

US Tells Turkey to Give Up on Russian S-400s in Exchange for Patriot Systems Deal – Report

ISTANBUL - The US has made an official offer to Turkey for a \$3.5 billion sale of American Patriot missile systems, but only under the condition that Ankara cancels its S-400 purchase from Russia, local media has reported. A US delegation visited the country midweek to present Washington's terms to Turkish defense and foreign ministry officials. The contract put together by the Americans included a prerequisite, according to which the Patriot missile defense systems will only be supplied to Ankara if it gives up its deal to buy Russian air defense systems, Yeni Safak reported. In December, the US State Department approved the sale of 80 Patriot missiles and 60 other missiles, along with launching stations, radars and other equip-



ment, to Turkey, which it called an important ally. The Turkish government, which had been long



trying to acquire the Patriots, got frustrated with the US for not selling them the missiles "when they were needed the most."

In 2017, Ankara signed a contract with Russia to buy the more advanced S-400 air defense systems. Their installation is expected to begin in Turkey in October this year. The move caused outrage in the US as Washington claimed that the use of Russian hardware by a NATO state like Turkey endangers the whole bloc. The US Congress delayed the shipment of 100 F-35 fighter jets to Turkey in retaliation. However, Ankara has been reluctant to give in to the American pressure. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan insisted that the S-400 purchase was a "done deal" and that his country didn't need anybody's permission to strike deals essential for its security. (Russia Today)

Neighbor News

China, Russia, Iran Cited by US Govt as Biggest 'National Security Threats'

TEHRAN - China, Russia and Iran have been identified as the biggest three "national security threats" to the United States in an official US government report listing its top 26 perceived security threats. Titled "Long-range emerging threats facing the United States," the report was compiled by the Washington-based Government Accountability Office. It polled four US federal agencies to come up with the 26 worst threats as identified by the US Departments of Defense, State, and Homeland Security as well as the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI). The National Interest news outlet reported. Pointing to "Chinese global expansion," the

report alleged: "China is marshalling its diplomatic, economic, and military resources to facilitate its rise as a regional and global power." "This may challenge US access to air, space, cyberspace, and maritime domains," it further added, emphasizing: "China's use of cyberspace and electronic warfare could impact various US systems and operations." Describing "Russian global expansion," it then accused Moscow of "increasing its capability to challenge the United States across multiple warfare domains, including attempting to launch computer-based directed energy attacks against US military assets." (Press TV)

Pakistan Needs to Expand Economic Links

KARACHI - A Seminar on 'Strategic Neighbourhood of Pakistan' was held by Karachi Council on Foreign Relations (KCFR), in partnership with Pathfinder Group and Martin Dow Group of Pakistan. The topic was introduced by Institute of Business Administration Associate Dean Dr Huma Baqai, who is also a member of the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs appointed by the Prime Minister, and the KCFR Secretary-General. The keynote speaker, President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Sardar Masood Khan, articulated the subject, followed by a presentation by Ambassador Ali Sarwar Naqvi. According to the speakers, in the present day, in a highly connected and communicating world,

Pakistan shall have to expand its economic links through expansion of trade and exchange of services to accomplish a favourable connectivity with the rest of the world. This would remain the keyword to establish a favourable Strategic Neighbourhood for Pakistan. Though Pakistan has four immediate neighbours with whom positive interaction was mandatory, Pakistan also needs to establish strong economic ties with major regional and international powers active in the region, they maintained. KCFR Chairman Ikram Sehgal proposed to hold two more seminars in Muzaffarabad on similar topics with the emphasis on education and trade, which was generously agreed to by the AJK President. (Agencies)

UAE-Pakistan Talks on Oil Refinery at End Stage

ISLAMABAD - A Pakistani minister says his government's talks with the United Arab Emirates on setting up an oil refinery in Pakistan "reached their final stage" during the visit of the crown prince of Abu Dhabi. Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry also says Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan's visit on Sunday will further strengthen ties between the two countries. The prince and Prime

Minister Imran Khan held a one-on-one meeting, followed by delegation-level talks. The prince arrived in Islamabad to a red-carpet welcome. Prime Minister Imran Khan received him and personally drove him to his residency for a welcome ceremony. The crown prince had been expected to announce a financial assistance package but left Islamabad in the afternoon without any announcements. (Fox News)

Pakistan Railways Set to Introduce 20 Trains, 2 New VVIP Trains

ISLAMABAD - Minister for Railways Sheikh Rasheed has announced that Pakistan Railways will introduce 20 new trains in the year 2019 across the country for facilitating the masses as it had introduced in first three months of the incumbent government. Talking to media he told that he has planned to launch two VVIP trains within the next six months with an effective fuel and power tracking system installed. Sheikh Rasheed also announced that salaries of railways police will be brought at par with those of Punjab police. Replying to a question Rasheed said, "Railways has planned some targets that include apart from oth-

ers, earning 10 billion in this year and following a strategic approach for achieving these goals in the specific time". While responding about International Monetary Fund (IMF) he said, "government does not want to avail IMF option but due to the ailing national economy, government is striving for adopting this option on soft conditions". Sheikh said Saudi Arab and China's financial grant has given some support to the national economy and it will get more strengthened after the visit of Emirati Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan to Pakistan expected on Sunday and hopefully, he will be announcing more aid." (Agencies)

Japanese, Australian FMs to Visit India: Foreign Ministry

NEW DELHI - Foreign ministers of Australia and Japan, Marise Payne and Taro Kono, will arrive in India on Monday for three-day visits respectively. Both are bilateral visits, said official sources in India's external affairs ministry. The key highlight of Payne's visit would be her participation in the annual event of "Raisina Dialogue" in the Indian capital, which is a multilateral conference committed to addressing the most challenging issues facing the global community. Every year, global leaders

in policy, business, media and civil society are hosted in New Delhi for the dialogue to discuss co-operation on a wide range of pertinent international policy matters. The conference is hosted by India's think tank "Observer Research Foundation (ORF)" in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs. Besides, Payne would hold bilateral meetings with her Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, and Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. (Xinhua)

Trump Aide: Syria Withdrawal Waiting on 'Conditions'

JERUSALEM - President Donald Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton, said Sunday that the U.S. military withdrawal from northeastern Syria is conditioned on defeating the remnants of the Islamic State group, and on Turkey assuring the safety of Kurdish fighters allied with the United States. Bolton, who traveled to Israel to reassure the U.S. ally of the Trump-ordered withdrawal, said there is no timetable for the pullout of American forces in northeastern

Syria, but insisted it's not an unlimited commitment. "There are objectives that we want to accomplish that condition the withdrawal," Bolton told reporters in Jerusalem. "The timetable flows from the policy decisions that we need to implement." Those conditions, he said, included the defeat of remnants of IS in Syria, and protections for Kurdish militias who have fought alongside U.S. troops against the extremist group.



Bolton's comments mark the first public confirmation that the drawdown has been slowed, as Trump faced widespread criticism from al-

lies and the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis for a policy that was to have been conducted within weeks. (AP)

Malaysia's King Abdicates: Palace Statement



KUALA LUMPUR - Malaysia's king has abdicated, royal officials said Sunday, ending weeks of specu-

queen. Sultan Muhammad V's decision marks the first time a king has abdicated in the Muslim-majority country since it gained independence from Britain in 1957. "The National Palace informs that his majesty has resigned as the 15th king effective January 6," said a statement from the palace. It did not give any reason for the 49-year-old royal's move. But there had been a question mark over the reign of the king, who

ascended to the throne in December 2016, since he took a leave of absence for medical treatment in November. Reports then circulated online that he had married a former Miss Moscow in Russia -- although royal officials in Malaysia have so far not commented on the rumours. Speculation intensified about his future this week when the country's Islamic royals reportedly held a special meeting. (AFP)

Al-Qaida-Linked Groups Enter Largest City in Syria's Aleppo Countryside

DAMASCUS - The al-Qaida-linked militants entered on Sunday the largest city in the western countryside of northern Syria's Aleppo province, the latest in a series of advances made against the Turkey-backed rebels. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the umbrella group of the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front, entered the city of Atareb, some 25 km west of the capital city of Aleppo, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor. The capture of Atareb is

the latest advance of the HTS against the Turkey-backed National Liberation Front (NLF), as the HTS managed in less than a week to strip the NLF of the entire western countryside of Aleppo, including closer to the capital city, which is under full government control since late 2016. The HTS has controlled a large area, stretching from the western outskirts of Aleppo city to areas near the Turkish Iskenderun city, according to the Observatory. (Xinhua)

U.S. Business Leader Calls for More "Normalized" Trade Relationship with China

WASHINGTON - As the United States and China continue their trade talks, Gary Shapiro, president and CEO of the U.S. Consumer Technology Association (CTA), said he would like to see a more "normalized" trade relationship with China, arguing that tariffs are not the right mechanism to solve the problems. Shapiro made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Xinhua ahead of the 2019 Consumer Electronics Show (CES), which will be held in Las Vegas from Tuesday to Friday. (Xinhua)

Iraqi President Calls for Strengthening Army

BAGHDAD - Iraqi President Barham Salih took part in celebrations of the Iraqi Army Day on Sunday and stressed the need to strengthen the army as a "national and professional institution" for all Iraqis.

On the occasion of 98th anniversary for the establishment of the Iraqi army, Salih said in a tweet on his official account that "we recall the achievements of the army in the defense of the homeland, and the latest of which is to defeat terrorism." Salih asserted "the need to strengthen the capabilities of the army as a national and professional institution for all Iraqis and to protect the homeland and its constitutional, democratic and federal system." Earlier in the day, Salih attended a ceremony at the monument of the Unknown Soldier in Baghdad Green Zone, where he laid a wreath of flowers on the monument. (Xinhua)

Poland to Close 'Escape Rooms' That Fail Safety Standards: PM

WARSAW - Poland will close 'escape rooms' that do not meet safety standards, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said on Sunday after a fire killed five teenage girls. The girls were celebrating a birthday at an escape room in the northern town of Koszalin when the fire broke out. The venue's owner was arrested on Sunday, Polish media reported. Authorities carried out inspections of at least 178 escape room locations across Poland at the weekend and found 129 did not meet health and safety standards,



said the head of state fire services Leszek Suski. Thirteen locations were ordered closed. In escape rooms, participants are locked in and race against the clock to solve puzzles and challenges to open a way out. "This was unprecedented ... any sort of prevention is important," Morawiecki told reporters. Interior Minister Joachim Brudziński urged parents to report potential safety violations at escape rooms or other children's entertainment centers. (Reuters)

Philippine Court Orders Arrest of Japanese Casino Mogul Okada

MANILA - A Philippine court has ordered the arrest of Japanese pachinko billionaire Kazuo Okada, about a month after the country's Department of Justice recommended the filing of charges against him over three counts of fraud. The DOJ has found cause to indict Okada for three counts of swindling after he acquired "through mistake or fraud" \$3.15 million in salary and consultancy fees during his tenure as chief executive of Manila casino operator Tiger Resort.

Okada had filed a motion for reconsideration at the DOJ, dismissing the accusations against him as baseless. Judge Rolando How of the Paranaque City Regional Trial Court Branch 257 ordered the National Bureau of Investigation and the Philippine National Police to present Okada to court. The warrant of arrest was issued on Friday and made public on Sunday. The bail was fixed at 348,000 Philippine pesos (\$6,627) for all three charges. (Reuters)

Merkel's Coalition Partner Demands Answers over German Data Breach

BERLIN - Chancellor Angela Merkel's junior coalition partners, the Social Democrats (SPD), demanded on Sunday that her interior minister quickly find out what Germany's security agencies knew about a huge data breach and how they reacted.

The breach has shocked Germany's establishment and risks rocking Merkel's awkward 'grand coalition' again just months after a row over the fate of the domestic intelligence agency chief came close to tearing apart the ruling alliance. The government said on Friday that personal data and documents from hundreds of German politicians and public figures including Merkel had been published online, in what appeared to be one of Germany's biggest data breaches. Lars Klingbeil, secretary general of the center-left (SPD), told the Funke media group the government must quickly shed light on "which agencies knew what exactly when, and how that was dealt with".

"This should be a priority for (Interior Minister) Horst Seehofer. It's about protecting our democracy," Klingbeil added.

Seehofer told the Sueddeutsche Zeitung he only became aware of the breach on Friday morning, but that he would share everything he finds out with the public and intended to do so by the middle of this week at the latest.

The ecologist Greens leader in parliament, Anton Hofreiter, said the president of the BSI cyber defense agency, Arne Schoenbohm, must explain himself urgently in an extraordinary parliamentary committee meeting. (Reuters)