

## STATE OF EMERGENCY IN CRIMEA AFTER POWER LINES BLOWN UP

**SEVASTOPOL:** Crimea declared a state of emergency yesterday after its main electricity lines from Ukraine were blown up, leaving the Russian-annexed peninsula in darkness after the second such attack in as many days. More than 1.6 million people are without power, water supplies to high-rise buildings have stopped and cable and mobile Internet is down.

The electricity feed from Ukraine was cut at 00:25 am (22:25 GMT), the Crimean branch of Russia's emergency situations ministry said in a statement. Crimea still depends on Ukraine for its electricity even after its annexation by Russia in March last year, a move which paved the way for the uprising in eastern Ukraine that has now killed more than 8,000 people.

The Black Sea peninsula produces only 30 percent of its own energy needs, according to the regional government. "As of 1 pm (10:00 GMT), 1,641,000 people have been left without electricity," and 150 schools have no power, Russia's energy ministry said.

So far, Crimea has enough fuel to keep the gas and diesel-powered generators it has running for 29 days, the Russian authorities said.

An explosion on Saturday in Ukraine's Kherson region bordering Crimea cut the two

working power lines to the peninsula, the state energy company Ukrenergo told Interfax-Ukraine news agency. Two of the total four power lines had already been downed Friday in separate blasts.

In the port city of Sevastopol, electricity was cut off completely at 2:00 am, although different districts have since had brief rolling periods of power, an AFP journalist reported.

"I had no electricity all night. These useless officials can't run the city and they still haven't built a local power station," said 49-year-old resident Konstantin. "It's not the first time Ukraine has cut off electricity to Crimea, we are already used to power cuts and stock up on batteries," added Oleg, 56.

"The problem is the fridge keeps going off."

**'Act of terrorism'**

After the first attack on Friday, Ukrenergo posted pictures of a downed pylon and one with a hole blown through it. "The nature of the damage shows that it took place as a result of shelling or the use of explosive devices," it said.

The head of the anti-narcotics department of Ukraine's interior ministry, Ilya Kiva, who was at the scene, wrote on Facebook: "The pylons have just been blown up!!!"

The identity of the attackers is not known. "The investigation is ongoing. So far there are no hypotheses, the investigators are working," Ukrainian interior ministry spokeswoman Nataliya Stativko told AFP.

Crimea's leader Sergei Aksyonov suggested Ukraine was involved in the blasts and said Crimea's prosecutors have opened their own criminal probe. "I think Ukraine isn't looking for (the attackers). Its agencies may have done this themselves. I consider this action was agreed upon," Aksyonov told Moscow's Govorit Moskva radio.

Russian senator Franz Klintsevich called the attacks "an act of terrorism." "Blowing up the power lines... close to the Crimean border has practically cut off the whole peninsula. That's a real act of terrorism," he told RIA Novosti news agency. Crimean Tatars, an ethnic group native to the peninsula who oppose Russian rule, have been holding protests at the site of the broken power lines since Saturday, calling for a blockade of Crimea to protest at the jailing of dozens of activists.

"We want to end the occupation of Crimea," said Refat Chubarov, one of the leaders of the community. He declined to comment on whether activists could have been involved in the explosions, saying: "I wasn't



**SIMFEROPOL:** A man sells candles on a street after a power failure, in Simferopol, Crimea yesterday. Russia's Energy Ministry says nearly 2 million people on the Crimean Peninsula are without electricity after two transmission towers in Ukraine were damaged by explosions. — AP

there." Crimea experienced several total power cuts last winter, attributed by the authorities to repairs and technical problems, but seen by residents as deliberate pressure from

Ukraine. Russia plans to build two gas-powered power stations in Crimea which would burn gas piped from the mainland, but these are still at the planning stage. — AFP



**BERLIN:** German Chancellor Angela Merkel, German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrueck, and Otmar Issing, of the German Government's task force for finance architecture, from right, brief the media after a meeting at the chancellery in Berlin. — AP file photo

GERMAN GOVT CLASH ESCALATES AS MERKEL MARKS DECADE IN POWER  
CDU AND CSU EXCHANGE BARBS AFTER MUNICH CONGRESS

**BERLIN:** The parties in Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition government exchanged insults at the weekend in an escalating clash over refugee policy that has left the German leader looking more vulnerable than at any time during her decade in power.

Divisions between her conservatives and the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) over benefits for refugees prompted coalition leaders to cancel a special cabinet meeting planned for today where they had hoped to agree measures to speed up the processing of asylum seekers.

But the biggest fight was within Merkel's own conservative ranks as members of her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) lined up to condemn their Bavarian sister party for humiliating the chancellor at a congress in Munich on Friday evening. With Merkel standing next to him, Horst Seehofer, the leader of the Bavarian Christian Union (CSU), openly criticised her for refusing to put a formal cap on the number of refugees entering Germany. He was cheered loudly by members of his party as Merkel stood fidgeting uncomfortably on the stage.

Elmar Brok, a senior member of Merkel's CDU, denounced Seehofer's behavior as "impolite, unseemly and unacceptable" in an interview with the Tagesspiegel newspaper. Other CDU members said

the CSU leader had broken a taboo in how the two parties behave with each other.

Seehofer refused to back down, telling German television station n-tv that he could not in good conscience tell a "fairly tale of harmony and consensus" when major differences remained.

The barbs flew as Merkel marked her 10-year anniversary in office yesterday. Her popularity ratings have plunged from a gaudy 75 percent in April to below 50 percent and support for her CDU/CSU bloc has dipped five points to 37 percent, still more than ten points ahead of the next strongest party, the SPD.

**LOOMING ELECTIONS**

To prevent further damage, her advisers say she must find a way to curb the number of migrants entering Germany, ideally by the spring when three state elections will be held in a major test before the next federal vote in 2017. A party congress of her CDU in early December will be an important gauge of how strong support within her own party is.

"There are real Merkel loyalists in the CDU and those that are more tactical," an official close to the chancellor told Reuters on condition of anonymity. "The CDU is not a party that pushes out its leaders. But you will see a shift if people get the sense that Merkel

is a burden for them rather than a bonus." Roughly 7,000 migrants have been entering Germany each day in recent weeks, according to police, with the vast majority flowing into Bavaria over the Austrian border. Roughly a million are expected to arrive this year alone.

Merkel has rebuffed calls from the CSU and members of her own party to impose a ceiling on the number of refugees Germany will accept, saying this would be impossible to enforce. To reduce the numbers, she is hoping Turkey will agree to keep more refugees in exchange for financial support from the European Union. She is also pressing for so-called "hotspots" to be set up at Europe's external borders, and for faster processing of migrants at home, so that those who are not granted asylum can be expelled more rapidly.

But SPD resistance to her domestic plans and opposition in Europe, particularly eastern countries, to accepting refugee quotas are sowing doubts about whether her strategy can succeed.

"Up until a few months ago, most Germans saw Merkel as a rational, reliable and risk-averse defender of a very comfortable German status quo," the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung said in a weekend editorial. "Nowadays, even in her own party, one hears the refrain: we don't recognize her anymore." — Reuters

## EU OFFICIALS SEE NO QUICK DECEMBER FIX WITH BRITAIN

**BRUSSELS:** European Union leaders are not only unlikely to reach a deal next month with Britain on its demands for reform of the bloc but may not even narrow differences at a pre-Christmas summit, officials and diplomats said.

After a week of "confessional" meetings between aides to summit chairman Donald Tusk and envoys from other member states, which should conclude today, people involved told Reuters many opposed demands British Prime Minister David Cameron laid out in a letter to Tusk two weeks ago. Cameron has set an end-2017 deadline for a referendum on EU membership. In order to stay in, he says, London needs changes. The longer such negotiations with EU partners take and the more divided they become, the greater the risk he will fail to deliver such reforms.

One proposal many leaders object to is that immigrants from EU states should wait four years before receiving in-work benefits such as tax credits and support for children living abroad. Officials and diplomats see that as discriminating between EU citizens on national grounds, which they say jars with basic EU treaty law. "The situation is between difficult and very difficult," one official said late last week, after more than 20 of the 27 other member states had had their meeting with staff working for Tusk, the European Council president whose job it is to forge compromise among the members of the European Union.

The one-to-one meetings, a standard EU procedure, are intended to frame negotiations and there had been some hope in recent months that at least the bulk of a deal might be ready for the Council to endorse at its next meeting on Dec. 17-18.

But the official said it was hard to imagine that a deal would be reached at that summit and that even constructive discussions were

not a certainty. "Many countries say they want more Europe, not less Europe. And Cameron wants less Europe."

"There is no agreement on individual issues like the four years and no one will agree to discrimination." A spokesman for the British government said: "We've always been clear that what matters is addressing the concerns of the British people. We'll be driven by substance not speed."

"The prime minister looks forward to a substantive discussion on the UK renegotiation at the December European Council."

**DOWNBEAT**

Cameron will have to work hard in the coming weeks to sway EU leaders to achieve a successful outcome to negotiations. Other EU leaders see him as failing to show solidarity on matters such as the influx of refugees to Europe and the euro zone crisis.

Earlier this month, the EU's executive divided Cameron's demands for reform into three categories: the feasible, the difficult and the "highly problematic". The last refers particularly to curbing benefits for workers from other EU states.

Such curbs are a particular dislike of ex-communist eastern states like Tusk's fellow Poles, not just because many of their citizens work in the wealthier west but also because it is a touchstone of their emergence from Soviet control. One EU diplomat said that, while most want to see Britain, the EU's second biggest economy, remain in the bloc, its demands posed complex problems.

In addition, the attacks on Paris, the conflict in Syria and with Islamic State, plus the refugee crisis, will leave leaders with little time to negotiate with Cameron over the next month, the diplomat said. — Reuters

## UK TO BUY MORE F-35 JETS, BOOST ANTI-TERROR BUDGET

**LONDON:** Britain plans to increase the number of fighter jets it can launch from aircraft carriers and boost anti-terrorism spending, finance minister George Osborne said yesterday. The government is due to set out a new five-year defence strategy on Monday and a broader budget plan on Wednesday.

"We are going to step up the aircraft carrier punch of the United Kingdom. We are going to make sure that when these aircraft carriers are available they are going to have planes that can fly from them in force," Osborne told BBC television. "By 2023, we will be able to have 24 of these jets, some of the most powerful

in the world, the F-35, on the decks of these carriers."

Osborne denied his overall focus on cutting public spending might hurt Britain's attempts to prevent attacks like the ones seen in Paris earlier this month, saying spending on anti-terrorism defenses would be increased by almost a third. "We will make sure that Britain is properly defended against the terrorist threat," he said. "Precisely because we are making difficult decisions in other parts of our budget, we can give our military more kit, we can increase our counter-terrorism budget by 30 percent." — Reuters

## UGANDAN GAYS HOPE THE POPE WILL SPEAK OUT ON THEIR BEHALF

**KAMPALA:** Gay activists are hoping Pope Francis will preach tolerance toward homosexuals, and even go so far as to condemn violent attacks against gays during his upcoming visit to Uganda. Church leaders, however, are praying he'll avoid the issue altogether.

The divergent expectations underscore the acrimonious state of the gay rights debate on a continent where homosexuality remains taboo and homosexuals are greatly despised. In Uganda, where homosexuality is illegal and where attacks against gays have forced many to seek refuge abroad or lead secret lives at home, gay leaders nevertheless hope Francis will weigh in with a firm message of tolerance. "I see this particular pope as more progressive but I wouldn't call him an ally like (President) Obama," said Frank Mugisha, a prominent gay leader. "I would like to see his position very clearly because what he said came as a by-the-way when he said he can't judge." Francis famously said "Who am I to judge?" in referring to a purportedly gay priest. He has called for a church that is more tolerant and welcoming for those on the margins, including gays.

But he has also denounced what he calls the "ideological colonization" of the developing world, a reference to the way wealthy countries and non-governmental organizations condition development aid on Western ideas about contraception and human rights.

In Africa, that can boil down to the loss of international funding for school or health pro-

grams unless they promote condom use. Some European countries such as Sweden and Norway cut funding to Uganda's government when it passed an anti-gay bill, which had widespread support in Uganda even as the international community condemned it as draconian.

The bill was signed into law last year before a court nullified it on a technicality; an earlier version had prescribed the death penalty for some homosexual acts. Homosexuality is still criminalized under a colonial-era law banning sex acts against the order of nature. Stronger anti-gay legislation was supported by local church leaders who said it was necessary to protect poor African children from Western homosexuals who lure them with money.

At a recent Vatican meeting on family issues, African cardinals were at the forefront in blocking the church's overtures to gays and in insisting that the Catholic Church as a whole denounce this "ideological colonization," saying wealthy countries have no right to impose their ideas on poor countries with different cultural views.

"I doubt that Pope Francis will talk about homosexuals," said Archbishop John Baptist Odama, who heads the local conference of Catholic bishops. "There is a clear teaching of the church on homosexuality. Because the aim of it is not to promote life but to act against it, those with that tendency are called to abstinence." — AP

## BERLIN SETS UP REFUGEE SHELTER AT FORMER STASI HQ

**BERLIN:** Berlin has opened a shelter at the former headquarters of communist East Germany's feared Stasi secret police to help house a record influx of asylum seekers, weekend media reports said. Nearly 500 people, most of them from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, have been staying in the foreign intelligence wing of the imposing former Ministry of State Security since

late Friday, the daily Berliner Zeitung said. Up to 900 people will eventually be housed there temporarily.

"The rooms will finally be used for something meaningful," it quoted a spokesman for the German Red Cross (DRK), Ruediger Kunz, as saying. The Berlin social services agency could not immediately be reached for comment yesterday.



**Migrants queue during a snow shower to board a bus after crossing the border between Austria and Germany in Wegscheid near Passau, Germany, yesterday. — AP**

The office block was once the fiefdom of legendary spymaster Markus Wolf. Dubbed "The Man Without a Face" because Western intelligence services long lacked even a photograph of him, Wolf directed one of the world's most formidable espionage networks for nearly three decades.

A legend in his own lifetime, Wolf successfully ran more than 4,000 spies across the Iron Curtain during his tenure from 1958 to 1987, infiltrating countless "moles" deep into the West German government administration. Wolf's wing was used by the national railway company Deutsche Bahn in the 1990s but had been vacant for a few years, the Tagesspiegel newspaper reported.

Up to six people per office will sleep in bunk beds at the site, where asylum seekers can spend three months until they are placed in more permanent housing.

The main Stasi headquarters, where the enormous agency kept vast records on East German citizens, would remain a museum, the Berliner Zeitung said.

Around 7,000 Stasi employees worked in the sprawling complex in the city's Lichtenberg district, which was stormed by protesters in the weeks after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 to stop staff from destroying files. German authorities are scrambling to find beds for up to one million asylum seekers expected in the country this year alone.

In October, the iconic airport Tempelhof, built by the Nazis and later the staging ground for the Berlin Airlift, was also converted into a temporary shelter. — AFP