

Obama Asks Pakistan, India to Stop Moving in 'Wrong Direction'

WASHINGTON - US President Barack Obama has urged India and Pakistan not to continue moving in the wrong direction as they develop their military doctrines.

In his concluding remarks at the fourth and final Nuclear Security Summit, Mr Obama said that leaders from across the globe had gathered at the two-day event to discuss "one of the greatest threats to global security - terrorists getting their hands on a weapon of mass destruction".

At a news briefing after



the summit, Mr Obama identified various regions that deserved special at-

tention for preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and enriched materi-

als and South Asia was top on this list. "The other area where I

think we need to see progress is Pakistan and India, that Sub-continent,

making sure that as they develop military doctrines, that they are not continually moving in the wrong direction," he said. President Obama also expressed concern over a rapid increase in tactical or small nuclear weapons, although he did not name the countries that were doing so.

"Global stocks of plutonium are growing, nuclear arsenals are expanding in some countries, with more small tactical nuclear weapons which could be at greater risk of theft," he said. (Agencies)

Nieghbor News

EU Banks Start Re-Engaging with Iran

TEHRAN - European banks have reportedly started to re-engage with Iran after over two months from the removal of sanctions against the country.

The Financial Times reported on Sunday that Belgium's KBC, Germany's DZ Bank and Austria's Erste Bank that they have started handling transactions on behalf of European clients doing business in Iran.

Nevertheless, bigger European banks remain on the sidelines, "scarred by a string of multibillion-dollar fines for earlier sanctions breaches in Iran", the FT added. KBC, Belgium's biggest

bank, has announced that it had "decided to support its well-established customers in its home markets" of Belgium, the Czech Republic and Slovakia "in their genuine trade with Iran, respecting all EU and US sanctions".

"Such support is restricted to trade only and always subject to an in-depth screening of each transaction and all parties concerned," FT has quoted KBC as saying in a statement. "To this effect KBC indeed has developed correspondent relationships with several state-owned and private Iranian banks." (PressTV)

Uzbekistan Senate Approve OIC Charter

TASHKENT - The charter of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was ratified during the meeting of Uzbekistan's Senate.

The OIC charter was adopted in Dakar, Senegal, on March 14, 2008.

By adopting the law on ratifying the OIC charter, Uzbekistan reaffirmed its political support and intention to develop and strengthen the cooperation with this organization and Muslim countries, Sadyk Safayev, head of the Senate Committee for Foreign Policy, said. He said the ratification of this law will make

it possible to intensify the process of attracting financial resources from Islamic financial institutions, in particular from the Islamic Development Bank. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was established in September of 1969 to ensure Islamic solidarity in social, economic and political spheres. The organization has 57 member states.

Uzbekistan became an OIC member in 1996. The country took over the presidency of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC in 2016. (Agencies)

Syria Opposition Sees US 'Ambiguity' on Assad Future

PARIS - A Syrian opposition figure on Sunday criticised perceived "American ambiguity" on the future of President Bashar al-Assad and urged Washington to confirm he will not be "rehabilitated" in a future government.

"We have American ambiguity that is very damaging for us," Bassma Kodmani, member of the main opposition High Negotiations Committee which attended last month's peace talks in Geneva.

The committee has rejected Assad's demand for any transitional government to include his re-

gime as Syria struggles to emerge from five years of civil war.

The White House last week indicated Assad should not feature in a transitional unity administration, White House spokesman Josh Earnest dubbing his participation a "non-starter" for Washington.

But Kodmani said the committee wanted confirmation of that stance two days after high level US-Russian discussions on ways of strengthening a fragile ceasefire.

"We don't know what the ... (More on P4)...(21)

Iran Plans \$2.5bn Oil Tanker Expansion

TEHRAN - Iran is renting its oil tankers to foreigners after the lifting of sanctions and plans \$2.5 billion of investment to renovate and expand the fleet, a senior official says.

"After two years of constant efforts, two important plans of the National Iranian Tankers Company including a five-year strategic program and investment were approved," its managing director Ali Akbar Safa'ei said on Sunday.

"This program includes \$2.5 billion of investment

in various sectors which will herald a bright future for the company in diversifying its income basket and expanding its activities," he said.

Safa'ei touched on the interest shown by foreign banks and financial institutions in resuming cooperation with Iran, saying NIIC was the first Iranian company to resolve issues related to obtaining finance.

NIIC is also "the first Iranian company able to rent ... (More on P4)...(22)

Syrian Army Fully Captures Key IS-Held City Near Palmyra after Intense Battles

DAMASCUS - The Syrian army on Sunday fully captured a key city in the central province of Homs near the ancient city of Palmyra, following intense battles against the Islamic State (IS) group, state news agency SANA reported.

The Syrian forces backed by Russian warplanes stormed the city of Qaryatain from a number of directions, a day after Syria's boots on the ground stormed areas in the western parts of that key city.

A military source told Xinhua that the army's entry

into Qaryatain came after the bomb squads dismantled explosive devices and other booby-traps the IS terrorists had planted to thwart the advance of the Syrian army. On Saturday, the Syrian forces unleashed a wide-scale offensive on the city, which has succeeded in breaking through the IS defenses in the western part of that predominantly-Christian city. The Russian warplanes are playing a significant role in helping retake Qaryatain, the source added. The military cam-



paign to reclaim Qaryatain came less than a week after the Syrian army captured

Palmyra, which had been held also by the IS for 10 months. (Xinhua)

Uncertainty Reigns A Day before Migrants Are to be Returned to Turkey

LESBOS - Greece is due to begin returning migrants to Turkey, little sign of preparation is evident on Lesbos, the island through which hundreds of thousands of people have poured into Europe since last year.

A few signs Turkey was getting ready for the migrants could be seen on Saturday. Two room-size tents were set up on the pier of the cramped port at Dikili, where migrants being returned from Lesbos were to be taken. Two portable toilets were installed nearby.



The return of the migrants is a key part of an agreement between the European Union and Turkey aimed at ending the uncontrollable influx into Eu-

rope of migrants and refugees fleeing poverty and war in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

Under the agreement, those who cross into

Greece illegally from Turkey from March 20 will be sent back to Turkey once their asylum applications have been processed. ... (More on P4)...(23)

Execution of Palestinian Exposes Israel's Military Culture

RAMALLAH - It might have been a moment that jolted Israelis to their senses. Instead the video of an Israeli soldier shooting dead a young Palestinian man as he lay wounded and barely able to move has only intensified the tribal war dance of the Israeli public.

Last week, as the soldier was brought before a military court for investigation, hundreds of supporters protested outside. He enjoys vocal support too from half a dozen cabinet ministers, former army generals, rabbis and - according to opinion polls - a significant majority of the Israeli Jewish public.

It is worth reflecting on this generous act of solidarity. It is hard to dispute the main facts. On March 24 two Palestinians - Abdel Fattah Al Sharif and Ramzi Qasrawi, both aged 21 - were shot during an attack on soldiers manning a checkpoint in the occupied city of Hebron in the West Bank. Ten minutes later, the 19-year-old soldier at the centre of the investigation arrived. Qasrawi was dead and Al Sharif was lying in the road wounded. Other soldiers milled around, ... (More on P4)...(26)

Flights Resume at Bomb-Hit Brussels Airport under Tighter Security

BRUSSELS - Brussels Airport reopened Sunday with three "symbolic" flights and strict additional checks for passengers, marking a new high-security era for air travel in Belgium after attacks by Islamic State suicide bombers.

The key travel hub has been closed since two men blew themselves up in the departure hall on March 22 in coordinated blasts that also struck a metro station in the Belgian capital, killing a total of 32 people.

A Brussels Airlines plane bound for the Portuguese city of Faro became the first to take off from the reopened airport.

Tearful employees and government officials



marked the 1140 GMT departure with a minute's silence and a round of applause, AFP reporters saw, while on the tarmac fire engines and police vehicles formed a guard of honour.

"We're back," Brussels Airport chief executive Arnaud Feist said after watching the plane take to the skies.

Two further flights, to

Athens and Turin in Italy, were also scheduled for departure in what Feist called a "symbolic" reopening of the airport. The same three planes were to return to Brussels with passengers later Sunday. The restart of the airport has been hailed as the beginning of a return to normal for a traumatised country, but the shadow ... (More on P4)...(24)

22 Militants Killed as Iraqi Forces Extend Control of Anbar

RAMADI - A total of 22 Islamic State (IS) militants were killed Sunday in airstrike on IS positions and clashes with security forces who gain more ground in Iraq's western province of Anbar, a provincial security source told Xinhua.

Security forces and allied paramilitary Sunni tribal fighters fought fierce clashes with IS militants and made a new progress in their offensive to drive out IS militants from the town of Heet, 160 km west of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, the source said on condition of anonymity.

During the day, the troops retook control of Sikak and Askari districts in eastern Heet and managed to recapture a police station and raised the Iraqi flag on its building, the source said.

The battles resulted in the killing of 16 IS militants and five security members, along with destroying two army vehicles, the source added.

At the end of the day, the clashes were underway as the troops were fighting to gain more ground while heading toward the central ... (More on P4)...(25)

Saudi-Led Airstrikes Hit Al-Qaida Positions in SE Yemen

ADEN - The Saudi-led Arab coalition launched fresh airstrikes against several military bases controlled by al-Qaida militants in Yemen's southeastern province of Hadramout on Sunday, a security official told Xinhua. "More than five Saudi-led airstrikes targeted the Air Defense Base, the Coast Guards base and other military camps controlled by al-Qaida members near the port city of Mukalla, the provincial capital of Hadramout," the local security official said on condition of anonymity.

"The fresh air bombings hit al-Qaida positions in the eastern parts of Mukalla, leaving dozens of terrorists killed and injured and at the scene," the local source said. Meanwhile, local residents confirmed to Xinhua that Saudi-led fighter jets struck the presidential compound held by al-Qaida members in Mukalla.

However, a government official based in Hadramout said that there is no information yet whether the strikes were launched by warplanes of the Saudi-led coalition or by U.S. drones. The Yemen-based ... (More on P4)...(29)

Fire Engulfs Russian Defense Ministry's Building in Moscow

MOSCOW - A massive fire raged at a former headquarters of the Russian Defense Ministry in Moscow on Sunday before it was brought under control several hours later.

Hundreds of firefighters and several cranes were seen battling the blaze Sunday afternoon after the fire broke out hours earlier. Igor Denisov of the Emergency Situations Ministry in Moscow told Russian news agencies that firefighters "localized" the blaze, which had spread ... (More on P4)...(27)

Nigeria Denies Purported Protest by Troops in NE State

LAGOS - Authority of the Nigerian Army has denied an online media report about a protest by a group of soldiers over lack of water and other logistics at Alagarno forest in restive northeast Borno State.

Spokesperson for the Army, Col. Sani Usman, who made this known in a statement made available to Xinhua on Sunday, described the report as false and misleading. Usman said it was orchestrated and planted in the media by those sympathetic to the course of the insurgents. ... (More on P4)...(28)

President Xi's Proposals Show Resolve in Nuclear Security: Experts

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping's proposals at the Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) demonstrate China's resolve against nuclear terrorism and will boost world confidence in nuclear energy development, experts said on Sunday. Xi joined some 50 world leaders on Friday for the fourth and final NSS, a process initiated by U.S. President Barack Obama to discuss how to ensure the security of nuclear materials and facilities and prevent nuclear terrorism. Describing nuclear terrorism as a grave threat to international security, Xi called for "zero-tolerance for nuclear terrorism" and "removing its breeding ground" at the summit. Despite growing attention to nuclear security around the

world, the development of nuclear energy and increasing use of nuclear technology in agriculture and medicine mean risks for proliferation and loss could surge, experts said. They also warned against terrorists using nuclear devices to launch attacks. "Leaders of the nuclear energy industry have demanded top priority be given to nuclear security and preventing terrorists from using the Internet to attack nuclear facilities," said Zhu Xuhui, a senior advisor with the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association. Apart from reinforcing its commitment to countering nuclear terrorism, Xi stressed China has always been committed to development and use of nuclear energy while ensuring security. (Xinhua)

Pakistani Forces Kill 252 Terrorists, Clear More Areas in Waziristan

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani military forces have killed 252 terrorists over the past two months and cleared more areas in the remote mountainous North Waziristan region, in the final phase of the major offensive, the military said on Sunday.

Hundreds of troops, backed by fighter jets, have been chasing the remaining militants in Shawal Valley where they are hiding. "During last phase of operation in Shawal, 252 terrorists have been killed reportedly 160 were severely injured. In the last two months, valiantly fighting in Shawal, eight sol-

diers of Pakistan Army embraced Shahadat (martyrdom) while 39 injured," the army spokesman said in a statement that major terrorist hubs of Mana, Gurbaz, Latak, Inzarkas and Magrotai have been cleared.

"The battle to clear last pocket close to Pak-Afghan border continues. The ongoing operation is being conducted in extremely hostile terrain and harsh weather condition," he said, adding that the Shawal heights are fully covered with snow and visibility is very poor on and inside mountains. (Xinhua)