



**FREETOWN (Press TV) –** Sierra Leone's vice president has applied for asylum at the US embassy in the capital city of Freetown and is waiting for a decision on his case, a source says.

Vice President Samuel Sam-Sumana requested asylum from the US ambassador on Saturday after soldiers disarmed his security team during an encounter at his residence in Freetown.

Witnesses said heavily armed soldiers rushed into Sumana's residence but he was nowhere to be found. The soldiers, however, left with stacks of documents.

Sam-Sumana "is now in hiding at a secure location awaiting a reply to a request he has made by telephone to the American embassy for asylum for himself and his wife," a source close to him said.

Meanwhile, Sierra Leone's ruling All People's Congress (APC) party has denied reports that the vice president's life is in danger.

The APC confirmed it "has been informed by the American embassy in Freetown that Vice President Samuel Sam-Sumana has requested to seek asylum... alleging that his life is under threat and that his residence has been looted."

On March 6, the APC party expelled the 52-year-old Sam-Sumana from what it described as "his anti-party activities, including fomenting violence."

He is accused of instigating "frequent unrest" in his eastern home district of Kono, while plotting to set up a break-away political party.

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**SYDNEY (Reuters) -** The first aid teams to reach Vanuatu reported widespread devastation on Sunday as authorities declared a state of emergency after a "monster" cyclone tore through the Pacific island nation.

With winds of more than 300 kph (185 mph), Cyclone Pam razed homes, smashed boats and washed away roads and bridges as it struck late on Friday and into Saturday. Aid workers described the situation as catastrophic.

The count of confirmed deaths was at eight with 30 people injured. But those numbers were almost certain to rise as rescuers reached the low-lying archipelago's outlying islands.

Aid workers were particularly worried about the southern island of Tanna. An official with the Australian Red Cross told Reuters an aircraft had managed to land there and aid workers confirmed there was "widespread destruction".

"Virtually every building that is not concrete has been flattened," said the official, adding two deaths had been confirmed on the island which has a population of about 29,000 and is about 200 km (125 miles) south of the capital, Port Vila.

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**CAIRO (Press TV) –** Egyptian security officials say a bomb explosion in the capital, Cairo, has claimed the life of at least one person.

According to the officials, an improvised explosive device (IED) went off Saturday evening in the working class district of el-Matariya. The victim died after arriving at hospital.

The attack took place amid heightened security during a three-day conference on investment in the North African country which started on March 13. The gathering at the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, located some 400 kilometers southeast of the capital, has attracted world leaders and businessmen.

Prior to the conference, analysts had warned of militant attempts to sabotage the investment summit, which comes after four years of economic stagnation in the country following the ouster of long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

The el-Matariya district came under numerous bombing attacks targeting mobile phone shops, last week.

Over the past few months, el-Matariya has also been the scene of clashes between security forces and protesters, mostly supporters or members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Some militants have recently launched a campaign of attacks against local and foreign business interests, including banks, mobile phone service providers and fast food restaurants.

# Ukraine's Poroshenko Submits Donbass Special Status Bill



Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko

**KIEV (PRESS TV) –** Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko has submitted a draft resolution to parliament that would grant special status to outlined parts in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Lugansk.

The draft law was registered into the database of the parliament on Saturday.

The specified area that would receive special status had been outlined by Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council two days earlier.

Mykhaylo Koval, the Council's deputy secretary, said the special status law would only apply to regions seized by pro-Russia forces on September 19, 2014 and any areas captured afterward would not be included.

The Ukrainian lawmakers are expected to vote on the draft on March 17 or 18.

The parliamentary vote will come

after the March 14 deadline set under the Minsk ceasefire agreement, according to which the Ukrainian parliament should have adopted the draft indicating the specified self-governed areas.

Previous failure to approve the bill prompted the head of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic to urge the guarantors of the Minsk deal, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande, to exert pressure on Kiev to abide by the agreement.

East Ukraine ceasefire deal

The two warring sides, Kiev and pro-Russia forces in the eastern regions of Ukraine, reached a ceasefire last month following peace talks in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, on February 11-12 between the leaders of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine.

Back in September 2014, the rep-

resentatives of Ukraine, Russia, and the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk signed another ceasefire deal in Minsk. However, the truce was violated on an almost daily basis by both the Ukrainian military and the pro-Russia forces and thus failed to deliver any practical result.

Source of conflict

Donetsk and Lugansk are two mainly Russian-speaking regions in eastern Ukraine, which have been hit by deadly clashes between pro-Russia forces and the Ukrainian army since Kiev launched military operations in April last year to crush pro-Russia protests there.

In May 2014, the situation in the two flashpoint regions started to worsen as the residents overwhelmingly voted for independence from Ukraine in referendums.

# Ferguson Activists Press Ahead, Undeterred by Latest Shooting

**WASHINGTON (Reuters) -** As the hunt for suspects in the shooting of two police officers in Ferguson, Missouri, extended into a third day, activists took the first steps on Saturday to force the mayor out of office while residents awaited signs of progress in the investigation.

A group called Organization for Black Struggle (OBS) said it is starting a petition to recall Mayor James Knowles. He is one of the few senior city officials remaining after the police chief, a municipal judge and others resigned following a U.S. Department of Justice report March 4 depicting a Ferguson police force mired in racial bias.

An uneasy quiet prevailed in the St. Louis suburb, in contrast with the mayhem that erupted near midnight on Thursday when gunshots rang out during a protest rally, wounding a pair of officers.

Police arrested two people on Saturday night in neighboring St. Louis when about 70 protesters tried to block a street, a Reuters witness said. They were later released.

The shooting on Thursday sent a fresh jolt of tension through a city that has become a symbol of racial conflict since a black teenager was killed by a white police officer last August and a grand jury returned no criminal charges.

"There has been a lot of outrage here over the past seven months," Montague Simmons, executive director of OBS, explaining why activists were determined to press ahead with their demands. "We feel this could be a moment of transfor-

mation where people go from being outraged to being involved."

Knowles, a Republican who was 31 when he was first elected in 2011 in a non-partisan election, said on Friday that it would be up to voters to remove him from the part-time job.

Residents will have 60 days to gather signatures from 15 percent of registered voters in the last mayoral election to prompt a special election, OBS said in the statement.

Steve Moore, owner of the Celebrity Soul Food Restaurant, said that when he moved to his current location, Knowles was one of his first customers, asking if there was anything the city could do to help.

"He's continuing to make changes and if people get behind him and hold him accountable he's a good leader for the city," said Moore. He added that he had lost about 80 percent of his business since the unrest began in August.

Some Ferguson residents said they were growing weary, especially after the latest spasm of violence, despite sympathy for protesters who have been out in force since the killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown.

"It's been emotional here. We all want justice for Mike Brown, but we also have to heal," said Jerome Parker, 26, who lives in the area and works in a store. "I support the protests, but I need to make a living."

Parker also worries about the impact the shooting of the officers will have on the push for reforms in Ferguson.

# China Has Plenty of Room to Maneuver Policy: Premier



Reporters raise hands during China's Premier Li Keqiang's annual news conference at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing March 15, 2015.

**BEIJING (Reuters) -** China has a lot of room to maneuver its policy and boost its economy having avoided using strong, short-term stimulus in recent years, Premier Li Keqiang said on Sunday, in a rare suggestion that authorities can do much more to stoke growth.

Li, addressing a news conference at the end of China's annual session of parliament, tried to allay fears about a stumbling economy by vowing to keep it growing at a reasonable speed, even as he acknowledged the job is not easy.

He assured his audience that policymakers would prop up the economy if growth was at risk of breaching a "lower limit", or hurt employment and income gains.

"In recent years, we have not taken any strong, short-term stimulus policies, so we can say our room for policy maneuver is relatively

big, the tools in our toolbox comparatively many," Li said.

"If the slowdown in growth affects employment and incomes, and approaches the lower-limit of a reasonable range, we will stabilize policies and the market's long-term expectations for China," he said at a two-hour briefing.

"And at the same time, (we will) increase the intensity of targeted (policy) control," he said.

Turning to his government's plans to deliver economic growth of around 7 percent this year, Li said: "It looks like economic growth has been adjusted lower, but in reality achieving this target will not be easy."

A 7 percent growth target is China's lowest in 11 years, and would mark the slowest expansion in a quarter of a century if it came to pass.

# Cluster Bombs Recently Used in Libya: HRW



The photo shows the tail unit of an RBK cluster bomb recently found outside the city of Sirte, Libya.

**TRIPOLI (PRESS TV) –** Human Rights Watch (HRW) says there is "credible" evidence that banned cluster bombs have been used during the conflict in Libya over the past four months, as the security situation further deteriorates in the conflict-ridden North African country.

"There is credible evidence of the use of banned cluster bombs in at least two locations in Libya since December 2014," the New York-based international non-governmental organization said in a

were from a recent attack," the organization said.

"It is not possible to determine responsibility on the basis of available evidence," HRW said, however.

It also called on Libyan authorities to join the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, which prohibits the use of cluster munitions in any circumstances.

"The use of cluster munitions in populated areas, such as Sirte, violates the laws of war due to the indiscriminate nature of the weapon," the arms director at Human Rights Watch and chair of the Cluster Munitions Coalition, Steve Goose, said.

"The new evidence of cluster munitions use in Libya is highly disturbing," he said, adding, "Most nations have banned these weapons due to their inherently indiscriminate nature and the unacceptable harm they pose to civilians."

"The internationally recognized government in Libya and parties to the conflict should urgently secure and destroy any stocks of cluster munitions," Goose said.

statement released on Sunday.

It said the remnants of RBK-250 PTAB 2.5M cluster bombs were found in the town of Bin Jawad, located 650 kilometers (400 miles) east of the capital, Tripoli, in February and in the city of Sirte, situated 450 kilometers (280 miles) east of Tripoli, in March.

"The good condition of the paint on the bomb casings and lack of extensive weathering indicated that the remnants had not been exposed to the environment for long and