

EU approves Cyprus bailout terms

AFP, Nicosia

Eurozone finance ministers formally yesterday approved the terms of a problematic Cyprus debt rescue that will cost Nicosia much more than first thought after confusion over the terms.

Reviewing the eurozone's fortunes after the Cyprus crisis suddenly raised fresh questions over the future of the single currency, the 17 finance ministers also said however that bailed-out Ireland and Portugal were making progress and would likely win more time to repay their debt.

Dutch Finance Minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem, head of the Eurogroup, said ministers welcomed as "fully in line" a March 25 rescue accord between Cyprus and its international creditors.

Under last month's bailout accord, Cyprus was to cough up 7.0 billion euros and its creditors, known as the Troika, 10 billion euros.

There was considerable confusion when the 23 billion euros figure came to light and Nicosia asked for more aid earlier this week, prompting speculation the deal would need to be amended.

Nuke-armed N Korea unacceptable: US

Kerry pushes for de-escalation of crisis in South

AFP, Seoul

US Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday demanded North Korea abandon an expected missile launch as Pyongyang turned its nuclear threats on Japan amid a chilling new evaluation of its offensive capability.

Any missile launch would be a "huge mistake", he said, adding that the US and the rest of the international community would never accept North Korea as a nuclear state.

Kerry, visiting Seoul to give fulsome US backing to military ally South Korea, joined President Barack Obama in decrying North Korea's incendiary rhetoric -- and urged China to step in.

Obama earlier said that "nobody wants to see a conflict", but emphasised that the United States was ready to take "all necessary steps to protect its people" and defend its allies in the region.

The air of crisis that has engulfed the region for weeks, since North Korea staged a rocket launch and atomic test, was given even greater menace from a US intelligence report that said it may now have a nuclear warhead in its arsenal.

US and South Korean military officials downplayed the assessment by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), but Pyongyang warned of the direst results if Japan executes its threat to shoot down any North Korean missile.

The North's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said such a "provocative" action would end with its instigators "consumed in nuclear flames".



John Kerry and Park Geun-Hye

Japan positioned Patriot anti-missile batteries around Tokyo this week to protect the 30 million people who live in the vast conurbation.

However, Kerry mixed tough talk with more conciliatory comments about the prospects for a peaceful way out of a crisis that has sent inter-Korea tensions soaring.

In particular, he said Washington chose to "honour" the vision of South Korea's new President Park Geun-Hye, who was elected on a pledge of greater engagement with Pyongyang.

Park has made a series of statements in recent days hinting at a dialogue with Pyongyang.

North Korea, as a show of force, has two mid-range missiles ready for imminent launch from its east coast.

Observers believe a launch is most likely in the build-up to Monday's anniversary of the birth of late founder Kim Il-Sung.

Russia eyes space supremacy

AFP, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin yesterday unveiled a new \$50 billion drive for Russia to preserve its status as a top space power, including the construction of a brand new cosmodrome from where humans will fly to space by the end of the decade.

Fifty-two years to the day since Yuri Gagarin became the Soviet Union's greatest hero by making the first human flight into space, Putin inspected the new Vostochny (Eastern) cosmodrome Russia is building in the Amur region of the Far East.

Putin said in a live link-up with the multinational crew of the International Space Station (ISS) that Russia hoped to have the first launches from Vostochny in 2015 and the first manned launches in 2018.

Russia still carries out all manned launches from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan -- the same place where Gagarin made his historic flight -- but this has been shadowed in recent years by disputes with the Kazakh authorities over lease terms.

Putin announced that the town being built around the new cosmodrome to house its engineers and families would be called Tsiolkovsky, in honour of the Russian scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky who pioneered rocket design in the early Soviet era.

The Russian space programme has been hurt in recent years by a string of launch failures of unmanned probes and satellites, but Putin vowed Moscow would continue to ramp up spending.

He said that from 2013-2020, Russia would be spending 1.6 trillion rubles (\$51.8 billion, 38 million euros) on its space sector, a growth far greater than any other space power.

One of Russia's most embarrassing failures was the loss of its Phobos-Grunt probe to Mars in 2012 which ended up crashing back into Earth rather than even coming close to completing its mission of visiting a Martian moon.

The head of Russia's space agency Roscosmos, Vladimir Popovkin, meanwhile said Moscow was targeting 2030 as the year in which it could begin creating a base on the moon for flights to Mars.

US Senate agrees to debate gun bill

AFP, Washington

The US Senate voted Thursday to debate the nation's most ambitious gun safety legislation in almost two decades, after a bipartisan group of lawmakers agreed on expanding background checks.

Some 16 Republicans joined the Democrats, setting up crucial votes next week on amendments to a bill that would tighten checks for firearms buyers, stiffen penalties for gun trafficking and boost school safety measures.

President Barack Obama has leaned heavily on Congress to adopt his proposals after a series of gun related violence.



PHOTO: AFP

A portrait of the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is held by a supporter of Venezuelan acting President and presidential candidate Nicolas Maduro during his closing campaign rally in Caracas on Thursday ahead of the April 14th presidential election. Maduro and opposition rival Henrique Capriles held large closing rallies, ending a brief and bitter race to succeed Hugo Chavez on the anniversary of a failed coup against the late leader.

Blast near Iraq mosque kills 12

AFP, Baquba

A bomb exploded near a Sunni mosque north of Baghdad yesterday, killing twelve people, a police colonel and a doctor said, the latest in an uptick in violence in the runup to elections next week.

The bomber struck after prayers at the Omar bin Abdul Aziz mosque, south of Baquba, and also wounded another 25 people the sources said.

Iraq is to hold provincial elections on April 20, its first polls since 2010.

Attacks on candidates have left at least a dozen election hopefuls dead, according to an AFP tally. That, and the fact that only 12 of Iraq's 18 provinces will vote due to a government postponement has drawn the credibility of the elections into question.

Space exploration needed for survival

Hawking says man may not last another 1,000 yrs on Earth



MAIL ONLINE

Stephen Hawking, the British physicist who spent his career decoding the universe and even experienced weightlessness, today called for the continuation of space exploration - for humanity's sake.

The 71-year-old said he did not think humans would survive another 1,000 years 'without escaping beyond our fragile planet'.

Professor Hawking made the remarks at Cedars-Sinai Medical Centre in Los Angeles, where he toured a stem cell laboratory focused on trying to slow the progression of Lou Gehrig's disease.

The calls come as Nasa's planetary science budget, which would be crucial to finding a habitable alternative to Earth, was cut by \$300 million this year at the expense of other projects.

Hawking was diagnosed with the neurological disorder 50 years ago while a student at Cambridge University. He has defied this incurable disease with self-will and determination.

Renowned for his work on black holes and the origins of the cosmos, Prof Hawking is famous for bringing esoteric physics concepts to the masses through his best-selling books, including A Brief History Of Time, which sold more than 10 million copies worldwide.

UN aims to end diarrhoea, pneumonia child deaths

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday launched a plan aimed at all but eradicating childhood deaths from diarrhoea and pneumonia by 2025, in a bid to save the lives of some two million children every year.

The UN's agencies for health and children said they were joining forces with governments and other bodies to use existing low-cost methods to take on two diseases that are the leading killer of children under the age of five.

Pneumonia and diarrhoea together account for 29 percent of all deaths in children under the age of five, killing some two million a year, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation (WHO) said.

The diseases are closely linked to poverty, hitting children with the least access to clean water and sanitation and who are the least likely to have received vaccines that could protect them, said Viviani.

Syria urges UN action against Qaeda rebels

AFP, Damascus

Syria demanded that the UN slap sanctions on a jihadist group after it pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda, as UN said Western nations have "hard evidence" of chemical weapons usage in Syria.

In a letter to the United Nations, Syria's foreign ministry said it "expects the Security Council to fulfil its role and preserve global security," and class the Al-Nusra Front as an al-Qaeda-linked group, state media reported.

A sanctions regime was introduced by the UN to punish individuals and entities linked to al-Qaeda, freezing assets, banning travel and imposing an embargo on arms destined for the terror network.

The letter followed a pledge by Al-Nusra Front on Wednesday of allegiance to al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri and support for his call for an Islamic state to be created in Syria, raising concerns by Western nations about weapons falling into the wrong hands.

Meanwhile, UN diplomats said Western nations have "hard evidence" that chemical weapons have been used at least once in the Syrian war but a UN investigation is now unlikely to get into the country.

President Bashar al-Assad's government asked the UN to investigate its claims against rebel forces. But it is now refusing to let international experts into the country because the UN wants to look into claims against Assad's forces.

"In one case we have hard evidence," a western diplomat told reporters, commenting on the rival claims.

The Syrian government called for a UN investigation after it said opposition rebels fired a chemical weapon shell into Khan al-Assal in Aleppo province on March 19.

At least 28 people were killed in violence across Syria yesterday, according to a preliminary toll, most of them in Damascus and Aleppo in the north. More than 70,000 people have been killed in Syria's two-year conflict, the UN says.

NEWS IN brief

Ex-German president charged with graft

AFP, Berlin

Germany's disgraced former president who resigned amid a political favours scandal last year was charged with corruption yesterday, public prosecutors said.

If the case proceeds, Christian Wulff, 53, would become Germany's first former head of state to answer charges in court. He was the youngest president in Germany's history.



Christian Wulff

Sudan president visits South Sudan

AFP, Juba

Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir arrived in South Sudan yesterday, for the first time since his 2011 visit for the country's independence; a sign of easing tensions after bloody border battles last year.

South Sudanese President Salva Kiir, Bashir's former civil war foe and an ex-rebel commander, welcomed his counterpart at Juba airport, as a military band struck up their respective national anthems.

The two nations battled over their undemarcated border one year ago, with Khartoum's warplanes bombing the South, and Juba sending troops deep into disputed areas to

Israel reopens Gaza border crossing

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel reopened a goods crossing into the Gaza Strip yesterday, officials said, after closing it several days earlier in response to rocket fire from the besieged Palestinian enclave.

A rocket fired from Gaza crashed into southern Israel on Sunday, as US Secretary of State John Kerry arrived for talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. It struck an uninhabited part of the Negev desert, causing no damage or casualties.

French Senate adopts gay marriage law

AFP, Paris

France's upper house Senate yesterday voted to adopt a landmark bill granting homosexual couples the right to marry and adopt, after a heated debate and protests from conservatives and religious groups.

The vote, by a show of hands, puts the bill on track to become law after technical second readings in both houses.

Senators had on Wednesday approved the crucial first article of the bill granting gay couples the right to marry and to adopt, by a vote of 179 to 157.

2,000 invited to Thatcher funeral

AFP, London

Britain was printing invitations Thursday for 2,000 people for the funeral of Margaret Thatcher, ranging from all of the surviving US presidents and British prime ministers to celebrities including "Top Gear" host Jeremy Clarkson.

Argentina meanwhile downplayed Britain's decision not to invite President Cristina Kirchner in a sign of the tensions that still exist between the two countries following the 1982 Falklands War, regarded by the Iron Lady herself as her finest hour.

Thatcher died in London's Ritz Hotel on Monday at the age of 87, after suffering a stroke. She was Britain's first female prime minister and was in office from 1979 to 1990.

START A JOINT VENTURE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR LAND WITH SHELTECH FOR THE HIGHEST RATE OF RETURN

Land Wanted

ANY PRIME LOCATION IN DHAKA

[ESKATON GARDEN, KALABAGAN, DHANMONDI SEGUNBAGICHA, MONIPURIPARA, LALMATIA MIRPUR, MOHAMMADPUR, BARIDHARA GULSHAN, BANANI, UTTARA]

ONLY THE LAND OWNER(S) ARE REQUESTED TO CONTACT

01713-091720 01713-091721
01713-091718 01713-091719

Sheltech Tower : 55, Bir Uttam Gazi Nuruzzaman Road (West Panthapath), Dhaka-1205, Bangladesh
E-mail : sheltech@citechco.net Web site : www.sheltech-bd.com
Fax : 880-2-9143332 Tel : (02) 9143333-8 [6 Lines]

FOUNDER MEMBER
REHAB # 008/1992