

US & South Korea Agree to Scrap Major Military Drills to Foster Denuclearization – Seoul

WASHINGTON - Washington and Seoul will no longer conduct the large-scale Foal Eagle and Key Resolve war games, the South Korean Defense Ministry said on Sunday. It comes several days after US President Trump complained about the drills' cost. The cancellation of the annual war games, originally scheduled to kick off in spring, was announced by the South Korean military, as it made public the details of a call between acting US defense chief Patrick Shanahan and his South Korean counterpart, Jeong Kyeong-doo, Yonhap reported.

Seoul said that the move to call off the exercises was in support of the diplomatic efforts to pursue a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. The drills have been paired since 2001 and traditionally take



place in February and March. North Korea saw the allies' annual saber-rattling as preparation for invasion.

"The minister and secretary made clear that the

alliance's decision regarding the adjustment of the exercise and drills reflects both countries' expectation to back diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions and achieve the complete denucleari-

zation of the Korean Peninsula through a final, full verified method," the ministry said in a statement.

By ditching the costly war games, the US and South Korea are not eliminating joint exercises completely. They are planning new command-post drills and will continue to carry out field maneuvers. However, these are expected to be conducted on a significantly lower scale. In the run-up to the announcement, unnamed officials told CNN that Washington and Seoul might instead carry out drills "at a small unit level" that would feature "virtual training." NBC News reported, also citing officials, that the large-scale war games would be replaced by "mission-specific training." ...*(More on P4)...(12)*

Neighbor News

U.S. Wants to Know If Pakistan Used U.S.-Built F-16 Jets to Down Indian Warplane

ISLAMABAD - The United States is "seeking information" on whether Pakistan used U.S.-built F-16 jets to down an Indian warplane, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad said on Sunday, which may violate the F-16 sale agreements between Washington and Pakistan.

Pakistan says it did not use F-16s in shooting down an Indian warplane when it crossed the Line of Control that

acts as a de facto border in Kashmir. Islamabad says this was an act of self defense. "We are aware of these reports and are seeking more information," a U.S. Embassy spokesperson told Reuters. "We take all allegations of misuse of defense articles very seriously." U.S. often inserts restrictions on how its exported military hardware can be used through so-called end-user agreements. (Reuters)

US, Clients in Decline; Opposite Front on the Rise: Iran

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian security official says America and its client states in the Middle East are on the decline and that the group of countries seeking stability in the region has gained the upper hand.

"The supremacy of the front seeking and building stability against the front creating terrorists and sponsoring instability is indicative of the fact that US policies are on the road to failure," Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said on Sunday.

Shamkhani said the US - along with its Western partners and reactionary regimes in the region - employed terrorist elements and mercenaries

to uproot Islamic resistance, but the perseverance of the Syrian army, Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'abi, Yemen's Ansarullah movement and allied forces proved that "the paper-mâché of American power can collapse with the touch of a finger." He said US President Donald Trump and even "his lackeys" complacently humiliate Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates by saying those states would not last long without America. Shamkhani said Iran's prediction was that US allies in the region would face an uprising by their "humiliated citizens" if those governments continued to rely on America for protection. (Press TV)

US Denies Russia-Protected Buses Access to Syria's Rukban Camp to Evacuate Refugees

WASHINGTON - The US has rejected a joint request by Moscow and Damascus to let them evacuate refugees stranded in the Rukban camp within the US-controlled zone in Syria to areas under Damascus' control, the Russian military said.

The first column of buses accompanied by Russian military police set off for the camp on Friday. They were supposed to enter through one of the two mobile checkpoints opened by the Russian and Syrian

forces last month and ferry the refugees to other parts of Syria for permanent resettlement. However, the planned operation was apparently aborted after the US military, which controls the 55km area around the US military base at Al-Tanf - including the Rukban camp - refused to grant permission for the buses to proceed, Sergey Solomatin, head of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of the Warring Parties in Syria, said on Saturday. ...*(More on P4)...(17)*

China Considers Legal Changes on Technology to Placate US

BEIJING - In an unusual step, China's ceremonial legislature is due to endorse a law meant to help end a bruising tariff war with Washington by discouraging officials from pressuring foreign companies to hand over technology.

The battle with China's biggest trading partner is overshadowing the National People's Congress, the country's highest-profile event of the year. It brings 3,000-plus delegates to the ornate Great Hall of

the People in Beijing for two weeks of speeches, meetings with senior leaders and political ritual to endorse the ruling Communist Party's economic and social welfare plans.

A gathering of noncommunist groups held at the same time brightens Beijing's drab winter, drawing tech billionaires, movie stars and ethnic minorities in distinctive traditional dress.

That gives President Xi Jinping's government a platform for adver-



tising changes aimed at ending the fight with President Donald Trump that has disrupted trade in goods from soybeans to medical equipment. The technology measure is part of a proposed ...*(More on P4)...(13)*

Russia Tells U.S. It Is Ready for Bilateral Talks on Venezuela



MOSCOW - Russia is ready to take part in bilateral talks with the United States over the issue of Venezuela, Rus-

sia's foreign minister told his U.S. counterpart late on Saturday. The situation in Venezuela was the main topic in a

phone call between Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that took place on March 2, Russia's foreign ministry said on its website.

"In connection with Washington's proposal to hold bilateral consultations on the Venezuelan topic, it was stated that Russia is ready to participate in this," the ministry said in a statement.

It was "vital to be strictly guided by the principles of the UN Charter since only the Venezuelan people have the right to

determine their future," the statement said.

Russia and the United States have been at loggerheads over a U.S.-led campaign for international recognition of Juan Guaido, the Venezuelan opposition leader who declared himself the interim head of state, over President Nicholas Maduro.

In the phone call, initiated by the United States, Lavrov condemned the threats that Washington made towards "the country's lawful leadership," the ...*(More on P4)...(14)*

Mafia 'Super Fugitive' Arrested in Italy after 14 Years on the Run

ROME - A top mafia fugitive dubbed the second most dangerous man in Italy was arrested Saturday after spending 14 years on the run. Marco Di Lauro, 38, was arrested at an apartment in Naples, where he lived with his wife, according to police.

Di Lauro, the fourth son of ex-Camorra boss Paolo Di Lauro, was sitting with his two cats and eating pasta when he was taken into custody in an operation that involved around 150 officers, Agence France-

Presse reported.

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte praised the arrest on Twitter, thanking police for the swift capture.

"A great job and an extraordinary team operation," he said, calling the arrest "another blow to organized crime."

The 38-year-old was wanted over charges that include murder, drug trafficking, arson, armed robbery, racketeering and extortion, according to Europol.

The crime fighting agency ...*(More on P4)...(18)*

Tomato Prices Cause Inflation in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - In February 2019, fruit and vegetable products became the leader in price increase in Uzbekistan which led to a general increase in inflation in the consumer sector at 1.6 percent, Trend reports with reference to Uzbek State Statistics Committee.

In the last month of winter, food prices rose by 2 percent compared to January. Fruits and vegetables' cost increased by 4 percent. In particular, tomatoes added 12.5 percent, cucumbers - 9.5 percent, watermelons - 7.1 percent, melons - 6 percent, pears and grapes - 5.5 percent, apples - 3.1 percent.

The State Statistics Committee placed public catering at the second position, the cost of which increased on average

by 3.3 percent. Dairy products are in the third place.

Among the foodstuffs, in annual terms, rice rose in price most of all - by 56.2 percent. Moreover, among the drivers of inflation are bread products (28.3 percent), meat (19.5 percent), catering (18.7 percent) and dairy products (15.6 percent). Non-food products rose in February by 1.5 percent. The prices for communication devices have risen sharply - by 9.5 percent per month. The cost of basic household goods and electrical appliances increased by 5.8 percent, detergents - by 5.7 percent. The prices for automotive fuel have decreased, however, by only 0.1 percent. In particular, propane dropped by 1 percent. (Trend)

Dutch Husband of Shamima Begum Wants to Take Her Home

LONDON - The Dutch man who married a British teenager after she ran away to join the Islamic State group says he wants to return home to the Netherlands with Shamima Begum and their newborn son.

Yago Riedijk, 27, told the BBC from a Kurdish-run detention center that he met Begum within days of her arrival in Syria when she was 15. He says the marriage was "her own choice."

When asked if marrying 15-year-old was appropriate, he said: "To be honest, when my friend came and said there was a girl who was interested in marriage, I wasn't that interested because of her age, but I accepted the offer anyway." Riedijk says that while he fought for IS, he now rejects the group and tried to leave it. (AP)

5 Years on, Malaysia Open to Proposals to Resume MH370 Hunt

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia - Malaysia's transport minister said Sunday that the government is open to new proposals from U.S. technology firm Ocean Infinity or any other companies to resume the hunt for Flight 370, as families of passengers marked the fifth anniversary of the jet's mysterious disappearance.

Ocean Infinity mounted a "no cure, no fee" search for the plane in the southern Indian Ocean in January 2018 that ended in May without any clue on where it could have crashed. But the company's CEO, Oliver Plunkett, said in a video shown at the public remembrance ...*(More on P4)...(19)*

Russian Oil Expert Detained at Kiev's Request in Greece, Lawyer Calls Arrest 'Politicized'

MOSCOW - A Russian national has been arrested in Greece and faces extradition to Ukraine on tax-crime charges. His lawyer said he is being persecuted for supporting the former Ukrainian president who was ousted in a Western-backed coup.

Evgeny Kalinin, a Russian energy expert, was arrested by the Greek authorities at Athens International Airport on Thursday, his lawyer, Yannis Rahiotis, told Sputnik.

Kalinin is a well-known oil industry expert, Rahiotis said, noting that his client was on a routine business trip to the country at the time. Kalinin appeared



in court on Friday, when he was sent to prison until Ukraine's extradition request is delivered to Athens.

According to Rahiotis, Kalinin faces unspecified tax-crime charges, which allegedly arise from his past work as a top executive in Ukraine's oil company. Kalinin served as vice

president of TNK-BP Commerce, a Kiev-based company that specializes in producing and selling crude oil products in Ukraine and Russia, until 2011. The company, which was founded in 2003, also operates a network of gasoline and filling stations in Ukraine. ...*(More on P4)...(15)*

Google Rules Saudi Women Control App Violates No Rules – Report

CALIFORNIA - Google has apparently told a US congresswoman that a Saudi government app that allows men to keep tabs on women and bar them from leaving the country is in compliance with its guidelines, Business Insider reported.

The Alphabet-owned IT giant has reportedly found nothing wrong with the controversial app, devised by the Saudi government to help citizens with routine administrative duties such as tracking female members of

their families, the Insider reported on Saturday. The statement was made by Google in response to a request by Rep. Jackie Speier (D-California) and another 13 of her fellow lawmakers, including freshman Muslim representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib.

The app that has sparked an outcry in the US House is Absher, which provides Saudi citizens and residents with an opportunity to "safely browse your ...*(More on P4)...(16)*

On Brink of Syria Defeat, Islamic State Unleashes Car Bombs

NEAR BAGHOUZ, Syria - Islamic State launched suicide car bombs against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) assaulting Baghouz, in a last-ditch effort to stave off defeat in its final patch of territory, fighters from the U.S.-backed force said on Sunday. Capturing the village in eastern Syria will be a milestone in international efforts to roll back the jihadists, whose self-styled "caliphate" covered roughly one third of Syria and Iraq at its height in 2014.

But it is universally accepted that the group, which has been in territorial retreat since then and suffered its major defeats in 2017, will remain a security threat as an insurgent force with sleeper cells and some desolate pockets of territory.

The SDF had said it expected a "decisive battle" on Sunday after advancing gradually for 18 hours to avoid land mines sown by Islamic State (IS), whose fighters are also using underground tunnels to stage ambushes and then disappear.

By midday, however, there was no sign of the battle being over.

The SDF has previously estimated several hundred IS insurgents to be inside Baghouz, mostly foreigners, and the U.S.-led international coalition supporting the SDF has described them as the "most hardened" militants. From a position about 3 km (2 miles) from the front line on Sunday afternoon, warplanes and the pounding of artillery could be heard overhead as plumes of smoke rose over Baghouz. ...*(More on P4)...(20)*

French Companies Studying New Economic Projects of Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT - A round table meeting was held in Paris dedicated to the trade and economic relations between Turkmenistan and France, Trend reports with reference to the Turkmen Foreign Ministry.

The event was organized by the Embassy of Turkmenistan together with the French-Turkmen Chamber of Commerce.

The discussion was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan, as well as the Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for the Economy and Finance of France, the leaders of French companies and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry "MEDEF International." The parties discussed promising areas of cooperation. Representatives of French companies ex-

pressed their willingness to participate in major projects in Turkmenistan, the report said.

French companies operate in Turkmenistan in such areas as construction, transport, tourism and energy. The two countries are also interested in the implementation of a project of transporting Turkmen gas to Europe.

The option of laying a gas pipeline through the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan and its connecting to the transnational projects in the European direction is being considered.

The French Total and Gas de France companies are interested in developing the hydrocarbon resources of the Turkmen part of the Caspian Sea and exploring the possibilities of transporting gas to Europe. (Trend)