

Millions in US Aid to Syrians Suspended over Graft Probe

WASHINGTON - The US government has suspended millions of dollars in funding to several organizations providing aid for Syria after discovering they were systematically overpaying Turkish companies for basic goods with the collusion of some of their staff.

The US Agency for International Development's independent government auditor said it had "established grounds resulting in the suspension of 14 entities and individuals involved with aid programs



from Turkey." Among the revelations, it said in a statement Friday, was "a network of commercial vendors, NGO employees, and others who have colluded to engage in bid-rigging and multiple bribery and kickback schemes related to contracts to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria." USAID did not identify any of the charities, but among those affected are the International Medical Corps (IMC), the Irish charity Goal and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), headed by former British foreign minister David Miliband, humanitarian sources told AFP.

All the allegations relate to buying goods in Turkey, with NGOs systematically overpaying, (AFP)

UK Think Tank Says Exit from EU Would Be 'Significant Shock'

LONDON - A British think tank says a decision by U.K. voters to leave the European Union would deliver a significant shock to the economy - with the pound dropping by as much as 20 percent in the immediate aftermath of the June 23 referendum. Economists at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research estimated Tuesday that economic growth would slow to 1.9 percent in 2017, compared with a rate of 2.7 percent if Britain remains in the

28-nation bloc. "In the short run, the current heightened levels of uncertainty are likely to persist, if not intensify, as the U.K. establishes its place outside the EU," the think tank said. "Financial markets are already pricing in a period of currency volatility around the referendum." NIESR joins economists at the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development ... (More on P4)...(16)

New Russian Weapons Turned Tide in Syria: Putin

BERLIN - A German court on Tuesday threw out a bid by Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for an injunction against the boss of German media giant Axel Springer in a widening row over free speech. Erdogan had sought a court order to stop the media group's chief Mathias Doepfner from repeating support for a TV satirist who crudely insulted the Turkish leader. The legal action came after Doepfner published

an open letter in one of the group's newspapers, in which he backed Jan Boehmermann - the satirist who in a poem accused Erdogan of bestiality and watching child pornography. But the court dismissed Erdogan's application on the basis of the "constitutionally guaranteed right of the defendant to the freedom of expression." "When a potential conflict arises between the fundamental right to the freedom of expression and



the personal rights of the plaintiff, it is admissible for Doepfner to publicly express an opinion in this controversial debate," said Christina Harpering, spokeswoman for the Cologne court. (AFP)

Kremlin Says Minsk Agreement in "Deplorable" Shape

MOSCOW - The implementation of the internationally-brokered agreement aimed to settle the Ukraine crisis is in "deplorable" shape, the Kremlin said Tuesday before the upcoming meeting of foreign ministers of the Normandy quartet. "The situation is far from being promising and productive. So far we cannot but acknowledge the deplorable situation in terms of the implementation of the Minsk agreement," the TASS news agency quoted Kremlin

spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying. However, Peskov added that the Normandy quartet remained the main foundation for resolving the crisis, and Moscow considered the work within this format extremely important. Foreign ministers from the Normandy format, composed of Russia, Germany, France and Ukraine, are scheduled to meet on Wednesday in Berlin to discuss the protracted crisis. The Minsk agreement



was signed in February 2015 in the Belarussian capital and is aimed at reaching a peaceful settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Since

then, however, Russia has accused the Ukrainian authorities of reluctance in implementing the agreement, while Kiev ... (More on P4)...(17)

Norway Extends Internal Schengen Border Controls

OSLO - The Norwegian government said on Tuesday it would extend its internal Schengen border controls for an additional 30 days in order to ensure its "public order and internal security." Checks on persons at ferry arrivals from Denmark, Sweden and Germany will continue up to June 11 and the border control is extended for reasons of public order and internal security, the Norwegian government said in a statement. "There are many unregistered migrants in the Schengen area who may

wish to move to another country. Norway's controls at internal border have good preventive effect on any arrivals and there is no report that the controllers have caused inconvenience for ordinary travelers," Norway's Minister of Justice and Public Security Anders Anundsen was quoted as saying in the statement. There is still pressure on the perimeter, and although several measures have been implemented, there are still deficiencies in external border control in Greece, the statement ... (More on P4)...(18)

French to Force Through Labor Reform without Lawmakers' Vote: PM

PARIS - French Prime Minister Manuel Valls Tuesday announced government decision to impose the controversial reform of labor code without lawmakers' vote due to lack of majority and continued rebellion even in the Socialist ruling camp. Following an emergency cabinet meeting, ministers agreed on the use of the 49-3 de-

ree of the Constitution to force through labor code reform after the executive failed to gain support of rebels Socialist lawmakers at a meeting earlier on Tuesday. "We have a coherent and balanced text... Ministers have allowed me to engage the responsibility of the government because the country needs to move forward," Valls

was quoted as saying by BMTV news channel. Under pressure to lower jobless claims, the Socialist government proposed to loosen labor rules by making layoffs easier, reducing overtime pay and economic redundancies and opening to negotiation working hours and holidays. However, critics say such reform would ... (More on P4)...(19)

Obama to Visit Japan's Hiroshima Later May: White House

WASHINGTON - The White House said Tuesday that U.S. President Barack Obama will visit Hiroshima later this month, the first by a sitting American president. Calling the visit to Hiroshima "historic," the White House said in a statement that Obama's trip will highlight his "continued commitment to pursuing the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons." According to another statement released by Ben Rhodes, Obama's deputy national security adviser, the visit to Hiroshima is slated for May 27. "He (Obama) will not revisit the decision to use the atomic bomb at the end of World War

II. Instead, he will offer a forward-looking vision focused on our shared future," said Rhodes. The White House had previously ruled out the possibility that Obama would apologize for the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima that killed tens of thousands of Japanese civilians in August 1945. In a recent daily briefing,

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said unequivocally that Obama does not believe that Japan deserves a formal government apology. During his tenth trip to Asia from May 21 to May 28, Obama will also visit Vietnam and participate in his final G7 Summit in Ise-Shima, Japan, said the White House. (Xinhua)



Hungarian Parliament Approves Referendum on EU Migrant Quotas

BUDAPEST - Hungary's parliament gave the green light Tuesday to proceed with a government-initiated referendum on the European Union's (EU) mandatory migrant quotas. Voters in the country will be asked in the referendum whether they choose to allow the EU to order the mandatory resettlement in Hungary of

non-Hungarians without parliamentary approval. Antal Rogan, head of the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office, said recently that he envisaged holding the referendum in September or early October. Hungary's supreme court last Tuesday indirectly ruled in favor of the government referendum when it rejected all ap-

peals against a go-ahead decision made by the National Elections Commission. Last year the European Parliament voted for a quota system to relocate and resettle asylum seekers among EU states, and EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker proposed in September ... (More on P4)...(21)

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Kazakhstan Continues Providing Disaster Relief to Tajikistan

DUSHANBE - Kazakhstan is continuing to provide disaster relief to Tajikistan. The next consignment of humanitarian aid for victims of floods and mudslides in Tajikistan worth 873,000 U.S. dollars will arrive in Tajikistan in the near future, according to the Kazakh Embassy in Dushanbe. Eight train cars carrying food products will arrive in Dushanbe in

the near future. The aid will be handed over to the Agency for State and Material Reserves of Tajikistan. We will recall that Kazakhstan this year provided the first humanitarian aid to Tajikistan in February. The assistance reportedly included preserved milk products, canned meats, vegetable oil, butter, and macaroni. (Asia-Plus)

Pakistani PM to Attend Energy Project Launching in Tajikistan

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will visit Tajikistan on May 11-12 to attend the Launching Ceremony of CASA-1000 Power Project, officials said on Tuesday. Under CASA-1000 Project, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan will supply 1300 MW of electricity to Pakistan (1000 MW) and Afghanistan (300 MW) during the summer season. The project is expected to be completed by 2018. CASA-1000 Project is a flagship project and the first of its kind that will link Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in electricity grid. President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, has invited the prime minister and Afghan president

to attend the ceremony to mark work on the project. The leaders from participating countries and other stakeholders are also expected to participate in the Launching Ceremony of CASA-1000. "The electricity purchased under this project will help mitigate electricity deficit of Pakistan in summer season. In this period there is surplus hydropower in Tajikistan and thus the project will create win-win situation for all," the Foreign Ministry said. The project will go a long way in regional integration, which is very important for economic and social development of the region, a Foreign Ministry statement said. (Xinhua)

Mideast Partition Plot Spreads Insecurity in Mideast: Iran Official

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian official says the Islamic Republic opposes any plot aimed at splitting up the Middle East countries including Iraq and Syria, warning that it will spread insecurity across the region. Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior adviser to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on international affairs, made the remarks while speaking to reporters following a meeting with Markus Ederer, the State Secretary of Germany's Federal Foreign Office, in Tehran on Tuesday. He added that Middle

East states such as Syria and Iraq should not be divided under any circumstances. "Iran and Germany oppose any kind of secessionism and encouraging the disintegration of regional countries because it will not be in the interests of the region and its people," Velayati said. "If such destructive measures go ahead they will spread across the region and in practice the region will be stripped of security," he added. He noted that Iran and Germany call for a speedy settlement of problems in the Middle East through "peaceful and fair" approaches. (PressTV)

"Belt And Road" Enhances China-Arab Strategic Cooperation: Chinese FM

CAIRO - China will advance the Belt and Road Initiative with Arab countries and consolidate China-Arab strategic cooperation ties, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi wrote in an Egyptian state-run newspaper on Tuesday. Paying an official visit to Qatar to attend the 7th ministerial meeting of the China-Arab States Cooperation Fo-

rum, Wang wrote in an article published in the official Ahram newspaper on Tuesday that he will discuss with the Arab countries "means of jointly advancing the Belt and Road Initiative and deepen China-Arab strategic cooperation." China and Arab countries will also exchange views on international and regional issues of ... (More on P4)...(22)

Russia Developing New Capacity to Counter U.S. Missile Shield in Europe

MOSCOW - Russia is developing new capacity to counter U.S. missile defense systems in Europe, a senior military officer said Tuesday. The U.S. missile shield in Europe does not present a major threat to the Russian Strategic Missile Forces (RSMF), as the RSMF has kept ramp-

ing up its capabilities, said RSMF commander Lieutenant General Sergei Karakayev. He said the new missile systems of the RSMF have been equipped with warheads with hard-to-predict flight paths and other devices capable of overcoming missile shields. ... (More on P4)...(23)

Germany to Press for Progress on Elections at Ukraine Talks

BERLIN - Germany is putting forward a proposal for holding local elections in eastern Ukraine, with the aim of moving toward a deal before the European Union's sanctions against Russia expire at the end of July. Diplomats from Germany, Russia, Ukraine and France are discussing the plan in Berlin ahead of a meeting of the country's foreign ministers on Wednesday. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said Tuesday progress on implementing a cease-fire agreement forged in Minsk last year "is a snail that's moving forward by the millimeter, at best." Steinmeier says the Minsk process can't continue indefinitely, and "we need not just a clear pledge from the conflict parties tomorrow in Berlin but above all success in the implementation." More than 9,300 have died in fighting in eastern Ukraine in two years. (AP)

Jordan Signs Deals with U.S. to Buy TOW Missiles

AMMAN - Jordan's Defense Ministry on Tuesday signed an agreement with U.S. Department of Defense to acquire tube-launched, optically tracked, wireless-guided, or TOW, missiles made by Raytheon Company. Raytheon will begin deliveries to Jordan this year, Raytheon Company said in a statement to the press. The agreement was announced during the 11th Special Operations Forces Exhibition (SOFEX) 2016, which is held in Jordan until May 12. TOW is in service in more than 40 international armed forces and integrated on more than 15,000 ground, vehicle and helicopter platforms worldwide. Raytheon has delivered more than 690,000 TOW missiles to U.S. and allied warfighters. The TOW weapon system will be in service with the U.S. military beyond 2025. "Our international partners rely on the kind of ... (More on P4)...(20)