would be preceded by the meetings of Joint Working Groups (JBGs) in 6 key areas including finance and banking, trade, energy, transport and communications; Education; and Culture and Tourism," it said. (Monitoring Desk)

Battle Persists for Ukraine Railway Hub, Despite Peace Deal

LUHANSKE - Intense artillery exchanges between Ukrainian government forces and Russian-backed separatists persisted Monday around a strategic town in eastern Ukraine - fighting that threatens to dash a cease-fire deal brokered by European leaders last week.

Under a cease-fire agreement negotiated by the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France, the warring sides are to begin withdrawing heavy weapons from the front line Tuesday. That plan already looks at risk, with the rebels saying they are not satisfied that conditions are in place for the process to go ahead.

Associated Press reporters in Luhanske, a government-held town 15 kilometers (9 miles) northwest of the bitterly contested railway hub of Debaltseve, heard sustained shelling Monday. Some of the artillery appeared to be outgoing, suggesting it was being fired by Ukrainian troops.

Debaltseve, still in government hands, remains in contention despite the cease-fire. The rebels insist the town should revert to their control because they have encir-



led it. A loaded Grad rocket launcher was seen pointing in the direction of Debaltseve, but it was not fired while AP journalists were present. Observers from the Organization from Security and Cooperation in Europe, who are supposed to monitor the cease-fire, said Sunday that separatists denied them access to Debaltseve.

Despite the cease-fire that went into effect early Sunday morning, five Ukrainian troops were killed and 25 were wounded in the past 24 hours, Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said Monday. Separatist military official Eduard Basurin said in a televised news conference Monday that the government overnight lobbed artillery at Horlivka, a town under rebel control. Ukraine, howev-

er, blamed that attack on the rebels. The government-appointed police chief of the Donetsk region, Vyacheslav Abroskin, said the separatists shelled the town in order to derail the truce. The cease-fire appeared to hold elsewhere. The city hall of the rebel capital Donetsk, which came under heavy artillery fire in the past week, said on Monday that there was no fighting in the area.

Ukraine and the West accuse Russia of arming and supplying manpower to the separatists and have imposed a range of economic sanctions to pressure Moscow into changing its course. Russia denies all suggestions it is directly involved in the war in Ukraine but the sheer amount of heavy weapons the rebels have belies that claim. (AP)

EU Puts 19 More Individuals on Its Ukraine Sanctions List

BRUSSELS - The European Union has added 19 more individuals, including a Russian deputy minister of defense, on its sanctions list for their actions linked to the fighting in eastern Ukraine, in a move strongly criticized by Moscow.

The EU published the list, which also included nine entities, on Monday, one week after the EU foreign ministers decided on the issue. There was a week's lapse in the publishing of the list because of the negotiations which led to an agreement between Ukraine and Russia last Thursday.

The additions bring the total number of individuals hit with a travel ban and asset freeze to 151 while 37 entities are now also hit with restrictive measures. The Russian foreign ministry reacted angrily, calling it "clumsy" in the context of last week's cease-fire deal. The ministry dismissed the new EU sanctions as



"running against common sense" and harming chances "to resolve an internal Ukrainian conflict." The latest batch includes Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov, an outspoken critic of Ukraine, two more high-level officials linked to the military, and two state Duma officials who backed the annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula last year. Among the officials from the Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, was Iosif Kobzon, who has been supportive of the separatists, and is also well known as a crooner. The entities

targeted consist of eight armed separatist groups and one Russian movement backing the separatists in eastern Ukraine. The EU, at the same time, continued to prepare work on a possible extension of economic sanctions. "These measures can be adjusted in a positive or negative way," depending on how the implementation of the peace agreement progresses, said EU spokeswoman Maja Kocijancic. A cease-fire in eastern Ukraine went into effect Sunday but on Monday the two sides were accusing each other of violations. (AP)

Russia will Respond 'Adequately' to New EU Sanctions

MOSCOW - Russia's Foreign Ministry said on Monday Moscow would respond "adequately" to new European Union sanctions over the Ukraine crisis,

adding that the measures would not help secure a solution to the conflict.

The EU earlier on Monday published a new list of Ukrainians and

Russians targeted with sanctions for undermining Ukraine's independence, including Russian singer Iosif Kobzon and two Russian deputy defense ministers. (Reuters)

Early Presidential Election Proposed in Kazakhstan

ASTANA - The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, an influential organization chaired by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, has proposed an early presidential election in the country.

At a meeting of the council of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan on Saturday, the Assembly members unanimously supported the initiative of holding an early presidential election in Kazakhstan, Novosti-Kazakhstan reported.

The Assembly said that an early election is crucial to "ensure the continuity of the current policy" and to strengthen the country's economy. In its address to the nation, the Assembly said that "At the new and difficult stage of world imbalances it is necessary to show confidence in National Leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, so that the country continues its way towards large-scale modernization and inclusion in the top 30 of the world's

most-developed nations."

The next presidential election in Kazakhstan is scheduled for 2016, but the Assembly is proposing that it be held this year.

The Assembly also said that Nazarbayev needs another term to steer Kazakhstan through the ongoing economic crisis. The Deputy Chairman of the Assembly, Anatoly Bashmakov, said that an early election would also end speculation about Nazarbayev's possible successor.

"Behind-the-scenes games are beginning - there are those who are getting ready to become the successor and those who are grooming their own proteges," Bashmakov said. Nazarbayev, 74, has ruled Kazakhstan since 1989 when it was still a Soviet republic. The previous presidential election in Kazakhstan was also an early election. It was held on 3 April 2011, and Nazarbayev won with 95.55 percent of the votes. (Agencies)

Two Linked to Gunman in Copenhagen Shootings Arrested

COPENHAGEN - Two men have been arrested for aiding the alleged perpetrator in the weekend's shootings in the Danish capital of Copenhagen, authorities said on Monday.

The men are accused of having helped the gunman "with word and deed" in the attacks at a cultural center and a synagogue, the Copenhagen Police said in a statement on Monday. The two were arrested on Sunday as police carried out extensive search operations in the Copen-

hagen area. Apart from charges of complicity in murder, attempted murder and aggravated assault, the pair are also accused of having violated the weapons section in the Danish Criminal Code by keeping loaded firearms.

Police believed they had helped the alleged offender to obtain a firearm, and that they must have offered him refuge. A hearing was held early Monday in the courthouse Dommervagten in Central Copenhagen. (Xinhua)

Russia Hopes Minsk Agreements will Be Abided By: Kremlin Adviser

MOSCOW - Russia hopes the Minsk agreements on resolving the Ukraine crisis will be abided by, Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov said on Monday, adding that EU sanctions were illegal and prevented the solution of problems in the country. "Our attitude remains the same - sanctions are illegal.

They prevent the solution of problems, I mean Ukrainian problems, and hinder the development of relations between the European Union and Russia," he told reporters. He said the situation in eastern Ukraine was developing "not badly" - better than it had been before the meetings in Minsk. (Reuters)

35 IS Militants Killed in Clashes with Syria Kurds: Activists



DAMASCUS - At least 35 Islamic State (IS) militants have been killed in clashes with Syria's main Kurdish armed group in the town of Ayn al-Arab, a monitoring group said on Monday.

The clashes on Sunday in the countryside of Ayn al-Arab, also known as Kobane, also left four fighters of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) killed, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The London-based Observatory said the YPG now controls over 2,000 square km in the north-eastern countryside of Syria's northern province of Aleppo. The Kurdish fighters, backed by several rebel factions, have managed to recapture large swathes of predominantly Kurdish

areas from the IS since late January, it added.

Since the town's recapture, YPG forces have been expanding their control from Ayn al-Arab into the surrounding countryside, where they have largely encountered weak resistance from the militants.

The IS unleashed a major offensive against Ayn al-Arab late last year due to the city's strategic importance and location on the Syrian-Turkish borders. U.S.-led airstrikes and efforts by the YPG and other groups in the city have weakened the IS militant group.

Around 70 percent of Ayn al-Arab has been destroyed due to the month-long clashes, according to the Observatory, which says it relies on a network of activists on the ground inside Syria. (Xinhua)

Removal of Sanctions Necessary for N. Deal: Deputy FM

TEHRAN - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Europe and North America Majid Takht Ravanchi underlined that reaching a final deal in the nuclear talks between Tehran and the world powers depends on the latter's decision to withdraw their sanctions against Tehran.

"If the other side withdraws from its previous thoughts and stop making an instrumental use of the sanctions, we will be able to reach a comprehensive agreement at the earliest," Takht Ravanchi said in a meeting with Political Director of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wegger Christian Strommen in Tehran on Monday. Elsewhere, he underscored the necessity for

the development of economic and trade cooperation between Iran and Norway, and said oil, gas, petrochemicals, energy, fishery and environment are good grounds for the expansion of bilateral ties and mutual cooperation. Strommen, for his part, said that there are abundant capacities for cooperation between Iran and his country, and added, "Energy and marine co-operation, including fishery and environmental issues, are among the appropriate areas for cooperation."

He also expressed the hope that the nuclear talks between Tehran and the Group 5+1 (the US, Russia, China, Britain and France plus Germany) would yield good results. (FNA)

China to Play Constructive Role in Myanmar Peace Process

BEIJING - China will continue to play a constructive role in promoting the peace process in Myanmar, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on Monday.

China has always respected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Myanmar, said spokesperson Hua Chunying at a routine press briefing. She said China will never allow any organizations or individual using Chinese territory to undermine China-Myanmar relations as well as the stability of the border areas. Hua made the remarks when asked to confirm whether China has links with the Ko-

kang ethnic army. The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA) launched attacks on several government outposts in Kokang region, Myanmar's northeastern Shan state, on Feb. 9.

The government terms MNDA as Kokang renegade groups. The battlefield mainly covered areas of Laukkai and Kongyan. During the week-long clashes, the government forces carried out five air strikes, claiming 47 of their forces lost their lives with 73 others being wounded in the heavy fighting with MNDA over the past few days. (Xinhua)

World Bank Provides Loan for Railway Link Project in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors last Friday approved a US \$195 million IBRD loan for the Pap-Angren Railway Project in Uzbekistan.

The project will help improve transport connectivity in the Ferghana Valley by enhancing the efficiency of transport services into and out of the Uzbekistan part of the Valley, the World Bank said. The railway link will improve year round inter-regional accessibility for a population of 7.6 million. Small and medium enterprises will be able to expand their market access and increase their profits. The construction of the railway will also stimulate enterprises' growing

demand for workers in some key sectors such as textiles or the services sectors.

The project contributes to the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation or CAREC Program that is implementing a Transport and Trade Facilitation Strategy focused on 6 transport corridors. The Pap-Angren investment is located along Corridor 2 that runs from the east to the west, from China to the Caucasus. The project also supports the government's Medium Term Industrial Modernization and Infrastructure Development Program and is aligned with the main pillars of the World Bank Country Partnership Strategy for 2012-2015. (Agencies)