

# Russia Signs Up to \$100 Bn BRICS Fund to Rival IMF

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin ratified an accord Saturday to set up a \$100-billion reserve fund for the so-called BRICS -- the five leading emerging economies that include Russia, China, Brazil, India and South Africa.

Moscow is expected to contribute \$18 billion to the reserve, well behind the \$41 billion China has promised to pour into the fund that was set up after an agreement signed in July 2014 in Brazil.

The emerging economies also plan to form their own international bank based in Shanghai to challenge western dominance



over international money markets. "The accord on the creation of a common reserve fund for BRICS countries has been rati-

fied," a document from the Kremlin quoted by RIA Novosti news agency said. The fund is meant to shield the BRICS against

"short-term liquidity pressures" and promote greater cooperation between the five member countries. Russia -- which

has suffered huge currency fluctuations since the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine -- sees the fund as an alternative to

international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank that are dominated by the United States. (AFP)

## Kerry Pledges Closer US Ties with Reform-Minded Sri Lanka

COLOMBO - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Saturday championed the new Sri Lankan government's push for democratic reform and promised closer ties with the strategically located Indian Ocean nation.

"In this journey to restore your democracy, the American people stand with you," said Kerry, on the first visit to the island in a decade by the top U.S. diplomat.

Kerry met with President Maithripala Sirisena, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and Foreign Minister Mangan-

la Samaraweera. On Sunday, he planned to see leaders from the Tamil minority. Sri Lanka's government is determined to end years of international isolation linked to its long war with Tamil separatists, so it really rolled out the red carpet for Kerry. He entered the Foreign Ministry under a welcome sign bearing his image and was greeted by musicians playing horns and drums and dancers in silver breastplates as he proceeded down a long crimson rug. "We intend... (More on P4)...(24)

## Saudi Arabia Denies Aden Ground Operation

RIYADH - Saudi Arabia on Sunday denied media reports that troops were deployed to Yemen's Aden to start a ground operation there. "There are no foreign forces in Aden, but the coalition continues to help fight against the Houthi militia," spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition Ahmed al-Asiri said in a statement. It was earlier reported that the first Saudi-led coalition ground troops entered Aden and an-



other force is on its way to the southern port city, a Yemeni govern-

ment official said. Meanwhile, Yemen's Aden al-Ghad news-

paper reported that "the first push of the Arab ground force arrived on Sunday morning in Aden and began to take part in battle." The paper is linked to southern separatists demanding the restoration of the southern state that merged with North Yemen in 1990. The Saudi-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against the Houthi rebels and their allies since March 26. (Xinhua)

## Death Roll from Nepal's Deadly Quake Climbs to 7,240

KATHEMANDU - Death toll from the massive earthquake in Nepal reached 7,240, while the number of injuries stood at 14,122, the Ministry of Home Affairs said on Sunday. Four persons, including a 105-year-old woman, were rescued alive from the debris of collapsed buildings in Nepal on Sunday, the police said. On Sunday, a 4.9-magnitude earthquake hit Nuwakot district of the Central Nepal, Nepal's National Seismological Center said. No casualties have so far been recorded in the fresh tremor. Meanwhile, the country's health authorities said a majority of health facilities in Nepal's quake-affected areas, including Sindupalchok and Gorkha, have sustained damage in the April 25 earthquake.

An assessment by the World Health Organization and Nepal's Ministry of Health said on Sunday that district hospitals in Ramechhap, Nuwakot, Sindupalchok and Rasuwa have been dysfunctional. A situation report released by the United Nations Nepal office showed that 90 percent of health facilities located in the worst-hit areas have been severely damaged. People in the remote areas of the worst-affected districts are still waiting for medical aid, though medical teams have set up camps at relatively accessible locations.

The Nepalese health authorities said some 50 national and international medical teams have so far been assigned to the quake-hit districts. (Xinhua)

## Iran Pledges to Protect Shared Security Interests with Yemen



DUBAI - Iran's deputy foreign minister said Tehran will not let regional powers jeopardize its security interests in Yemen, Tasnim news agency reported, in the strongest acknowledgment yet of Iranian involvement in the Arabian peninsula. Iran has denied accusations from Western and Arab states that it is arming Shi'ite Muslim Houthi rebels in Yemen, though a U.N. sanctions monitoring panel revisited those allegations in a confidential report this week. Tehran has regularly condemned a Saudi-led air campaign against the insurgents. "Others will not be allowed to put our shared security at risk with military adventures," Hossein Amir Abdollahian said, according to the Iranian Tasnim news agency in an article published on Saturday. Saudi Arabia, which sees

itself as the guardian of Sunni Islam, has long vied for influence with Iran, the region's main Shi'ite Muslim power. The Saudi-led coalition has been carrying out air strikes in Yemen since late March against the Houthis and their allies, whose rapid advances forced Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his government into exile in Riyadh. Iran does not recognize Hadi and has portrayed the air strikes as an intervention in Yemen's internal affairs. Earlier this week, Saudi Arabia said coalition jets destroyed the runway of Yemen's Sanaa airport to prevent an Iranian cargo plane from landing there. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said on Saturday that several countries, including Iran, backed a negotiated political process to resolve the conflict in Yemen. (AFP)

## Israel's Jewish Ethiopian Minority Rallies against Racism

JERUSALEM - Several thousand people, mostly from Israel's Jewish Ethiopian minority, are protesting in Tel Aviv against racism and police brutality. Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said Sunday's protest was mostly peaceful. Protesters blocked roads in central Tel Aviv and chanted "violent police officers belong in jail." The first rally last week in Jerusalem turned violent. Supporters say the protests will continue. Israel's

Ethiopian community was shaken last week when footage emerged of an Ethiopian Israeli in an army uniform being beaten by police. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he will meet Monday with representatives of the community as well as the beaten soldier. Thousands of Ethiopian Jews live in Israel, many of them secretly airlifted into the country in 1984 and 1990, but their absorption into Israeli society has been rocky. (AP)

## Kerry in Kenya to Offer Help against Militants: Officials

NAIROBI - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Kenya on Sunday to offer help in countering Somali al Shabaab militants who have staged deadly attacks there and elsewhere in East Africa. Kerry will also address Kenya's human rights in meetings with President Uhuru Kenyatta and other government officials as well as discussing the troubled peace process in South Sudan and violence in Burundi, a U.S. official said. Kerry's visit

followed the killing of 148 people by al Shabaab militants in an attack on the university at Garissa, northern Kenya, on April 2. "We will be looking at additional ways that we may be able to support Kenyan efforts to fight al Shabaab," the official said, without giving details. Kenyan Foreign Minister Amina Mohamed said last month that Nairobi wanted intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support from Western allies.

Washington is particularly worried about the security situation in Kenya's neighbour Somalia, where a fragile government backed by Western powers and African peacekeepers is struggling to contain al Shabaab, which is allied to al Qaeda. "Our major message is that fighting terrorism requires a multi-faceted approach," the U.S. official said. Assistance should also help poor communities in Kenya that al Shabaab may seek... (More on P4)...(21)

## New Migrant Rescues in Med As Nearly 3,700 Taken to Italy

ROME - Italy's coastguard attempted to rescue more migrants in the Mediterranean Sunday after nearly 3,700 were picked up trying to reach Europe on Saturday alone. Although it was not a record, the number saved was one of the highest ever recorded in a single day, and raised fears that the tide of desperate people trying to reach Europe has not been slowed by recent disasters. Italian coastguards said 3,690 migrants were rescued on Saturday without giving details of Sunday's on-

going operations. Coastguards coordinated the rescue of a record 3,791 migrants on April 12 and another 2,850 the following day. Saturday's operations in the Mediterranean involved four Italian coastguard vessels, two Italian navy ships and two customs boats, as well as four cargo ships and tugs. The Italian frigate Bersagliere took 778 migrants on board while the patrol boat Vega plucked another 675 from the water. French patrol boat Commandant Birot, which was sent last week

to boost the EU's Operation Triton patrols dealing with the influx of migrant boats, also picked up 219 people off the coast of Libya Saturday. It was due to dock Sunday at 17H00 (15H00 GMT) in the port of Crotona in Calabria in the south of Italy, and sailors were to pass two suspected traffickers on to the Italian police. EU leaders have tripled the budget for patrols off war-torn Libya, from where most of the migrants set out for Europe, after more... (More on P4)...(22)

## Pro-Kurdish Turkish Leaders Campaign in Europe for June Vote

PARIS - A pro-Kurdish Turkish political leader says he's confident that his party can achieve the 10 percent threshold needed to put lawmakers into parliament in Turkey's June 7 election. But he and others are campaigning across Europe to ensure a victory. Selahattin Demirtas, co-leader of the Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party, or HDP, drew thousands of backers Saturday to a Paris rally. Other



party leaders went to Austria and Germany. Demirtas told The Associated Press that "we will reach the 10 percent threshold. There

is no risk." He said his party's priority would be a new constitution with "ethnic, religious and gender rights."... (More on P4)...(23)

## Neighbour News

### China Sends Armed Police to Nepal for First Time

BEIJING - China has sent armed police force for rescue operation in earthquake hit areas after Beijing received an "urgent request" from Nepal, State media said. This is the first time the country's armed police have ventured beyond its borders.

The first batch of 160 "armed police officers" crossed the Friendship Bridge that links the two countries on May 2. A total of 500 police officers and 180 pieces of road repair machinery will be sent, according to Fu Ling, a senior officer with the traffic rescue

brigade of the police. The visiting policemen were received by the Nepalese police at the border, the official Xinhua news agency said. China has also sent geologists to Nepal to assist in the rescue operation. This is a significant move, which was approved by the State Council, which is the cabinet, and the Central Military Commission. The first task assigned to the armed police forces is to reopen the road connecting the border pass of Zham and Kathmandu, which has been disrupted, Xinhua said. (Agencies)

### No Need for US to Escort Ships in Persian Gulf: Iran Navy Cmdr

TEHRAN - Iran's Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said that the US Navy does not need to escort US-flagged ships traveling through the secure Persian Gulf waters. "Security fully prevails in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman due to the permanent presence of Iran's [regular] Navy and the naval forces of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC). Therefore, there is no need for the Americans to escort their ships in this region," Sayyari told reporters on Sunday.

He, however, recommended the US to escort its ships sailing in the Gulf of Aden and Bab al-Mandab Strait because of insecure conditions. Sayyari was reacting to a decision by the US Navy

to accompany US and British-flagged commercial ships as they travel through the Strait of Hormuz into and out of the Persian Gulf. Pentagon spokesman, Colonel Steve Warren, said the decision is a direct result of the Iranian Navy's recent seizure of a Marshall Islands-flagged ship in the Persian Gulf. Sayyari defended as "fully legal" Iran's decision to impound the cargo ship in the Persian Gulf.

On April 28, Iranian forces boarded the Maersk Tigris (shown below) carrying the Marshall Islands flag in the Strait of Hormuz, after the vessel, with 34 crew members aboard, reportedly trespassed on Iranian territorial waters. (Monitoring Desk)

### President Ilham Aliyev Receive the Pakistani Minister

BAKU - President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has received Pakistani Minister of Finance, Revenue, Economic Affairs, Statistics and Privatisation Mohammad Ishaq Dar. Mohammad Ishaq Dar greeted the head of state on behalf of President of Pakistan Mamnoon Hussain and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. He said Pakistan has always supported Azerbaijan's just position on the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, adding this support will be continued. Mohammad Ishaq Dar expressed gratitude of the people and leadership of Pakistan to Azerbaijan's first lady, UNESCO and IS-ESCO goodwill ambassador, president of the Heydar Aliyev Foun-

dation Mehriban Aliyeva for implementing a number of social and humanitarian projects in the country.

Saying that Azerbaijan and Pakistan enjoyed high-level relations, the head of state stressed the importance of elevating the economic cooperation to this level. President Ilham Aliyev recalled with pleasure the Pakistani President's visit to Azerbaijan and their meetings, saying they discussed the bilateral financial, economic, investment making issues. The head of state noted the role of high-level visits in terms of the development of the bilateral ties. Saying that the two countries enjoy high-level cooperation in international... (More on P4)...(25)

### Poet Believes Using Persian Alphabet in Tajikistan Possible but Needs Time

DUSHANBE - Tajik poet Mo'min Ghanaat says though speaking Persian language, people in Tajikistan use the Cyrillic writing system, adding that using Persian script is possible but it needs time. Speaking to Tajikistan Ferje news agency, Ghanaat said at the periodic meeting on dialogue among civilizations, "During former Soviet Union era, we were seeking both Persian and Cyrillic writing systems. At that time, we wanted to use Cyrillic as well as Farsi scripts because of conditions those days; our intention was to seize the chance but failed to do so and today, we are left undecided on either of the both. Now it's hard to get back to our initial writ-

ing system because our first script was cuneiform and Avesta is cuneiform, said the poet, adding that later our script was Soghdhi, despite gaining limited progress. At any rate, he added, recourse to the Persian alphabet is not possible at once, he added.

Tajik is a variety of Persian language spoken in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Afghanistan by about 4.4 million people. The Persian language in this region was renamed Tajik by Stalin in 1932 in order to distance Persian speakers in Central Asia from Persian speakers in Iran. (Agencies)