

Nuclear Deal will Reduce Iran Enrichment Capacity: US Adviser

DOHA - A nuclear deal with Iran will significantly reduce Tehran's enrichment capacity, US Vice-President Joe Biden's national security adviser told a conference in Qatar on Monday.

Dr Colin H. Kahl, speaking at the US-Islamic World Forum in Doha, said the current deal being hammered out was the best on offer, despite many sceptical voices in the US and elsewhere, including Gulf Arab states.

"Under the deal we are negotiating... Iran's enrichment capability will be substantially rolled back," said Kahl.

"The deal we are negotiating makes us and the region safer."

The ongoing talks to finalise a nuclear accord between Iran and



world powers, including the United States, are deadlocked weeks ahead of a deadline.

Negotiations at the weekend in Geneva, Switzerland, failed to bridge differences between Washington and Tehran, especially over the crucial issue of inspections of military sites.

Other sticking points remain, including the possible military dimensions of the Iranian nuclear programme and the demands by the P5+1 group for UN inspections of Iranian military bases.

A deadline has been set for June 30 to reach a ground-breaking agreement that would see Iran curtail its nuclear ambitions in return for a lifting of crippling international sanctions. (AFP)

NATO to Hold Exercise to Test Communications Systems

BRUSSELS - Poland is hosting NATO's Exercise Steadfast Cobalt this Sunday so that the organization can test communications systems, according to NATO's press release Wednesday.

Troops from over 20 NATO allied nations are taking part in the two-week exercise, in which nearly 1,000 personnel are to participate.

The exercise is aimed at certifying the deploy-

able communications and information systems used by elements of the NATO Response Force (NRF).

For the first time, this exercise introduces advanced communication assets down to the tactical level and, in addition to supporting troops, other capabilities such as cyber defense have also been included.

Major General Thomas Franz, said, "All commu-



nication systems must be instantly responsive, indeed in some instances, operational before any task force arrives on location." "We have also

introduced on Steadfast Cobalt effective procedures to train, test, and evaluate new communication structures," said Franz. (Xinhua)

Coalition Pounds Yemen, US Says Envoy Met Rebels

SANAA - Saudi-led coalition warplanes intensified raids on Yemen's capital Wednesday, as Washington confirmed a top US diplomat had met representatives of Iran-backed rebels to try to revive proposed Geneva peace talks. The UN Security Council appealed for a new humanitarian ceasefire and peace talks as soon as possible to end fighting that has killed at least 2,000 people since March.

The 15-member council, backing an appeal by UN chief Ban Ki-moon, said in a unanimous statement it was "deeply disappointed" that the planned May 28 talks in Geneva were pushed back. Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia and its regional allies have been bombing the rebels since late March to try to restore Yemen's exiled President Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi to power. Dozens of explosions rocked

the capital as coalition jets pounded Sanaa for hours from early Wednesday, an AFP correspondent said. The raids targeted several rebel arms depots, a pro-rebel military police camp and a renegade troop base, according to residents. The bombing shook nearby buildings and sent flames shooting into the air as debris rained down on houses in the surrounding area. (AFP)

More Than 10,000 Jihadists Killed Since Coalition Raids: US

PARIS - More than 10,000 jihadists have been killed in air strikes against the Islamic State group over a nine-month coalition campaign, US deputy secretary of state Antony Blinken said on Wednesday. "We have seen enormous losses from Daesh (IS), more than 10,000 since the beginning of the campaign and this will end up having an impact," Blinken told French radio, without specifying whether

the losses were in Iraq or Syria. Blinken was speaking a day after an international conference in Paris in which 20 or so representatives of the anti-IS coalition pledged support for Baghdad's plan to claw back territory from the marauding jihadists who have conquered large parts of Iraq and Syria.

The coalition's strategy has been criticised for relying on air strikes without committing boots on the ground, but Blinken

stressed there had been "significant progress". Islamic State now controls "25 percent less of Iraq after nine months, a lot of their equipment has been destroyed and many Daesh members have been eliminated," said Blinken.

He nevertheless acknowledged the "resilience" of the group after the coalition has launched about 4,000 air strikes on them. (AFP)

S. Korea Tests Missiles that Can Hit 'Any Target' in N. Korea

SEOUL - South Korea on Wednesday test-fired two ballistic missiles capable of hitting any part of North Korea, in an apparent response to recent bellicose boasts from Pyongyang about its nuclear and missile capabilities. In an unusual move, President Park Geun-Hye personally observed the test exercise, a defence ministry official said. "The military tested

two home-developed, long-range missiles that could hit any target in North Korea," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The test came almost a month after North Korea said it had successfully tested a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) -- a claim which numerous experts said was probably exaggerated. A fully developed SLBM

capability would take the North Korean nuclear threat to a new level, allowing deployment far beyond the Korean peninsula and giving it the potential to retaliate in the event of a nuclear attack.

As well as the SLBM test, Pyongyang recently boasted of its ability to miniaturise a nuclear warhead to fit on high-precision, long-range rockets. (AFP)

Iraqi Officials Fear is 'Water War' in Ramadi

BAGHDAD - Iraqi officials voiced fears Wednesday that jihadists will use their seizure of a dam in Ramadi to mount fresh attacks on pro-government forces preparing to try to retake the city. A string of advances last month by the Islamic State group cast doubt on the strategy of the US-led coalition battling the jihadists, but Washington has insisted it is on the right track. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said after the May 17 fall of Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, that his men would take it back within days but operations are moving slowly. IS militants used an unprecedented wave of suicide truck bomb attacks to seize Ramadi in a three-day blitz last month. In recent days they have

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Iraq, Iran Fighters Deployed to Defend Damascus: Security Source

BEIRUT - Thousands of Iranian and Iraqi fighters have been deployed in Syria in past weeks to bolster the defences of Damascus and its surroundings, a Syrian security source told AFP on Wednesday.

"Around 7,000 Iranian and Iraqi fighters have arrived in Syria over the past few weeks and their first priority is the defence of the capital. The larger contingent is Iraqi," the source said on condition of anonymity. "The goal is to reach 10,000 men to support the Syrian army and pro-government militias, firstly in Damascus, and then to retake Jisr

al-Shughur because it is key to the Mediterranean coast and the Hama region" in central Syria, he added. Syria's government lost control of Jisr al-Shughur in northwestern Idlib province on April 25, as a coalition of opposition forces including Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra Front swept through the region. Iran's official news agency IRNA quoted elite Revolutionary Guards General Qassem Soleimani as saying "in the coming days the world will be surprised by what we are preparing, in cooperation with Syrian military leaders." (AFP)

US, Allies Launch 18 Air Strikes against IS in Iraq: Military

WASHINGTON - U.S. and coalition forces conducted 18 air strikes targeting Islamic State in 10 Iraqi cities since Tuesday morning, as well as four air strikes against the militant group in Syria, the U.S. military said.

The strikes in Iraq destroyed Islamic State targets including buildings, fighting positions, tactical units, vehicles and heavy machine guns, the Combined

Joint Task Force said in a statement Wednesday. Cities hit included Ramadi, recently captured by the militant group, Sinjar, Tal Afar, Baiji, Kirkuk, Mosul and Fallujah, it said.

The statement said the strikes in Syria destroyed six Islamic State fighting positions near Al Hasakah and an armored vehicle near Dayr Az Zawr, where they also hit a tactical unit. (Reuters)

Baltics Eye Flashpoints with Russia, Guard against 'Green Men'



TALLINN/RIGA - From sabotage of energy installations to cyber attacks and declarations of "independence" by Russian-speaking border villages, the Baltics are preparing for possible flashpoints of war. Ukraine's conflict with Moscow-backed separatists has unnerved Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, the only parts of the former Soviet Union that have joined NATO and the European Union.

They are small, geographically-isolated from the rest of the EU, and have Russian-speaking minorities which President Vladimir Putin declared last year gives Moscow the right to intervene with military force. Their fear is not only about a conventional

war of tanks rolling across 627 miles (1,009 km) of border, but of smaller, ambiguous incidents similar to the tactics Moscow employed to wrest control of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula last year.

For more than a year the three countries have prepared for a kind of murky conflict or "hybrid war", with exercises against "saboteurs", campaigns against Russian "propaganda" and increased spending on defense and border security. Lithuania held a simulation in May of separatist groups attacking installations near Russia's enclave of Kaliningrad, a base of Moscow's Baltic fleet which is connected to the rest of Russia by a train line through Lithuania. (Reuters)

Neighbour News

'Technicalities will not Kill Russia's S-300 Delivery to Iran'

TEHRAN - Iran's ambassador to Moscow says technicalities are not going to impede the delivery of Russian S-300 missile defense systems to the Islamic Republic.

Addressing the issues surrounding the transfer of the air defense systems to Iran, Mehdi Sanaei said, "Most importantly, the Russian president has lifted the ban [on S-300 deliveries to Iran]," Russia's Interfax news agency reported on Wednesday. "The rest will be done by experts. These are technical issues rather than serious problems, and I do not think they can hinder the fulfillment of the decision made by the Russian president," the envoy added.

The two sides agreed on the procurement of the defense apparatuses to Iran in 2007. Moscow, however, banned the delivery in 2010 under the pretext that the agreement was covered by the fourth round of the United Nations Security Council sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program. Following the imposition of the ban on the surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems delivery by Moscow, Tehran filed a complaint with an arbitration court. The Iranian ambassador also addressed the issue of the lawsuit, affirming it will be no object if Tehran is determined to obtain the SAM systems. "What suit are you talking about if the Iranian side procures the system?" he asked. (Agencies)

China Ties Soe Employees' Salaries to Profitability

BEIJING - Against the backdrop of waning revenues and profits, the state-owned enterprise (SOE) watchdog on Wednesday said combined salaries must be reduced at central SOEs witnessing declining profits. In the latest circular issued to centrally-administered SOEs, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) called for efforts to boost revenues, slash costs and fulfill this year's operation targets. Salaries must be strictly tied to company profits, and in SOEs reporting growing profits, salary increases should not surpass that of profits, said the SASAC. Priority should be given to improving growth quality and efficiency, in-

novation, opening new markets, and reducing operational costs to register higher combined profits at all SOEs, said the SASAC.

"The global economy is undergoing profound adjustments, and the recovery lacks momentum. The Chinese economy is faced with mounting challenges, and some industries are facing risks of overcapacity, weak demand, low product prices, and high debt levels," it stressed. Combined business revenues of 112 SOEs directly under the central government's administration stood at 25.1 trillion yuan (4.1 trillion U.S. dollars) in 2014, up 3.8 percent year on year, but the growth rate was its slowest since 2009. (Xinhua)

Pakistan wants Good Relations with India: Nawaz Sharif

ISLAMABAD - Amidst exchange of barbs, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif today struck a conciliatory note saying he wants to establish good relations with India.

Sharif was talking to Pakistan High Commissioner to India Abdul Basit, who met him in Islamabad and briefed him over the relations with India.

Radio Pakistan reported that the High Commissioner apprised the Prime Minister on the state of Pakistan-India relations with particular reference to the "latest developments".

"Pakistan wants to establish good relations with India on the basis of sovereign equality and mutual respect," Sharif was quoted as saying.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister and ex-ambassador Tariq Fatemi was also present during the meeting.

Basit arrived from New Delhi early this morning and briefed officials at the Foreign Ministry about recent statements by Indian leaders.

After consultation at the Foreign Ministry, the High Commissioner met the Prime Minister to brief him about the ties with India. (Agencies)

Uzbek Farmers Learn European Experience

TASHKENT - Representatives of the Agro Information Center Innovation Uzbekistan NGO at the Council of Farmers of Uzbekistan and the heads of 24 Uzbek farming enterprises have visited Belgium and the Netherlands to learn the latest European intensive gardening technologies, the Jahon information agency reported. The Uzbek delegation visited local agro-centers, companies and farms, and provided information on the trade, economic and investment potential of Uzbekistan and its agricultural sector. The Uzbek farmers familiarized themselves with European agricultural equipment and advanced technologies, livestock and fish farm equipment, and other machinery. Representatives of Belgian and Dutch companies expressed an interest

in bilateral cooperation and contracting.

The director of an experimental garden for growing apples, pears and cherries of the fruit cultivation Research Center Pcfruit G. Verkammen told Jahon that his company is ready to establish cooperation with Uzbek colleagues. "Last year I took part in an international conference in Tashkent which was devoted to the food program, which allowed me to share knowledge and research in the field of agriculture," Verkammen said.

"I know that reforms in the Uzbek agrarian sector are consistently being carried out. Particular attention is paid to establishment of new orchards, the expansion of agricultural enterprises specializing in horticulture." (TCA)