

Libya Rival Factions Sit at Same Table for First Time

SKHIRAT, Morocco - Officials from Libya's rival parliaments sat down at the same table for the first time on Sunday at the latest round of United Nations-backed peace talks in Morocco - a move negotiators saw as an important step to forming a unity government.

Libya has two governments and parliaments, with the internationally recognized government operating out of the country's east since an armed alliance known as Libya Dawn took over the capital Tripoli



and declared its own government last year. A new round of talks among the warring fac-

tions has been underway in the Moroccan coastal town of Skhirat since Friday, hosted by the United Nations in an effort to end a conflict that threatens to break up the oil-producing nation.

Nearly three weeks after U.N. envoy Bernardino Leon handed them a final draft, negotiating teams have been trying to hammer out amendments while hardliners on the ground keep fighting for a military victory.

"This is definitely an important step," UN ... (More on P4)... (22)

'Real Risk' of Grexit if Greeks Vote 'No' in Referendum: French PM

PARIS FRANCE - There is a "real risk" of Greece leaving the eurozone if the Greek people vote against the EU's bailout proposals in a referendum, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said Sunday.

However, Valls urged the Greek authorities to "come back to the negotiating table" after Athens broke off deadlocked talks on trying to rescue Greece's debt-stricken economy.



Valls refused to attack the decision of the Greek government to call a referendum, say-

ing: "When you ask the people to decide, to exercise their democratic right, this should not be criticised. "It is obvious that if there is a negative response, there is a real risk ... of leaving the eurozone," Valls told rolling news channel iTELE. "I continue to believe ... that a deal is still possible and I invite the Greek government to return to the negotiating table," the prime minister added. (AFP)

Australian IS Fighter 'Still Alive' after Drone Strike: Report

Sydney - Canberra was Sunday attempting to verify whether an Australian Islamic State group fighter, notorious for being photographed with severed heads, had survived a drone attack after a report said he was still alive.

Australian media last week reported that two of the country's most wanted IS jihadists, Khaled Sharrouf and Mohamed Elomar, were believed killed in a drone strike in Syria. But highly classified photographs of the

Predator strike have only confirmed the death of Elomar, with no indications that Sharrouf also perished, The Sunday Telegraph reported.

"He's got nine lives," an unnamed source told the newspaper. "It was a split-second thing." Prime Minister Tony Abbott has previously said his government had a "high degree of confidence" that Elomar had been killed in a coalition air strike but could not say the same for Sharrouf. (AFP)

Terrorists do not Divide but Unite Us: EU Diplomat

BRUSSELS - Terrorists do not divide but unite us, wrote the EU chief diplomat, Federica Mogherini, in a tweet. "Tunisia, Kuwait, France: Europe and Arab world united as victims and in the response. Terrorists want to divide us, they unite us even more," she wrote. During Thursday's Heads of State

and Governments Summit, Ms Mogherini had sent a letter to European Council President Donald Tusk to update him on the EU's strategy to fight terrorism, which was reviewed at the suggestion of the leaders last February, immediately after the Paris shootings. "We will continue to act with

urgency and determination in order to achieve the fastest possible impact on the ground. For this to work, we must all commit to closely coordinate internal and external actions on the one hand and the EU institutions and countries on the other, so as to enhance the impact of our ... (More on P4)... (23)

61 Killed in Violence, Clashes with IS Militants in Iraq

BAGHDAD - A total of 61 people were killed on Sunday, most of them were Islamic State (IS) militants, in clashes, air strikes and gunfire across Iraq, security sources said.

In Anbar province, the army artillery pounded IS positions in Saggara area near the city of Haditha, some 200 km northwest of the Iraqi capital of Bagh-

dad, leaving 26 IS militants killed along with destroying two of their vehicles, a provincial security source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, the security forces and allied Sunni militias repelled sporadic attacks by the IS militants on military positions in three villages and Alous area near the IS-held city of

Heet, some 160 km west of Baghdad, killing 15 IS militants and destroyed eight of their vehicles, the source said. Also in the province, up to 10 people were killed and 19 others wounded in air strikes by Iraqi aircraft on several districts in the IS-seized city of Fallujah, some 50 km west of Baghdad, the source added. (Xinhua)

Former Sri Lankan President to Contest as Prime Minister Candidate: Aide

COLOMBO - Sri Lankan former President Mahinda Rajapaksa will contest as a prime minister candidate in the August 17 Parliament elections, a former Minister and close aide of Rajapaksa said Sunday.

Kumara Welgama, a former minister in Rajapaksa's government, said that the former president will look to contest under the betel leaf symbol of the opposition United

People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA). "I can clearly state that Mahinda Rajapaksa will contest as the prime minister candidate," he said. Welgama said that all attempts will be made to unite the political parties in the UPFA, including the main opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), and put forward Rajapaksa as the UPFA prime minister candidate. (Xinhua)

UK, Canadian, US Students May Have Left Sudan for IS

KHARTOUM - Twelve students including British, Canadian, Sudanese and US citizens are feared to have left Khartoum for Turkey to try to join the Islamic State group, their university said on Sunday. Another group of British students of Sudanese origin from the same private University of Medical Sciences and Technology travelled to Turkey in March and it is believed they crossed into Syria. "We confirmed reports from multiple parties that 12 medical stu-

dents at the university left for Turkey on Friday," the dean for students Dr Ahmed Babikir told AFP. Khartoum airport authorities confirmed the group had flown to Turkey and the students' families said they had not seen them since Friday and were unable to find their passports, Babikir added. It was likely they were trying to reach Syria to join IS because they were still sitting their final exams and had not warned relatives they were leaving, he said. (AFP)

Bahrain to Step Up Security in Mosques after Kuwait Deadly Attack

MANAMA - Bahrain announced on Sunday that security measures will be beefed up in mosques across the country following a spate of mosque bombings in neighboring Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa on Sunday met with two top clerics from the Sunni and Shiite Endowments to discuss their plans following the recent attacks against places of

worship. The meeting discussed the installation of CCTVs and the closure of mosques after each prayer, a statement by the Bahraini Interior Ministry said. The minister vowed to protect the places of worship and citizens, it added. He warned that legal procedures will be taken against anyone who endangers national unity through extremist religious speech. (Xinhua)

Syrian Forces Kill 30 Rebels in Daraa

DAMASCUS - At least 30 rebels were killed and many others wounded by strikes of Syrian army in southern province of Daraa, the state news agency SANA reported Sunday.

The military forces also destroyed weaponry and rocket launchers in the operation that took place nearby the Electricity Company in Daraa, said SANA, adding that two other rebel groups were eliminated in Daraa al-Balad area. Citing a military source, SANA said four rebel

factions, called al-Muezz Brigade, also escaped the town of Naime, after the military forces struck a position gathering their leaders on Saturday evening. Last Thursday, a coalition of 51 rebel and jihadi groups declared the start of a major offensive to drive government forces out of Daraa.

The offensive, dubbed "the Storm of the South," aims to take control of the entire city of Daraa and its vicinity, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. (Xinhua)

Philippines Halts Repairs on Spratlys Airstrip Ahead of UN Suit

MANILA - The Philippines has halted the repair of its airstrip in the disputed Spratly islands due to its pending suit at The Hague challenging China's claim over the waters, a presidential spokesman said Sunday. The work on the airstrip on Thitu island, which the Philippines calls Pagasa and which hosts a

small community, comes as China builds up outcroppings in the waters into islands that can host military facilities. "The repair has been stopped because we uphold the principle of keeping the status quo in the areas involved," said President Benigno Aquino's spokesman Herminio Coloma. (AFP)

US Warship Visits Georgia Amid Ukraine Crisis



BATUMI GEORGIA - A US warship arrived Sunday in Georgia's Black Sea port of Batumi on a training mission, the US embassy said, sending a message of support to the NATO aspirant amid the conflict in Ukraine.

The US 6th Fleet's guided missile destroyer USS Laboon "will conduct routine combined training with the Georgian Coast Guard," the US embassy in Tbilisi said. The port call "reaffirms the United States' commitment to strengthening ties with NATO allies and partners like Georgia, while working

toward mutual goals of promoting security and stability in the Black Sea region," the embassy said in a statement.

Moscow's seizure of Crimea from Kiev's rule and its support for Ukrainian rebels have alarmed Georgia, which fought and lost a brief war with Russia in 2008. The Ukraine crisis has triggered the worst confrontation between Russia and the West since the Cold War, and the US said last week it would deploy heavy weapons in central and eastern Europe in a move that angered Moscow. (AFP)

US Senators Urge Full US-Cuba Embassy Ties



HAVANA - A trio of US senators visiting Cuba's capital on Saturday called for the reopening of full embassies in Havana and Washington, under the recent US-Cuban diplomatic thaw. After over five decades of Cold War bad blood, President Raul Castro and US President Barack Obama in December agreed to normalize relations, and the two leaders held groundbreaking talks on the sidelines of an April summit in Panama. "We must open an embassy, a full embassy. We had full embassies years

ago," said Patrick Leahy, a Vermont Democrat, joined by colleagues Ben Cardin, a Maryland Democrat and Dean Heller, a Nevada Republican. "Some in the congress oppose opening it," Leahy said. "I like to say that they are very much in the minority." Leahy, a frequent visitor to Cuba in recent years, said Obama has been chipping away at restrictions on US travel to the Communist-run island, and that he expected regularly scheduled commercial flights would not be far off. (AFP)

Neighbour News

Chinese Premier Arrives in Brussels for China-EU Leaders' Meeting

BRUSSELS - Chinese Premier Li Keqiang arrived here Sunday for the 17th China-EU leaders' meeting in Brussels.

During his stay in Brussels, Li will co-chair the China-EU leaders' meeting with President of the European Council Donald Tusk and President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker. Li will also meet Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel.

Li is expected to discuss China-EU cooperation and international and regional issues with European leaders, address the opening ceremony of a China-EU business summit and attend a forum on the China-EU urbanization partnership. During Li's visit, China and the EU

will issue a document to outline their future cooperation priorities and a statement on climate change, and sign several cooperation deals on regional policies, intellectual property rights protection, customs and technological innovation, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said. The EU has been China's largest trading partner for 11 years while China has been the EU's second largest trading partner for 12 years. Bilateral trade volume exceeded 600 billion U.S. dollars in 2014.

After the Brussels trip, Li will visit France and deliver a speech at the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development headquarters in Paris. He will also visit Marseille and Toulouse after Paris. (Xinhua)

Iranian Chief Negotiator for Nuclear Talks to Leave for Tehran: Official

VIENNA - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is to leave Vienna for Tehran on Sunday night, an Iranian official told Iranian media. Zarif is supposed to fly to Tehran after the meetings with foreign ministers of the world powers, and would be back to the talks before the June 30 deadline. Gaps remain in the some areas of the talks, especially the pace and timing of the sanction relief and the monitoring and verification of

Iran's nuclear program. The P5 plus 1 countries (Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- plus Germany) are holding meetings to coordinate their positions of the negotiation. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius hinted there are also differences among the six countries. The Iranian official told Iranian media that Iranian delegations will stay in Vienna and continue the talks beyond the June 30 deadline. (Xinhua)

Pakistan Army Kills 23 Militants in Airstrikes

ISLAMABAD - At least 23 militants, including foreigners, were killed today by Pakistani fighter jets in the country's restive northwest tribal region near the Afghan border where a massive military operation is underway against the Taliban. The rebels were targeted in remote areas of Khyber and North Waziristan tribal districts.

The army said in a statement that foreigners were among 23 terrorists killed

in the air attacks and huge ammunition dump was blown up in the strikes in Khyber. Pakistan has launched a massive offensive against militants in the north, and so far killed more than 2,800 rebels in a year-long fight. But militants have hideouts in some pockets of Khyber and North Waziristan where troops cannot easily operate due to hilly terrain and thick forests. (Monitoring Desk)

Uzbekistan to Introduce Additional Duties on Ukrainian Imports from July 1

TASHKENT - Uzbekistan will introduce additional duties on imports of Ukrainian goods from July 1, 2015 for one year, President of Ukrkondprom Association Oleksandr Baldyniuk wrote on his Facebook page. According to the post, Uzbekistan will impose an additional duty of 5% to 10% depending on the type of goods. The new duties have been introduced as the Ukrainian au-

thorities passed a law on measures to stabilize Ukraine's budget balance and introduced an additional imports duty. Ukraine is ninth in the structure of goods turnover in Uzbekistan. In 2014, bilateral goods turnover was \$607.6 million. In the structure of Ukrainian imports agro-industrial complex and engineering products have a large share of the Uzbek market. (Agencies)

Tajikistan Expresses Condolences over Death of Ex-Russian PM

DUSHANBA - Tajikistan on Saturday expressed deep condolences over the death of former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov. "Primakov was an outstanding statesman, a scientist and a politician, and did much to address regional and global issues", Tajik President Emomali Rahmon said in the message to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, "Tajik government

extends its sincere sympathies and condolences to Primakov's family". As a good friend of the Tajik people, Primakov made a great contribution to the development of the Tajikistan-Russia mutual cooperation amid all fields, said Rahmon, adding that Tajik people will always remember this Russian diplomat who achieved peace and harmony in our land. (Agencies)