

Obama Expected to Push for Gulf Missile Defense at U.S. Summit

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama is expected to make a renewed U.S. push next week to help Gulf allies create a region-wide defense system to guard against Iranian missiles as he seeks to allay their anxieties over any nuclear deal with Tehran, according to U.S. sources. The offer could be accompanied by enhanced security commitments, new arms sales and more joint military exercises, U.S. officials say, as Obama tries to reassure Gulf Arab countries that Washington is not abandoning them. With little more than a week to go before Obama



hosts the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council at the White House and then

at Camp David, aides are discussing the options in pre-summit meetings

with Arab diplomats. Officials say no final decisions on possible U.S. proposals have been made. Obama faces a formidable challenge in deciding how

far to go to sell skeptical Sunni-led allies on his top foreign policy priority, a final nuclear deal with Shi'ite Iran due by a June 30 deadline. Failure to placate them could further strain ties, though additional defense obligations would carry the risk of the United States being drawn into new Middle East conflicts. Obama issued the invitation to the GCC after Iran and six world powers reached a framework agreement last month that would give Tehran sanctions relief for reining in its nuclear program. Gulf Arab neighbors, including key U.S.... (More on P4)...(23)

Neighbour News

US Backing 'Immense Crimes' in Yemen: Khamenei

TEHRAN - Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday accused the United States of supporting "immense crimes" in Yemen by Saudi Arabia, which is leading an air war against Tehran-backed rebels. "The Saudi government is killing innocent people, women and children in Yemen ... and Americans support these immense crimes," Khamenei said in a speech to students quoted on his official website. Iran, the Shiite rival of Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia, has strongly condemned the nearly six-week-old coalition air strikes against Shiite Huthi rebels who have seized large parts of Yemen including the capital. Washington has given

intelligence and logistical support to the coalition. Tehran is a key ally of the Huthi rebels but denies arming them. "The Americans shamelessly support the killing of the Yemeni population, but they accuse Iran of interfering in that country and of sending weapons when Iran only seeks to provide medical and food aid," Khamenei said. "The revolutionary people of Yemen do not need weapons because they control all the country's military bases and centres," he added. Tensions between Riyadh and Tehran have been rising steadily, not only over Yemen but also the situation in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Shiite-majority but Sunni-ruled Bahrain. (AFP)

Five Soldiers Killed as Talks Resume Over Truce: Ukraine

MINSK - Ukraine said Wednesday that five Ukrainian soldiers were killed as fresh clashes rumbled on despite the resumption of talks between the government and rebels over a battered truce deal. Over the past 24 hours four servicemen died when their armoured vehicle hit a landmine close to the frontline town of Avdiivka in the ravaged east, while a fifth was killed in an insurgent ambush and a further 12 wounded, Ukrainian spokesman Andriy Lysenko said. The latest casualties come

as Ukrainian and separatist representatives met in Minsk for the first time since the two sides inked a shaky peace deal in February that dampened much of the fighting but failed to halt clashes at key hotspots. Negotiators from the warring sides held talks with international mediators and officials from Russia -- which Kiev accuses of masterminding the conflict -- in the Belarusian capital to discuss the battered truce and a convoluted political roadmap for ending the conflict. (AFP)

Netanyahu's Efforts to form Israeli Government Go Down to Wire

JERUSALEM - Benjamin Netanyahu, locked in down-to-the-wire coalition talks, faces a midnight deadline to form a government or risk being denied a fourth term as Israel's prime minister. Nearly two months after a convincing election victory, Netanyahu is struggling to build a solid parliamentary majority, with a former ally abandoning him this week. The key to his political future now lies with the ultranationalist Jewish



Home party, which advocates annexation of parts of occupied territory. Shortly after the March 17 vote, Netanyahu and his Likud party appeared to be

coasting toward a right-leaning government with control of 67 of parliament's 120 seats. But on Monday, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, whose once-strong relationship with the Israeli leader turned sour long ago, dropped a bombshell by taking his far-right Yisrael Beiteinu party out of the coalition talks. That left Netanyahu with the support of two ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties and a centrist faction, a total... (More on P4)...(24)

Poland Recalls Dark Side of WWII Victory

WARSAW - Poland on Thursday marks 70 years since the end of World War II, with an emphasis on the dark side of history: that victory over Nazi Germany triggered 45 years of Soviet domination. The anniversary comes as relations between the Kremlin and the West sink to Cold War-era lows because of tensions over Russia's role in the Ukraine crisis and fears of its territorial ambitions. "The end of this war, which overturned German occupation, did not bring freedom to our part of Europe, because the countries here were subordinated against their will to Stalin's empire," Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski said in a weekend interview with the Gazeta Wyborcza daily. Seeking to hold European talks on the topic, Komorowski in January invited foreign leaders to mark the anniversary in Poland -- to coincide with a conference of German, Polish and Russian historians who have been meeting since 2009. Historical and political discussions will be held in the northern port city of Gdansk on May 7, followed by a midnight ceremony at nearby Westerplatte, where the first shots of the war were fired on September 1, 1939. Komorowski wanted participants to reflect on three anniversaries at once: 70 years since the victory over Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, 70 years since the Yalta conference where the West ceded a part of Europe -- including Poland -- to Stalin, and 25 years since the fall of communism. But the initiative has not gone over well in Russia. Senior Moscow officials immediately denounced the event, which they believe is meant to compete with their traditional Red Square military parade on May 9. (AFP)

U.S. to Discuss Pause in Yemen Fighting with Saudis: Kerry



DJIBOUTI - The United States is concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in Yemen and will discuss a possible pause in fighting with Saudi officials on Wednesday to try to get food, fuel and medicine to civilians, Secretary of State John Kerry said. "The situation is getting more dire by the day and we are concerned about that," Kerry told a news conference during a visit to Djibouti, the first secretary of state to visit the Horn of Africa nation. Kerry said the United States had urged both sides in the Yemen conflict to comply with humanitarian laws and to ensure that civilians were spared in the fight-

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Over 120 Dead in More Yemen Fighting, Aid Groups May Stop Work

ADEN/CAIRO - Over 120 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in heavy fighting across Yemen, rescue workers and Houthi sources said on Wednesday, as aid agencies warned fuel shortages could halt their urgent work. The heaviest clashes

were concentrated in the southern port city of Aden, where at least 40 civilians trying to flee the city by boat died when shells fired by Houthi fighters struck their vessel, rescue workers and witnesses said. Earlier in the day, Houthi sources

said 40 civilians were killed when warplanes from a Saudi-led coalition struck Yemeni provinces near the Saudi border overnight, following the death of three Saudis in the first deadly cross border attack since the Arab alliance... (More on P4)...(25)

U.S. Aims to Make Iran Nuclear Deal Immune to Russian, Chinese Veto

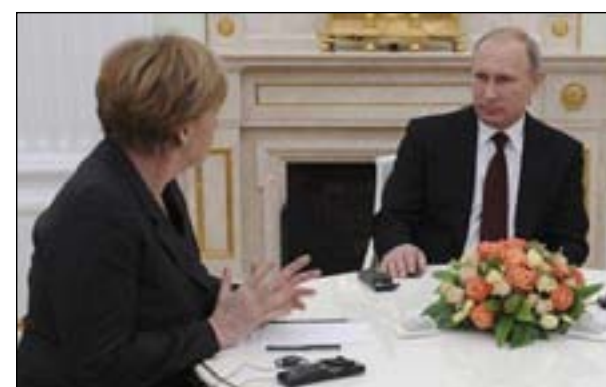
UNITED NATIONS - Washington wants to be certain that any nuclear deal between Iran and major powers includes the possibility of restoring U.N. sanctions if Tehran breaks the agreement without risking Russian and Chinese vetoes, a senior U.S. official said on Tuesday. United Nations sanctions and a future mechanism for Iran to buy atomic technology are two core sticking points in talks on a possible nuclear deal on which Tehran and world powers have been struggling to overcome deep divisions in recent days, diplomats said on condi-

tion of anonymity. Negotiators were wrapping up nearly a week of talks in New York on Tuesday, the latest round in 18 months of discussions aimed at clinching a long-term deal by June 30 to curb Iran's nuclear program in exchange for an end to sanctions. Expert-level negotiations are expected to continue for several days. The current talks have been taking place on the sidelines of a conference on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The negotiations between Iran, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China and the European Union

will resume in Vienna next week. The latest discussions revolved around a future Security Council resolution that would endorse a deal and render invalid all previous sanctions resolutions, while keeping U.N. bans on ballistic missiles, an arms embargo and some other restrictions. U.S. and European negotiators want any easing of U.N. sanctions to be automatically reversible - negotiators call this a "snapback" - if Tehran fails to comply with terms of a deal. Russia and China traditionally dislike such automatic measures... (More on P4)...(26)

Germany's Merkel to Discuss Ukraine with Putin

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel will discuss the crisis in Ukraine at talks in Moscow on Sunday, a Kremlin aide said on Wednesday. Merkel will not attend a military parade on Red Square on Saturday commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of World War Two in Europe. The event is being shunned by Western leaders angered by Russia's role in the conflict in Ukraine. But she will be in Moscow for events on Sunday marking the victory over Nazi Germany



and will hold a news conference with Putin, Kremlin foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov said. Merkel and French President Francois Hollande helped broker a ceasefire between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine on Feb. 12 but it has been violated many times. "Naturally the situation in Ukraine will be among the main topics of the talks with the German chancellor," Ushakov told reporters, adding... (More on P4)...(27)

Hezbollah Fighters Attack Syrian Al Qaeda Gathering along Border

AMMAN - Lebanese Hezbollah militants on Wednesday attacked a gathering of leaders of Syria's Nusra Front and other insurgents in an area near Lebanon's eastern border with Syria, killing three of them, the group's television channel said. Shi'ite Muslim Hezbollah, which is a staunch ally of Syria's President Bashar al Assad, has sent hundreds of combatants to fight alongside his forces. The television channel gave no details other than the operation took place in an rugged mountainous

area along the border that witnesses frequent clashes. The station said the fighters killed three militant leaders, including Nusra Front's local chief in the area. Hezbollah's leader said on Tuesday his Lebanon-based militant group would launch an attack inside Syria against al Qaeda-linked insurgents in the mountain region along the countries' border. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah did not give a date when the assault would be launched, but... (More on P4)...(29)

Brunei, China Sign Agreement on Construction of Pulau Muara Besar Bridge

MUARA PORT, Brunei - The Brunei Economic Development Board (BEDS) and China Harbor Engineering Company Limited (CHEC) on Wednesday signed a contract and held a groundbreaking ceremony here for the construction of Pulau Muara Besar Bridge, Road and Utilities in the country. The 204 million U.S. dollar contract was awarded to CHEC, a subsidiary of China Communications Construction Company Limited (CCCC) through an open tender process. The development of Pulau Muara Besar Bridge, Road and Utilities project involves a construction of a 2.7 km bridge that connects the mainland to the western

shore of Pulau Muara Besar, a 2.925 km main road on Pulau Muara Besar, an approaching road along Jalan Perusahaan and utilities comprising of power lines, telecommunication lines, untreated and treated water supplies. Once the project is completed, it will be able to attract more foreign direct investments particularly in the area of petrochemical and related downstream oil and gas industries. This project, scheduled to complete by 2018, is another strategic infrastructure project undertaken by the BEDB to transform Pulau Muara Besar into a world-class industrial park, said BEDB in a statement. (Xinhua)

Australia's FM Announces \$19m Aid for Pakistan

ISLAMABAD - Visiting Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop Wednesday announced a \$19 million aid package for Pakistan that includes help for border areas hit by conflict and natural disasters. Bishop made the pledge during a two-day visit to Islamabad, where she is holding talks with her Pakistani counterpart Sartaj Aziz on efforts to counter militancy, the future of Afghanistan and the reported rise of the Islamic State group in the region. The aid package includes \$8 million to help restore infrastructure damaged by floods and conflict in the restive northwest and southwest, and around \$8 million to support a trade initiative in partnership with the World Bank. It has not yet been announced where the re-

maining assistance will be spent. Bishop added the two countries "have common interests in counter-acting transnational crimes including drug- and human-smuggling". Bishop said she would also encourage Australian tourism to Pakistan, which has been battling an insurgency for over a decade. "People-to-people links are important and of course we want to see Pakistan as a safe and secure environment so that you can engage international visitors," she said. Aziz briefed the visiting dignitary on Pakistan's relations with neighbouring India and Afghanistan. She is expected to meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Raheel Sharif tomorrow. (Agencies)

President of Korean Air visits Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - President of Korean Air (flag carrier airline of South Korea) Chi Chang-hoon was received by the Ministry for Development of Information Technology and Communications of Uzbekistan in Tashkent. Issues of cooperation in the field of education in information and communication technologies were discussed during the meeting. Operation of the Inha University in Tashkent which was established last year was mentioned with satisfaction, reports the press

service of the Uzbek Ministry. The sides agreed to keep supporting activities of the new university and campus, including selection of qualified teachers from Korea and other countries. Korean Air, or Korean Air Lines Co. is the largest airline in South Korea based on fleet size, international destinations and international flights. The airline's global headquarters located in Seoul. The company's international passenger and cargo divisions serve 130 cities in 45 countries. (AKI)