

# Ukraine Truce Fades as Fighting Rages, Arms Pullback Stalls

NIKISHIN - Pro-Russian rebels bombarded government troops encircled in east Ukraine on Tuesday and a plan for both sides to pull back their heavy guns stalled, pushing a fragile peace deal closer to collapse.

A Reuters witness near the front line said artillery rounds rocked the town of Debaltseve every five seconds and black smoke rose skywards, despite a truce that has eased fighting in many areas since the European-brokered deal took effect on Sunday.

The rebels said they had captured parts of Debalt-



seve, which sits on a strategic railway junction, and that some Ukrainian soldiers had surrendered, but Kiev denied this.

"At the moment there is

fierce fighting on the outskirts of the town. There are clashes around the station. But our forces are holding their positions and they are completely within their rights to

open fire in response," Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Ly-senko said. Hopes that the deal reached last Thursday would end a conflict

that has killed more than 5,000 people were always low after a rebel advance in January scuppered an earlier truce.

But the ferocity of the fighting at Debaltseve was unexpected and has heightened concerns in Kiev and the West that the separatists and Russian President Vladimir Putin want to cement the latest rebel gains before peace takes hold.

Military trucks and tanks came and went in the largely destroyed village of Nikishine as the rebels pounded nearby Debaltseve with Grad rockets, heavy artillery and

mortar bombs. Palls of smoke hung over Debaltseve, which has a peacetime population of about 25,000 and has been under fire for weeks.

Monitors from the OSCE security group were expected to try to reach the besieged town after Germany said it had agreed steps with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine to ensure they had "free access" in the east. But a new call by Berlin for peace and for the withdrawal of heavy weapons to start as scheduled on Tuesday under the peace deal, reached ...*(More on P4)...(21)*

## UN Security Council to Meet Wednesday on Libya

UNITED NATIONS - The U.N. Security Council will meet in an emergency session Wednesday on the crisis in Libya.

The meeting comes as Egypt presses the council to take action after the Islamic State group posted a video of the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi said in a radio interview aired on Tuesday that creating a U.N.-backed coalition



was the best course of action to rid Libya of Islamic extremists. The Egyptian foreign

minister and the U.N. envoy to Libya are expected to brief the council Wednesday. (AP)

## Putin, Merkel, Poroshenko Agree on OSCE's Monitor Mission

MOSCOW - Top leaders of Russia, Germany and Ukraine have agreed on the monitor mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in eastern Ukraine, said the Kremlin on Tuesday.

"The leaders exchanged views on the role of the OSCE in current phase of the monitor mission," said the Kremlin press service in a statement posted on its website.

Discussions were conducted on the implementation of the package of measures agreed at the quartet negotiation in Belarus' capital of Minsk last week, in particular on concrete steps of the ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons and situation in the eastern Ukrainian town of Debaltsevo, said the statement.

Debaltsevo, a small railway hub lying between the two rebel strongholds of Donetsk and Lugansk, has become one of the main flashpoints in recent weeks, as some 8,000 Ukrainian troops have reportedly been encircled by militia in Debaltsevo, a claim denied by Kiev.

The OSCE on Monday released an online daily report on the situation in Ukraine, confirming that the conflicting sides in Ukraine generally observed the ceasefire in the first 18 hours, despite some firing incidents in several locations in eastern Ukraine including Debaltsevo, Sievierodonetsk, Lugansk and Donetsk.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Mer-

kel and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko also agreed to continue contacts in different formats in order to facilitate the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Local media reported that an online video conference of the Contact Group would be held Tuesday to discuss a number of "day-to-day issues."

Putin, Merkel, Poroshenko and French President Francois Hollande struck the ceasefire deal in Minsk on Thursday in a bid to end the violence in Ukraine's eastern regions of Donetsk and Lugansk. The OSCE is to serve as a mediator and observer of the implementation of the Minsk agreements reached by the Ukrainian conflicting sides. (Xinhua)

## EU Blows Hot and Cold, Waiting for Greece to Bend

BRUSSELS - European Union finance ministers wielded enticements and veiled threats on Tuesday to press Greece to stay in an international bailout as financial markets slipped on fears of disruption if Athens' credit lines expire in 10 days time.

However, the euro recovered from a dip that followed the acrimonious breakdown of talks on Monday night, as investors took the view that both sides would climb back from the brink. If there is no deal on further financing this month, Greece could face a bank meltdown and run out of money as early as March, possibly becoming the first country to leave the euro zone or issue a parallel currency.

French Finance Minister Michel Sapin aired a compromise plan to let Greece run a smaller budget surplus and said reaching a deal was largely a matter of phra-

seology, since there was consensus that there would be no write-off of Greek debt.

"It's a problem of wording, although the legal tool cannot be anything else than an extension of the (bailout) program," he told reporters.

Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, who stayed in Brussels for a routine EU finance ministers' meeting on other issues, dismissed the argument that his only option was to ask them to extend a bailout his government was elected to scrap.

"We will continue to deliberate, in order to enhance the chances and actually achieve a very good outcome for the average European," Varoufakis said, pledging an "honorable solution". Deputy foreign minister Nikos Chountis voiced "cautious optimism". But with impatience between seasoned Eurocrats and the radical

novices from Athens mounting, he slammed the EU for sticking to its key demand: "We don't accept blackmail proposals, ultimatums about extending the bailout."

Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the Dutch finance minister who chairs the Eurogroup of 19 countries using the common currency, stuck to his guns, saying Athens must seek an extension: "It's really up to the Greeks. We cannot make them or ask them. We stand ready to work with them, also (over) the next couple of days."

Varoufakis's talk of "honor" reflects how far arguments are partly about semantics, important to both sides as they try to save political face. But some of his partners accused the new government of failing to grasp the gravity of the situation or put forward coherent proposals in writing. (Reuters)

## Remittances to Developing Nations to Hit \$500 Billion in 2015: UN Official

ROME - An estimated 230 million migrants will send \$500 billion in remittances to developing countries in 2015, a flow of capital expected to do more to reduce poverty than all development aid combined, a senior official of the U.N. agricultural bank said.

Ten percent of the world's people are directly affected by this money, Pedro De Vasconcelos, program coordinator for remittances with the International Fund for Agricultural Development, told a conference on Tuesday. "Migrants are investing back into poor regions," Vasconcelos said, adding that about \$200 billion is expected to go directly to rural areas.

This money could play a key role in boosting food production and eliminating the hunger faced by 805 million people by allowing families to invest in land, seeds, livestock and equipment.

The United Nations esti-



mates that is the number of people - one ninth of the global population - who have too little to eat. An estimated 80 percent of the rural people receiving remittances do not have access to traditional banking services, Vasconcelos said.

Harnessing mobile technology and other new approaches to banking could help link rural residents to financial systems when they collect their remittances, giving them better access to sav-

ings, insurance and other financial products which could help them improve farm productivity, he said.

The projection of \$500 billion in remittances going to poor countries in 2015 is a significant jump from the \$404 billion in such remittances the World Bank recorded in 2013. Remittances are worth four times as much as all overseas development aid provided by wealthy countries, Vasconcelos said. (Reuters)

### India's Modi Vows to Protect All Religious Minorities

NEW DELHI - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed on Tuesday to protect all religious groups, an apparent response to a series of attacks on Christian institutions in New Delhi fuelling concerns that minorities are being targeted by Hindu zealots.

Critics say that Modi's government, which is led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has failed to protect religious minorities and rein in Hindu extremists emboldened by its election victory last year.

"I condemn all incidents of violence where religious minorities were targeted," Modi told an event organized by the Christian community to celebrate the beatification of two Indians by Pope Francis late last year.

"No religious group can incite violence ... my government will ensure there is complete freedom of faith." Modi, a self-proclaimed Hindu nationalist, rarely attends events organized by minority communities. His decision to appear among Christians followed a drubbing for his party in elections to the Delhi local assembly last week, where it won just three of 70 seats, raising concerns that it could face setbacks in other state elections on the horizon. (Reuters)

### Record Flow of Migrants Likely This Year: EU Border Chief

WARSAW - A record number of migrants look set to flow into Europe this year, with human traffickers becoming increasingly aggressive as they take advantage of chaos in Africa and the Middle East, the EU borders chief said.

Many asylum seekers and illegal immigrants are reaching Europe via the Mediterranean sea, with hundreds dying during the perilous crossing, said Fabrice Leggeri, executive director of Frontex, the European Union's border cooperation agency.

Libya's plunge into anarchy has created an ideal environment for traffickers, who pack people fleeing war and poverty in the Arab world and sub-Saharan Africa onto rickety boats that set sail for Europe - mainly aiming for nearby Italy. In an interview at the War-

saw headquarters of Frontex, Leggeri said the numbers since Jan. 1 of what his agency terms "irregular crossings" into Europe at all border points was the highest ever recorded. An official put the number at more than 5,600, despite winter storms and cold that normally deter the human smugglers. Asked if that meant 2015 would be a record year, Leggeri said: "Yes, if the current trend is confirmed."

In 2014, there were approximately 300,000 irregular crossings into the European Union, with U.N. data showing at least 218,000 people entering via the Mediterranean. The other major route for migrants was overland from the Middle East into the western Balkans and onto the EU, officials said. ...*(More on P4)...(22)*

### Egypt Refers Ousted Morsi to Military Tribunal

CAIRO - Egypt's military prosecution has referred ousted Islamist President Mohammed Morsi and more than 190 others to a military tribunal, known for swift and harsh verdicts.

The official says that the new case against Morsi opens on Feb. 23 and is linked to the violence that swept the country after the deadly police disbursement of two large protest camps by pro-Morsi supporters that left hundreds dead in 2013.

The crackdown sparked a wave of violence across the country. Prosecutors charged Morsi and 198 members of the Muslim Brotherhood, including top leader Mohammed Badie, of inciting violence resulting in the deaths of 30 people, assaults on army troops and the torching of military vehicles, the official said speaking on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to brief the media. (AP)

## Neighbor News

### Iran Speeds Up N. Progress: President Rouhani

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani underlined that the country doesn't take permission from anyone to make progress in different scientific and technological fields, and said Tehran has accelerated its peaceful nuclear activities.

"We have made highly important progress in the nuclear field, but the negotiations receive so much attraction and hue and cry that they overshadow these activities, otherwise, we are running at a higher speed," Rouhani said, addressing a ceremony to commemorate the space technology day in Iran on Tuesday. He underscored the country's progress in different aerospace, ge-

netics, medical and other scientific fields, and said, "We don't and will not take permission from anyone to make progress in science and knowledge." He referred to the enemies' attempts to seek excuses to pressure Iran and block the country's scientific development, and said his government is and will continue efforts to defuse the enemies' plots and show that their excuses and allegations are baseless.

His remarks came after Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei underlined that the dispute over the country's nuclear program is politicized, used as a pretext to put ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

### USAID Continues Supporting Central Asia

DUSHANBE - The U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan, Susan Elliott, and USAID's Regional Mission Director for Central Asia Jonathan Addleton launched the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Strategy for 2015-2019 for Central Asia, the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe said. Tajikistan's Minister of Energy and Water Resources Usmonzoda and Jalil Pirizoda, head of the Department of Agriculture and Land Use, also participated in the event, demonstrating the Tajik government's commitment to working together to achieve the goals outlined in this new five-year commitment to Tajikistan.

With the launch of this new strategy, USAID will focus on expanding

diverse and competitive trade and markets; enhancing regional cooperation on shared energy and water resources; and supporting more effective and inclusive governance institutions.

USAID will help the economies of Central Asia become stronger and more resilient, with significantly increased cross-border trade, including with Afghanistan and the broader South Asia region, and increased income-generating opportunities for the poor.

USAID aims to make the shared issues of water and energy compelling reasons for cooperation, instead of sources of conflict, and achieve more effective and equitable management of these two critical trans-boundary resources. (Agencies)

### Pakistan and Turkey Share A 'Joint Destiny': Sharif

ISLAMABAD - While addressing the Pakistan-Turkey Business Forum on Tuesday, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif paid tribute to the ties between the two nations, stating that both countries share a 'joint destiny'.

"Words cannot do justice to the special bond between Turkey and Pakistan, we are bound together by our common faith and culture, we share a distinct sense of a joint destiny," the PM said. The gathering was attended by the visiting Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu as well as Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

The premier also commended the business forum for its work to enhance socio-economic development in both Pakistan and Turkey.

"I welcome all of you to this forum; I welcome

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and am confident this initiative will create new avenues for trade between Pakistan and Turkey as well as helping the economic growth of both countries," Nawaz said.

The PM told the forum that both countries have struggled and made great sacrifices for democracy adding that it was a proud moment that two democratically elected governments were working to enhance economic ties. "Today a multi-track engagement is working on socio-economic spheres. We intend to create an investment friendly environment in Pakistan," he said. The premier also addressed the security situation in Pakistan and stated that the country was facing difficult times, but would emerge stronger. (Monitoring Desk)

### China-RoK-Japan Discuss Restarting FM Meeting in Late March

BEIJING - The Chinese Foreign Ministry on Tuesday said that China, the Republic of Korea (RoK) and Japan were discussing the possibility of a foreign ministers' meeting in late March, after a break of almost two years. "Currently, the three countries are in discussion on the topic," spokesperson Hua Chunying told a daily press briefing. Calling China-RoK-Japan cooperation an important part of East Asia cooperation, Hua said China has always

attached great importance to the trilateral cooperation and actively promoted its healthy development. The first foreign ministers' meeting among the three countries was in June 2007 in the RoK and had been held annually in the countries by rotation.

The sixth meeting, held in April 2012, was the last time the three countries met as China-Japan and RoK-Japan relations soured due to rows over historical and territorial issues. (Xinhua)