

# No One can Speak to Putin in Ultimatum-Like Tone: Kremlin

MOSCOW - The Kremlin says President Vladimir Putin would not accept any ultimatums over the crisis in Ukraine amid reports that Russia must agree to a Franco-German proposal for peace or await further economic sanctions.

"We've already said everything about the tone of the negotiations. No one has ever spoken or can speak to the president in an ultimatum-like tone much as one would like to," President Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said on Monday. The comments come in response to a report published by the Wall Street Journal a day ear-



lier, where it was claimed that German Chancellor Angela Merkel has given Putin until February 11 to agree to the peace plan for Ukraine, or face more sanctions. The report, which cited unnamed

Western officials, further noted that the German chancellor also told the Russian leader during the late-night talks in the Kremlin on February 6 that she would not oppose to Washington's

sending military hardware to Ukraine. The leaders of Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France are slated to convene in the Belarusian capital city of Minsk on Wednesday to revive an

earlier deal inked between the sides involved in the Ukrainian crisis and tamp down the flare-up of violence in eastern Ukraine. In September 2014, the representatives of Ukraine, Russia, and the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk inked a ceasefire deal in Minsk; however, both the Ukrainian military and pro-Russia forces operating in eastern Ukraine have violated the truce on an almost daily basis. According to the UN, fighting in eastern Ukraine has left over 5,300 people dead and more than 12,200 wounded since mid-April 2014. (Press TV)

## Italian Police Arrests 27 in Anti-Mafia Operation

ROME - Italian police arrested at least 27 people in an anti-mafia operation in Sicily on Sunday night, including a city council member in the regional capital Palermo.

Those arrested were variously charged with mafia association, extortion, and robbery. City councillor Giuseppe Faraone, 69, is suspected of being linked to a local clan of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, and was charged with attempted extortion aggravated by mafia-like methods. According to prosecutors in Palermo, he asked an entrepreneur running an electronic components company to pay "protection money" on behalf of a mafia boss operating in northern Palermo. Faraone was elected to the city council in 2012 with a center-left list now ruling the Sicilian capital, but had previously run for center-right Christian-Democratic UDC party and served in the regional government and the provincial council. A construction company working with the local church was also among those businesses allegedly hit by mobsters running the racket.

The operation was carried out in Palermo by Italian military and finance police. At least 20 of the 27 issued arrest warrants targeted people who were already in jail on other charges, prosecutors said. A key contribution to the probe came from 14 businessmen who rebelled against the extortion and cooperated with authorities, local media cited investigators as saying. Their help was crucial to identify the alleged extortionists and the arrest, prosecutors said. (Xinhua)

## Nieghbor News

### Iran Calls for Collective Efforts to Fight Terrorism

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called for collective efforts by all countries to uproot the Takfiri terrorists in the region, and warned against their rising threats.

"The sooner the international community and particularly our friends in the region come to realize that they cannot even gain short-time benefits from the existence and cooperation with these Takfiri groups, the sooner we can reach a methodology of how to deal with them," Zarif told reporters on the sidelines of the 51st International Security Meeting in Munich on Sunday.

The Iranian foreign minister, meantime, regretted that some countries have been cooperating with the Takfiri terrorists to the sake of political gains.

Last month, Vice-Speaker of the Iranian Parliament Seyed Mohammad Hassan Aboutorabi Fard in a meeting with Vice-President of the German Bundestag Claudia Roth said defeating terrorism needs honest partnership

and serious campaigning by all states. "In fighting the ominous phenomenon of terrorism as a global problem, we need serious determination and cooperation among all those countries which are sincere in this regard," Aboutorabi Fard said during the meeting in Tehran. Earlier this month, Iranian President's Chief of Staff Mohammad Nahavandian underlined that Iran is now spearheading the international fight against terrorism and extremism. "Iran is now an axis of campaign against violence and extremism and everyone should increase their efforts in this field," Nahavandian told reporters on the sidelines of a poster exhibition titled World Against Violence and Extremism (WAVE) in Tehran. He reiterated that the world has welcomed President Hassan Rouhani's WAVE initiative, and said, "This shows that the fight against violence and extremism is what the people of the world need today." (FNA)

### Chinese FM to Visit Pakistan, UAE, Iran

BEIJING - Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is to pay an official visit to Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Iran from Feb. 12-16.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying made the announcement on Monday at a regular press briefing.

Wang is paying the visit at the invitation of Adviser to the Pakistani Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. (Xinhua)

### Tajikistan, US Discuss Implementation of CASA-1000

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan's First Deputy Finance Minister Jamoliddin Nuraliyev met with Daniel Rosenblum, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asia, in Dushanbe to discuss the feasibility study for implementation of the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000), Avesta news agency reported citing the press service of Tajikistan's Finance Ministry. The sides pointed out that the project is an important and timely step towards further expansion of the regional cooperation.

The officials also discussed prospects of construction of the Rogun hydroelectric power plant (HPP) in Tajikistan and the issues related to the impact of anti-Russian sanctions on Tajikistan's economy.

Both officials pointed out the significance of implementation of the upcoming programs and the ne-

cessity of coordination of Tajikistan's collaboration with the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) allocated US\$7.5 million to Tajikistan for implementation of the CASA 1000 project. The World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank provided \$45 million and \$70 million respectively for this project. The CASA 1000 power transmission project extends from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and is expected to be completed in 2017. The project is designed to build the necessary infrastructure and create the institutional and legal framework for transmission of surplus electricity from existing generation facilities in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The project is supported by the US government. (TCA)

### Sharif Calls for Reforms in Civil Bureaucracy

ISLAMABAD - Expressing concern and dissatisfaction with the performance of the civil bureaucracy, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Monday directed that a detailed report must be submitted to him within four months' time in order to bring about holistic reforms in the structure of the civil service, including in the accountability mechanism for civil servants.

"It is a point of concern that various officers, even those at the senior level, are lacking in competence and initiative which is hampering service delivery to the public," the prime

minister said chairing a high-level meeting at the Prime Minister House in Islamabad.

The meeting also reviewed the implementation of a reforms agenda of the government, which included deliberations on the setting up of a monitoring, evaluation and delivery cell in the premier's office.

The prime minister said that the evaluation of government officers and staff should be done in a meaningful manner, so that the best of the lot could be brought forward to improve the government's functioning and services to the people. (Monitoring Desk)

## Boko Haram Wages New Niger Attack

NIAMEY - Nigeria's Boko Haram fighters launched a new attack in neighbouring Niger on Monday, as parliament in Niamey was set to vote on joining a regional force against the Islamists.

The insurgents raided a prison in the southeastern border town of Diffa, which they first attacked on Friday, but were repelled after a heavy exchange of fire, humanitarian sources said.

"The attack failed. The assailants were quite easily pushed back," one source told AFP. Niger's parliament was expected on Monday to support a proposal to deploy troops inside Nigeria to help in the battle, along with soldiers from Chad, which has a battle-hardened army, and Cameroon. No casualty toll was immediately available after the raid by Boko Haram, which has widened a deadly six-year insurgency in Nigeria with attacks in neighbouring countries.

A journalist in Diffa said he saw the bodies of Boko Haram fighters in a hearse but was unable to count them. Some Boko Haram fighters sought to hide out in the town. "The soldiers are looking for them, weapons at the ready. The army has encircled Diffa," the journalist said.

Another journalist said some of the fighters were being held in the prison they attacked. Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau vowed in a new video released on Monday to defeat the military force taking shape to fight the militants in Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger.

The small nation of Benin on Nigeria's western border on Saturday agreed to join the alliance, which would include 8,700 troops, police and civilians. But Shekau dismissed the force, previously set at around 7,500, saying: "We can seize them one by one." Niger's Defence Minister Mahamadou Karidjo said Sunday that he hoped for a favourable parliamentary vote to "bring the final blow against the forces of evil." "The boys are chomping at the bit to go" to fight Boko Haram, he said on public television. "The defensive position our forces have held for more than three months is not a good position," Karidjo said. "We shall eradicate the Boko Haram plague in the region."

Niger said 109 jihadists were killed during an attack last week on Diffa and a simultaneous assault on Bosso, also close to the border, the first by Boko Haram in the country. (AFP)

## Don't Assume Euro Zone will Accept Your Demands: EU Warns Greece

NAUEN - The European Union's chief executive warned Greeks on Monday not to expect the euro zone to bow to leftist Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' demands in a growing confrontation over Athens' debt crisis. Tsipras laid out plans on Sunday to dismantle Greece's "cruel" austerity program, ruled out any extension of its 240 billion euro international bailout, which runs out at the end of this month, and vowed to seek reparations from Germany for World War Two.

His uncompromising maiden policy speech to parliament spooked European financial markets and partners outside the euro area. British Prime Minister David Cameron chaired a special meet-

ing with finance ministry and Bank of England officials on Monday to plan for a possible Greek exit from the euro zone, a Treasury source said.

Ahead of a meeting of G20 finance ministers in Istanbul, the United States and Canada urged the EU and Greece to tone down the rhetoric over austerity and work for a compromise on the debt issue.

Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, who found scant support on a tour of European capitals last week for his plans to restructure Greece's debt, angered some euro zone partners by saying on Sunday the 19-nation single currency area would ultimately collapse if Greece were forced out.



European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker told reporters on a visit to Germany: "Greece should not assume that the overall mood has so changed that the euro zone will adopt Tsipras's government program unconditionally."

The head of the EU's executive arm, who met the Greek leader in Brussels last week, said he did not expect a deal on the way forward with Greece at an EU summit on Thursday or a finance ministers' meeting of the euro zone on Wednesday.

"I don't think we'll reach final conclusions so soon," Juncker said at a meeting of Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Nauen, near Berlin. (Reuters)

## EU Puts Off Fresh Russia Sanctions Awaiting Minsk Talks



BRUSSELS - The European Union decided Monday to hold off temporarily on slapping sanctions on more Russians and Ukrainian separatists and await the outcome of possible peace talks later this week.

With the leaders of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine due to hold negotiations in Minsk, Belarus, on Wednesday, the EU has delayed placing asset freezes and travel bans on 19 more individuals, including five Russians, for their actions in eastern Ukraine. It said

the situation would be reviewed Monday.

"The principle of the sanctions is maintained but the application will depend on what happens on the ground," French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said during a break in talks with EU foreign ministers in Brussels. Fabius said political advisers would meet in Minsk on Tuesday to "hopefully" set up talks for the following day between German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois ... (More on P4)... (25)

## Syria Says It Doesn't Need Jordan's Help Against IS

BEIRUT - Syria's foreign minister on Monday criticized neighboring Jordan, which recently stepped up air strikes against Islamic State targets in Syria, and said his country does not need outside help in battling IS militants.

Walid al-Moallem also told reporters that Damascus will not accept Jordanian or other foreign ground troops crossing into Syria to fight the Islamic State group. There has been no mention of any international troops offering to go into Syria to fight IS. Jordan has, however, vowed to retaliate

harshly for the slaying of one of its pilots, who was burned alive by the Islamic State group militants last week.

"We will not allow anyone to violate our national sovereignty and we do not need any ground troops to fight Daesh," al-Moallem said, using the Arabic acronym for the extremist group.

"The Syrian Arab government is fully capable of fighting Daesh valiantly and we don't need any other troops," he added. Al-Moallem spoke at a joint press conference with Belarusian counterpart Vladimir Makei in the Syrian capital. (AP)

## Merkel Sets to Argue in Washington



WASHINGTON / DONETSK, Ukraine - German Chancellor Angela Merkel is set to argue in Washington on Monday against arming Ukraine in its conflict against Russian-backed rebels, while in Brussels EU ministers held off tightening sanctions to

give peace talks a chance. Merkel's message that sending Western weapons to Kiev risks escalating the conflict is likely to get a sympathetic hearing when she meets President Barack Obama later in the day.

But critics of Obama's cautious foreign policy

approach are already demanding decisive U.S. action to help Kiev fight the separatists in eastern Ukraine, even if this deepens a standoff with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Nine Ukrainian troops have been killed in the past 24 hours and seven civilians also died, Kiev said on Monday, with fighting particularly intense around the town of Debaltseve, a major rail and road junction northeast of the city of Donetsk.

At a security conference in Munich over the weekend, Merkel said it was uncertain whether further negotiations would lead to a deal with ... (More on P4)... (26)

## IS Pulls Forces and Hardware from Syria's Aleppo: Rebels

AMMAN - Islamic State has withdrawn some of its insurgents and equipment from areas northeast of the Syrian city of Aleppo, rebels and residents say, adding to signs of strain in the Syrian provinces of its self-declared caliphate.

The group, which has recently lost ground to Kurdish and Syrian government forces elsewhere in Syria, has pulled fighters and hardware from several villages in areas northeast of Aleppo, they said. But it has not fully withdrawn from area.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which tracks the war using a network of sources on the ground, said Islamic State had redeployed forces from Aleppo province to join battles further

east with Kurdish forces and mainstream rebel groups.

Islamic State-held areas northeast of Aleppo mark the western edge of a domain that expanded rapidly in Syria and Iraq last year after the jihadists seized the Iraqi city of Mosul.

Last month, the group suffered its first major setback in Syria since last summer, being driven from the predominantly Kurdish town of Kobani by Kurdish militia backed by U.S.-led air strikes. Syrian government forces waging a separate campaign against the group have also inflicted losses on it recently.

"There are tactical withdrawals. It's not a complete withdrawal," said

the leader of a mainstream rebel group, citing contacts in Islamic State-held areas near Aleppo. Other groups had not moved to take the evacuated areas because Islamic State had not fully pulled out, he added.

But he said IS appeared to be preparing for a fuller pullback, saying they had even dismantled a bakery in the town of al-Bab, some 40 km (25 miles) northeast of Aleppo.

"They are still there, but they have pulled out the foreign fighters, the heavy equipment, changed their positions," the rebel commander said in a phone interview, declining to be identified because it would endanger ... (More on P4)... (27)