

Russia-Ukraine Row over Crimea Escalates as Moscow Cuts Coal to Kiev

KIEV - Russia has begun to restrict coal supplies to Ukraine, Energy Minister Volodymyr Demchyshyn told parliament on Friday, days after the Kremlin threatened to punish Kiev for a power blackout of Russian-annexed Crimea. Demchyshyn said pro-Russian separatists who control coal mines in eastern Ukraine had also halted coal supplies. He said Kiev had one month of its own coal supplies left and was seeking alternative supplies from South Africa.

"Coal supplies have been restricted from uncontrolled territory (Donbass) and from Russia," said Demchyshyn. "Right now our power stations have enough coal reserves in storage to last for at least one month. But in the long-term problematic questions will arise." Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said on Tuesday that Russia might cut coal supplies to punish Ukraine for what he said was its deliberate refusal to help rebuild power lines to Crimea, which were blown up by unknown saboteurs. Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine



in March last year, plunging relations between the one-time allies into crisis. Minor repair work has been carried out on the sabotaged pylons and power

lines in southern Ukraine which supply Crimea, but none of the four pylons which were destroyed are operational. Ukraine depends on coal to fulfil around 44 percent of

its power needs. Nuclear energy makes up about the same proportion, with the rest of its needs being met by renewable sources. (Reuters)

Nieghbor News

Iran, Tajikistan Mull Expansion of Parliamentary Co-Op

MOSCOW - Chairman of Majlis (parliament) National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi on Friday conferred with Tajik Majlis Speaker, Mili-Ubaidulloev on expansion of parliamentary, political and security cooperation between the two countries. Iran, Tajikistan mull expansion of parliamentary co-op. The meeting took place on the sidelines of the parliamentary assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in St Petersburg on Friday. In

the meeting, the Tajik Majlis speaker urged all countries in the region to help maintain stability and tranquility of the region while underlining the need to fight against terrorists. Ubaidulloev described his presence as the special guest at CSTO very impactful. Boroujerdi, for his part highlighted regional developments, mainly the threats made by terrorist groups in Central Asia and said expansion of regional cooperation, such as exchange of intelligence information... (More on P4)...(28)

China Air Force Conducts West Pacific Drill, Patrols ADIZ

NANJING - Aircraft from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force have reached more than 1,000 km beyond the First Island Chain for a drill in the western Pacific, a military spokesman said. Multiple types of planes, including the H-6K medium-long range bomber, flew over the western Pacific via the Miyako Strait on Friday for an open sea drill, which is the fourth this year, said PLA Air Force spokesman Shen Jinke. The spokesman also announced that the PLA has sent H-6K bombers and several other types of fighters and early warning aircraft to patrol in China's East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). Shen said the drills have improved the air force's combat abilities over long distances and over

the open sea. He stressed that such drills conform to common practices of maritime nations and are out of normal needs of China's national defense and army construction. "In line with international laws and practices, these open sea drills beyond the First Island Chain will proceed in consideration of actual situations," the spokesman said.

Also, Shen said that over the two years since the establishment of the East China Sea ADIZ, the PLA keeps routine patrols in this zone and has been swift in identifying and monitoring foreign military aircraft entering the ADIZ. The air force also took "relevant measures" in response to some threats of "abnormal and unclear situations" to safeguard the country's air security, according to Shen. (Xinhua)

Pakistan Plans Reforms in Militancy-Hit Tribal Regions

ISLAMABAD - A high level committee in Pakistan is working on comprehensive reforms to bring the country's tribal regions to the national mainstream as violent extremism and terrorism in nearly a decade has badly disrupted the lives of the tribal people. The reforms include an important suggestion to merge the militancy-hit tribal areas into the northwest province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) so they have representation in the provincial assembly. Presently the Federally Administered Tribal

Areas or FATAs do not have representation in the provincial assembly. However, the National Assembly and the Senate have members from the tribal regions. Another proposal is that a FATA elected executive council should be formed to elect the chief executive like provincial chief ministers. The idea behind the government move is to remove the sense of deprivation among the people in FATAs as the activities of armed groups have damaged their traditional system of "jirga" ... (More on P4)...(29)

Iran Says Tests will show how Diplomat Died in Saudi Arabia

TEHRAN - Iran expects medical tests to establish within 48 hours if a high-ranking diplomat died on pilgrimage in the stampede at the hajj in Saudi Arabia, following contrasting accounts about his demise. Ghazanfar Roknabadi, 49, a former ambassador to Lebanon, was initially reported as being among 464 Iranian pilgrims killed in the hajj's worst ever tragedy in September. At least 2,236 worshippers perished in the giant crush at Mina, near the Muslim holy city of Mecca in western Saudi Arabia. But suspicion has surrounded the circumstances of Roknabadi's death, with senior offi-

cials suggesting as late as two weeks ago that he was alive and being held hostage. Iran finally confirmed Thursday that Roknabadi's corpse had been identified in Saudi Arabia. His body arrived back in Tehran on Friday with his coffin draped in the Iranian flag for a funeral ceremony. Confusion over his death added to already heavy strain between Tehran and Riyadh, the Middle East's strongest Shiite and Sunni powers, who back opposing sides in conflicts in Syria and Yemen. Roknabadi was Tehran's envoy to Beirut, a highly sensitive post, until last year. Lebanon ... (More on P4)...(30)

Over 1 Mln Children Urgently need Assistance in CAR: UNICEF

GENEVA - The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) on Friday said an estimated 1.2 million children are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance nearly three years after conflict erupted in the Central African Republic (CAR).

UNICEF called on all parties to the conflict to grant unrestricted access to organizations seeking to aid those affected by the crisis.

"The violence that has plagued this country has had a devastating impact on the lives of children," said Mohamed Fall, UNICEF's Rep-

resentative in the Central African Republic.

"The humanitarian needs are overwhelming, to meet them we need access and we need greater international support," Fall added.

UNICEF estimated that more than two million children have been affected by the violence which first broke out in December 2012 and reached crisis levels in December 2013 following clashes that led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands in the capital, Bangui. Nearly 400,000 people remain displaced ... (More on P4)...(23)

NATO Split on Message to Send Georgia on Membership Hopes

BRUSSELS/BERLIN - NATO allies are split over what message to send Georgia over its long-delayed membership bid, diplomats said, with some European capitals arguing the alliance would be unable to defend the ex-Soviet state in the event of a conflict with Russia.

NATO gave Georgia an open-ended promise of membership at a summit

in April 2008. That fed into tensions with Moscow that four months later culminated in a war leaving the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia occupied by Russian military.

Talks about Georgia's NATO membership have largely been on the back-burner since. But the question will arise again next Tuesday when ... (More on P4)...(24)

Turkish President Called Putin after Su-24 Downing: Kremlin

MOSCOW - The Kremlin confirmed Friday that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had indeed tried to call his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin after the downing of Russia's fighter jet by Turkey. "Yes, it was about seven or eight hours after the incident," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, adding that Putin had been informed about the call. Erdogan said Thursday in an interview with France 24 TV channel that he had tried to call Putin after the incident, but could not reach him. On Thurs-

day, however, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov denied there had been such a call. Moreover, the Turkish president said he had also requested a meeting with Putin at next week's United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, but has not received a reply from the Russian side. "The request has also been transmitted to the president," Peskov said without clarifying whether the meeting would take place. Turkey-Russia relations have plummeted after the downing incident, with Ankara claiming that the



Russian SU-24 warplane had violated its air space. Denying the allegations, Putin has demanded a high-level apology from the Turkish leadership and a compensation for

the damage. Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has ordered the government to draft possible economic sanctions against Turkey. (Xinhua)

French FM Envisages Cooperation with Syrian Gov't Army without Al-Assad

PARIS - French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius on Friday said cooperation with Syria's ground governmental forces is possible in order to fight the Islamic State (IS) but without President Bashar al-Assad. "We don't want to send our forces, this would be counterproductive. But (there can be) Syrian soldiers from the Free Syrian Army, Sunni Arab states and why not regime troops," Fa-



buis told RTL radio. "Assad cannot be the future of his people," he stressed.

Rebuffing Russia's proposal to support the Syrian government to be a part of international efforts to end the four-year conflict, French President Francois Hollande set the departure of the Syrian president as a pre-condition for negotiating a political transition in Syria. (Xinhua)

Cameron Announces new Funding for Commonwealth Counter-Extremism Unit

LONDON - British Prime Minister David Cameron on Friday announced 5 million pounds (about 7.52 million U.S. dollars) of funding for a Commonwealth counter-extremism unit, in a bid to strengthen the bloc's ability to counter extremist narrative. The new investment included 1 million pounds a year for 5 years to help fund the new Commonwealth counter-extremism unit, which is expected to focus on strengthening ability of Commonwealth countries to counter extremism. Cameron, who was scheduled to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in



Malta on Friday, also unveiled additional 200,000 pounds seed funding to expand European counter-radicalization youth network to include the Commonwealth, according to the Downing Street. "The fight against extremism is something that affects us all. The Commonwealth has a vital role to

play in broadening international efforts to counter extremism," Cameron said ahead of the gathering. "This is the struggle of our generation, but by working together we will defeat this extremist scourge that is a threat to us all," he stressed. As part of British gov ... (More on P4)...(25)

Spanish Socialist Leader Insists on need for EU Consensus Against IS

MADRID - Leader of the Spanish Socialist Party Pedro Sanchez on Friday highlighted the need for European unity and also called for a European intelligence service in order to combat the threat posed by Daesh (the Islamic State).

"We need to define a common EU strategy to respond to Daesh," said Sanchez, who said that key to his strategy to combat terrorism was the creation of "a European Intelligence Agency."

"It's clear that we need to strengthen European co-operation in intelligence," he stressed.

Sanchez gave his message in a specially arranged meeting with members of the foreign press corps in Madrid, just four weeks ahead of the Dec. 20 Spanish general election. The Socialist candidate added that "the biggest blow to Daesh would be the end of the Syrian civil war, so bringing that about has to be a priority," although he made it clear he believed it "would be an error to send troops to Syria." "The response has to be from those nations whose territorial integrity is being threatened. The international community has to support these nations ... militarily we have to involve Arab and Muslim countries in the fight against Daesh," commented Sanchez, who said that despite incidents such as the recent Paris attacks, which claimed 130 lives, Arabs and Muslims were "suffering more," pointing out recent terrorist attacks in Tunisia and Beirut as well as the ongoing Syrian civil war. (Xinhua)

China to Offer Humanitarian Aid of \$6.5 Mlnto Int'l Organizations

BEIJING - China will provide 6.5 million U.S. dollars in humanitarian aid to four international organizations to help tackle the refugee crisis, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said Friday. Three organizations, namely United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP), and World Health Organization (WHO), will receive 2 million U.S. dollars, respectively. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will be provided 500,000 U.S. dollars of humanitarian aid. The MOC is currently discussing relevant details of the plan with these organizations. (Xinhua)

Slovakia to Join EU Military Operation in Mali

BRATISLAVA - Slovakia is ready to join the European Union (EU)'s military operation in the African country of Mali and thereby support France in resolving its current complex security situation. The Slovak Cabinet at an extraordinary session on Friday approved the dispatch of members of the Slovak Armed Forces to the EUTM Mali training mission. Slovakia will make five highly skilled military experts available for a period of six months. Slovak Defence Minister Martin Glvac perceived the step as a show of solidarity with France and European values. The exact conditions under which the experts will be sent will be discussed with France. The EUTM Mali mandate is based on a decision of the UN Security Council and has been operating since 2013. It aims to train members of the Malian army to be able to join the UN in its Multidimensional ... (More on P4)...(27)

Queen Elizabeth II Opens Commonwealth meeting in Malta

VALLETTA - Queen Elizabeth II opened the Commonwealth summit Friday on the Mediterranean island of Malta - a meeting that this year will focus on climate change and the threat of extremist violence. The 89-year-old British monarch praised the accomplishments of the Commonwealth during her address to the other leaders of the 53-nation organization. "Prince Philip and I first came to live here in Malta in 1949, the year the

Commonwealth was founded," she said, hailing a vast advancement in freedom and human rights in the decades since then. "I have been privileged to witness this transformation and to consider its purpose." Between 1949 and 1951, Philip was stationed on Malta as a Royal Navy officer and the future queen lived as a military wife, rather than a duty-burdened heir to the throne. The Commonwealth links ... (More on P4)...(26)