

Moscow, Washington Discuss Possible Kerry Visit to Russia: Sources



MOSCOW (Reuters) - Moscow and Washington are discussing a possible visit to Russia by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to discuss the Ukraine crisis, diplomatic sources say. It would be Kerry's first visit to Russia since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, during which ties between Washington and Moscow have plunged to their worst level since the Cold War. "Talks (on arranging a Kerry visit)

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry have been going on for weeks," one diplomatic source told Reuters, adding that the visit could take place "in the coming days or weeks." Russian newspaper Kommersant quoted unnamed sources on Friday as saying Kerry would visit Moscow for talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Feb. 4-5. The United States and the European Union have imposed sanctions in Russia over its annexation of the Crimea

peninsula from Ukraine and its support for separatists fighting government forces in eastern Ukraine. The EU decided to extend its current sanctions on Thursday. Washington accuses Russia of sending troops and weapons to eastern Ukraine, a charge which Moscow denies. Russia says the West was behind the overthrow of a Ukrainian president backed by Moscow, an accusation denied by Washington and Brussels.

Ukraine Peace Talks Aborted as Civilians Die in Donetsk

KIEV (Reuters) - Civilians were killed on both sides in heavy fighting in eastern Ukraine on Friday, while an attempt to reopen peace talks in neighboring Belarus was aborted before it began.

Two rebel delegates flew to the Belarus capital Minsk, only to announce that talks would not take place on Friday and they were flying back to Moscow. Any talks would be the first since a five-month-old ceasefire collapsed with a new rebel advance last week.

The rebel advance stronghold Donetsk echoed to the sound of heavy artillery fire, including salvos from multiple rocket launchers and heavier thuds from artillery coming from the direction of the airport, a constant battlefield.

A Reuters spokesman in Donetsk saw four covered bodies near a cultural center hit by artillery, and a fifth dead person in a badly-damaged car nearby. A woman was weeping by one of the bodies.



Vladislav Deinego, representative of the self-proclaimed Luhansk republic, speaks to the media before leaving Belarus at Minsk's International airport January 30, 2015.

Humanitarian aid was being distributed at the center when the shell struck. A kilometer (half mile) away, a sixth dead person lay where a trolleybus had been hit. The separatists said the total death toll in those two strikes was seven. Kiev said Friday's shelling of Donetsk was carried out by the rebels

themselves to ruin the chance of peace talks. Both sides have made similar allegations throughout the conflict, which are impossible to verify. "We are already used to this artillery and there's nothing we can do about it. Our boys are defending us," said Alla, a shopkeeper in downtown Donetsk.

Japan, Jordan Seek News on Fate of ISIL Captives

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan and Jordan scrambled on Friday to find out what had happened to two of their nationals being held by Islamic State, after a deadline passed for the release of a would-be suicide bomber being held on death row in Amman. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said every effort was being made to secure the release of journalist Kenji Goto.

"We are gathering and analyzing information while asking for cooperation from Jordan and other countries, making every effort to free Kenji Goto," he told a parliamentary panel. Jordan's army said state agencies were "working round the clock". Jordan said on Thursday it was still holding the Iraqi woman prisoner as a deadline passed for her re-

lease set by Islamic State militants, who threatened to kill a Jordanian pilot unless she was handed over by sunset. An audio message purportedly from Goto said the pilot would be killed if Jordan did not free Sajida al-Rishawi, in jail for her role in a 2005 suicide bomb attack that killed 60 people in the Jordanian capital Amman.

UN Court Confirms Life Term for Srebrenica Massacre Convicts



A Bosnian Muslim woman, survivor of the 1992 massacre in the Bosnian town of Prijedor, cries by the caskets of her relatives in the village of Kozarac, July 19, 2014.

NEW YORK (PRESS TV) - A UN court has confirmed life sentences for two people convicted of involvement in the massacre of Srebrenica Muslims during the Balkans War.

The Appeal Chamber "affirms the life sentence" against former Bosnian Serb Vujadin Popovic, 57, and Ljubisa Beara, 75, Judge Patrick Robinson said during a hearing at the UN's Yugoslav war crimes court on Friday.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, set up to deal with war crimes in the Balkans, sentenced the two to life imprisonment on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2010.

During the Friday's hearing session, the Hague-based tribunal also found three other high-ranking officials in the Bosnian Serb Army in 1995 guilty for their role in the Srebrenica massacre, Europe's worst such incident since World War II.

The ruling confirmed prison terms of 35 and 13 years for Drago Nikolic, and Vinko Pandurevic, respectively.

The prison sentence for the fifth senior official in the Bosnian Serb Army in 1995, Radivoje Miletic, was shortened from 19 to 18 years.

They had pleaded not guilty to all charges.

The eastern city of Srebrenica, located in the east of Bosnia and Her-

zegovina, was a UN-protected area that was besieged by Serb forces throughout the 1992-95 war for Serb domination in Bosnia.

However, the UN troops offered no resistance when the Serbs overran the majority Muslim city on July 11, 1995, rounding up Srebrenica's Muslims and killing over 8,000 men and boys. An international court later labeled the killings as genocide.

Bosnians marked the 19th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre by burying the remains of 175 newly-identified victims of the 1995 genocide on July 11, 2014.

According to Press TV, families of the victims bid their last farewell, laid flowers and prayed for those who were killed in the summer of 1995 in the city.

The remains, found in mass graves and identified through DNA analysis, were buried in Srebrenica during the event, bringing the total of identified victims to 6,241. A 14-year-old boy was the youngest identified victim of the Srebrenica massacre.

"We came here to honor the victims, we cannot forget what happened. 8,372 people were killed here just because they were Muslims. We are here to send a message to Europe and to tell them that they should be ashamed that they allowed this to happen," a participant in the anniversary told Press TV.

UN Says 200,000 Somali Children Face Starvation

NEW YORK (PRESS TV) - Over 200,000 children are suffering from hunger with more than 38,000 children at "high risk" of dying due to severe malnutrition in Somalia, where a great proportion of the population is still experiencing grave food insecurity after over two decades of war.

More than 731,000 people, including 203,000 children, continue to suffer from hunger and are acutely food insecure, according to a joint report released by the UN Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) and the US-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) on Thursday.

"Many children remain acutely malnourished, despite a small decrease in their numbers over the past six months," the statement read.

"An estimated 202,600 children under the age of five are acutely malnourished, including 38,200 who are severely malnourished and face a high risk of morbidity and death," it added.

Philippe Lazzarini, the UN deputy special representative, resident

and humanitarian coordinator in Somalia, said, "Malnutrition rates remain stubbornly high," adding, "The outlook for 2015 is worrisome."

UN Special Representative for Somalia Nicholas Kay argued that the international community has lost its focus on the country.

He said it is "important that we sustain the attention" on Somalia, adding, "It is a concern, especially regarding the humanitarian funding."

Kay noted that the UN received last year half the necessary aid it needed.

Somalia was the hardest hit by a severe drought in 2011 that affected more than 13 million people across the Horn of Africa. More than 250,000 Somalis died in a famine which was caused by the drought.

The African country has been the scene of clashes between government forces and al-Shabab fighters since 2006.

Somalia did not have an effective central government from 1991 to 2012, when lawmakers elected Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as the new president.



CAIRO (PRESS TV) - At least two children have been killed in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, a day after at least 44 people were killed and dozens of others injured in a series of militant attacks across the volatile region.

Medical authorities, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a six-month-old baby was hit in the head by a bullet and a six-year-old was killed in a rocket blast in the peninsula on Friday as Egyptian army troops clashed with militants in the area.

Two more people, including a 12-year-old boy, sustained grave gunshot wounds.

The latest fatalities come as a massive car bomb on Thursday detonated outside the headquarters of the 101st Brigade of the Egyptian army in the city of el-Arish, situated 344 kilometers (214 miles) northeast of the capital, Cairo, leaving scores of people killed and wounded.

Two Egyptian army officers were also injured when an army convoy was targeted with mortar shells in the border city of Rafah.

Over an hour later, there were reports of another ambush on an army convoy just south of Rafah. Gunmen also reportedly attacked a checkpoint in the city.

Earlier on Thursday, fierce clashes broke out between militants and Egyptian army soldiers in the town of Sheikh Zuweid. The violence lasted for over an hour, and completely destroyed an armored vehicle belonging to the Egyptian military.

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria (AP) - Chad sent a warplane dropping bombs and ground troops to drive Islamic extremists from a Nigerian border town, leaving it strewn with the bodies of the Islamic extremists, witnesses said Friday.

Thursday's bombing marked the first such action by foreign troops on Nigerian soil to fight the militants of Boko Haram.

To further help Nigeria battle its extremists, the African Union moved to send ground forces and the U.S. said it would assist.

Also Thursday, Boko Haram fighters broke a second attack in a week on Maiduguri, the biggest city in Nigeria's northeast. Soldiers fled when the insurgents began launching rockets just outside the city of 2 million but the militants were fought off by the civilian self-defense group armed with homemade hunting rifles, according to its spokesman, Muhammad Gava.

The African Union chairwoman, at an AU summit in Ethiopia, called for deployment of 7,500 West African troops to fight the spreading Islamic uprising by Nigeria's home-grown extremists. A senior U.S. official told reporters that the United States government will take a role in the fight against Boko Haram.

NEW YORK (PRESS TV) - United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called on African leaders to stop "clinging to power" during an annual summit in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

The UN chief voiced concern over attempts by some African leaders to remain in power during a speech at the two-day summit of the African Union (AU) on Friday.

"People around the world have expressed their concern about leaders who refuse to leave office when their terms end. I share those concerns. Undemocratic constitutional changes and legal loopholes should never be used to cling to power," Ban said.

Ban further called on African leaders to listen to the demands of the people they are representing, saying, "I urge all leaders, in Africa and around the world, to listen to your people. Modern leaders cannot afford to ignore the wishes and aspirations of those they represent."

His remarks come as leaders of countries such as Benin, Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville, and Rwanda are all thought to be considering changes to allow their leaders to stay in power for a third term. African nations including Algeria, Angola, and Chad have already brought about such changes.