

EU Chief Speaks Out Against Arms Supplies for Kiev

RIGA, Latvia - The European Union's foreign policy chief on Friday came out against a bipartisan call in the United States to provide lethal, defensive weapons to Ukraine in its fight against Russian-backed separatists.

House Speaker John Boehner and a group of top Democrats and Republicans wrote to President Obama calling for deliveries but so far have found few backers in the 28-nation EU.

Federica Mogherini said Friday that "the European Union is doing enough" and insisted that the implementation of the peace deal brokered in Minsk last month "is the way to go forward."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel are been particularly outspoken against pouring more firepower into the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Mogherini said that "what Ukraine needs now is not only the full respect of its sovereignty, of its territorial integrity, but it is also peace." On Friday, Austrian Foreign



Minister Sebastian Kurz said arms deliveries "would only stoke the fire."

"Our goal must be a ceasefire, not an escalation," Kurz said. The U.S. lawmakers insisted the so-called Minsk agreements have only consolidated Russian and separatists' gains, and urged quick approval of additional efforts to support Ukraine. They said the EU was far too slow and meek in its reaction to the crisis.

Britain on Friday continued its policy of providing non-lethal defense assistance to Ukraine as the EU continues to look for a political solution, approving 850,000 pounds (\$1.29 million) for first aid kits, night vision goggles, helmets and other equipment.

"Our overall aim is to strengthen the defensive capability of the Ukrainian armed forces and build the resilience that they need," said British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon.

Boehner and others found the EU approach insufficient, especially for a conflict happening on its doorstep, as they urged Obama "to lead Europe" in challenging Putin. (AP)

28,000 Flee Drive to Retake Iraq's Tikrit: UN

BAGHDAD - Some 28,000 people have fled the Tikrit area as Iraqi forces battle the Islamic State jihadist group in a massive offensive aimed at retaking the city, the UN said.

The involvement of Shiite militiamen in the operation, which has been dubbed an attempt to avenge the IS massacre of hundreds of mainly-Shiite recruits last year, has raised fears of sectarian killings targeting Sunni Arabs.

"Military operations in and around Tikrit have precipitated displacement of an estimated 28,000 people to Samarra," the UN said in a statement Thursday.

"Field reports indicate that additional displacements are under way and that yet more families remain stuck at checkpoints," it said.



The newly displaced Iraqis join what the International Organization for Migration says are 2.5 million people already forced from their homes in the country. Some 30,000 Iraqi security forces members and allied fighters launched the operation to retake Tikrit on Monday, the largest of its kind since IS overran swathes of territory last June. Retaking Tikrit, the

hometown of executed president Saddam Hussein, from militants who have had more than eight months to dig in poses a major challenge for the country's forces. Sectarian-fueled revenge killings targeting Sunni Arabs have been a feature of past operations involving Shiite militias, raising concerns that the same may happen in Tikrit. "We have urged all ... (More on P4)...(29)

No Country Has Reached Gender Equality: Head of UN Women

UNITED NATIONS - The head of the U.N. agency promoting equality for women is lamenting that a girl born today will be an 81-year-old grandmother before she has the same chance as a man to be CEO of a company - and she will have to wait until she's 50-years-old to have an equal chance to lead a country.

Twenty years after 189 countries adopted a blueprint to achieve equality for women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said in an interview with The Associated Press that not a single country has reached gender parity and equality.

The executive director of UN Women spoke ahead of International Women's Day on Friday and next week's meeting of the



Commission on the Status of Women. The commission will review the 150-page platform for action to achieve equality that was adopted at the groundbreaking U.N. women's conference in Beijing in 1995. Then-U.S. first lady Hillary Clinton inspired delegates and women worldwide when she declared in a keynote speech: "Human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights." Although there has been progress since Beijing, especially in women's health and girls' education, Mlambo-Ngcuka said, there are fewer than 20 female heads of state and government, and the number of women lawmakers has increased from 11 percent to just 22 percent in the last two decades. "We just ... (More on P4)...(30)

UNESCO Decries Destruction of Ancient Site in Nimrud, Iraq

PARIS - The head of the U.N.'s cultural agency says the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage like that at an archaeological site in Nimrud, Iraq, amounts to a "war crime."

UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova appealed in a statement Friday to people around the world - "especially youth" - to protect "the heritage of the whole of humanity."

The Iraqi government says Islamic State militants "bulldozed" the re-

nowned archaeological site of the ancient city in northern Iraq with heavy military vehicles on Thursday.

Bokova denounced "this cultural chaos" and said she had alerted both U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

The discovery of treasures in Nimrud's royal tombs in the 1980s is considered one of the 20th century's most significant archaeological finds. (AP)

Saudi Top Diplomat Urges Allies to Face IS 'on the Ground'

RIYADH - Saudi Arabia's foreign minister on Thursday urged the U.S.-led coalition conducting air strikes against the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq to wage a ground war against the jihadists.

Islamic State: In Iraqi battle for Tikrit, signs of Iran's expanding role Christian Science Monitor

The kingdom, part of that coalition, "stresses the need to provide the military means needed to face this challenge on the ground," Prince Saud al-Faisal said at a news conference with US Secretary of State John Kerry. Several Arab countries have joined the air campaign against IS.

President Barack Obama, anxious to avoid a drawn-out ground war, has backed an air campaign, but ruled out deploying infantry.

The Saudi minister also warned of Iran's growing role in Iraq, accusing the Shiite-dominated Islamic republic of "taking over" the kingdom's Arab neighbour through its aid in the fight against IS.

"Tikrit is a prime example of what we are worried about. Iran is taking over the country," Faisal said of the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's hometown.

Kerry confirmed that the US had information that the commander of Iran's powerful Quds force, General Qassem Soleimani, was on the ground in Iraq aiding the offensive. "Is General Soleimani - has he been on the ground, is he playing a role? The answer's yes," Kerry said. "We've got information to that effect," he said, insisting however that the operation was Iraqi-led. (AFP)

APEC Meeting Seeks to Boost Infrastructure Development

MANILA - Deputies from finance ministries and central banks of member economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) on Friday discussed ways to develop infrastructure construction and improve financial resilience in the region.

The senior officials gathered in Tagaytay city in northern Philippine province of Cavite for the APEC Finance and Cen-

tral Bank Deputies' Meeting, which was held from March 5 to 6.

Some of the pertinent topics of the meeting were withstanding external shocks, surviving weak global markets, and natural calamities.

"Boosting financial resiliency and infrastructure development poses the benefit of ensuring that economic gains of the region can be sustained," said the Philippine Fi-

nance Undersecretary Gil Beltran on Friday during the meeting.

Financial resiliency and infrastructure development are the third and fourth pillars, respectively, of the Cebu Action Plan, which is a medium-to long-term development roadmap for Asia-Pacific economies that is proposed by the Philippines.

Along with efforts by the Philippines and other

APEC member economies toward financial resiliency and infrastructure development, there was a consensus that it is necessary to implement more measures.

The discussions that took place during the Finance and Central Bank Deputies' Meeting will be taken up once again in the APEC Finance Ministers' Meeting in central Philippine city of Cebu this September. (Xinhua)

China Likely to Maintain 7% Growth for 20 Years

BEIJING - China has lowered its 2015 economic growth target to about 7 percent, a growth pace which analysts said could be maintained for 20 years as the country continues to enjoy huge development potential.

Addressing the opening of the annual session of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, Premier Li Keqiang said the target, down from last year's 7.5 percent, is in line with efforts to create a "moderately prosperous society."

Actual economic growth last year was 7.4 percent, the lowest since 1990.

"If China's economy can grow at this rate for a relatively long time, we will secure a more solid material foundation for modernization," Li said. Lu Feng, a professor with the Peking University's National School of Development, said the 7-percent target, though the lowest in more than a decade, still represents a medium-high-level of

growth and the Chinese economy has the potential to maintain the speed over the next 20 years.

Between 1978 and 2013, annual growth of the Chinese economy averaged close to 10 percent. However, the "good old days" had to end, with growth decelerating to 7.7 percent in 2012 and 2013.

To defuse problems and avoid falling into the "middle-income trap" while achieving modernization, China must rely on development, which requires an appropriate growth rate, the premier said in his government work report delivered to the top legislature.

With the Chinese economy entering a "new normal," policy makers have been trying to balance the need to cushion the economy's slowdown with monetary and fiscal support measures against long-term goals. In order to realize the country's development goals set for 2020, ensure ... (More on P4)...(31)

Greek PM Hits Out at ECB over Cash Squeeze

Athens - Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has accused the European Central Bank of holding "a rope" around the country's neck as Athens scrambled Friday to avert a looming state default.

The ECB "is still holding the rope which we have around our necks," said Tsipras, according to excerpts of an interview with Germany magazine Der Spiegel to appear Saturday. The remark came after Athens this week received no help from the Frankfurt-based institution to address a cash squeeze caused by the non-delivery of promised loans. Athens is scrambling to find cash to address a daunting repayment schedule, with over 6.0 billion euros (\$6.8 billion) falling due this month. Tsipras, who will travel to Paris and Brussels next week, warned of a "thriller" over Greek finances unless the ECB backs down. The new leftist premier said Athens wanted permission to issue addi-

tional short-term bonds called treasury bills, and if the ECB refuses "the thriller we saw before February 20 will return." He was referring to a terse standoff between Athens and its international creditors before a compromise agreement was signed by eurozone finance ministers on February 20. Tsipras will meet European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker next week, though the prime minister's office said the discussions would be on how to "utilise European funds to address the humanitarian crisis and unemployment."

Tsipras, who will be in Paris on March 12 for talks with the OECD, will also meet European parliament chairman Martin Schulz in Brussels on Friday, the latter's office said. Meanwhile a finance ministry source on Friday said Athens had repaid the International Monetary Fund a first debt instalment of 310 million euros. (AFP)

Neighbor News

Political Difficulties Still Present in N. Talks: Iranian FM

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif underscored that political and not technical difficulties have prevented striking a final agreement with the world powers.

Zarif told the Kyodo News on Thursday that the remaining difficulties in the talks were not technical anymore and were political, urging the West to make a political decision.

"Sanctions and an agreement don't go together," he said, adding, "We have a very clear mandate that all sanctions must go."

The Iranian foreign minister stressed the importance of creating a verification mechanism to secure the implementation of the agreement. "If there is an agreement and our parliament ap-

proves, Iran is accepting to abide by even more stringent international controls," he said.

The Iranian foreign minister was in Montreux, western Switzerland, for three-day nuclear talks through Wednesday with US Secretary of State John Kerry.

His remarks came after representatives of Iran and the Group 5+1 (the US, Russia, China, Britain and France plus Germany) wrapped up deputy-level negotiations over Tehran's nuclear program in the city of Montreux, Switzerland. The talks are expected to resume March 15 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Both Iran and the G5+1 negotiators have underlined that cutting a final deal before the July 10 deadline is possible. (FNA)

Pakistan Wants to Have a Sustained Relationship with US: Nisar



ISLAMABAD - Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan on Friday said that Pakistan wants to have a long term, sustained and multifaceted equation with the United States.

This was stated by the interior minister during his meeting with Mr Richard G. Olson, US Ambassador to Pakistan who called on Nisar at Punjab House today.

During the meeting, both diplomats discussed Pak-US bilateral relations, regional security situation and the recent visit of the interior minister to the US. Nisar said that long term relations with the US would not only contribute towards bringing the two countries closer to each other but would also contribute signifi-

cantly towards the promotion of regional peace and development.

The interior minister also said that peace in the region was a shared objective of the two countries and close collaboration and enhancing multifaceted cooperation between the two countries was of great significance for achieving shared goals.

Nisar also appreciated the White House initiative of convening a conference on countering extremism as he believed that the need to have serious discussions and deliberations on this issue was never as great as it is today. The interior minister reiterated his call that strengthening local communities, winning the ... (More on P4)...(32)

Li Advocates "Twin Engines" for Medium-High Growth

BEIJING - Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Friday advocated to create "twin engines" to realize medium-high-level of growth and development. Joining a panel discussion with national legislators from Shandong Province, Li said the country would encourage popular entrepreneurship and mass innovation while increasing supply of public goods

and services. Li stressed that major infrastructure projects, such as renovation of rundown urban areas, railway projects and big water conservancy projects, would attract diversified investment in addition to that from the government.

"We should revive the conventional growth engine," he said. ... (More on P4)...(33)

Iranian Investors to Build Two Enterprises in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Investors from Iran will build two enterprises in the Danghara Free Economic Zone (FEZ) in the Khatlon province in southern Tajikistan, Avesta news agency reported.

According to Safarali Taifurov, deputy director of the Danghara FEZ, Iranian investors plan to build an enterprise to produce plastic pipes and an enterprise to process fruit and produce dried fruit. "An Iranian company plans to launch production of plastic pipes of different diameters," Taifurov said. "They also plan to start production of plastic pipes with a

diameter of three meters, which are not produced in Tajikistan today. Implementation of the project will start at the end of March." According to the official, Iranian investments in this project will total \$5 million. The new production facility will fully meet the needs for plastic pipes in southern Tajikistan.

Another Iranian company, Green Gold, plans to build a plant to process fruit and dried fruit in the Danghara FEZ. The company is currently designing the new plant and plans to invest \$3 million in its construction. (Agencies)