

NATO Denies it is Making War more likely in Europe

BRUSSELS - NATO on Wednesday defended the number of military exercises it has staged as a response to "growing Russian aggression" and refuted suggestions that they were helping make war in Europe more likely. The alliance was reacting to a warning from a London-based think tank about the risks from a sharp increase in Russian and NATO war games since the conflict between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists flared up in April last year. "NATO military exercises are not, as the reports sug-



gest, making war in Europe more likely," NATO spokeswoman Carmen Romero said after the Eu-

ropean Leadership Network (ELN) published its assessment. "They are intended pre-

cisely to have the opposite effect: to enhance security and stability in Europe in response to growing Rus-

sian aggression," Romero said in a statement. "All NATO military activities are proportion-

ate, defensive, and fully in line with our international commitments," she added.

The ELN report was titled: "Preparing for the Worst: Are Russian and NATO Military Exercises Making War in Europe more Likely?"

The ELN report authors said the nature and scale of the exercises contradicted claims from both sides that they targeted hypothetical opponents.

"Russia is preparing for a conflict with NATO, and NATO is preparing for a possible confrontation with Russia," ELN said. (AFP)

Kerry Optimistic about Congress Support for Iran Nuclear deal

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Tuesday expressed optimism that the Obama administration will garner enough support from Congress to implement the Iran nuclear deal. "We're going to be successful on plan A," Kerry said at a discussion in New York when asked what the White House would do if Congress kills the deal. "That's our policy, and I'm quite confident we're going to be." At the discussion on the



nuclear deal reached by six world powers and Iran last month, Kerry continued to defend the accord, warning of consequences if Congress rejects it in a vote

in September. President Barack Obama has reiterated that he would veto any plan of disapproval of the deal by Congress. "That is a recipe, very quickly...

for the American dollar to cease to be the reserve currency of the world, which is already bubbling out there," Kerry said.

Senator John McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Tuesday that there will be enough votes to pass the resolution of disapproval against the deal, but he is less sure on getting enough support to override the president's veto, news website The Hill reported. (Xinhua)

Turkey Denies Warplanes from Incirlik Air base join Anti-IS Strikes in Syria

ANKARA - Turkish Foreign Ministry denied on Wednesday media reports that jets taking off from Incirlik Air Base in Adana province in southern Turkey took part in U.S.-led anti-IS coalition's airstrikes overnight on Idlib province in Syria.

"No manned and unmanned aircraft using the Incirlik Air Base participated in Tuesday's air operation carried out by the coalition forces," said the ministry. The ministry rejected as "misleading" and "evil-minded" reports in Turkish media

that said aircraft returning from the attack flew towards Turkey. On Sunday, six F-16 fighters arrived at Incirlik Air Base in Adana province in southern Turkey, private Dogan news agency reported, saying that these fighter planes are expected to

conduct airstrikes against Islamic State (IS) targets in neighboring Syria and Iraq. Along with them, about 300 airmen from the 31st Fighter Wing also arrived at the Incirlik Air Base on Sunday, according to the report. Incirlik... (More on P4)... (29)

Libya PM Resigns Live on TV Hours after Peace Talks Restart

TRIPOLI - The prime minister of Libya's internationally recognised government, Abdullah al-Thani, announced his resignation in a surprise move live on television Tuesday, hours after fraught peace talks between the country's rival factions restarted.

During the talk show Prime Minister Al-Thani faced a barrage of angry questions from citizens who blamed his government for the lack of basic services such as electricity and poor security in areas it controls.

"If my exit is the solution, then I announce it here," al-Thani said during the talk show, adding that "my resignation will be



submitted to the parliament on Sunday". The prime minister, who escaped an assassination attempt in May when gunmen opened fire on his car after a parliament meeting, was also hit with accusations of corruption against his government in the television interview Tuesday. Libya, which

plunged into chaos after the fall of Moamer Kadhafi in 2011, currently has two rival parliaments vying for power as well several militia groups battling for control of the country's vast resource wealth. Al-Thani's elected government has been working out of a small eastern city near the border with

Egypt since an Islamist militia alliance captured the capital Tripoli last year.

Earlier Tuesday the two rival factions started a new UN-sponsored round of peace talks in Switzerland's Geneva aimed at creating a unity government, with representatives of the powerful Tripoli parliament joining the negotiations after boycotting them last month.

United Nations special envoy Bernardino Leon, who is brokering the talks in Geneva, is urging the key camps to reach a political deal in the hope that a unity government could enforce a durable ceasefire. (AFP)

Indonesian President Reshuffles Cabinet to Boost Economy

JAKARTA - Indonesia's president announced a Cabinet reshuffle Wednesday, replacing key economic ministers with the aim of speeding up infrastructure spending to revive sputtering growth and stabilize the sliding rupiah. The Cabinet shake-up comes amid increasing public dissatisfaction with the lagging performance of Indonesia's economy since Jokowi took office nearly two months ago. Southeast Asia's largest economy, home to more than 250 million people, grew 4.7 percent in the second quarter, the slowest pace since 2009. Four ministers lost their jobs and two were rotated to less important positions,

ending weeks of speculation in Indonesia about the possible changes. President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo chose former central bank governor Darmin Nasution to become Indonesia's new coordinating minister for the economy, replacing Sofyan Djalil. Djalil has become the national development planning minister, replacing Andrinof Chaniago. Jokowi picked Thomas Lembong as trade minister. Jokowi also appointed current Presidential Chief of Staff Luhut Panjaitan as the new coordinating minister for politics, law and security and a prominent economist Rizal Ramli as the coordinating maritime minister. (AP)

Turkey's Erdogan Vows no let-up in Fight Against Kurdish Rebels

ANKARA - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday vowed to fight on against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants, in the face of mounting attacks on security forces blamed on the Kurdish rebels. "Let me put it clearly, the operations will continue," he said in a televised speech in Ankara, as Turkey presses on with air strikes on PKK targets in the country's southeast and in northern Iraq. "We will never stop in the face of all these attacks. We will continue to fight with determination," he added. Erdogan vowed "no

concessions" in the fight against "terror", saying: "A state subjected to an armed attack has the right to defend yourselves with arms."

Turkey is currently pressing a two-pronged "anti-terror" offensive against Islamic State (IS) jihadists in Syria and PKK militants following a wave of attacks.

The state-run Anatolia news agency reported over the weekend that so far 390 "terrorists" had been killed in the campaign against the PKK. But the Kurdish rebels have hit back, leaving a 2013 truce declared by the PKK in tatters. (AFP)

Britain's Hammond in China for Security, Climate Talks

BEIJING - British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said Wednesday that an international agreement to limit Iran's nuclear program could give impetus to efforts aimed at curbing North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

Hammond, who is in Beijing for talks on security cooperation and climate change, made the comments during a speech to students at elite Peking University. He is to meet with Chinese senior foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi on Thursday and visit an Airbus assembly plant in Tianjin.

Calling the Iran agreement reached in Vienna

a "major success for multilateral diplomacy," Hammond said there "may be lessons to be drawn around the world including on tackling nuclear proliferation" in North Korea.

While offering no specifics, Hammond said Britain strongly supports the long-stalled six-nation negotiating process on North Korea hosted by China. Britain shares an interest "in ensuring that this particular multilateral initiative succeeds in bringing to an end North Korea's nuclear weapons program. China, of course, has a particularly influential role to play," he said. (AP)

UN Experts Warns Against Deliberate Starvation of Civilians in Yemen

GENEVA - Yemen is now in the midst of a major food crisis as the conflict in the country continues, Hilal Elver, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, warned here on Tuesday.

According to the UN human rights expert, sieges in a number of governorates, including Aden, AL Dhali, Lahj and Taiz have been preventing staple food items, such as wheat, from reaching the civilian population, while airstrikes have reportedly targeted local markets and trucks laden with food items. "The deliberate starvation of civilians in both international and internal armed conflict may constitute a war crime, and could also constitute a crime against humanity in the event of deliberate denial of food and also the deprivation of food sources or supplies," she warned. According to her,

Yemen relies on imports for 80 per cent of its food intake and the current clashes have resulted in steep price hikes, which, combined with increases in the price of diesel by some 47%, are having a devastating impact on the country's food security. "As the conflict continues to escalate, over 12.9 million people in Yemen are now surviving without adequate access to basic food supplies, including six million who are deemed severely food insecure," Elver said. "The situation facing children in the country is particularly alarming, with reports suggesting that 850,000 Yemeni children face acute malnutrition, a figure that is expected to rise to 1.2 million over the coming weeks, if the conflict persists as its present level," she stressed. (Xinhua)

PNG Ousted Prime Minister given Compensation for "Illegal Removal"

SYDNEY - Papua New Guinea's (PNG) government has paid almost 1 million Australian dollars in compensation to the country's former prime minister for his "illegal removal from office" in 2011, Australian media reported on Wednesday. The 972,570 Australian dollar (704,940 U.S. dollar) payment is part of an out-of-court settlement agreed to earlier in 2015, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) said. In 2011, PNG's parliament voted to remove former Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare from office while he was in Singapore for extended medical treatment

and current Prime Minister Peter O'Neill was elected. The O'Neill government drafted legislation that retrospectively authorized the decision, following a Supreme Court ruling that said the ousting of Somare was unconstitutional. "(Somare's) claim is relative to special damages calculated by the attorney-general's office based on the Salaries and Wages Remuneration Committee (SRC) Awards and other such parameters," a spokesman for Somare's office told ABC. "The constitution allows Somare to seek redress for a series of breaches committed during the 2011... (More on P4)... (30)

Neighbour News

Iran Hails Lebanon's PM Efforts in Anti-Terror Fight

BEIRUT - Visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif hailed Tuesday Lebanon's Prime Minister Tammam Salam's role in fighting terrorism and maintaining security in the country. "We appreciate the major role played by Lebanon's prime minister in administering security, fighting extremism and terror, and fostering cooperation among various Lebanese parties" Zarif said following talks with Salam at the Grand Serail, where Zarif added, "We discussed cooperation between the two countries and bilateral ties." He noted that Salam's role led to "increased calm, stability and security in the country."

Zarif pointed out the tense domestic political situation stressing that "this is no time for competition and rivalry in Lebanon. If there must exist compe-

tion, let it be concerning building Lebanon." "The Islamic Republic of Iran supports the Lebanese people and their demands," Zarif added.

According to various media reports, Zarif discussed with Salam Lebanon's ongoing presidential vacuum and both officials agreed there should be increased deliberation regarding this topic. The Iranian official, upon his arrival to Beirut as the first stop in his regional tour, hoped that the nuclear deal between his country and world powers would "pave the way towards opening a new chapter of ties amongst regional countries."

"He stressed that talks with Lebanese officials will focus on cooperation between Beirut and Tehran. "We need substantial dialogue and cooperation to confront regional challenges" said Zarif. (Xinhua)

Chinese Diplomat Outlines Limits to Freedom of Navigation

MANILA - China respects freedom of navigation in the disputed South China Sea but will not allow any foreign government to invoke that right to its military ships and planes can intrude in Beijing's territory, the Chinese ambassador said. Ambassador Zhao Jianhua said late Tuesday that Chinese forces warned a U.S. Navy P-8A not to intrude when the warplane approached a Chinese-occupied area in the South China Sea's disputed Spratly Islands in May. A CNN reporter who was on board the plane, which had taken off from the Philippines, reported the incident then. "We just gave them warnings, be careful, not to intrude," Zhao told reporters on the sidelines of a diplomatic

event in Manila. Washington, however, does not recognize any territorial claim by any country in the South China Sea, a policy that collides with the position of China, which claims virtually the entire sea. When asked why China shooed away the U.S. Navy plane when it has pledged to respect freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, Zhao outlined the limits in China's view. "Freedom of navigation does not mean to allow other countries to intrude into the airspace or the sea which is sovereign. No country will allow that," Zhao said. "We say freedom of navigation must be observed in accordance with international law. No freedom of navigation for warships and airplanes." (AP)

Lawmakers of Pakistani Political party Quit Parliament

ISLAMABAD - Lawmakers of an influential Pakistani political party on Wednesday resigned over what it alleged "victimization" of its activists during the security forces' ongoing operation in the port city of Karachi. Members of the National Assembly, Senate and the provincial assembly in Sindh province belonging to the Mutahida Qaumi Movement or MQM submitted resignations. MQM is the party of mainly ethnic Urdu-speaking people, who had migrated to Pakistan after the independence of Pakistan in 1947. The party has a strong support in

Karachi and some urban areas of Sindh province. The government has denied victimization of any political party and insists that the security forces are only targeting terrorists, criminal gangs, kidnappers and extortionists in the operation in Karachi. The paramilitary forces had launched the operation last year in the wake of growing incidents of target killings, kidnappings for ransom and extortion in Karachi, also the commercial hub of Pakistan. Resignations have not yet been accepted and their legal aspects are being... (More on P4)... (31)

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan Devise new Punishments for Terror Suspects

DUSHANBE - Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have in close succession come up with a new punishment for people suspected of involvement with terrorist organizations. If official accounts are anything to go by, however, the authoritarian governments are also trying their hand at less harsh measures to attack the intensely hyped specter of Islamic terror. Uzbek news website Anons.uz has reported that President Islam Karimov on August 10 signed off on amendments to the law detailing when somebody can be stripped of

their citizenship. Under the revised law, the penalty will now apply if a given person "has caused substantial harm to the interests of society and the state by engaging in activities in the interests of a foreign state or by committing offenses against peace and security." Crimes against peace and stability are interpreted in Uzbekistan as acts that include incitement to conflict and terrorism, or any other activity related to terrorism and mass murder. The U.S. Department of Defense-funded regional... (More on P4)... (32)