

India, Pakistan to Join Security Group Led By Russia, China

UFA, Russia - President Vladimir Putin announced Friday that India and Pakistan will join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a group dominated by Russia and China and also including former Soviet republics in Central Asia.

Russia sees the organization, expanding for the first time since its creation in 2001, as a counterweight to Western alliances.

Membership in the group potentially offers India greater access to the energy resources of Central Asia. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has combined



his attendance at the summit in Russia with visits to SCO members Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajik-

istan and Uzbekistan.

Putin opened the annual summit by announcing the acceptance of India and Pakistan as members. He said Belarus would obtain observer status, joining Afghanistan, Iran and Mongolia, while Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia and Nepal would be welcomed as "dialogue partners." The SCO leaders expressed hope that Iran also would soon become a member, but said Tehran first needed to reach an international agreement on curbing its nuclear program, Russian news agencies reported.(AP)

Putin Calls for Lifting All Sanctions against Iran

UFA, Russia - Russian President Vladimir Putin called on Friday for sanctions on Iran to be lifted as soon as possible after a deal is reached on Tehran's nuclear program. Putin told a news conference in the Russian city of Ufa that there was a question over which sanctions should be lifted and when, but went on to say they should be ended as soon as possible. "We are



calling for the comprehensive lifting of them as soon as possible," he said. Iran has also been restricted from selling oil as part of the sanctions. Putin said Iran would probably increase its oil production once the curbs are lifted. "It is possible, the global economy would adjust to it, I mean that consumption would grow... we are ready for it," he said. (Reuters)

Iran Nuclear Deal Possible in Coming Days: Germany

BERLIN - Germany believes a nuclear deal between Iran and major powers is possible in the coming days, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Friday. Over the past two weeks, Iran, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China have twice extended deadlines for completing the long-

term nuclear agreement. "The negotiations are very intensive," the spokesman told a regular government news conference. "The devil is absolutely in the detail." "I hope very much, and also expect, that in the coming days we will reach the point when decisions are taken on the political questions," he added.(Reuters)

India, Pakistan Agree to Revive Stalled Dialogue

NEW DELHI - India and Pakistan Friday decided to revive the stalled dialogue process and find ways to expedite trial of the Mumbai attack case at talks between Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi in Ufa, Russia, said local media. The Press Trust of India also reported that Modi had agreed to visit Pakistan next year for the South Asian Association for Regional

Cooperation (SAARC) Summit to be held in Islamabad. Modi and Sharif held their first bilateral talks in over a year for nearly one hour at the sidelines of the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). India suspended dialogue on improving relations with Pakistan one year ago over the contacts between Pakistan diplomats in Delhi and separatist leaders of Indian-controlled Kash-

mir. The two sides also decided that Indian National Security Advisers Ajit Doval and Pakistani PM's security advisor Sartaj Aziz will meet in New Delhi either next month or in September to discuss "all issues connected to terrorism". The two leaders focused their discussions mainly on terrorism, which India has been projecting as the core issue bedeviling India-Pakistan relations, report.(Xinhua)

No Summit on Sunday if Greece Aid Deal Agreed at Saturday's Eurogroup Meeting

BRUSSELS - There won't be a summit on Sunday if a deal on aid for Greece is reached at Saturday's Eurogroup meeting, a European official said at a briefing on Friday. A senior EU official said a list of proposed "prior actions" from Greece was received by the Eurogroup on Thursday night and the European institutions have access to it. "On 10 a.m. Saturday (0800 GMT), the Euro

working group will look at the assessment of the institutions about the prior actions to see if conditions are met," the official said. He added that if Saturday's Eurogroup meeting led to an agreement there would be no summit on Sunday, and if no agreement, the consequences were "quite clear". The official also said that bridge financing for Greece would also be discussed if the aid pro-

gram was agreed upon at the Eurogroup meeting. Greece submitted its formal request to the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) on Wednesday, asking for a three-year loan from the bailout fund. The financially-troubled country then submitted a detailed reform proposals to Eurogroup on Thursday night, aiming to avoid a possible Greek default and "Grexit."(Xinhua)

Iran, Powers Give Themselves to Monday for Nuclear Deal

VIENNA - Iran and major powers gave themselves until Monday to reach a nuclear agreement, their third extension in two weeks, as Tehran accused the West of throwing up new stumbling blocks to a deal.

Both sides say there has been progress in two weeks of talks, but British Secretary Philip Hammond called it "painfully slow" and he and his French counterpart, Laurent Fabius, left Vienna saying they would return on Saturday. Having missed a Friday morning U.S. congressional deadline, U.S. and European Union officials said they were extending sanctions

relief for Iran under an interim deal through Monday to provide more time for talks on a final deal. Iran and six powers - Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States - are trying to end a more than 12-year dispute over Iran's atomic program by negotiating limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief. The sides remain divided over issues that include a U.N. arms embargo on Iran which Western powers want to keep in place, access for inspectors to military sites in Iran and answers from Tehran over past activity suspected of military aims. (Reuters)

Syrian Children Face Water Scarcity, Heat: UN

BEIRUT - The U.N. children's agency warned on Friday that millions of Syrian children face a "high risk" of disease due to the scarcity of clean water and the scorching summer heat. Syria's civil war, now in its fifth year, has damaged much of the country's infrastructure and killed more than 220,000 people. Millions are displaced within the country, forced to live in crowded and dirty conditions. Water cuts are common throughout Syria. UNICEF said that since the beginning of 2015, Syria has reported 105,886 cases of acute diarrhea. There has also been a sharp increase in cases of Hepatitis A, with

a record number of 1,700 new cases reported in one week alone in February, the agency said. "The situation is alarming, particularly for children who are susceptible to water borne diseases," said Hanaa Singer UNICEF's Representative in Syria. "Water has become even more scarce and unsafe, and poor hygiene conditions especially among the displaced communities are putting more children at severe risk." The area of Deir el-Zour province, where sewage has contaminated the Euphrates River, is at a particularly high risk, with 1,144 typhoid cases having been reported there, UNICEF said.(AP)

Germany Cautious About Greece's New Proposals

BERLIN - German government expressed its cautiousness about Greece's latest reform proposals on Friday, saying that it's waiting for formal reviews of the troika institutions. German government declined to give any immediate comment on the content of Greece's latest reform proposals which includes spending cuts, tax increases and pension reforms. "We have to wait for the reviews of the institutions (European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund)," said Frank Paul Weber, a spokes-

man of German Federal Finance Ministry. According to him, finance ministers of the euro zone will discuss the review results of the institutions when they meet Saturday afternoon in Brussels, and will give their recommendations to the heads of states for a scheduled EU summit on Sunday. "The outcome of the discussion of the euro group finance ministers is totally open," Weber said, adding that German Chancellor Angela Merkel had asked German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaueble to accompany her to the summit.(Xinhua)

Uzbekistan Calls for Creating UN Commission on IS Problem

UFA - President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov has called on Friday for the creation of a UN commission on the problem of activity of the Islamic State (IS) terrorist organisation. He raised this issue at an expanded meeting of the Council of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Ufa, capital of Russia's Bashkortostan republic. "Many speak of the Islamic State, but unfortun-

nately, hardly anybody has found the roots of the Islamic State creation. Elaborating on the topic, I think that the UN should create a special commission [on IS]," the Uzbekistani leader said. "I think this commission might put forward a certain proposal and discuss it to work out a general opinion on what the Islamic State is and how we should perceive and combat it," Karimov said.(TASS)

Russia Protests Demolition of Soviet War Memorials in Poland

MOSCOW - Russia has protested plans to demolish a Soviet war memorial in Poland and accused the Warsaw government of escalating its "war on monuments." The Russian Foreign Ministry said at least 10 war memorials have been desecrated or demolished in Poland during the past year. Friday's protest concerns a memorial in the town of Pieniezno dedicated to Soviet Gen. Ivan Cheryakhovsky, who was fatally

wounded at the site in February 1945. Soviet war memorials have fallen into disrepair and been regularly vandalized in Poland, where the Soviet role in World War II is viewed with ambiguity or outright hostility. In Russia, the official narrative is that the Red Army liberated Poland from Nazi occupation. Russia says the demolition of war monuments in Poland violates a 1994 agreement between the two countries.(AP)

IS Bomb set Fire to Government HQ in North



BEIRUT - A mortar round fired by Islamic State militants caused a major blaze at a Syrian government headquarters building in the northeastern city of Hasaka and firefighters had put it out, state television said on Friday. The ultra hardline jihadists hit

a civilian ID and passport office building in Hasaka, where the army has fought off several major incursions in recent weeks. Earlier a Syrian army source said the militants had blown up a third explosive-laden car in the eastern part of the city. (Reuters)

Neighbour News

Iran Urges West to Stop Excessive Demands for Nuclear Deal

TEHRAN - Hundreds of thousands of Iranians held nationwide rallies on Friday to mark Al-Quds, or Jerusalem Day, in support of the Palestinians, as Iranian officials urged the West to stop excessive demands for a nuclear deal. The rallyers chanted anti-Israel slogans and carried banners, denouncing what they called "war crimes" against Palestinians in Gaza and in the occupied territories. The participants in the rallies also urged the Iranian nuclear negotiators in the talks with the powers to observe the red lines of the country drawn by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. They asked the Iranian negotiators not to give in to the pressures and excessive demands by the "unreliable enemy" in the ongoing talks. In the capital Tehran, a

number of Iranian government officials, military commanders and lawmakers, also joined the rally and reiterated the Islamic republic's solidarity with the Palestinians in "their strive to achieve their rights." Al-Quds Day is an annual event that began in Iran in 1979 and is observed on the last Friday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in Iran and several Muslim countries. On Friday, Iran's First Vice President Eshaq Jahanghiri who attended the rallies in Tehran drew on ongoing nuclear talks between Iran and the world powers, saying that the United States and its allies should stop their excessive demands in the talks for a comprehensive deal over the country's disputed nuclear program. "If the West retreats from its excessive demands, we can reach a good agreement," Jahanghiri said. (Xinhua)

Xi Eyes China-Uzbekistan Community of Common Interests, Destiny

UFA, Russia - Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday voiced his expectation to build a community of common interests and common destiny between China and Uzbekistan. "China attaches great importance to its ties with Uzbekistan and firmly adheres to a friendly policy toward the country," Xi said when meeting here with his Uzbek counterpart Islam Karimov on the sidelines of the 15th Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit. Noting that the development of bilateral ties have made leaps and bounds in recent years, Xi said the two countries have carried out comprehensive cooperation on security, energy, finance, transport, agriculture and telecommunications, along with a series of

joint large-scale projects, bringing tangible benefits to the two peoples. "I hope the two sides will continue working together closely to make China and Uzbekistan a community of common interests and common destiny featuring equality, reciprocity and win-win cooperation with a common stake in security," said the Chinese president. There is immense potential for economic cooperation between China and Uzbekistan, Xi said, calling on the two sides to interlink their development strategies, chart a roadmap for cooperation based on the existing deal on building the Silk Road Economic Belt, and identify and carry out some early-harvest projects. (Xinhua)

Chinese President Welcomes Pakistan's Entry Into SCO

UFA, Russia - Chinese President Xi Jinping said here Friday that Beijing welcomes Pakistan's upcoming entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Xi made the remarks when meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif prior to the 15th SCO summit, which is set to start procedures for granting India and Pakistan full

membership. "China is willing to maintain close cooperation with Pakistan within the SCO framework," said the Chinese president. Pakistan and India are now among the five observers of the SCO, which currently groups China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. (Xinhua)

Uzbekistan to Chair SCO in 2015-2016

BISHKEK - SCOThe chairmanship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will be given to Uzbekistan from July this year, reports SCO Secretary-General Dmitry Mezentsev. "It is very important that those positions laid under the chairmanship of one country will be maintained and developed in the framework of a new phase after transition to a new chairmanship of the member state," Mezentsev said. "We are convinced that this will happen again when

the presidency is passed to Uzbekistan in July this year," he said. The transfer of chairmanship to Uzbekistan will take place on July 10 in Ufa during summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is expected to result in signing of a number of important documents. Today, the SCO includes China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Three countries - India, Iran and Pakistan - are expected to become full-fledged members. (AKIpress)