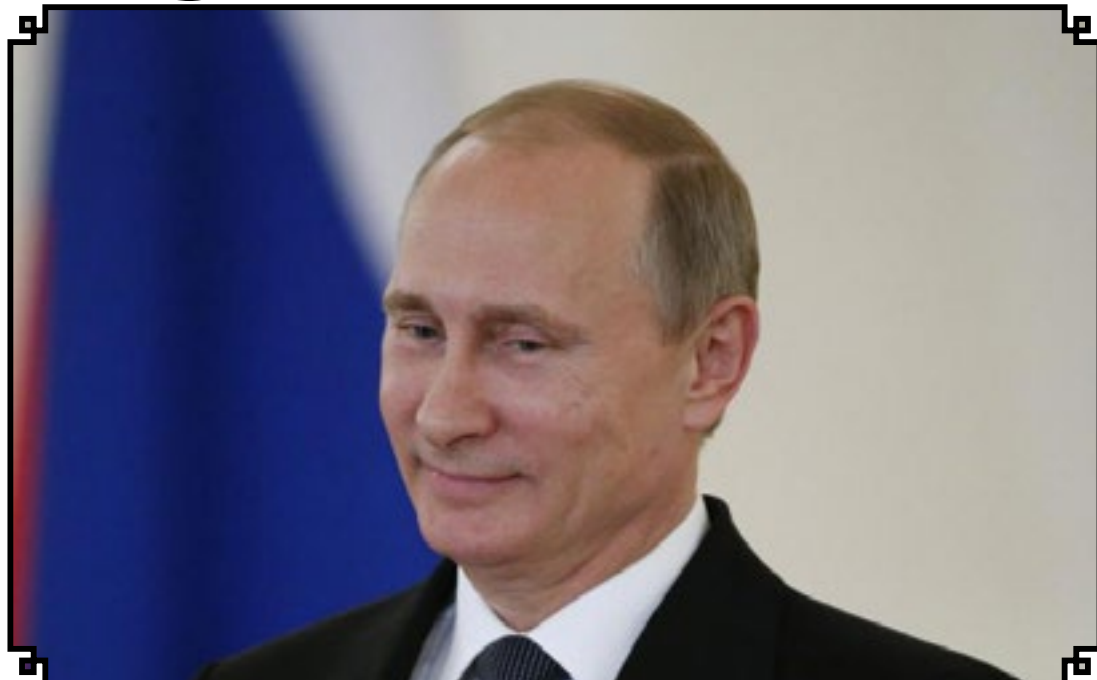


Putin Getting Left out of G-7 Meeting, But Not Much Else

WASHINGTON - When President Barack Obama and other world leaders gather in Germany next week, Russia's Vladimir Putin will be left off the guest list, part of his punishment for more than a year of alleged Kremlin-supported aggression in Ukraine. But despite vows from Obama and his European counterparts to isolate Putin as long as the crisis in Ukraine remains unresolved, the Russian leader is still a central player in major international affairs, including the U.S.-led nuclear talks with Iran. Just this month, German Chancellor Angela Merkel traveled to Moscow for talks with Putin and Secretary



of State John Kerry went to Sochi to confer with the Russian leader. Putin and British Prime Minister David Cameron also spoke by phone in recent days and agreed to resume talks aimed at ending Syria's civil war, another matter where Putin's cooperation is crucial. U.S. officials defend the engagement with Russia, saying it is limited to areas where Moscow and the West have shared interests. Outreach to Putin on such matters, officials argue, should not be seen as a sign that the West has accepted the status quo in Ukraine, where pro-Russian separatists continue to stoke instability. (AP)

US and Iran Address Obstacles to Nuclear Deal as Deadline Nears



GENEVA - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry met his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif on Saturday in a bid to overcome the remaining obstacles to a final nuclear agreement, a month ahead of a deadline for a deal between Tehran and world powers. The meeting in Geneva is the first substantive talks since Iran and the six world powers - Britain, France, the United States, Russia, China and Germany - struck an interim deal on April 2. Among the issues still to be resolved is the push by the world powers for international access to Iran's military sites and its team of atomic experts. For its part, Tehran

wants sanctions to be rescinded immediately after a deal is reached. A senior U.S. State Department official said there had been substantial progress in talks in Vienna in recent weeks on drafting a political agreement and three technical annexes on curbing Tehran's nuclear program. The United States has said it will not extend the talks beyond the June 30 deadline. "We really do believe we can get it done by (June) 30th and we're not contemplating an extension. We just aren't," the official told reporters traveling with Kerry to Geneva. But France, which has demanded ... (More on P4)...(20)

Cambodia, Russia Sign Deal on Fight against Terrorism

PHNOM PENH - Cambodia and Russia have signed an intergovernmental memorandum of understanding (MoU) on counter-terrorism, an official said Friday. The deal was inked on Wednesday during Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sar Kheng's visit to Moscow, Gen. Por Pheak, director of the Cambodian Interior Ministry's International Relations Department, told reporters at Phnom Penh International Airport while returning from Russia with Sar Kheng. "During the visit, Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng signed

the MoU with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov," he said. "The MoU focuses mainly on mutual help through exchanging information, experiences, and expertise in the process of preventing and cracking down on terrorism and financing of terrorism." In Moscow, Sar Kheng also met with Russian Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokol'tsev in which they discussed details of cooperation plan stated in the MoU, he said, adding that the two ministers also talked on cooperation in law enforcement and cross-border crime suppression. (Xinhua)

Russia Releases 89-Name EU Travel Blacklist

THE HAGUE - Moscow has released a blacklist of European Union politicians barred from Russia in response to EU sanctions over Crimea and Ukraine, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said on Friday. "Russia yesterday handed over a list of people to diverse EU embassies who may not enter Russia any longer," Rutte said at a weekly press conference, adding that two Dutch MPs and a Dutch MEP were on the list.

The list contains 89 names, according to a letter from Belgian Foreign Minister Didier Reynders tweeted by Belgian MEP Mark Demesmaeker. The letter, which was confirmed as authentic by the Dutch foreign ministry to AFP, said Moscow had asked for the list not to be made public. Moscow drew up the list in response to the EU's own sanctions and travel bans over Russia's annexation of Crimea last ... (More on P4)...(24)

US Should Allow Sale of Defensive Weapons to Vietnam: McCain

SINGAPORE - America needs to provide Vietnam with more defensive weapons, U.S. Sen. John McCain said Saturday as tensions in the Asia Pacific region heightened over China's expanding land reclamation projects in the South China Sea. But U.S. efforts so far are focused on delivering some of the limited maritime weapons allowed under last fall's easing of the weapons sales ban on Hanoi. According to a senior U.S. official, Defense Secretary Ash Carter will meet with Vietnam officials in the coming days to discuss the U.S. providing the defensive maritime weapons already allowed. Carter spoke at an international security

conference here Saturday at the start of an 11-day Asia trip. McCain, who also was attending the International Institute for Strategic Studies summit, wants to see a gradual removal of the U.S. ban, and said the U.S. should provide additional defensive weapons that could be used in case of a conflict with China. He added that the U.S. should continue its ban on weapons used for crowd control or to commit human rights abuses. The U.S. last October partially lifted its ban on weapons sales to Vietnam to boost the country's ability to defend itself in the South China Sea. Only the sale of lethal maritime security ... (More on P4)...(21)

Iraq Forces Edge Towards Ramadi, Retake Area: Army



BAGHDAD - Iraqi forces retook an area west of Ramadi on Saturday as they pressed their operation aimed at sealing off the jihadists who captured the city two weeks ago, commanders said. "The Iraqi army and the Hashed al-Shaabi liberated the Anbar traffic police building in the 5K area west of Ramadi after a fierce fight," an army officer said. Hashed al-Shaabi ("popular mobilisation" in Arabic) is an umbrella for mostly Shiite militia and volunteers that

has played a key role in Iraq's fight against the Islamic State (IS) group. "The battle forced IS to withdraw from the building, which they had used as a base, and pull back into Ramadi city," the officer told AFP. Iraq forces have launched wide operations aimed at severing the supply lines of the jihadists who control most of Anbar, a vast Sunni province in western Iraq of which Ramadi is the capital. "The security forces today are tightening their ... (More on P4)...(22)

Poroshenko Appoints Ex-Georgia Leader Saakashvili Governor

ODESSA, Ukraine - Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on Saturday appointed fiercely pro-Western former Georgian leader Mikheil Saakashvili, who once fought a war with Russia, as governor of the strategic Odessa region. Poroshenko made the announcement at a televised event in the Black Sea port alongside the reformist Saakashvili, calling the ex-Georgian president a "great friend of Ukraine". "There remain a large number of problems in

Odessa: preserving sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and peace," Poroshenko said. "But maybe the biggest challenge is another war -- a war against corruption, a war against injustice, a war against the un-reformed economy." The controversial announcement of the flamboyant Saakashvili as head of the southern coastal region is a pointed signal from Kiev to Moscow that it remains set on its pro-European course despite a bloody ... (More on P4)...(25)

US Hits Out at China over Sea Reclamation, Vows More Patrols

SINGAPORE - The United States on Saturday called for an immediate end to China's intensifying reclamation works in the South China Sea and vowed to continue sending military aircraft and ships to the tense region. US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter told a high-level security conference in Singapore that Beijing was behaving "out of step" with international norms. China insists it has sovereignty over nearly all of the South China Sea, a major global shipping route believed to be home to oil and gas reserves. "First, we want a peaceful resolution of all disputes. To that end, there should be an immediate and lasting halt

to land reclamation by all claimants," Carter said at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue on security with a high-level Chinese military delegation in the audience. He acknowledged that other claimants have developed outposts of differing scope and degree, including Vietnam with 48, the Philippines with eight, Malaysia with five and Taiwan with one. "Yet, one country has gone much farther and much faster than any other. China has reclaimed over 2,000 acres, more than all other claimants combined and more than in the entire history of the region. And China did so in only the last 18 months," Carter said. (AFP)

Yemen's Saleh Says Saudi Offered Him 'Millions' to Fight Huthis

DUBAI - Yemen's ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh said in an interview broadcast Friday he had rejected "millions of dollars" Saudi Arabia offered him if he stood up to the Shiite rebels. "They told us 'we'll pay you millions of dollars if you ally with us'" against the Huthis, Saleh told the Beirut-based

Al-Mayadeen television channel, adding that he rejected the offer. "We will not let go of the Huthis," he said. He said the former Saudi ambassador in Yemen "came to me with a message from the kingdom asking me to stand by (fugitive President Abd-rabbo Mansour) Hadi ... (More on P4)...(23)

US, Allies Conduct 22 Air Strikes against IS Militants: US Military

WASHINGTON - U.S.-led forces targeted Islamic State militants in Iraq with 16 air strikes from Friday morning through Saturday morning and conducted another six strikes against the group in Syria, the U.S. military said on Saturday. The strikes in Iraq were spread throughout the country, hitting targets near Baghdad, Baiji,

Fallujah, Hit, Kirkuk, Mosul, Ramadi, Sinjar and Tal Afar, according to a military statement. Those in Syria were concentrated near Al Hasakah, with four strikes hitting Islamic State tactical units and destroying fighting positions and artillery. The coalition forces also conducted air strikes near Dayr Az Zawr and Kobani. (Reuters)

Australia Calls for Greater Cooperation on Returning IS Fighters

SUDNEY - Stronger regional cooperation is needed to counter the threat posed by foreign fighters returning from the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq, Australia's foreign minister said Saturday. About 90 countries have claimed that some of their citizens were involved in terrorism overseas, Julie Bishop said. "The threat of returning foreign terrorist fighters to Australia is real and present," she told reporters in Perth.

"We are also concerned about the threat of foreign fighters returning to our region. "And this threat demands a stronger and closer level of cooperation amongst all countries affected by it." Bishop said Australia deeply appreciated the cooperation it already had with its neighbours, and was not singling out any country to do more. "But we, and countries in our region, know that it will have to be stronger ... (More on P4)...(26)

Neighbour News

Rouhani Calls for 'Free' Legislative Vote in Iran

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday that the government aims to hold "free" parliamentary elections next year, the official IRNA news agency reported. "The success of the government is to hold free, healthy and competitive elections," Rouhani said in a speech to governors and provincial governors. Iranians will vote for a new parliament on February 26, 2016, when elections for the Assembly of Experts in charge of appointing, supervising and dismissing the supreme leader are also due. Rouhani said politicians should be allowed to speak freely in public, regardless of their views.

"Preventing someone from making a speech by sticking a label on him" is unacceptable. His comments come weeks after dozens of protesters threw bricks at the taxi of outspoken MP Ali Motahari in the southern city of Shiraz as he planned to deliver a speech. Motahari has frequently criticised the regime's house arrest of opposition leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi. The pair were placed under house arrest in 2011 after repeatedly challenging the official 2009 election results. Since the attack on Motahari, several reformist figures have been also prevented from giving speeches across Iran. (AFP)

Chinese President Demands Efforts to Ensure Public Safety

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged authorities to stay on high alert and make every effort to ensure public safety for the country's billion-plus people. In a group study of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee Friday, Xi stressed the importance of public safety in a stable social environment, according to a statement released Saturday. "We should dedicate our efforts to improving public safety, so that our people can live and work happily and safely," Xi told members of the Political Bureau. Public safety generally includes food and drug safety, workplace safety, disaster pre-

vention and relief. "China's public safety conditions are largely good, but we must be alert to latent problems," said the president, calling for an improved mechanism to avoid and better respond to safety hazards. Xi asked officials to strengthen safety regulations for agricultural products to make sure people eat safely and healthily. He vowed to adopt the strictest safety standards in food and drug production and punish violators severely. China prioritizes people's lives and will hold local governments accountable for workplace accidents and launch a campaign nationwide to defuse safety risks, Xi said. (Xinhua)

Turkmenistan Starts Harvesting Campaign

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan - Turkmenistan is actively preparing to harvesting campaign, said the message of the government of Turkmenistan. This issue was discussed at the last meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of the country, said the message. Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said that the main challenge facing farmers is to collect their harvest of wheat quickly and without losses, according to the message. Harvesting in Ahal, Balkan, Lebap and Mary

provinces will begin June 3 and in Dashoguz province June 14, according to the schedule. Some 1,700 combine harvesters, who will work in two shifts, have been prepared throughout the country. The delivery of wheat to 155 grain handling centers, as well as barns and grain elevators is provided by 6,800 units of vehicles. Turkmenistan plans to provide a wheat crop of 1.6 million metric tons in 2015. Turkmenistan first started to export surplus of harvested wheat since 2011. (Trend)

UCMTF Bats for French Textile Machinery in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - French textile machinery manufacturers' association UCMTF was recently invited by Ilkhom Khaydarov, Uzbek minister in charge of the textile industry and chairman of the board of the state joint-stock company for the light industry "Uzbekyengilsanoat", to organize two seminars in Uzbekistan, UCMTF said in a statement. Christian Guinet and Mrs. Evelyne Cholet, vice-president international and secretary general of UCMTF, led the French delegation of seven companies. The seminars which were very well attended by the Uzbek textile companies took place in Tashkent and Bukhara. The strategy of UCMTF is to organize such events as close as possible to the textile production centres.

It was not the first time the French machinery manufacturers came to Uzbekistan, they organized a pavilion at CAITME in Tashkent in 2005 (the first foreign pavilion to be organized in the fair) and already held two seminars in the Uzbek capital. The new 2015 initiative was intended have direct contacts with the Uzbek producers at a turning point of their development. Uzbekistan which has been an historical cotton producer, one of the biggest in the world, is planning to increase the added value of this production thanks to the manufacturing of yarns, fabrics and finished goods. Therefore machinery for spinning, weaving, dyeing and finishing with state-of-the-art technologies and services are needed. (Agencies)