

Israel Targets 'Hezbollah Attack Tunnels' from Lebanon

METULA, Israel - Israel said on Tuesday it had launched an operation to "expose and thwart" cross-border attack tunnels from Lebanon dug by the Iran-backed Lebanese movement Hezbollah.

The army said the operation was for now confined to Israel and did not extend into Lebanon, where the tunnels originated. The broader frontier appeared calm in the hours after the announcement, despite fear that it could lead to confrontation.

There was no immediate comment from Hezbollah. A Lebanese army source said the situation was calm on its side of the border, as did U.N. peacekeepers operating there. (Reuters)

No Oil Will Go Through Persian Gulf If US Targets Iran's Crude Exports: Rouhani

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani has reaffirmed that the United States will not be able to stop Iran's oil sales, warning that no crude will find its way out of the Persian Gulf should Washington attempt to target Iranian crude exports.

"The US should know [this] that we are selling and will continue to sell our oil and it will not be able to block Iran's oil exports. And it should also know that if it attempts to stop Iran's oil [sales] someday, no oil will be exported from the Persian Gulf," he said during a speech on Tuesday in the city of Shahroud, Semnan Province.

Rouhani further noted that Washington had failed in its declared aims of stopping Iran's crude ex-



ports, choking its trade with the world, and isolating the country regionally and internationally.

"Our great nation proved to be the ultimate victor of this battle on all stages," the president said. The US had initially vowed to reduce Iran's oil sales to "zero" under the bans, but it later backed down and granted waivers to almost all of Tehran's major crude buyers. (Press TV)

Global Humanitarian Agencies Need 22 Bln USD for 2019: UN

GENEVA - The world has exceptionally high humanitarian needs driven mainly by armed conflicts that create immense suffering and displacement for years, and international agencies will need 21.9 billion U.S. dollars to do their work in 2019, the United Nations said Tuesday.

In 2019, nearly 132 million people across the world will need humanitarian assistance, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock said at a press briefing in Geneva, presenting the Global Humanitarian Overview 2019 (GHO).

The country with the biggest problems is going to be Yemen, he said, while also noting that

there is an 80 percent chance of an El Nino climatic event which could lead to drought in southern African countries such as Madagascar, Malawi, and Zimbabwe.

The United Nations and its partner organizations aim to assist 93.6 million of the most vulnerable people with food, shelter, health care, emergency education, protection, and other necessary assistance.

"We are going to increase our cooperation with development agencies," Lowcock said.

He explained that early action and innovative financing, such as risk insurance and contingency financing, can help close this gap. (Xinhua)

(1) It's Time for...

Mattis remarked.

This comes after the US Special Envoy for Afghan Peace Zalmay Khalilzad resumed his tour to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Belgium, The United Arab Emirates and Qatar to facilitate peace process.

Khalilzad departed for an eight-nation tour from December 2 to 20, the US Department of State said in a statement.

The envoy will also meet with Afghan government officials and other interested parties to support and facilitate an inclusive peace process in Afghanistan, empowering the Afghan people to decide their nation's fate, the statement said. (Pajhwok)

(2) US Envoy Zalmay...

On Monday, Prime Minister Imran Khan received a letter from US President Donald Trump seeking Islamabad's "assistance and facilitation in achieving a negotiated settlement of the Afghan war".

"President Trump has also acknowledged that the war had cost both USA and Pakistan," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

"He has emphasized that Pakistan and USA should explore opportunities to work together and renew partnership."

The ministry "welcomed" the US decision for negotiations, noting that "Pakistan has always advocated a political settlement to end the war in Afghanistan".

"Pakistan reiterates its commitment to play a facilitation role in good faith," the FO statement read. "Peace and stability in Afghanistan remain a shared responsibility."

The PM had also shared the development during a meeting with TV anchors and reporters in Islamabad on Monday.

PM Imran further revealed that Trump has asked for Pakistan's help in "bringing the Taliban leadership to the negotiating table".

He added that he had always believed only dialogue could bring stability in Afghanistan. (Monitoring Desk)

(3) Taliban Hold...

week talks with Khalilzad".

The source said it was unclear if the delegation led by Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai will meet directly with the head of the Taliban. Haibatullah is believed to have rarely contacted his envoys when first taking charge of the movement, but now appeared to be taking a keen interest in negotiations. A Western source confirmed the arrival of the Doha delegation, saying it was at least five strong.

Zalmay Khalilzad, Donald Trump's special envoy to Afghanistan, is visiting countries in the region this week before he is expected to meet the Taliban envoys in Doha.

Pakistan also disclosed on Monday that Mr Trump had asked for the country's help to start negotiations that could end America's longest running war.

Discussions between America and the Taliban so far are understood to have not moved beyond "talks about talks" and confidence-building measures including prisoner releases. The Taliban refuses to talk to the Afghan government, which last week named its own 12-member negotiating team.

The Doha office source said the talks with the Americans were "moving forward but still lots of up and down has to be resolved". He said "huge differences" remained but "the good point is that we are talking and will keep talking".

A US drone on Saturday killed a powerful Taliban military commander who was said to be opposed to talks with the Americans.

Mullah Abdul Manan Akhund, the Taliban shadow governor of Helmand, was killed in the province's Nawzad district.

His control of the province's opium crop gave him lavish wealth and independence within the movement, while his tribesmen had a rivalry with those of Haibatullah, said Graeme Smith, a consultant for the International Crisis Group.

"That made Manan a persistent headache for the Taliban leadership, because he did not always respect orders. For example, Manan reportedly was not enthusiastic about the Taliban's recent decision to engage the United States in peace negotiations. He was also running his own foreign policy to some degree, with his own channels to Iran," he said.

A former senior Taliban member told the Telegraph that "by coincidence or purpose, the eliminating of Mullah Manan and his other hardline colleagues in Helmand will help the Taliban political team to reach an agreement". (Pajhwok)

(4) UN Calls for Women's...

activists, advocates, mediators and negotiators - as well as opportunities to amplify women's voices and ensure they are at the negotiating table.

"Not only does peace last longer when women lead and participate in peace processes, but also women have a right to participate in negotiating peace in Afghanistan," said Aleta Miller, the

UN Women Country Representative for Afghanistan. "No decisions on the future of Afghanistan should be made without the full participation of all citizens affected by that future, and no peace process will be complete and lasting without the direct involvement of women."

The gender-equality advocates, noting that it is common for male family members to discourage or prohibit the participation of female family members in any activities outside the home, stressed how failure to respect, protect and promote women's human rights and the continued discrimination women face within their communities and families limit their ability to participate in resolving conflict in Afghanistan.

Those in attendance spoke about the need to overcome barriers to women's voices being heard in peace discussions. Those obstacles, the participants noted, are compounded by general insecurity as well as targeted attacks against women's human rights defenders, including journalists, activists and high-profile women leaders.

Launched in 2010, 'The Global Open Days' events are designed to support dialogue between UN senior leadership and women's organizations and gender-equality advocates across the world on the implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace, and security. (PR)

(5) Afghan President...

pledged authorities would "conduct a thorough investigation into this."

Attorney General Farid Hamedy promised a transparent probe.

"I would like to assert in front of our athletes, the president and people of Afghanistan that we will proceed with this investigation transparently, justly and comprehensively," said Hamedy. Sayed Alireza Aqazada, AFF's secretary-general, denied the allegations in the Guardian report, saying they were "all baseless and untrue."

Meanwhile, Hafizullah Wali Rahimi, president of Afghanistan's Olympic Committee, told local media that such allegations were not new and that there had been similar complaints in the past.

"Even if mere allegations (of abuse) cause our people to stop sending their sons and daughters to sports, we need to act immediately," said Ghani. "We have to have a framework in place to mitigate such incidents in our sports." (AP)

(6) Korean Envoy...

Hameedullah Farooqi, chan-

cellor of Kabul University and presidential advisor, welcomed the opening of the library at Kabul University and added the Korean language course was being taught here but there was no specific place for the students.

"We are trying to create a Korean language department in the faculty of literature in future," he said. (Pajhwok)

(7) NATO Expects Russia...

of course we expect all powers, countries in the region, including Russia and Iran, to support this Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and play a constructive role."

When asked about Afghans concerns regarding achievements they gained over the last 16 years might be compromised, Stoltenberg said they strongly believed in a political settlement and a peace process which was Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. "And therefore it's not for NATO to set specific red lines. It's for those sitting around the negotiating table. But we support the Afghans."

"We also welcome the progress we have seen in Afghanistan when it comes to women's rights, democracy. And we continue to provide support to the Afghan government to modernise its institutions and strengthen its democratic processes."

The NATO's Foreign Ministers meeting today and tomorrow will address a wide range of issues of importance for their shared security, including Russia's destabilizing behavior.

The NATO chief asked Russia to release Ukrainian vessels, ships and sailors Moscow seized from Ukraine.

"We are also concerned about the new Russia missile system which puts the INF Treaty in jeopardy. It's urgent that Russia ensures full compliance in a transparent and verifiable way because the INF Treaty is so important for our security." (Pajhwok)

(8) Turkish Aid...

help women get jobs and improve their social status.

The aid includes training in stitch embroidery, the holy Quran, literacy, hairdressing, and Turkish language courses.

The vocational training of up to six months is expected to benefit some 350 women.

Reporting by Sayed Khodabardi Sadat: Writing by Munira Abdelmenan Awel. (AA)

(9) Concerns of...

of their basic rights and lack of access to justice and courts, sexual assaults, kidnappings, women harassment still happened in Afghanistan.

Danish the framework of the

peace negotiations prepared by the government, particularly by the president, was a comprehensive plan that considered the worries of all Afghans.

He said the plan stressed constitutions should be acceptable to all Afghans and if amendments to the constitution were required, they should be according to the framework mentioned in the Constitution.

The Afghan nation and the government welcomed peace talks and offered no preconditions in this regard, he said.

However, he said: "There are still questions with people that whether the Taliban would continue their tyranny as they did in the past, could the Taliban respond to the heirs of civilians killed by this group? Taliban killed many tribal elders, would they change their behavior? And some more questions."

He added that the Taliban should respond to many questions raised by the masses. (Pajhwok)

(10) NATO Probe...

New York Times published an article claiming that Czech and US soldiers were being investigated for their role in beating Khan, who later died of his injuries.

Khan, a commando in the Afghan army, was accused of killing Czech soldier Tomas Prochazka in October, and was initially in US and Czech custody before being returned to the Afghan army in an unconscious state.

Defence Ministry Spokesman Javid Ghafoor said that NATO has launched investigation into the death of Wahidullah upon the request of Defence Minister Gen. Bahrami.

He said the investigation would be shared with the media upon its completion. (Pajhwok)

(11) 'Dozens of Fuel...

administration at the Aqina port, said more than 80 gas tankers remained stopped at the border due to problems between domestic companies and the Dubai-based company.

Pajhwok tried to contact GEO-CHEM Middle East Company officials for comment, but failed. Pajhwok contacted the company's chief operating officer Wajid Sherzai three times on Monday, but he said he would discuss the matter with the director.

According to the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry website, Geo-Chem Middle East chemists take samples, make necessary tests and certify quality of fuel per standards set by ANSA.

If the sample passes all the prescribed tests, the fuel is imported into Afghanistan. (Pajhwok)