

NEWS IN
briefTop US senator urges
weapons for Ukraine

AFGP, Washington

The head of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee called Sunday for supplying Ukraine with weapons to fight what he called a "direct invasion" of the country by Russia. "We should provide the Ukrainians with the type of defensive weapons that will impose a cost upon (Russian President Vladimir) Putin for further aggression," Robert Menendez told CNN's "State of the Union" talk show. His comments came as Putin raised the stakes in the months-long Ukraine conflict by calling for the first time for statehood to be discussed for the restive east of the former Soviet state.

Shiite rebels rally in
Sanaa after leader
defies UN

AFP, Sanaa

Tens of thousands of Shiite rebel activists demonstrated in the Yemeni capital yesterday heeding a call by their leader to press their campaign to oust the government in defiance of the UN. The show of strength by the Zaidi Shiite rebels caused traffic jams on several major roads in Sanaa, an AFP correspondent reported. In a speech late on Sunday, rebel leader Abdulmalik al-Huthi called on supporters who have been manning armed protest camps in the capital for the past week to continue their campaign to topple the national unity government, from which the rebels are excluded.

Japan confirms more
dengue infections

AFP, Tokyo

An outbreak of dengue fever in Japan -- the first since World War II -- could have affected up to 20 people, media reported yesterday, as officials confirmed three more cases. The new cases, who are in their teens or 20s, are all believed to have visited Tokyo's Yoyogi Park, one of the major green lungs of the metropolis, which is popular with residents and tourists alike. The park, one of the largest open spaces in central Tokyo, is believed to be the source of the mosquito-borne disease.

Paris building blast
death toll reaches 7

AP, Paris

The death toll in the partial collapse of a four-story apartment building has risen to seven in a north-eastern Paris suburb after emergency crews pulled the body of an elderly woman from the rubble. Fire department spokesman Gabriel Plus said the body was found yesterday morning in Rosny-sous-Bois. Officials said there was no longer danger in the neighbourhood after the explosion sheared part of the building Sunday.

INDIA COALGATE
Cancel all licenses,
go for auction: govt

NDTV ONLINE

The Indian government has asked the Supreme Court to decide quickly on what happens next to more than 200 licenses issued by different governments since 1993. Last week, the top court said those allocations were illegal but stopped short of cancelling them.

The government's top lawyer, Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi, proposed in court that about 46 of the 218 allocations declared illegal should not be taken back from the companies that operate them as they were either producing coal or were close to producing coal.

He also said that the government is open to re-auctioning the coal blocks if their allocations are revoked, a stand challenged by an association of coal producers which said that if the mining licenses are cancelled wholesale, firms will have to default on bank loans worth five lakh crores.

The government's awards of the blocks to steel, cement and power companies has been at the centre of the scandal dubbed "Coalgate" since 2012 when a Comptroller and Auditor General report in 2012 said the under-priced sales had cost the exchequer up to 1.86 lakh crores.

The licenses were issued without a transparent bidding process by government committees.

Analysts have warned a mass cancellation of the blocks would be a worst-case scenario and add to a shortage of coal for power plants. Coal is used to generate more than two-thirds of India's electricity.



Anti-government protesters run after police personnel and beat a riot policeman, while one of them returns a tear gas shell towards law enforcers in Islamabad yesterday. Inset, cricketer-turned politician Imran Khan looks on from the stage during protests near the prime minister's residence yesterday. His supporters trying to topple Pakistan government briefly seized the state broadcaster, intensifying the political crisis gripping the nuclear-armed nation.

PHOTO: REUTERS/APP



'Don't mess with
NATO's ex-Soviet
members'

Obama's message
to Putin

AFP, Washington

Setting the stage for a NATO summit dominated by the worst East-West tensions in decades, President Barack Obama will go to Estonia this week with a simple message for Vladimir Putin -- don't mess with NATO's ex-Soviet members.

With Europe and the United States accusing the Russian president of sending his troops to intervene directly in Ukraine, Obama's trip to Europe, his second of the year, comes at a dangerous moment.

Obama will make clear that NATO views its Article Five creed on common defense as inviolate, and his first visit as president to the Baltic states -- long seen as a potential flashpoint of any Western military clash with Russia -- is highly symbolic.

The only other sitting president to visit Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia, the trio of former Soviet republics, was President George W Bush, in 2006, when calm prevailed across former Cold War frontiers.

"There is a perception in Eastern Europe and in the Baltics that Putin poses not just a threat to Ukraine, but he does actually pose a long-term threat to NATO, because his long-term strategic goal in this view is to undermine the US alliance system in Europe, or to show that it's hollow," said

Thomas Wright, of the Brookings Institution.

"The best way of doing that is to show that Article Five is hollow; that it doesn't mean what it says it means," said Wright, referring to the NATO pledge that binds member nations to view an attack on one country as an attack on the entire membership.

UKRAINE CRISIS

Russian FM calls for
immediate ceasefire

Ukraine defence chief warns of 'great war'

AGENCIES

Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, has said negotiations taking place in Minsk to resolve the crisis in eastern Ukraine should seek an immediate ceasefire.

"They must leave positions from which they can harm the civilian population," Lavrov told students in Moscow yesterday. "Very much count on today's negotiations being devoted above all to the task of agreeing an immediate ceasefire, without conditions."

Meanwhile, Ukraine's defence minister warned yesterday that a "great war" had broken out with Russia over his country's future that could claim tens of thousands of lives.

"A great war has arrived at our doorstep -- the likes of which Europe has not seen since World War II. Unfortunately, the losses in such a war will be measured not in the hundreds but thousands and tens of thousands," Valeriy Geletey wrote in a Facebook post.

Russia again denied yesterday either sending or planning to send troops into eastern Ukraine to help separatist rebels pursue their recent counteroffensive against the pro-Western government's forces.

But insurgency leaders have admitted that some off-duty Russian soldiers had already joined their ranks.

NATO has also accused the Kremlin of advancing more than a 1,000 soldiers and heavy weapons across the Ukrainian border in recent days.

The Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, accused Moscow of "direct and open" aggression against his country, as forces battled a Russian tank battalion for a vital airport in Luhansk yesterday, and in Ilovaysk, near the east's main city of Donetsk, several hundred Ukrainian forces remained trapped within an encirclement by Russia-backed separatists.

The talks in the Belarusian capital will bring together representatives of Russia, Ukraine, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe security forum and separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin has called on Kiev to enter discussions on "statehood" for the south-east regions of Ukraine a day after the EU gave Russia a week to de-escalate the situation in Ukraine or face further sanctions.

regions of Ukraine a day after the EU gave Russia a week to de-escalate the situation in Ukraine or face further sanctions.

Merkel calls anti-euro party
success a 'protest vote'

AFP, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel dismissed yesterday an anti-euro party's success in a weekend state election as a "protest vote" but admitted her party must do more to address constituents' frustrations.

Speaking at her conservative Christian Democratic Union's headquarters about the poll in the eastern state of Saxony on Sunday, Merkel said voters gave the Alternative for Germany a nearly 10-percent result to send the mainstream parties a message.

"A big part of this result is a protest vote,"

Merkel told reporters.

"We, the CDU, need to address the issues (that concern voters) and solve these problems -- that is how these protests can be quelled."

Merkel said the issues were less the eurozone bailout packages that Germany has bankrolled -- the AfD's original rallying cry -- and more



asylum policy, crime on the Polish and Czech borders, and the Ukraine crisis and relations with Russia.

"All the areas where you don't have answers yet -- there's a risk that opposition parties gain in strength," she said.

Marking its first entry in a German state assembly, the AfD party, which backs the dissolution of the euro and flirts with populist positions, exceeded pollsters' predictions with 9.7 percent of the vote.

"My aim is for them to play a marginal role very quickly," she said of its calls to jettison the euro.

Despite the AfD's strong showing, Merkel's

CDU retained its 24-year grip on power in the state with 39.4 percent of the vote.

The CDU has said it would shun the AfD as a coalition partner, and will likely form a "grand coalition" with the Social Democrats like the one Merkel leads at the national level.

UN considers IS
'war crimes' visit

AFP, Geneva

The UN Human Rights Council yesterday debated whether to send an emergency mission to Iraq to investigate suspected "crimes against humanity" by the Islamic State, as Baghdad called the jihadists an "imminent threat" to the world.

"This terrorist organisation must be criminalised and its acts must be criminalised because they are equivalent to genocide and crimes against humanity," Iraqi Human Rights Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani told the council.

The special session was called at Baghdad's request, with support from the five permanent members of the UN Security Council -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the US -- among other countries.

"The reports we have received reveal acts of inhumanity on an unimaginable scale," deputy UN rights chief Flavia Pansieri told diplomats from the 47 member states as she opened the emergency session. She listed targeted killings, forced conversions, abductions, slavery, sexual violence and torture and the targeting of ethnic and religious communities.

The IS has grabbed large swaths of Iraq's Sunni heartland since June 9. It has also occupied parts of Syria and declared a "caliphate" in a region straddling the two countries.

At least 1,420 people were killed in the country last month alone, according to fresh UN numbers issued yesterday, while more than 1.6 million people have fled their homes since the beginning of the year -- 850,000 of them in August.

India extends
Taslima
Nasreen's visa
by one year

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Controversial writer Taslima Nasreen, living in exile since 1994, has been given a one-year visa by Indian government and allowed to stay in this country till August 2015.

Nasreen, 51, was last month given two months temporary visa after the Home Ministry decided to initiate a verification process of her visa application.

"The writer's visa has been extended for one year, till August 2015," a Home Ministry official said yesterday.

Naseen had met Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh on August 2 after India's decision to grant her 2-month visa. At that time, the Home Minister had assured her to consider her plea for a longer-term visa.

Nasreen had to leave Bangladesh in 1994 in the wake of death threat by fundamentalist outfits.

She, now a citizen of Sweden, has been getting Indian visas on a continuous basis since 2004.

She has lived in the US, Europe and India in the last two decades since her exile.

The writer had to leave Kolkata in 2007 following violent street protests by a section of Muslims against her works.

India, Japan will shape
21st century: Modi

AFP, Tokyo

Conservative soulmates Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe declared yesterday ties between India and Japan were moving to a "new level", during a summit pregnant with promise for a relationship they hope will offer a counterweight to China.

Modi's first foreign visit outside the Indian sub-continent has been a relaxed display of personal chemistry between the leaders of countries that bookend an ever-more assertive Beijing, and which both have prickly relations with their giant neighbour.

Despite falling short of launching a "two-plus-two" security framework of foreign and defence ministers, the two men hailed the transformative potential of the partnership between Asia's second and third largest economies.

"The world knows the 21st century is Asia's century," Modi told a joint press conference after the summit.

"But its shape and quality are not yet clear. This will be decided by how Japan and India work together," he said, adding: "I think our relationship is moving to a new level."

Modi also lauded a tie-up he said was "the one with the most potential in the world".



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (L) shakes hands with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during a signing ceremony at Akasaka State Guest House in Tokyo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

VOTING REFORMS
Beijing faces defiance
in Hong Kong

AP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong pro-democracy lawmakers disrupted a Beijing official's speech yesterday as he sought to explain a decision announced over the weekend to tightly limit voting reforms for the southern Chinese financial hub.

The legislators chanted slogans and held up placards accusing China's central government of breaking its promise to let Hong Kong directly elect its leader. Some stood on chairs and pumped their fists, waving signs that said "Shameful" and "Loss of faith."

The noisy demonstration at the start of the speech by Li Fei, a deputy secretary general of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's legislature, was a rare occasion on which a Beijing official faced open defiance.

Li continued his speech after security officers hustled the lawmakers out of the auditorium, to applause from other members of the audience, including lawmakers and local councilors from pro-establishment parties and business leaders.

Police used pepper spray on members of a radical activist group that attempted to storm metal barricades and enter the venue.

On Sunday, Beijing inflamed political tensions by ruling out open nominations of candidates running for Hong Kong's top job in inaugural elections in 2017. The widely expected announcement set the stage for escalating confrontations between China's central government and democracy supporters in Hong Kong.