

## Rheinmetall Plans to Sue Germany over Saudi Arms Embargo: Spiegel

BERLIN - German weapons maker Rheinmetall plans to sue the government over its decision to stop all arms exports to Saudi Arabia after the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Spiegel Online reported on Sunday.

Citing a letter to the Economy Ministry, Spiegel said Rheinmetall intends to sue the German government for loss of revenue if the export suspension continues.

Berlin suspended approval of future export licenses to Saudi Arabia in October and in November said it had worked with industry to halt shipments of arms sales that were already approved.

No specific timetable was given at the time, but industry sources told Reuters an agreement had



been struck to revisit the matter by mid-January. Last week the economy ministry said the government still had no intention of approving

arms exports to Saudi Arabia.

Without citing sources, Spiegel said Rheinmetall believes it can claim for compensation because the government's decision affected

exports that had already been approved.

The company's management fears shareholders could sue Rheinmetall if the company does not demand compensation for the losses, Spiegel added.

"We cannot comment on individual decisions, possible revocations or individual measures," the Economy Ministry said in an emailed statement. A spokesman for Rheinmetall declined to comment on the report. Spiegel said goods worth up to 2 billion euros (\$2.3 billion) are affected by the export suspension, including four Cobra radar systems built by a consortium that includes France's Thales, Airbus and Lockheed Martin of the United States. (Reuters)

## Neighbor News

### Pakistan's Exports to Hit \$27 Billion in 2019, Says Official

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's volume of exports would increase to around USD 27 billion in 2019, a top financial advisor to Prime Minister Imran Khan has said.

The Imran Khan led government is facing increasing pressure for rising inflation, new taxes and an overall struggling economic picture since coming into power last year after the general elections.

Adviser to Khan for Commerce, Textile and Industry Production Abdul Razak Dawood said that the target of exports the government had set by the year end was around USD 27 bil-

lion. This year we will achieve the target of setting a new record for highest exports from Pakistan and we are looking at around USD 27 billion of exports, Dawood said at an Edible oil conference here on Saturday.

The government is due to announce a mini budget on January 23rd in the National Assembly, which could bring more taxes and duties for the consumers and importers. Stating that reducing imports was vital for economic growth, Dawood said the government is focusing on increasing volume of exports in 2019. (Agencies)

### 1.3 Tons of Illicit Drugs Seized in SE Iran

ZAHEDAN - The border guards' commander of Sistan and Baluchestan province said that the force has seized 1.29 kg of different illicit drugs in two operations on near the city of Saravan in southeast Iran.

Second Brigadier General Saeed Komeili said that drug traffickers were trying to transfer a significant amount of drugs to Iran's central regions when the force conducted armed operations and seized the two giant loads which included different types of illicit drugs.

According to him, the busted loads included

some 49 kg of morphine, 359 kg of hashish, 862 kg of opium and 27.5 kg of heroin.

The commander went on to say that a host of smugglers' vehicles were also busted during the operations, without mentioning the number of arrests or casualties. The Islamic Republic has been actively fighting drug-trafficking over the past three decades, despite its high economic and human costs. The war on drug trade originating from Afghanistan has claimed the lives of nearly 4,000 Iranian police officers over the past four decades. (MNA)

### Russian Crowd Defends Ownership of Kuriles before Abe Visit

MOSCOW - A crowd gathered in Moscow on Sunday to defend Russia's ownership of a chain of islands captured by Soviet troops from Japan during the final days of World War Two.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, due to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Tuesday, is pushing for a treaty for the islands, known as the Southern Kuriles in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan. Russia said

on Monday that its sovereignty over them was not up for discussion. "Any mention of handing over the Kuriles ... is nothing other than an act of treason," Igor Skurlatov, a speaker at the rally, said. "Today we give away the Kuriles, tomorrow we will give away Crimea."

Organizers said around 2,000 people attended. The city's security department put the number at 500, Interfax news agency said. (Reuters)

PARIS - The United States is increasingly aware of the importance of protecting its Kurdish allies even as it withdraws from Syria, French defense minister Florence Parly said on Sunday.

U.S. President Donald Trump said in December that Washington would withdraw the roughly 2,000 U.S. troops it has in Syria, raising fears for the fate of its allies among Kurdish forces who are seen as enemies by neighboring Turkey. "This question about the

### U.S. Is Aware of Need to Protect Kurds: French Minister



necessity to protect them has been taken into consideration by the Americans," Parly told a program hosted by France

Info, France Inter and Le Monde newspaper.

"The Kurds have been the best partners of the coalition," added Parly,

referring to an international coalition of countries, including the United States, fighting Islamic State. (Reuters)

### Al-Qaeda-Linked Jihadists Attack UN Base in North Mali



BAMAKO, Mali - An official with the United Nations mission in Mali says that jihadists linked to al-Qaida

have killed six peacekeepers and injured 19 others in an attack on a peacekeepers' camp in Aguelhoc, in northern

Mali's Kidal region. Residents confirmed the Sunday morning assault saying that attackers came in mo-

torcycles and cars. The Aguelhoc camp houses peacekeepers from Chad. The U.N. official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not permitted to speak to press on the matter. The peacekeeping mission in Mali is one of the U.N.'s deadliest. Mali is under threat from a number of extremist groups affiliated with al-Qaida and the Islamic State organization, and attacks have moved from the north to Central Mali. (AP)

### Turkish U.S. Consulate Worker Faces Charges over Gulen Links: DHA

ISTANBUL - Turkish prosecutors have prepared the charge sheet against a local employee of the U.S. consulate who was arrested over alleged links to the network of U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, Demiroren News Agency (DHA) reported. Gulen is accused at a Turkish state bank in an Iran sanctions-busting case. Topuz is in jail along with two other local consulate employees, as is a Turkish-U.S. national and former NASA scientist who faces terrorism charges. (Reuters)

and led to a months-long suspension of bilateral visa services. Relations between the two NATO allies have been strained over U.S. support for Kurdish fighters in northern Syria, Turkey's plan to buy a Russian missile defence system, and the U.S. jailing of an executive at a Turkish state bank in an Iran sanctions-busting case. Topuz is in jail along with two other local consulate employees, as is a Turkish-U.S. national and former NASA scientist who faces terrorism charges. (Reuters)

### UN Relief Agency Says Its Presence in Jerusalem Not "Gift from Israel"

RAMALLAH - Spokesperson for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Sami Mushasha told official Palestinian radio station Sunday that UNRWA's presence in Jerusalem is "not a gift from Israel, but mandated by a UN resolution in accordance with international law." He commented on Israeli reports that authorities will shut down UN service centers in East Jerusalem, including schools, before the beginning of the next school year. UNRWA said it has 8 Peacekeepers: UN Source BAMAHO - Gunmen killed at least eight Chadian UN peacekeepers in an attack Sunday on one of their bases in northern Mali, a source close to the MINUSMA force said. (AFP)

### Xi Sends Condolences to Mexican President over Deadly Pipeline Blast

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday sent a message of condolences to his Mexican counterpart Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador over a deadly pipeline blast that has killed at least 73 people.

In his message, Xi said he was shocked to learn of a fuel pipeline explosion in central Mexico that has caused heavy casualties. On behalf of the Chinese government and people, as well as in his own name, Xi extended his deep condolences to the victims and sympathy to their families and the injured people.

Xi said he wishes a quick recovery for the injured, and expressed China's readiness to provide necessary help. (Xinhua)

### At Arab Summit, Lebanon's Aoun Calls for Syrian Refugee Returns

BEIRUT - Lebanese President Michel Aoun urged world powers on Sunday to step up efforts for Syrian refugees to return home, regardless of any political solution to the war there.

Aoun told an Arab economic summit in Beirut that Lebanon had suggested solutions for safe returns for the meeting to agree.

Since conflict broke out in Syria in 2011, more than 1 million people have fled across the border to Lebanon, where aid agencies say most live in extreme poverty. The United Nations says it is not yet safe to return. Lebanese officials have called for



refugees to go home after Syria's President Bashar al-Assad reclaimed most of the country with Russian and Iranian help.

Divisions among Arab states over Syria, and internal disputes in Lebanon, have undermined the summit before it began, with several leaders staying away. A key

point of contention has been whether to bring Syria back into the Arab League, more than seven years after its membership was suspended. Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah, which has helped Assad's military defeat rebels and militants, wants rapprochement with Damascus. (Reuters)

### Do Not Hijack Brexit, Minister Warns Britain's Parliament

LONDON - Parliament cannot be allowed to hijack Brexit, Trade Minister Liam Fox said on Sunday, in a warning to lawmakers who want to take more control over Britain's departure from the European Union.

With just weeks to go before Britain is due to leave the EU, Prime Minister Theresa May will return to parliament on Monday to set out how she plans to try to break the Brexit deadlock after her deal was rejected by lawmakers last week.

She will also speak to ministers on Sunday on a conference call, a government source said, as the prime minister tries to navigate a way through the competing visions for the future from a second referendum to staying in the EU.

Time is running out for Brexit, Britain's biggest shift in foreign and trade policy in more than 40 years, but so far there is little that unites a divided parliament beyond its rejection of May's deal that envisages close economic ties with the EU. (Reuters)

### 'Huge Explosion' in Syria Capital Causes Fatalities: Monitor

DAMASCUS - A "huge explosion" near a military intelligence office in Damascus Sunday left a number of dead and wounded, a war monitor said, after state TV reported early indications suggested a "terrorist act".

"The explosion took place near a security branch in the south of the city. There are some people killed and injured but we could not verify the toll immediately," the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights told AFP.

It was unclear if the blast was caused by a bomb that was planted or a suicide attack, according to the monitor, which relies on a network of sources inside the country.

It said that shooting followed the explosion. Syrian state television earlier reported that a blast had been heard around the southern highway in Damascus. "First reports suggest a terrorist act," the broadcaster said.

The state outlet did not provide any more details on the incident. Syria is locked in a civil war that has killed more than 360,000 people and displaced millions since a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests in 2011 spiralled into full conflict.

With key military backing from Russia, President Bashar al-Assad's forces have retaken large parts of Syria from rebels and jihadists, and now control almost two-thirds of the country.

The Syrian regime in May reclaimed a final scrap of territory held by the Islamic State group in southern Damascus, cementing total control over the capital for the first time in six years. (AFP)

### UN Chief Wants Meaningful Pakistan-India Dialogue

UNITED NATIONS - The United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, has said he hopes to soon see Islamabad and New Delhi engage in a meaningful dialogue to resolve their disputes.

The UN chief's comments came in response to a question by a Pakistani journalist at a press conference in New York on Friday night.

Speaking about New Delhi's failure to positively respond to Islamabad's recent offers for talks, Guterres expressed willingness to facilitate any future Pakistan-India peace talks.

"I've been offering my good offices in relation to the dialogue between the two countries that, until now, had no con-

ditions of success," he said, adding, "The importance of India and Pakistan is such in international affairs, I hope that the two countries will be able to engage in a meaningful dialogue." On India's atrocities in the Indian Held Kashmir (IHK), Guterres said the UN had clearly done its job, as he referred to last year's damning UN report that calls for a 'commission of inquiry' to investigate the grave human rights violations in the held valley.

"The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has produced recently a very detailed report. So, the UN has clearly done its job in that regard," the UN secretary general said. (MNA)

### Iran, Turkey to Further Ease Border Trade

TEHRAN - Iranian and Turkish officials agreed to solve problems obstructing trade interactions across the common border of the two countries, and vowed to further strengthen cooperation and good neighborliness.

The 48th subcommittee of Iran and Turkey on border security convened in Turkish border province of Hakkari on Saturday.

The Iranian delegation was headed by Governor-General of West Azerbaijan province Alireza Mohammadzadeh, and the Turkish delegation was headed by Hakkari Governor Idris Akbiyik, according to a statement by Hakkari governorate.

During the subcommittee session, the two sides discussed obstacles on the way of bor-

der trade, and ways to resolve them, the announcement said.

The statement added that the two delegations also signed a protocol but it did not elaborate on the details of it.

It said the two sides underlined the need for further cooperation and good neighborliness.

Earlier on December 20, Tehran and Ankara jointly denounced the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal of July 14, 2015, and said that Washington's unilateral sanctions against Iran are destructive for the economy of the whole region.

Iran and Turkey agreed to step up their economic cooperation with the aim of reaching a \$30-billion target set for their annual trade. (FNA)