

Solution Vital to Israel's Security: Obama

CAMP DAVID - The United States still believes Israel's long-term security is best served by reaching an agreement to live alongside a recognized Palestinian state, President Barack Obama said Thursday. Obama was speaking shortly after Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu formed a new right-wing ruling coalition seen as likely to further strain already damaged ties with the Palestinians. "I continue to believe a two-state solution is absolutely vital for not only peace between Israelis and Palestinians, but for the long-term security of Israel as a democratic and Jewish



state," Obama told a Camp David news conference.

The traditionally close alliance between the United

States and Israel has been damaged by disagree-

ment over the peace process with the Palestinians

and by the perception of personal animus between Obama and Netanyahu. While both sides continue to pay public tribute to the relationship, the new Israeli government appears unlikely to make the kind of concessions needed to restart the moribund negotiations. Obama insisted, however, that a two-state solution remains the only available option for bringing the simmering conflict to an end. "I know that a government has been formed that contains some folks who don't necessarily believe in that premise, but that continues to be my premise," he said... (More on P4)... (23)

No Iran Warships Escorting Yemen-Bound Cargo Ship: Pentagon

WASHINGTON - Iran has so far refrained from deploying warships to accompany a cargo ship that Tehran says is carrying humanitarian aid to Yemen, despite its announced plans to do so, Pentagon spokesman Colonel Steve Warren told a news briefing on Thursday. Yemen said on Wednesday that if Iran does not allow a cargo ship bound for the Ara-

bian Peninsula to be searched, then Tehran "bears complete responsibility for any incident that arises from their attempt to enter Yemeni waters." The United States has criticized Iran's announced plans to send the ship directly to Yemen and urged Tehran to redirect the ship to Djibouti, from where the United Nations is coordinating aid distribution. (Reuters)

IS Seizes Government HQ in Iraq's Ramadi

BAGHDAD - Islamic State fighters seized the government compound in the city of Ramadi on Friday and edged closer to what would be their biggest victory in Iraq this year, officials said. The loss of the capital of Anbar province, which Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi had said would be the next target of government forces after wresting back Tikrit last month, would be a major setback for Baghdad. IS has threatened to take control of Ramadi for months and the breakthrough came after a wide offensive on several fronts in the province, including an assault using several su-

icide car bombs in Ramadi on Thursday. The jihadists seized the government complex at around 2:00 pm (1100 GMT) and raised the black flag, a police officer said, giving them nearly full control over Anbar's capital. IS "now occupies the government centre in Ramadi and has also raised its flag over the police HQ for Anbar," the police major told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. The group itself issued a statement saying its fighters broke into the government complex, and blew up the adjacent buildings of Anbar's governorate and the police headquarters. (AFP)

Survivors 'Unlikely' in Nepal Chopper Crash: US Military



KATHMANDU - The US military said Friday it expected to find no survivors after locating the wreckage of a helicopter that went missing with eight people on board in earthquake-devastated Nepal. "I can confirm that we have located the wreckage... it is unlikely there are any survivors," said John Wissler, commander of the joint task force investigating the disappearance, three days after the chopper vanished while delivering aid in a mountainous region. "It was a severe crash," said Wissler. The crashed aircraft was spotted in a remote forest around 70 kilometres (40 miles) northeast of Kathmandu, according

to Nepalese army official Major General Binoy Basnet. Basnet told AFP troops had reached the crash site on foot and two choppers, including a US military helicopter, and managed to land in the mountainous region after strong winds had kept them circling the wreckage. Nepal's Defence Secretary Ishwori Paudel earlier told AFP that three charred bodies had been discovered in the wreckage, but US military officials said they could not confirm the findings. "We have not been able to positively identify any remains at the site," Wissler told reporters in Kathmandu, adding that recovery operations would resume Saturday. (AFP)

Fighting Continues in Yemeni City Despite Truce, 10 Killed

ADEN, Yemen - At least 10 people were killed in heavy clashes in Yemen on Friday despite a five-day humanitarian truce, while aid distribution to the millions deprived of food, fuel and medicine by weeks of fighting and air strikes continued. Saudi Arabia, leading a coalition of Arab states backed by the West, has pounded Iranian-allied Houthi forces and fighters loyal to Yemen's former leader since March 26, aiming to restore Presi-



dent Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. The ceasefire, which began on Tuesday, appeared to

be mostly holding on Friday despite heavy ground fighting between local militiamen and the Houthis

in the city of Taiz, residents said. A medical source said 10 were killed. In the city of Dhalea residents also reported clashes on Friday but there was no information on casualties. "Nothing has changed with this truce. People are still fighting and the Houthis are still in control," said Alawi al-Afour, a resident in the southern city of Aden. "The legitimate Yemeni government is scattered abroad and has no authority inside." (Reuters)

France Offers Russia Euros 785 Mln to Ditch Warship Deal: Report

MOSCOW - France has offered Russia its terms to scrap a contentious contract to supply two warships that was suspended due to the Ukraine crisis, but Moscow judged the sum as unacceptable, a report said Friday. Russian defence sources told Kommersant newspaper that the French side is willing to pay 785 million euros (\$890 million), and the documents are now "being studied" by

the Russian government, defence ministry and other relevant parties which participated in the 2011 deal. But the daily reported that Moscow was not happy with the French offer, with the defence ministry claiming that Russian firms have now incurred 1.16 billion euros of costs associated with the ships. The fate of the two Mistral helicopter carriers has plagued French-Russian ties for over a year, following

the decision by Paris to put the 1.2 billion euro deal on ice as the West slapped sanctions on Russia over its annexation of Crimea and alleged backing for separatist rebels in Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin last month played down the importance of the ships and claimed that Russia ordered them mostly to help the French shipyard. (AFP)

Russia Crisis to Hit Ex-Soviet States Harder Than Expected: EBRD

TBILISI - The impact of Russia's economic crisis on its ex-Soviet neighbours will prove even more damaging than previously anticipated and continue into 2016, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) said on Thursday. Resulting from Western economic sanctions over the Ukraine conflict and falling oil prices, Russia's economic dive "is having larger-than-expected negative spill-over effects on countries with which it has strong economic links," the EBRD said. Russia's gross domestic product is due to contract by 4.5 percent this year and 1.8 percent in 2016, according to the EBRD's latest economic forecast issued during its annual meeting held in the Georgian capital Tbilisi.

The bank's grim forecast for Russia's economy came despite hopes in Moscow that the ruble's recent rebound would lessen the economic fallout and see a return to growth next year. "It is hard to see a rebound going forward without the reversal of the ongoing de-coupling of Russia's economy from the rest of the world and major structural reforms," the bank said. Under pressure from the recession in Russia and the ruble's depreciation, national currencies fell significantly against the dollar and euro in most of the ex-Soviet republics. "The most tangible impact of the Russian recession is in remittances home which are continuing to decline at an alarming rate," the EBRD said. (AFP)

Syria Sends Reinforcements as IS Closes on Ancient City

BEIRUT - Syria's army dispatched reinforcements to Palmyra in a bid to push back jihadists who advanced Friday to within touching distance of the ancient city, officials and a monitor said. "Islamic State group jihadists are now one kilometre (less than a mile) from the archeological site of Palmyra," Rami Abdel Rahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights,

told AFP. "The regime sent reinforcements and the army is bombing the surroundings of Tadmor from the air," he said, using the Arabic name for Palmyra. UNESCO describes Palmyra as a heritage site of "outstanding universal value". The ancient metropolis stood on a caravan route at the crossroads of several civilisations and its 1st and 2nd century temples and colonnaded streets

mark a unique blend of Graeco-Roman and Persian influences. And at least 26 civilians were executed by IS, including 10 by beheading, after they were accused of "collaborating with the regime" in villages near Palmyra that IS overran. But the governor of central Homs province, where Palmyra is located, said the situation was "under control". (AFP)

US Senator McCain Turns Down Ukraine Advisor Role

KIEV - Republican US Senator John McCain has turned down a post as advisor to Ukraine's pro-Western President Petro Poroshenko, saying constitutional constraints prohibited him from accepting. McCain, who has pressed Washington to send lethal weapons to war-torn Ukraine, rejected the offer to join an advisory council aimed at building global support for Ukraine citing his obligations as a US senator. "I was honoured to be asked to join Ukraine's International Advisory Council on Reforms, a forum for discussing ways to ensure



Ukraine's territorial integrity and security and support the country's democratic future in the face of Russian aggression," McCain said in a statement released on his official website in Washington Thursday. "However, under provisions of the US Constitution concerning the interaction of Members

of Congress with foreign governments, I am obligated to decline the invitation," the statement said. "I will continue to do everything I can to stop Vladimir Putin's unabated aggression, and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with free Ukraine," McCain said. (AFP)

Neighbour News

China Highly Values Sino-Latin America Cooperation

BEIJING - Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the country's top think tank, called for deepened China-Latin America cooperative ties, in an annual report on Latin America released on Friday. Although Latin America is not part of China's proposed Belt and Road Initiatives, their ties have been a good representation of the spirit of South-South cooperation, the CASS said. By adhering to the theme of "inclusive development", ties between China and Latin America will accelerate both side's eco-

nomical development and structural optimization, the report said. A highly common interest for further growth has already prompted a leapfrog Sino-Latin America relationship, the report noted. The CASS predicted that trade and investment will still be the major two pillars for Sino-Latin America partnership. But it also strongly suggested extending of various public diplomacy, such as the educational and think-tank exchanges. Communication at local government level should also be encouraged. (Xinhua)

Internal, External Forces Out to Derail CPEC: Sharif



ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said on Thursday that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project was not being welcomed by many internal and external forces who did not want to see progress and development in the country. "These people do not want to see the country get new roads, power houses, infrastructure,

health and education," he said while addressing a ceremony held at the Prime Minister's Office to launch a credit guarantee scheme for small farmers. The prime minister said that \$45 billion investment in projects under the CPEC was an eyesore for many and urged the nation to pray to Almighty Allah to protect the country from intentions of the evil. (Agencies)

Iran Urges UN to Help Provide Direct Aid Flights to Yemen

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian official has called on the UN and world countries to help send relief aid to Yemen through direct flights to the war-hit Arab country. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, the deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, made the request during a telephone conversation with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov on Friday. The Iranian official lashed out at Saudi Arabia for blocking humanitarian aid to Yemen as well as violating a five-day ceasefire in its military air campaign against Yemen,

which took effect on Tuesday. Amir-Abdollahian described the humanitarian situation in Yemen as catastrophic and said the Saudi truce in Yemen is merely a show. The Russian official, for his part, called on the global community to take serious measures to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen. In a separate telephone conversation on Friday, Amir-Abdollahian talked to the new UN envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, during which he called for speeding up aid delivery to Yemen. (Agencies)

Uzbekistan's Senate to Consider Some Laws

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan - A number of important laws are planned to be considered at a plenary session of the Senate of Uzbekistan in Tashkent. The Senators will also consider the laws "On compulsory insurance of civil liability of the carrier", the new versions of the laws "On the Securities Market" and "On electronic commerce". The agenda of the meeting also includes the consideration of the law "On amendments and additions, as well as the Annulment of Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan". The agenda also includes other laws envisaging the further intensification of the social

and economic reforms, improvement of investment climate and business sphere, entrepreneurship development, improvement of the judicial-legal area, information security. Moreover, a number of laws on the ratification of international treaties will be submitted at the meeting. The Senators will also discuss reports on the activity of the Oliy Majlis Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman), the Accounting Chamber and the State Committee for Nature Protection in 2014 at the plenary session. The plenary meeting will also discuss other issues related to the Senate's competence. (Trend)