

Baltic Forum in Latvia Addresses Russian-Western Issues, Growing Global Instability

RIGA - Growing global instability and tensions between Russia on the one hand and the West and NATO on the other were in the focus of the annual Baltic Forum conference, which took place in Latvia's seaside resort Jurmala on Saturday.

Opening the conference "Russia-EU: the challenges of interdependence and the setting of a new agenda", Nils Usakovs, the leader of Latvia's opposition leftist Harmony party and mayor of the capital city Riga, said we are living in times increasingly resembling the Cold

War era and it is therefore necessary to seek solutions for closer cooperation between countries to make conflicts impossible.

The Baltic Forum is already a success in that it brings participants from Europe, the United States and Russia to one table, Usakovs said, calling on participants of the forum to offer solutions that would make Western-Russian ties so close that they excluded the possibility of confrontation.

Andrejs Pildegovics, state



secretary of the Latvian Foreign Ministry, said at the forum that relations between the European

Union (EU) and Russia are currently at one of the lowest points ever. The Foreign Ministry offi-

cial indicated that when it comes to cross-border cooperation, Latvia and Russia have managed to maintain their relations in more or less "working order" and that travel intensity between the two neighbor countries has been showing promising signs again. Meanwhile, a "downward spiral" has continued to dominate disagreements between Russia and the West on global geopolitical issues, as the most fundamental differences between the two sides

still remain unsolved, the Foreign Ministry official admitted, adding that the situation with the so called frozen conflicts has been showing deterioration rather than progress. Igor Ivanov, president of the Russian International Affairs Council, who also spoke at the Baltic Forum, dismissed as untrue the notion that Moscow rejoices at every new problem plaguing Europe. "I can assure you that this is not the case," Ivanov said, adding that Russia wants stable and predictable partners in Europe. (Xinhua)

Fierce Fighting Rages in Yemen Despite Ceasefire

ADEN - Fierce gun battles erupted overnight between Yemeni rebels and pro-government forces along the border with Saudi Arabia despite a three-day ceasefire due to end late Saturday, military officials said. Warplanes from the Saudi-led coalition fighting in support of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi also bombed suspected Huthi rebel missile launchers east of the capital Sanaa late Friday, a military official said.

The air raids came after Patriot missiles shot down two rebel missiles on Thursday over Marib, east of the rebel-held capital.

UN special envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed said on Friday the ceasefire was "fragile but largely holding", urging all parties "to show restraint, avoid further escalation, and strictly adhere to the 72-hour ceasefire".

The truce took effect just before midnight on Wednesday to allow



aid deliveries in Yemen, where the war has killed thousands of people and left millions homeless

and hungry. The UN envoy is liaising with the parties in an ...*(More on P4)...(20)*

US Defense Chief in Baghdad on Unannounced Visit

BAGHDAD - U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter arrived here on an unannounced visit to meet with Iraqi leaders as the Iraqi forces are fighting to defeat the Islamic State (IS) militants from their last major stronghold in Iraq, al-Arabiyah television reported on Saturday.

Carter is expected to meet with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and other top officials and military commanders to discuss the Iraqi offensive against the extremist IS group in Mo-

sul, the channel said. Hundreds of U.S. troops are already in Iraq, serving as trainers and advisers, in an attempt to help the country win the battle against IS militants in the country's northern city of Mosul. The U.S.-led international coalition has also been conducting air raids against IS targets in both Iraq and Syria. Carter's visit came as the Iraqi security forces backed by anti-IS international coalition are carrying out a ...*(More on P4)...(21)*

Egyptian Court Confirms 20-Year Prison Sentence on Mursi

CAIRO - An Egyptian court confirmed a 20-year prison sentence against former president Mohamed Mursi on Saturday, judicial sources told Reuters. The sentence was for a conviction arising from the killings of protesters during demonstrations in 2012. It is the first of Mursi's four convictions to reach the end of the judicial process, and he cannot appeal further against it. Twenty-year jail sentences were also confirmed against other senior figures from the then-ruling Mus-

lim Brotherhood, including Mohamed el-Beltagy and Essam el-Erian. The men were convicted in April 2015 on charges including kidnapping, torture and the killings of protesters during unrest in 2012. The Muslim Brotherhood denies responsibility and says that most of those killed were from its own ranks.

Mursi has been sentenced in three other cases, including a death penalty for a mass jailbreak of Muslim Brotherhood prisoners ...*(More on P4)...(22)*

Solid Majority of Americans Support Legal Marijuana Use: Poll

WASHINGTON - A solid majority, or 60 percent, of Americans now support the legal use of marijuana as more states are to vote on the issue in the November elections, a new Gallup poll released Wednesday has found.

This is the highest record in Gallup's 47-year surveys since it first conducted the poll in 1969, when only 12 percent of Americans supported the legalization of marijuana use.

Marijuana use is cur-

rently legal in four states -- Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, Washington and the District of Columbia. Five more states -- California, Arizona, Massachusetts, Maine and Nevada -- will vote in November on whether to legalize marijuana use.

Americans' support for legal marijuana use has been rising since late 1970s when the support was 28 percent. After a retreat in the 1980s, the support stayed in the 25-percent range through 1995, before increasing



to 31 percent in 2000, Gallup said. Support for legalizing marijuana use in the United States reached a majority for

the first time in 2013 after Washington and Colorado became the first states to legalize recreational ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

Death Toll in Cameroon Train Derailment Rises to 63

YAOUNDE - The death toll in the train derailment in Cameroon has risen to 63, the country's national radio and television station CRTV reported on Saturday. More than one day after the accident which happened around 12:30 Friday local time (11:30 GMT) in Eseké station in Central Region, about 120 kms southwest of capital Yaounde, eight more bodies were discovered from the derailed train cars. CRTV earlier reported 55 people were killed and 575 injured.

The derailed train left Yaounde at around 10:30 a.m. Friday for economic capital Douala. The number of passengers on board doubled ...*(More on P4)...(24)*

Libyan Pro-Government Forces Free Foreign Hostages from IS

TRIPOLI - Libya's pro-government forces battling Islamic State (IS) military group in Sirte on Saturday freed 13 hostages held by IS.

The hostages, 11 Eritrean women, a Turk and an Egyptian, were freed while the government forces attempted to take over the 600 Block, said the media office of the government forces on its Facebook account.

The government fighters have taken over the block after three days of fierce fighting against IS affiliates, the media office said. Libya's UN-backed government of national accord formed a coalition of militias in May to fight against the increased dominance of IS in Sirte, some 450 km east of the capital Tripoli. ...*(More on P4)...(26)*

Iraqi Forces Recapture Town from IS As Troops Push on Mosul

MOSUL - Iraqi security forces on Saturday freed the town of Hamdaniyah from Islamic State (IS) militants near the city of Mosul, as major offensive continued to seize more ground around the city, a security source told Xinhua.

In the early morning, the Iraqi army stormed Hamdaniyah, some 40 km southeast of Mosul, from several directions and took control of the town after heavy clashes with the IS militants, the source from the Operations Command of Nineveh Liberation told Xinhua on condition



of anonymity. The troops raised the Iraqi flag on the local government building in central Hamdaniyah, which is also known as Bakhddida, the source said without giving further details about casualties.

The troops also took control of the nearby Christian village of Karamlis after the extremist IS militants fled their positions, the source said. Heavy battles are underway in what is ...*(More on P4)...(25)*

20 Turkish Tanks Enter Northern Syria Amid Gov't Condemnation

DAMASCUS - Twenty Turkish tanks entered northern Syria on Saturday to support rebels in their fight to capture a town from Kurdish-led fighters, amid condemnation and threats from the Syrian government.

The Turkish tanks crossed the border into the northern countryside of the northern city of Aleppo, in a bid to help the Ankara-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) capture the town of Tal Rifaat, close to the Turkish border, from the Kurdish-led Syr-

ian Democratic Forces (SDF), which they have recently taken from the Islamic State (IS) group, according to the pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV.

The Turkey-backed FSA has been engaged in a battle dubbed the Euphrates Shield, which is primarily aiming at stripping the IS from key ground in northern Syria and fill the void, in order to put an end to the expansion of the SDF, something Ankara has been keen to achieve, due to its fear of a Kurdish ...*(More on P4)...(27)*

UNHCR Says 33,000 Somali Refugees Repatriated from Kenya's Dadaab Camp

NAIROBI - The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said Saturday more than 33,000 Somali refugees living at Kenya's Dadaab camp have returned to their motherland since December 2014.

"In total, as of Oct. 15, 33,178 Somali refugees had returned home since December 8, 2014, when UNHCR started supporting voluntary return of Somali refugees in Kenya, out of which 27,077 were supported in 2016 alone," a UNHCR report said.

The report said some 517 refugees had been repatriated in the past two weeks by flight, adding that flight movements have now resumed and are currently operating three days per week.

"Owing to the suspension of reception of road convoys by the (Somalia's) Jubaland administration, the operation began facilitating return to Baidoa by flights," it added.

According to the UNHCR, road convoys were suspended from Aug. 30, after the Jubaland administration told the UNHCR Somalia it would not receive any more returnees until "integration process" inside Somalia was addressed. The UNHCR said two flights would continue to transport returnees to Jubaland every two days a week until further notice.

Jubaland, which borders Kenya, is an autonomous region in southern Somalia. UN agencies in Somalia held a meeting with the Jubaland administration last month, after which they said Jubaland agreed to cooperate in the reintegration of the returnees. Kenya says it is working ...*(More on P4)...(28)*

Nieghbor News

Nigeria to Buy 10 Trainer Aircraft from Pakistan

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan on Friday signed an agreement for the sale of 10 Super Mushshak aircraft to the Nigerian Air Force (NAF), the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) announced here on Friday. "The contract signing ceremony was held at Abuja (Nigeria) where Air Vice Marshal Iya Ahmed Abdullahi and Air Marshal Arshad Malik, Chairman of the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC), signed the contract," PAF spokesman Air Commodore Syed Mohammad Ali said. The contract includes operational training and technical support and assistance to the

NAF. The Pakistan Air Force would completely establish this facility in the shortest possible time, he said.

The contract will not only open new vistas for export of aviation equipment to foreign countries but also help generate revenue for the country. The aircraft is already in service with Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iran and South Africa.

The deal strengthens PAC's status as a world class aviation industry producing the super-sonic JF-17 Thunder and Super Mushshak trainer aircraft. (MonitoringDesk)

Chinese Naval Fleet Visits Vietnam to Boost Naval Ties

CAM RANH - A Chinese naval fleet arrived in Cam Ranh Port in central Vietnam on Saturday for a five-day visit to the country to promote military ties between the two sides.

The 23rd Chinese naval escort task force comprises Xiangtan, Zhoushan and Chaohu of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy.

The visit to Vietnam is the last stop of the fleet on their way home after completing escort missions in the Gulf of Aden, the waters off Somali and visiting Myanmar, Malaysia and Cambodia, said Senior Colonel Wang Hongli, commander of the task force, while addressing the media.

The PLA Navy and the Vietnam Navy have strengthened communi-

cation and cooperation in recent years. Till now, the two navies have held joint patrols in Beibu Bay for 20 times, under which joint exercises and ship mutual visits, among others, were conducted, Wang said.

"This visit will enhance mutual understanding and promote friendship, thus contributing to bilateral relationship at the government and military levels," said Wang, adding that mutual visit and football match will be held in the following days.

Chinese naval fleets have visited Vietnam several times since 2001. However, this is the first time for the Chinese naval fleet to visit Cam Ranh Port after it was opened as an international port in March this year. (Xinhua)

Iran, Total to Sign 2 Billion U.S. Dollar Petrochemical Industry Deal

TEHRAN - Iran and France's Total petrochemical company will finalize a 2 billion U.S. dollar deal by the end of the current Iranian year, March 20, 2017, reported Tehran's Times daily on Saturday.

Adel Nejad-Salim, Managing Director of Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company, was quoted as saying that the French company will invest in one of Iran's downstream olefin projects. "In recent months, Total has assessed petrochemical projects in Iran and reviewed the status of feedstock. Now, their final plan is ready and the

contract will be finalized in near future," Nejad-Salim said. Following the implementation of Iran's nuclear deal in January, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran and France's Total signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) paving the way for Total's investment in Iran's petrochemical industry. The report stated that in 2015 Iran had around 63 million tons of installed capacity of petrochemicals, which it plans to increase to 130 million tons by 2020, then up to 180 million tons in 2025. (Xinhua)

ODIHR to Send Full Observation Mission to Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) will send a full observation mission for the presidential election to Uzbekistan, said the ODIHR report on the pre-election environment and the preparations for the presidential election of Uzbekistan.

"A full-fledged observer mission is being sent to Uzbekistan for the first time, taking into account the country's readiness to hold an important political event in an opened and transparent manner in accordance with generally accepted international electoral standards," the report reads. It is proposed to include a main group, 28 long-

term observers, as well as 250 short-term observers, who will carry out systematic observation at the Uzbek polling stations on the election day, into the observation mission for the election in Uzbekistan, according to the report.

Earlier it was reported that experts of the needs assessment mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights headed by Alexander Shlyk (Belarus) and OSCE/ODIHR Election Advisor Ulvi Akhundlu (Azerbaijan) had a meeting in Uzbekistan's Central Election Commission October 11-14, 2016.

The meeting was held in connection with the upcoming presidential election in Uzbekistan. (Agencies)