

Putin Calls Obama, Discuss Ukraine, IS, Iran: White House

WASHINGTON - Russian President Vladimir Putin and President Barack Obama spoke by telephone Thursday and discussed continued tensions in eastern Ukraine and the fight against the Islamic State in the Middle East. The last time the men spoke was in February, the White House said.

Both the White House and the Kremlin offered similar statements describing the conversation, Thursday evening. The White House said Putin initiated the call to Obama. The White House said Obama told Putin Russia needs to meet commitments it made in Minsk, Belarus, earlier this year, including the removal of troops and equipment from Ukrainian territory. The Kremlin said the two leaders agreed that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin will discuss implementation of these agreements. The call came on the same day NATO's supreme allied commander cited a continuous flow of ammunition and other military supplies from Russia across the border to Ukraine. The Kremlin said the two men devoted "significant attention" to confronting terrorism and the Islamic State in particular and agreed to have Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry meet to review the issue. The White House and the Kremlin said the two leaders also addressed continued bloodshed in Syria and agreed on the importance of unity among the six world powers that are negotiating to restrict Iran's nuclear capabilities. (AP)



EU to Prepare New Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy: Tusk

BRUSSELS - European leaders have agreed to prepare a new strategy on foreign and security policy, European Council President Donald Tusk told a press conference on Friday following the day's summit meeting. He expressed solidarity with France, Kuwait and Tunisia, "which have been the victims of savage terrorist attacks."

"In the context of growing security challenges, leaders agreed that the Union will prepare a new strategy on foreign and security policy,"



... (More on P4)... (27)

Tusk said, adding "the high representative will submit it to the European Council next June." NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg joined the meeting to discuss the new threats facing Europe "at a time of hybrid warfare, global terrorism and cyber-attacks." Tusk added that Europeans must invest in their own defense to deal with a dramatically changed security environment. (Xinhua)

Turkey, Israel Seek Resumption of Reconciliation Talks

NKARA - Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu confirmed on Wednesday it was holding meetings with Israel to resume reconciliation talks to restore the deteriorated bilateral ties, local Hurriyet Daily News reported. "Talks between Turkey and Israel are very normal for the sake of the normalization of relations. How can reconciliation be achieved without holding any meetings?" Cavusoglu told reporters in the Turkish capital of Ankara. "The ball is in Israel's court" in regard to the normalization of bilateral ties since Ankara is still waiting for the fulfillment of its conditions for normalization, Cavusoglu said. Cavusoglu's remarks came a day after Israel's media reported that Israeli Foreign Minister Dore Gold and Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinerli ... (More on P4)... (26)

Kerry off to Vienna for Iran Nuclear Talks as Deadline Looms

WASHINGTON - With next week's deadline for an Iran nuclear deal fast approaching, Secretary of State John Kerry headed back to the talks in Vienna on Friday, this time leaning on crutches. On his first overseas trip since breaking his leg earlier this month, Kerry left Washington amid mounting debate over the wisdom of an agreement with Iran. Critics accuse the Obama administration and its partners of conceding too much in the talks. U.S. officials insist their positions remain unchanged and that Iran must agree to their demands by Tuesday's deadline. Kerry traveled with a State Department physician, as is customary, but this time also was accompanied by a physical therapist, officials said. Kerry said Thursday he is "always hopeful" but would not say he is optimistic about getting a deal. Other officials have suggested the deadline may slip in the same manner that a March 30 ... (More on P4)... (27)

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EU Provides Funds to Reform Immigration Laws in COMESA

LUSAKA - The European Union (EU) will release 85 million Euros to support initiatives aimed at reforming immigration laws within the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) as part of efforts to enhance intra-trade within the regional bloc, a senior official said on Friday. EU Head of

Delegation to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA Gilles Hervio said the funds will be made available in the coming six years to support initiatives to enhance the free movement of business persons and professionals. The funds, he said, have been provided under the 11th European Development

Fund (EDF), and will also be used to support regulatory reforms to facilitate trade in key selected service sectors in order to build on the momentum generated by the tripartite and continental free trade negotiation process. In remarks delivered to a meeting of COMESA, ministers ... (More on P4)... (28)

Sri Lanka's President Dissolves Parliament

COLOMBO - Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena on Friday signed a gazette notification to dissolve the parliament as of midnight, the government said. The dissolution paves the way for parliamentary elections to be held in the island nation most likely in August, months ahead of schedule. Elections Commissioner Mahinda Deshapriya is scheduled to hold a media briefing on Saturday where he will announce plans with regards to the polls. (Xinhua)

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German FM Condemns Attack in France

BERLIN - German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Friday condemned an attack on a factory in France. "We are hearing shocking reports from France about a brutal murder and an attack that has injured several people. We condemn this act of terror and fanaticism in the strongest possible terms," Steinmeier said in a statement. He extended his deepest sympathies to the families of the victims, saying Germany stood

"united with France in defending our free society against the blind hatred of terror." Earlier on Friday, two men stormed a gas company in Iserre, southeast France, and exploded gas containers. A least two people were wounded. A man was found decapitated at the site, with a flag of Islamic State (IS) aside. A presumed perpetrator, known to French intelligence services, was arrested shortly after the attack, reported local media. (Xinhua)

Russian Expert Urges Media to Promote Cooperation for Mutual Understanding

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia - Russian and Chinese news organizations should strengthen cooperation in order to help the two peoples better understand each other, says a Russian media expert. Mass media in the two countries should tell the truth about China-Russia cooperation initiatives, Andrei Bystritsky, dean of the Faculty of Communications, Media and Design at Moscow's National Research University Higher School of Economics, told Xinhua in an interview on Thursday. He added that the consensus to link China's Silk Road Economic Belt

undertaking with the development strategies of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union is also one of the major subjects at the China-Russia Media Forum held here of late. He said the mass media should create a favorable atmosphere for integration, and explain to the audience the advantages their countries will enjoy. As China-Russia relations are at an all-time high, there are broad prospects for media cooperation, which is expected to play a positive role in deepening strategic partnership and enhancing mutual understanding, he said. (Xinhua)

NATO Appoints New Chairman of Military Committee



BRUSSELS - NATO on Friday appointed General Petr Pavel, previously the chief of defense of the Czech Republic, as the new chairman of the NATO Military Committee. The former chairman General Knud Bartels leaves his position after a term of three and a half years. At the farewell ceremony attended by senior NATO military officials, Gen. Bartels laid a wreath at the NATO Memorial to honor the servicemen and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice in NATO-led missions and operations. Addressing the Military Committee, General Bartels thanked them for their work and their contribution in delivering timely military advice to the North Atlantic Council during his time as chairman. NATO said in the press release: "This is an important moment in the history of the Alliance as General Pavel is the first representative of a former Warsaw Pact nation to become chairman of the Military Committee." (Xinhua)

UN Expert to Visit China on Social Effects of its Int'l Lending

GENEVA - The United Nations independent expert on foreign debt, Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, will visit China from June 29 to July 6 to assess how its international lending contributes to human rights, in particular economic, social and cultural rights in borrowing countries. According to the UN's office here, China's own debt sustainability policies and its policies to address international problems relating to foreign debt and illicit financial flows will also be on the international expert's human rights agenda. "I am visiting China to learn more about the efforts made by the government and Chinese financial institutions to avoid negative human rights impacts in their international lending, including guidelines that have been developed to ensure respect for human rights, social and environmental standards," Bohoslavsky said. In recent years, China has become one of the major international lenders financing development and infrastructure projects worldwide, and promoting the development. (Xinhua)

U.N. Mediator to Visit Kuwait, Riyadh in Search of Yemen Deal



GENEVA - A United Nations envoy will hold talks in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the coming days on a draft peace proposal for Yemen with the aim of reaching a "preliminary agreement" with Houthi fighters, a U.N. spokesman said on Friday. More than 2,800 people have been killed in Yemen during three months of air strikes by a Saudi-led coalition, including Kuwait, that aims to restore President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi who is currently living in exile in the Saudi capital Riyadh. Iranian-backed Houthi fighters control large areas of Yemen, including the capital Sanaa. U.N.-sponsored talks in Geneva on a ceasefire between Yemen's warring parties broke up a week ago without a deal as the coalition staged further airstrikes. U.N. envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, who led the Geneva talks, will travel to Kuwait on Saturday and then spend a week in Riyadh before moving on to Sanaa for a further week of consultations, U.N. spokesman Ahmad Fawzi told reporters. "He intends to spend more time in the two capitals (Riyadh and Sanaa) to discuss the draft principles paper which was developed here in Geneva - as he said, 'until we reach a preliminary agreement,'" said U.N. spokesman Ahmad Fawzi. (Reuters)

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Neighbour News

Iran Foreign Minister Posts Upbeat Tweet about Possible N-Deal

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has reaffirmed that the Islamic Republic seeks a fair deal with the P5+1 countries, saying he will be going to the Austrian capital of Vienna - "to secure a fair and lasting deal." Referring to recent remarks by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei that Iran seeks a fair deal with the P5+1, Zarif wrote in a latest post on his Twitter account that "Iranians want a dignified deal and reject excessive demands," adding that he will be going to "Vienna to secure a fair and lasting" deal. Iran and the P5+1 - the US, the UK, France, China and Russia plus Germany - are holding talks to finalize the text of a possible deal over the Islamic Republic's civilian nuclear program. The two sides reached mutual understanding on the key parameters of the potential deal in the Swiss city of Lausanne on April 2. Seyyed Abbas Araqchi, who is Iran's deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs and a negotiator at the talks, said earlier on Friday that Zarif will be joining the talks in Vienna on Saturday. (Agencies)

Pakistan Heat Wave Eases after more than 1,150 Die

KARACHI - Sea breezes brought lower temperatures on Friday to ease a heat wave that killed more than 1,150 people around Pakistan's teeming port city of Karachi during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Mass funerals were held for 50 unidentified victims on Friday before their bodies were hastily buried. The extreme heat of up to 44 degrees Celsius (111 Fahrenheit) - the hottest since 1981 - coincided with power failures and triggered sharp criticism of the government's response in the city of 20 million people. On Friday, the daily high temperature was about 36 degree Celsius (97 Fahrenheit), according to Dr Mohammad Hanif of the Director National Weather Forecasting Centre. The power outages left many without fans, water or light at the beginning of Ramadan, when many Muslims do not eat or drink during daylight hours. "By Friday, at least 1,150 people have died in the government-run hospitals," said Anwar Kazmi of the Edhi Foundation, a private charity that runs a network of ambulances and morgues. (Reuters)

China-EU Summit Opportunity: European Scholar

BRUSSELS - The 17th China-EU leaders' meeting set for later this month in Brussels will be an opportunity for European and Chinese leaders to explore synergies between the European Union (EU)'s "Juncker Plan" and China-proposed Belt and Road initiative, a European expert has said. "The summit presents an opportunity for the Chinese Premier to meet the new European leadership, namely European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, and to jointly agree on the priorities for the EU-China Strategic Partnership for the upcoming years," Anna Katharina Stahl, research fellow at the EU-China Research Centre of the College of Europe, told Xinhua in a recent interview. Noting that the EU's and China's economic situation will remain high on the EU-China summit agenda, she said leaders at the summit are expected to discuss topics on boosting transport and infrastructure links between Europe and China. She said that 2015 marks the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the EU and China. Over the past 40 years the EU and China have built a mature relationship, she said, describing the establishment of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership a "landmark" in bilateral ties. Together with adoption of the "EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation", it deepened cooperation between the EU and China in a wide range of areas. "The EU and China share responsibility for addressing a variety of global challenges. In particular, European and Chinese leaders need to collaborate in the area of international development cooperation," said Stahl. (Xinhua)

National Security Service of Uzbekistan Burns 1.4 Tons of Drugs

Bishkek - burn National Security Service of Uzbekistan has demonstrably burned 1.4 tons of drugs in the industrial furnaces, the drugs were seized by law enforcement agencies during the fight against drug trafficking circulation. The process of liquidation was held in one of the enterprises of Tashkent in the presence of members of the International Commission for Drug Control, representatives of the UN Office on Drug and Crime, the public and the media. 133.3 kg of the total amount of burned drugs was heroine, 775 kg - opium, 93 kg - hashish, 309 kg - marijuana including a large number of poppy straw, cannabis and drugs in the form of tablets and solutions, clarified the source. During the similar action 1.27 tons of drugs were burned last year. (AKIpress)