

U.S. Plans to Store Heavy Arms in Baltic, Eastern Europe: Source

WASHINGTON - The United States plans to store heavy military equipment in the Baltics and Eastern European nations to reassure allies made uneasy by Russian intervention in Ukraine, and to deter further aggression, a senior U.S. official said on Saturday.

"We will pre-position significant equipment," the official said, commenting on a New York Times report that the Pentagon was poised to store battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and other heavy weapons for as many as 5,000 troops.

Poland and Lithuania both



confirmed they were in talks with Washington on stationing heavy arms in warehouses in the region.

"The threats to the Baltic region have increased. This has been discussed many times and I view positively (the fact) that talks lead to concrete decisions which, I think, will become a reality," Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevicius told Reuters. Poland's defense minister said he expected a decision soon.

"During talks in Washington in May I have been assured ... (More on P4)... (27)

Major Sides of Yemeni Conflict to Participate in Geneva Talks

GENEVA - Yemeni President Abd Rabou Mansour Hadi has decided to send one unified delegation to the Geneva consultations scheduled for the coming Monday, the UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, announced Sunday.

The Special Envoy welcomed the Yemeni president's decision to send a delegation and encourages its members to participate



in good faith and to seek outcomes that would lead to the alleviation of the

path to a peaceful and orderly transition.

According to the UN special envoy, the consultations being organized under the auspices of the United Nations bring together related Yemeni political entities together, including the General Peoples' Congress (GPC) and its allies, Ansar Allah and its allies, JMP and its partners, and the Peaceful Southern Hirk. "The ... (More on P4)... (28)

Snap Vote 'Inevitable' if No Government Within Deadline: Erdogan

ISTANBUL - Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said a snap election would be "inevitable" if both the ruling AK Party and the main opposition fail in efforts to form a new government within the constitutional limit of 45 days. In comments published on Sunday in Milliyet newspaper, Erdogan said he planned to grant a mandate to form a new government first to

the AKP, which won around 41 percent of the vote in the June 7 election -- short of securing the parliamentary majority required to rule alone. "Let's say the party who came first in the election could not achieve this (to form a government) and neither did the second one.... In such a case, going to the ballot box again as per the constitution would be inevitable," Erdogan told report-

ers late on Saturday as he flew back from Azerbaijan.

"I don't call this a snap poll but a re-run."

After parliament is sworn in later this month, Erdogan is expected to formally empower the AKP to form a new government. If it does not succeed in doing so within 45 days, he has the power to call a new election. (Reuters)

Kurds Nearing Key IS-Held Syrian Border Town

AKCAKALE, Turkey - Syrian Kurdish fighters closed in on the outskirts of a strategic Islamic State-held town on the Turkish border Sunday, Kurdish officials and an activist group said, potentially cutting off a key supply line for the extremists' nearby de facto capital. Taking Tal Abyad, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of the Islamic State stronghold of Raqqa, would deprive the group of a direct route to bring in new foreign militants or supplies. The Kurdish advance, coming under the cover of intense U.S.-led coalition airstrikes in the area, also would link their two fronts and put even more pressure on Raqqa as Iraqi forces struggle to contain the group in their country. Meanwhile, hundreds



of Syrian civilians trying to flee the offensive pressed against the barbed wire fences separating the town from Turkey, as masked militants likely belonging to the Islamic State group could be seen while Turkish soldiers watched from the other side.

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus speaking

on the refugee situation at the crossing between in Tal Abyad and Akcakale, claimed that those refugees were not fleeing fighting between Kurds and the Islamic State group, but were rather trying to escape to Turkey in case their villages are hit by U.S.-led coalition bombings. (AP)

Anti-EU Diehards Complicate Cameron's Referendum Strategy

LONDON - The diehard eurosceptics whom Prime Minister David Cameron tried to appease by promising a referendum on leaving the EU look set to cause him a series of headaches now the vote is on.

Cameron is in talks with fellow leaders to secure concessions on Britain's relationship with the European Union before a referendum

due by the end of 2017, but increasingly expected in 2016.

While those negotiations will be challenging as countries like Poland resist plans to limit migrants' access to state benefits, the struggle Cameron faces at home to keep his Conservatives in line could be just as tricky.

The 48-year-old, who

wants to stay in the EU subject to reforms, is not the first Conservative prime minister to face trouble from eurosceptics.

In 1993, John Major labelled three of his cabinet ministers "bastards" over their opposition to the Maastricht treaty, which created the EU. But with the government holding a ... (More on P4)... (29)

Syrian Nusra Front Promises Justice after Shooting of Druze

BEIRUT - The al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front acknowledged on Saturday that its members were involved in the killing of Druze villagers in northwestern Syria this week, saying they had violated orders and would face justice. Twenty Druze villagers were reportedly killed in the village of Qalb Loze in Idlib province on Wednesday when Nusra Front members opened fire in an incident that spiraled from their attempt to confiscate a house. The Druze community, which is spread across the Levant, practices a religion viewed as heretical by the puritanical brand of Sunni Islamism espoused by al Qaeda and Islamic State, the two most powerful insurgent ... (More on P4)... (30)

Britain Pulls out Spies as Russia, China Crack Snowden Files: Report

LONDON - Britain has pulled out agents from live operations in "hostile countries" after Russia and China cracked top-secret information contained in files leaked by former U.S. National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, the Sunday Times reported. Security service MI6, which operates overseas and is tasked with defending British interests, has removed agents from certain countries, the newspaper said, citing unnamed officials at the office of British Prime Minister David Cameron, the Home Office (interior ministry) and security services.

Snowden downloaded more than 1.7 million secret files from security

agencies in the United States and Britain in 2013, and leaked details about mass surveillance of phone and internet communications.

The United States wants Snowden to stand trial after he leaked classified documents, fled the country and was eventually granted asylum in Moscow in 2013.

He went to Russia via Hong Kong, and although he claimed in 2013 that the encrypted files remained secure, Britain believed both Russia and China had cracked documents which contain details that could allow British and American spies to be identified, the newspaper said, citing officials. (Reuters)

Israeli Leader Criticizes Upcoming UN Report on Gaza War

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday criticized an upcoming United Nations report into last year's war in the Gaza Strip, calling it a waste of time.

Instead, he said an in-depth Israeli report -- and another unofficial report compiled by a group of retired Western generals -- show "the truth" behind the fighting. Both documents say Israel did its utmost to avoid civilian casualties and said Gaza's Islamic militant Hamas rulers deliberately attacked Israeli civilians while using their own people as human shields. "Those who want to know the truth should read this report and read the report of the top generals," Netanyahu told his Cabinet.

"Whoever wants a baseless, automatic accusation against Israel can waste their time reading the U.N report. As far as we are concerned, we will continue to protect our soldiers and they will continue to protect us." Over 2,200 Palestinians, including hundreds of civilians, were killed, while 73 people died on the Israeli side. Israel says Gaza's Hamas rulers are responsible for the civilian casualties because it launched attacks from residential areas. Palestinians have said that the Israeli army violated the rules of war, which include giving adequate warning to civilians, using proportionate force and distinguishing between civilians and combatants. (AP)

N. Korea Test-Fires Three Short-Range Missiles

PYONGYANG - North Korea on Sunday test-fired three short-range missiles into the sea, South Korea's defence ministry said, weeks after claiming a successful submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) test.

The North fired three KN-01 missiles from a site near its eastern city of Wonsan, a ministry spokesman told AFP. "The missiles appear to have a range of nearly 100 kilometres (62 miles)," he said, adding the test lasted 26 minutes and began around 4.30 pm (0730 GMT).

"We are closely monitoring the movements of the North's military and

maintaining full readiness against potential provocations," he said.

The test is the latest since Pyongyang claimed on May 9 it had successfully test-fired a SLBM -- a technology that could eventually offer the nuclear-armed state a survivable second-strike capability. A fully developed SLBM capability would take the North Korean nuclear threat to a new level, allowing deployment far beyond the Korean peninsula.

But some experts have questioned the authenticity of the May test, saying photos of the launch might have been digitally manipulated. (AFP)

Neighbour News

Rouhani says Critics Belittle Sanctions Impact

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani hit out on Sunday at critics of his drive for a nuclear deal with major powers, saying they belittled the impact of sanctions on ordinary people.

"Those who say that the sanctions are not important probably don't know anything about people's wallets," Rouhani said in a televised speech, adding that they had raised the cost of imported goods by 10 to 15 percent.

In recent weeks, the president's conservative critics have claimed that the main cause of Iran's economic woes is not Western sanctions imposed over its controversial nuclear programme but failings in government policy.

Teheran mayor Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said earlier this month

that "mismanagement and a lack of planning in the current and previous governments have had more impact than sanctions".

Parliament speaker Ali Larijani said only "20 to 30 percent of the economic problems" of the country were due to international sanctions.

Rouhani has made the quest for a deal lifting the sanctions in return for reining in Iran's nuclear programme the centrepiece of his two years in power.

Iran and world powers are working to a June 30 deadline for a comprehensive agreement.

Sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States on Iran's oil and financial sectors since 2012 have plunged the country into a deep economic crisis with inflation rising to more than 40 percent. (AFP)

Chinese Airlines Cut Flights to S. Korea on MERS

BEIJING - Chinese airlines are cutting flights to the Republic of Korea (ROK) as the outbreak of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) reduces travel demand to the country.

Air China will cut the number of flights linking Beijing and Seoul to 21 a week from 24. The cut will run from June 13 to the end of August.

China Eastern Airlines will cut the number of its Kunming-Seoul flights from five to two a week between June 15 and June 30. From July 1 to the end of August, there will be three flights a week.

Other companies including China Southern Airlines, Shandong Airlines, Capital Air-

lines and budget carrier Spring Airlines have either cut or suspended flights to ROK.

The ROK surpassed Thailand and Japan to become the most favored destination for Chinese outbound tourists in 2014 with 6.1 million visitors.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China on Friday ordered airline companies to strengthen education of crew members about the coronavirus and enhance disinfection after passengers disembark.

Meanwhile, the CAAC requires airline companies to immediately report to local hygiene and quarantine authorities in case of suspected MERS cases. (Xinhua)

Conclusive Phase of Zarb-I-Azb Next Month: Pak Army

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistani army is finalising plans to launch the final phase of Operation Zarb-i-Azb in mid-July to flush out Taliban terrorists from their remaining strongholds along the border with Afghanistan.

"Preliminary preparations for the final push have started, which will begin next month," a senior military official told Dawn during a background briefing on the eve of the first anniversary of the commencement of Zarb-i-Azb.

The final drive will be in south of Dattakhel towards the border through the forested and mountainous Shalwal Valley.

A large number of militants fleeing the operation in other parts of North Waziristan are believed to have taken refuge in Shalwal Valley, which is considered to be an Al Qaeda sanctuary and a stronghold of Gul Bahadur, a warlord once considered pro-government.

Shalwal has also been the focus of US drone attacks this year with seven of the nine strikes hitting targets in the valley in which at least 43 suspected militants were killed.

"Operation ZeA moves to last few pockets close to Pak-Afghan border," military spokesman Maj Gen ... (More on P4)... (31)

Yemen Rebels Seize Provincial Capital Near Saudi Border

SANAA - Shiite Huthi rebels on Sunday seized a provincial capital in northern Yemen near the border with Saudi Arabia, residents said, a day ahead of UN-sponsored peace talks in Geneva. The rebels faced little resistance in taking control of al-Hazm, the main city of Jawf province, residents and sources

among local pro-government fighters said. The city lies some 150 kilometres (90 miles) south of the border with Saudi Arabia, which has been leading a campaign of air strikes against the Iran-backed rebels since late March. "There was very little resistance and the Huthis managed to seize the city and the local

government complex," said Mubarak al-Abadi, a fighter with the Popular Resistance local militia. Local armed groups known as Popular Resistance units have been formed in several provinces of Yemen to fight the rebels alongside forces loyal to exiled President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi. (AFP)