

NATO Urges Russia to 'Withdraw All Its Forces' from E.Ukraine

RIGA - NATO on Wednesday urged Russia to withdraw all forces from eastern Ukraine and to end its support for the pro-Moscow separatists as a ceasefire appeared to unravel.

"I urge Russia to withdraw all its forces from eastern Ukraine, to stop all its support for the separatists and to respect the Minsk agreement," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in the Latvian capital Riga.

"The ceasefire has not been respected," he told reporters before meeting with EU defence ministers and said he was "deeply concerned by the deteriorating situation" in eastern Ukraine.

"Russian forces, artillery and air defence units as



well as command and control elements are still active in Ukraine," he said, adding that "there has been a steady buildup of tanks and armoured vehicles across the border from Russia to Ukraine."

"The refusal of the separatists to respect the ceasefire threatens the

agreement as does the denial of access to the area for OSCE monitors." Stoltenberg urged Moscow to "use all its influence on the separatists to make them respect the ceasefire."

"We will provide practical support for Ukraine, with modernising and reforming the defence

army and of course we are also adapting our own defence posture to the fact that we see that the security environment in Europe is changing because of the actions of Russia in Ukraine."

NATO agreed earlier this month to dramatically boost its defences with six command cen-

tres in eastern Europe and a spearhead force of 5,000 troops, to counter what the alliance called Russian aggression in Ukraine. Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain have agreed to take the lead in forming the spearhead rapid reaction force, which would be available to deploy within a week in a crisis. The six "command and control" centres that will help the deployment of the force will be in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania, with a corps headquarters in Szczecin, Poland. All six countries were once in the Soviet Union's orbit and have voiced deep concern about Russia's actions in Ukraine. (AFP)

Ukraine Troops Pull Out of Besieged Flashpoint Town

ARTEMIVSK - Ukrainian troops pulled out of the flashpoint eastern town of Debaltsevo on Wednesday after it was stormed by pro-Russian rebels in what the EU said was a "clear violation" of an internationally-backed truce. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said 80 percent of the thousands of soldiers in the town -- a strategic railway hub sandwiched between the two main rebel-held cities of Donetsk and Lugansk -- had withdrawn. AFP journalists near the town but prevented from entering saw dozens of army tanks and vehicles carrying haggard soldiers leaving Debaltsevo. The rebels' assault on Debaltsevo dealt a heavy blow to the European... (More on P4)...(26)

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West Never Removes Sanctions against Iran: Khamenei

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei warned of the arrogant powers' plots to impede Iran's progress in different scientific and technological fields, and said even if Tehran accepts all the demands of the world powers in the nuclear standoff, they will never remove their embargos against the country.

"Their main goal of such measures (sanctions) is humiliation of the Iranian nation and stopping the nation and Islamic Republic's great move towards a new Islamic civilization and I believe that even if we accept the demands that they (want to) dictate to us in the nu-

clear issue, the sanctions will not be removed since they are opposed to the (Islamic) Revolution in essence," Ayatollah said in Tehran on Wednesday, addressing a large number of visiting Iranians from East Azerbaijan province.

He elaborated on the underlying cause of economic problems in Iran, and said, "One of the most important problems is the arrogant powers' plots after the end of the (Iraqi-) imposed war (1980-1988) to prevent Iran from becoming an influential economic pole in the region and the world."

Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to the western ... (More on P4)...(29)

At Summit, Obama Aims to Broaden World Approach to Extremism

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama is convening a summit Wednesday on the threat of violent extremism just as the situation has gotten worse, with the Islamic State group metastasizing and European cities learning firsthand that extremism's reach is not confined to the Middle East.

As crises boil over in Yemen and Libya, Obama is asking Congress to take a tough vote backing his military plan to defeat IS extremists in Iraq and Syria. But U.S. military action has so far proven the wrong tool to combat a robust social media and propaganda operation whose success



at recruiting fighters and jihadists from western communities, including such U.S. cities as Denver and Chicago, has been alarmingly impressive. With that threat in mind, Obama is hoping to concentrate the world's

focus on the need to combat the underlying ideologies that entice otherwise modern individuals -- including many disaffected youth -- to behead a non-believer, kidnap a schoolgirl or shoot ... (More on P4)...(27)

Most Pressing Goal for Iraq Remains Defeating ISIL: Outgoing UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS - The special representative of the UN secretary-general for Iraq, Nikolay Mladenov, on Tuesday stressed the optimism he feels for the country's future, while tempering those hopes with fear over the many things that can go wrong and saying the most pressing goal for the Middle East nation remains defeating Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

"I am a paranoid optimist," Mladenov said in his final briefing as the UN Iraq envoy to the UN Security Council, noting the efforts made by the Iraqi political, community and religious leaders to save their country from terror. "Today, more than ever, there is a growing understanding that the country can only move forward based on the principles of democracy, rule of law, respect for diversity and inclu-

sivity." Even though the national unity government was set on addressing many long-standing concerns of the Iraqi people, Mladenov said that he remains "paranoid."

"So many things can go wrong," he said. "ISIL remains in control of most of Iraq's western provinces, the fragile efforts towards unity and reconciliation need to be carefully nurtured if they are to bear fruit, while the economy has been hit by falling oil prices and skyrocketing security costs," he said.

Iraq is facing an insurgency by the jihadist group ISIL, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the Islamic State (IS), which has forced thousands of people mainly from minority communities to flee their homes since late last year. The group, whose fight-

ers had seized vast swaths of territory in northern Iraq since June 2014 and announced the establishment of a caliphate in areas under its control in Syria and Iraq, has released videos showing beheadings of people including two American journalists and a British aid worker. Mladenov also touched upon the Iraqi government's "important steps" on political and institutional reform, economic and social reconstruction and national reconciliation, as well as its efforts to engage countries in the region.

"Iraq's most pressing goal remains to win back territory taken by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL," he said. "The authorities have pledged to provide military and financial assistance to local leaders and tribal fighters to ... (More on P4)...(28)

Greece to Submit Loan Request to Euro Zone, Germany Resists

ATHENS/FRANKFURT - Greece will submit a request to the euro zone on Thursday to extend a "loan agreement" for up to six months but EU paymaster Germany says no such deal is on offer and Athens must stick to the terms of its existing international bailout.

The move, confirmed by an official spokesman, is an attempt by the new leftist-led government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to keep a financial lifeline for an interim

period while sidestepping tough austerity conditions in the EU/IMF program.

An EU source said whether finance ministers of the 19-nation currency bloc, who rejected such ideas at a meeting on Monday, accept the request as a basis to resume negotiations will depend on how it is formulated.

Hardline German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble poured scorn on the Greek gambit, tell-

ing broadcaster ZDF on Tuesday evening: "It's not about extending a credit program but about whether this bailout program will be fulfilled, yes or no."

However, German Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel, leader of the Social Democratic junior partners in conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition, welcomed what he called the signal from the Greek government that it was ready to negotiate. (Reuters)

New Zealand, Australian Defense Ministers Discuss ISIL Moves

WELLINGTON - The defence ministers of New Zealand and Australia met Wednesday to discuss what action they will take in the fight against Islamic State insurgents in Iraq.

New Zealand Defence Minister Gerry Brownlee said the talks in Melbourne with Australian counterpart Kevin Andrews would cover a range of regional and international security issues, including the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the future defence capability projects. "Australia is our closest security and trade partner and it is important we regularly share our perspectives on interna-

tional defense and security," Brownlee said in a statement from his office. Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari officially requested New Zealand military assistance in the fight against ISIL on a visit to Auckland last week during talks with Brownlee.

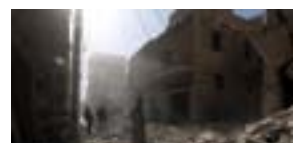
Foreign Minister Murray McCully and Prime Minister John Key. McCully said New Zealand would talk with Australia about the possibility of sending training troops to Iraq. The government announced on Feb. 10 that New Zealand troops had begun contingency training for a deployment to Iraq. Key has repeatedly ruled out New Zealand

troops being involved in combat, and said that if troops were sent they would only train Iraqi troops.

The announcement fueled the controversy over the move, which, political opponents said, was planned and decided months ago.

On Monday, Chief of the New Zealand Defence Force, Lieutenant General Tim Keating announced he would this week attend a meeting in Saudi Arabia of defence chiefs who belong to the coalition against ISIL in Iraq. The meeting was one of a series being held so coalition chiefs of defence could discuss the situation regarding ISIL. (Xinhua)

Syrian Rebels Regain Ground Lost Near Aleppo



BEIRUT - Syrian rebels on Wednesday regained much of the territory north of the city of Aleppo lost to government troops in fierce fighting the previous day in ongoing clashes that left more than 100 dead on both sides, activists said.

The violence came as U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura said he received a government commitment to suspend airstrikes on the city of Aleppo for six weeks, which would allow a proposed U.N. plan to "freeze" hostilities in the country's largest city to be tested.

De Mistura briefed the Security Council late Tuesday on his efforts to find a solution to Syria's civil war, which has killed more than 220,000 people. The envoy said he will return to Syria "as soon as possible" to assess whether the government's commitment is possible and to announce a start date.

An activist in Aleppo said most rebel factions will abide by a truce if the government stops airstrikes and release detainees, starting with female prisoners. Ahmad Hamed said via Skype that the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front, which has a small presence in the city, is not expected to abide by the plan. The Islamic State group is about 30 kilometers northeast of the city. (AP)

India to Build Strong Defense Industry: Modi

NEW DELHI - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi Wednesday said India will build a strong defense industry which gives room for public, private and foreign players to invest and develop. Addressing an air show in the southern city Bangalore, Modi also said it was important to modernize India's defense forces and increase preparedness.

Inaugurating the 10th edition of the Aero India 2015, Modi said India has to equip for the needs of the future, where technology will play a major role. Modi said the government was focusing on developing India's

defense industry with a sense of "mission", making it at the heart of the Make in India program, a brain child of the Bharatiya Janata Party government.

"Have introduced significant reforms in our offsets policy. I am acutely aware that it still needs a lot of improvements. Will pursue them," he added. Modi also praised the world arms industrialists to support India by participating in the air show, one of the biggest in the world. Numerous American, European, Russian and Israeli arms companies are participating in the annual show. (Xinhua)

OPEC Crude to Bounce Back Dramatically: BP

LONDON - The multinational energy giant, British Petroleum (BP) says the oil output by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) will reach record levels by 2030. In its newly-released Energy Outlook 2035, BP says, "The current weakness in the oil market, which stems in large part from strong growth in tight oil production in the US is likely to take several years to work through, but further out, the growth in tight oil is likely to slow and Middle East production will gain ground once more." According to the energy giant, "The call on OPEC crude begins to increase, exceeding the historical high (32 Mb/d in 2007) by 2030." It says China and India are among the main drivers

for oil demand in Asia, "Asia's import dependency rises from 23% in 2013 to 27% by 2035. Oil accounts for 60% of that rise, with imports accounting for over 80% of Asian oil consumption by 2035. Asia's oil imports in 2035 are almost as large as OPEC's current entire oil production." China remains the largest contributor to world demand growth and will replace the United States as the world's top oil consumer by 2035. India's import requirements also grow rapidly, with imports accounting for almost 90% of its total oil demand by 2035," it added. Meantime, BP says, "North America switches from being a net importer of energy to a net exporter this year (2015)." (Press TV)

China Still Darling of Foreign Investors

BEIJING - Even as growth slows and labor costs skyrocket, foreign investors keep pouring capital into China.

Politically and economically stable, with a huge pool of still relatively cheap labor and improving infrastructure, China remains the powerhouse of global production. An expanding local market of increasingly rich consumers has attracted companies from around the world who want a piece of the pie.

Although China's growth slowed last year, the 7.4-percent rise is still the envy of most other countries.

For the first time since 2003, China has replaced the United States as the top destination for foreign direct investment - investor confidence indeed. For most, it is not

just about a competitive manufacturing base, it is about proximity and access to China's vast army of prospective customers.

True, China is losing some labor-intensive manufacturers to lower cost countries, but high-end products are blossoming as investment shifts to more sophisticated sectors.

China's industrial clusters of raw materials and skilled labor, suppliers and logistics, designers and factories, all in one location, are hard to find in other countries.

While labor costs have risen in the developed coastal regions, interior provinces and smaller cities remain much cheaper and are now more accessible than ever due to better infrastructure. (Agencies)

Provinces Need to Fully Commit to NAP: Sharif

QUETTA - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday said that it is an occasion of achievement that the Federal government, Balochistan government, and armed forces are on all on the same page.

The Pakistani Prime Minister chaired the Balochistan Apex Committee meeting where amongst the participants were Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif, Senior Minister Nawab Sanaullah Zehri, and former Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali.

During the meeting, the PM went on to say that important decisions will be taken today regarding the provincial National Action Plan (NAP) and that it is the responsibility of all the provinces to fully commit to the progress of implementation of NAP. He further said that the progress was not

only being watched by the people of all the respective provinces but in fact the whole nation is seeking tangible results.

PM Nawaz also said that some provinces were progressing slowly on the implementation while some faster. He added that provinces should treat this as a competition.

He reiterated that NAP was not formulated by the federal government alone and it was a consensus by all political parties and the whole nation.

Earlier today, the PM and the COAS arrived in Quetta to attend the meeting.

The meeting also reviewed the law and order situation in the province as well as development projects. The PM is also expected to hold meetings with political leadership and party leaders in (Agencies)

Tajikistan's Fuel Imports Reportedly Reduce

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan's fuel imports have reportedly reduced. The Agency for Statistics under the President of Tajikistan said 37,400 tons of oil products to a total amount of 30.1 million U.S. dollars were delivered to the country last month, which was 45 percent fewer than in January 2014. In January 2014, Tajikistan reportedly imported 66,500 tons of oil products to the total amount of 56.7 million U.S. dollars. In 2014, Tajikistan im-

ported 580,000 tons of oil products. 376,000 of oil products were delivered to the country in 2013 and 373,000 tons of oil products were delivered to Tajikistan in 2012.

Russia provides the bulk of Tajikistan's fuel imports. Under the indicative fuel balance endorsed for 2015, Russia is expected to deliver one million tons of duty-free oil products to Tajikistan. A total is expected to include 600,000 tons of gasoline and diesel fuel. (Asia-Plus)