

Greece fails to reach bailout deal with EU

AFP, Brussels

Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras confronts European leaders including German Chancellor Angela Merkel at his first EU summit yesterday, after his government failed to secure a deal on renegotiating its huge bailout.

Tsipras warned ahead of the Brussels summit that the EU was now at a "turning point" following the breakdown of talks on the Greek debt crisis between eurozone finance ministers Wednesday night.

Tsipras will try to persuade the other 27 European Union leaders to back an austerity-lite replacement plan for Greece's 240-billion-euro (\$270-billion) EU-IMF bailout, which expires at the end of February.

"We are at a crucial turning point for Europe," Tsipras said after meeting Belgian premier Charles Michel. "We have to prove that Europe can find a solution, respect the positions that the parties take, and combine respect for democracy with European rules."

Tsipras's hard-left Syriza party came to power in January on the back of huge popular discontent with years of austerity.

German leader Angela Merkel and Tsipras will sit around the same table for the first time as part of the summit of 28 European Union leaders, but there was no immediate prospect of a face-to-face encounter.

An European source said the atmosphere at the summit would be "heavy, very heavy for Tsipras."



Reporter Bob Simon killed in car crash

AFP, Washington

Bob Simon, an award-winning war reporter and longtime correspondent for the "60 Minutes" news show, died in a car accident Wednesday. He was 73.

CBS News, which produces "60 Minutes," did not immediately provide additional details on the crash but paid tribute to Simon and his five-decade-long career.

Based in Saigon from 1971-72, Simon covered the Vietnam War including the end of the conflict. He was on one of the last helicopters out of Saigon in 1975, CBS said.

Simon won many awards for his work -- including 27 Emmys -- and covered a slew of stories including the violence in Northern Ireland from 1969-71, as well as from war zones across the globe including Cyprus, the Falkland Islands, the Gulf War and former Yugoslavia.

According to the New York Post, Simon died when the car he was in crashed into another vehicle.



PHOTO: AFP

Dentistry students and others watch as a makeshift memorial is made during a vigil at the University of North Carolina following the murders of three Muslim students on Wednesday in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Police probing the murder of the three by a North Carolina man said they were studying whether the slayings were racially motivated, as thousands gathered to mourn the killings and denounce intolerance.

US special forces to target ISIS leaders

Says Obama as he seeks war powers from Congress; UNSC seeks to choke off jihadists fund

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama said he would not flinch from sending US special forces to kill Islamic State leaders, as he called for Congress to authorize military operations that stop short of a full-scale invasion.

Tantamount to a declaration of war, Obama on Wednesday asked lawmakers for formal authority to take the fight to the Islamic State group, beyond their current footholds in Syria and Iraq if necessary.

"Our coalition is on the offensive," Obama said, adding Islamic State is "on the defensive" and is "going to lose."

Since August 2014, the US military -- along with allies -- has been conducting a campaign of air strikes against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

Obama has promised to back up the strikes with targeted covert ground-based attacks if necessary.

"If we had actionable intelli-



gence about a gathering of ISIL (Islamic State) leaders, and our partners didn't have the capacity to get them, I would be prepared to order our special forces to take action," Obama said.

"I will not allow these terrorists to have a safe haven."

The request signals a ramping up of pressure on Islamic State as the

Iraqi government prepares for a major ground offensive, expected within months.

Obama, however, placed limits on his power to deploy the military in both form and scope.

The proposed legislation does not authorize "enduring offensive ground combat operations," according to a draft sent to Congress.

The authorization would also "terminate three years after the date of the enactment of this joint resolution, unless reauthorized."

Obama will also have to report to Congress every six months.

With bitter arguments over previous wars still seared in US political memory, Obama was quick to make clear this would not be a sequel to Iraq or Afghanistan.

Obama said he had no intention to see the United States getting "dragged back into another prolonged ground war in the Middle East."

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council was to adopt a resolution yesterday aimed at choking off millions of dollars in earnings from oil sales, antiquities trafficking and ransom payments to the terrorist group.

The resolution calls for sanctions against individuals and entities that trade in oil with ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates such as the

Egypt frees Jazeera journos on bail

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday ordered the release of two jailed Al-Jazeera journalists pending retrial, after they spent more than 400 days in prison in a case that sparked worldwide outrage.

Mohamed Fahmy, who is Canadian and whose family hoped he would be deported, must pay 250,000 Egyptian pounds (\$33,000) bail.

His colleague, Egyptian Baher Mohamed, was freed without having to pay bail.

The two must appear in court again on February 23.

Fahmy and Mohamed entered the packed courtroom in white prison uniforms, after Australian colleague Peter Greste was deported home earlier this month.

The three were accused of supporting the blacklisted Muslim Brotherhood and originally jailed for between seven and 10 years each.

The case has been a major source of embarrassment for President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as he seeks to shore up international support following a widely condemned crackdown on the opposition.

Fahmy had renounced his Egyptian citizenship to benefit from a law that allows the deportation of foreign defendants and which led to Greste's release.

The three employees of Qatar-based Al-Jazeera English were arrested in December 2013 and charged with spreading false news about Egypt and supporting the Muslim Brotherhood.

Their arrests and continued detentions sparked widespread condemnation and calls for their release led by Washington and the United Nations.

The journalists' initial trial came against the backdrop of strained ties between Egypt and Qatar, which supported ousted president Mohamed Morsi.



'NUT RAGE' CASE

Korean Air heiress jailed

AFP, Seoul

The daughter of Korean Air's chairman was jailed for one year yesterday over a notorious "nut rage" incident that triggered an uproar over the behaviour of South Korea's business dynasties.

The district court in Seoul convicted Cho Hyun-Ah of violating aviation safety law by forcing a taxiing New York-Seoul KAL flight to return to its departure gate on December 5.

Cho, who was the airline's executive vice president at the time, had insisted on expelling the chief purser from the plane after taking exception to being served macadamia nuts in a bag, rather than a bowl.

The 40-year-old had treated the flight "as if it was her own private plane", Justice Oh Sung-Woo said, adding that the case had become the object of international ridicule and "damaged the dignity" of the country.

Cho, clad in a pale green jail suit and with her head bowed so that her hair partially obscured her face, occasionally reached up to wipe away tears as the judge read his ruling.

She was also convicted of assault on the cabin crew.

The chief steward, Park Chang-Jin, had testified that Cho had made him kneel and beg for forgiveness while jabbing him with a service manual.

Yingluck 'can't eat noodles' without our say: Thai PM

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's junta chief yesterday said the military is keeping such a close eye on ousted Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra that she would be unable to eat a bowl of noodles without their permission.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha, a former army general, was justifying the decision to have soldiers search a convoy taking Yingluck to a ceremony for her ancestors in her northern hometown of Chiangmai earlier in the week.

The following day she was pictured eating noodles in the town, a political stronghold of her wealthy but wildly divisive family.

"If she wants to go to eat noodles then she can go but if we prohibit her then she cannot go," Prayut told reporters Thursday, indicating the military would continue to monitor her movements.

He said the military's decision to halt Yingluck's convoy was part of providing security for the former premier at a turbulent time.

Prayut has built a reputation for his off-

the-cuff remarks and eccentric metaphors since seizing power in a coup last May.

Authorities last week said Thailand's first female premier -- and sister of billionaire former premier Thaksin Shinawatra -- is banned from travelling abroad as she faces criminal corruption charges over her administration's controversial rice subsidy scheme.

She was retroactively impeached last month by the country's military-appointed parliament over the populist programme, which funnelled cash to her rural base but cost billions of dollars.

The impeachment brought an automatic five year ban from politics. Prosecutors also said she would face separate criminal corruption charges over the scheme, a move that could see her jailed for up to ten years.

Experts say the impeachment and criminal charges are the latest attempt by the country's royalist elite, and its army backers, to nullify the political influence of the Shinawatras, whose parties have won every election since 2001.



UN warns of further conflict in Gaza

AFP, Ramallah

A top UN official yesterday warned of another potential conflict in the Gaza Strip, urging Israel to lift its blockade and the Palestinians to end in-fighting to avoid further violence.

The United Nations also called for an additional \$705 (622 million euros) million in humanitarian aid to the Palestinian territories, most of it for Gaza which saw its bloodiest and most destructive war last year.

"Right now, things are not going well, and we're very concerned about the possibility of a further conflict," James Rawley, UN humanitarian chief for the Palestinian territories, told AFP.

"But it's not inevitable... as long as several things happen. "To have a complete recovery of Gaza, even to go back to where we were in July (before the 50-day conflict) requires more than construction material going in. It requires a lifting of the blockade," said Rawley.

"In parallel, we have to see a commitment from the militant groups in Gaza to stop firing rockets at civilians in Israel... and Palestinian reconciliation moving forward" to reassure donors that building materials were not falling into the hands of militants, he added.

Rawley called for a "reconstruction hudna (truce) for three to five years" to allow rehabilitation of the increasingly unstable coastal enclave.

Meanwhile the UN, at a news conference in Ramallah, said 75 percent of the additional aid it needs would be destined for Gaza, and the remainder for the West Bank.

The July-August war between Israel and Gaza rulers Hamas killed almost 2,200 Palestinians and 73 on the Israeli side, and left 100,000 Gazans homeless.

Delivery of building materials to reconstruct damaged homes had increased significantly after a slow start, Rawley said, with "good cooperation" from Israel, which controls two of Gaza's three crossings. Egypt controls the third.

He also stressed the importance of implementing a months-old unity deal between West Bank-based Fatah, which dominates the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas, which has seen disputes over who controls Gaza's internal checkpoints.

QUOTE of the day



I'm not the chief minister, you are all Delhi's chief minister

-- Aam Admi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal invited all of Delhi to attend his swearing in as the chief minister in

DUA MAHFIL



Mr. Mohammad Abdul Mannan passed away on January 31st, 2015 in his residence in Gulshan, Dhaka. He was born on 12th June, 1938 in Maizbari, Mymensingh.

Mr. Mannan was a noted businessman and philanthropist. Among his legacies were several business enterprises he had founded and operated. He was a founding member of the Gulshan Central Mosque and Gulshan Club. He was also a founder and prime benefactor of the Abdul Khaleque High School and Maizbari Vocational College, Mymensingh. A dua mahfil was held in his home town Maizbari, Mymensingh on 9th Feb at the school premise.

Mr. Mannan is survived by his wife, son, three daughters, sons-in-law, seven grandchildren, and a host of relatives, friends and well-wishers.

A dua mahfil will be held at his residence on Road 101, House 18, Gulshan, Dhaka on 13th February, Friday at 4:00 pm. Friends, family and well-wishers are kindly requested to attend.

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