

N. Korea Modified Submarine Missile Launch Photos: U.S. Official

SEOUL - Photographs showing a North Korean missile launched from a submarine were manipulated by state propagandists and the country may be years away from developing such technology, analysts and a top U.S. military official said on Tuesday.

North Korea, sanctioned by the United States and United Nations for its missile and nuclear tests, said on May 9 it had successfully conducted an underwater test-fire of a submarine-launched ballistic missile which, if true, would indicate progress in its pursuit of missile-equipped submarines.

On Wednesday, North



Korea warned the United States not to challenge its sovereign right to boost

military deterrence and boasted of its ability to miniaturize nuclear war-

heads, a claim it has made before and which has been widely questioned by ex-

perts and never verified. But North Korea is still "many years" from de-

veloping submarine-launched ballistic missiles, U.S. Admiral James Winnefeld told an audience at the Centre for Strategic & International Studies in Washington on Tuesday.

"They have not gotten as far as their clever video editors and spinmeisters would have us believe," said Winnefeld, who is vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Analysis seen by Reuters from German aerospace engineers Markus Schiller and Robert Schmucker of Schmucker Technologie appeared to support Winnefeld's statement.

The Munich-based pair said photos of the launch ... (More on P4)...(25)

N. Korea Claims Breakthrough on Nuclear Missile Warheads



SEOUL - North Korea ramped up its nuclear threats on Wednesday, boasting of its ability to deliver miniaturised warheads on high-precision long range rockets, in a clear warning to the United States.

At the same time, it de-

nounced "reckless" remarks made in Seoul this week by US Secretary of State John Kerry, and cancelled an invitation to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to visit a joint industrial zone on its side of the border with South Korea.

Pyeongyang has been flexing its advancing military muscle of late, most recently announcing it had successfully test-fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM). On Wednesday its powerful National Defence ... (More on P4)...(26)

US-Led Strikes in Syria Kill 170 IS Jihadists in 48 Hours: Monitor

BEIRUT - Air strikes by a US-led coalition against the Islamic State group in northeastern Syria have killed around 170 jihadists in the past 48 hours, a monitoring group said Tuesday.

"The jihadists were killed in the past 48 hours in the province of Hasakeh, nearly all of them in very intense air strikes by the international coalition which is helping Kurdish forces in the area," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

In its latest update on the coalition's operations, the US military said in a statement that the alliance's warplanes carried out seven strikes near Hasakeh. They struck four IS tactical units, destroying seven vehicles, three fighting positions,



two armoured vehicles and a shipping container. "In northern Syria, Daesh continues to cede military capacity, fighters

and terrain," US Brigadier General Thomas Weidley said, using the Arabic acronym for IS. (AFP)

Iran Warships 'Linked Up' with Yemen-Bound Cargo Ship: Pentagon

WASHINGTON - The Pentagon said on Tuesday that two Iranian warships had linked up with a cargo ship that Iran says is carrying humanitarian aid to Yemen, adding it was monitoring the ships "every step of the way."

"We're not overly concerned at this point. It's a single ship that we've got very good account-

ability of," Pentagon spokesman Colonel Steve Warren told a news briefing. Warren said the two warships "linked up" with the cargo ship when it passed an area where they had been conducting, according to Tehran, counter-piracy operations. Another Pentagon spokesman said this happened on Monday. (Reuters)

IS Learns Lessons from U.S. Raid: Jihadist Sources

BEIRUT - A U.S. Special Forces raid against an Islamic State leader in Syria caught the jihadist group off guard, killing not only the declared target, but also two other important figures, jihadist sources in Syria said. The sources said a spy must have infiltrated the movement and passed on vital information that helped the U.S. commandos zero in on the home of their victim early Saturday when most of the guards had left to join a battle elsewhere.

They said the ultra-hardline group had absorbed the shock, but promised that any culprits would be discovered. The Islamic State was also considering tightening its recruitment procedures to try to root out moles and was considering forming a specialist unit to counter such attacks in future. ... (More on P4)...(28)

Iraqi Forces Say They Repulse Islamist Attack near Ramadia

BAGHDAD - Iraqi forces said they fought off an overnight attack by Islamic State militants near the city of Ramadi, which the insurgents overran at the weekend in the most significant setback for the government in a year.

Islamic State is seeking to consolidate its gains in the vast desert province of Anbar, of which Ramadi is capital, where

only pockets of territory remain under government control. The IS advance has exposed the shortcomings of Iraq's army and the limitations of U.S. air strikes. Government forces backed by Shi'ite militias have meanwhile been building up at a base near Ramadi in preparation for a counterattack ... (More on P4)...(29)

U.S. Willing to Change Pro-Democracy Programs in Cuba

WASHINGTON - The United States on Tuesday indicated its willingness to change pro-democracy programs which it organizes in Cuba and which are condemned by Havana, removing one of the biggest impediments to restoring diplomatic ties. A senior State Department official, speaking to reporters before talks with Cuban representatives on Thursday, said the sides had narrowed differences over reopening embassies since an agreement was reached

in December to renew diplomatic relations. The official said another obstacle had been removed after Cuba found a U.S. bank that would handle the accounts of a restored Cuban embassy in Washington. The official declined to name the bank. M&T Bank Corp canceled its services with Cuba's Interests Section in Washington in 2013 and Havana blamed the move on U.S. sanctions. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the democracy pro ... (More on P4)...(27)

Palestinians Banned from Riding Same Buses as Israelis: Official



JERUSALEM - Palestinians in the West Bank who commute to Israel to work will from Wednesday be banned from riding the same buses as Israelis to return home, a defence ministry official said. "Under a three-month pilot project, Palestinians who work in Israel will, starting Wednesday, need to return home by the same crossing without taking buses used by (Israeli) residents" of the

occupied West Bank, the official told AFP. Hundreds of Palestinians travel each day to work in Israel from the occupied West Bank, mainly in the construction business, using travel permits each time they cross. The official, who declined to be named, said Palestinian workers would now need to change buses to avoid riding vehicles carrying Israelis after crossing ... (More on P4)...(30)

UN, US Condemn Russian Embassy Attack in Damascus



UNITED NATIONS, United States - The United Nations and the United States condemned a mortar attack on the Russian embassy in Damascus that did not, however, cause any known injuries.

Lithuanian Ambassador Raimonda Murmokaite, whose country holds the rotating UN Security council presidency this month, said the "terrorist" attack caused "serious damage." The 15-member council stressed that host countries have an obligation to "take all appropriate steps to protect diplomatic and consular premises." The council also stressed the need to bring the perpetrators of the attack to justice. Joining the condemnation was the United States, which also renewed calls for a political solution to end the bloody Syrian conflict.

"We call for those responsible for all such acts to be held accountable and continue to stress the need for a political solution to the turmoil in Syria," said Jeff Rathke, a State Department

spokesman. He noted that the embassy is protected by international law. Earlier in the day, Moscow, a key ally of Damascus, said the embassy complex had come under mortar fire at 3:25 pm (1225 GMT).

It said the shots appeared to have been fired from the Jobar neighborhood, which is under the control of "armed illegal groups." "A shell exploded 50 feet (15 meters) from the main gate of our diplomatic mission. Another hit the external wall and fell in an embassy office. Luckily, no embassy staff was hit," the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement. "We consider this event as a terrorist act against the Russian embassy. We firmly condemn its perpetrators, organizers and instigators," the ministry added, calling for international action. Russia is one of the last allies of the Syrian regime, as the country struggles with a civil war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people in four years. (AFP)

Neighbour News

Iran Allows No Foreign Inspection of Military Sites: Leader

TEHRAN - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says Iran will not allow any inspections by foreigners of its military sites.

"They (P5+1 countries) are making new comments in the [nuclear] negotiations. Regarding the inspections, we have said that we will not allow foreigners to carry out inspections of any [Iranian] military sites," Ayatollah Khamenei said in the commencement ceremony for graduates of Imam Hossein Military Academy in Tehran on Wednesday.

The Leader further warned against the enemies' acquisitiveness. "The enemies should know that the Iranian nation and officials will, by no means, give in to ex-

cessive demands and bullying," Ayatollah Khamenei underlined.

Excessive demands, said the Leader, are among the challenges facing the Islamic establishment of Iran, saying, "We are not afraid of these challenges ... the Iranian nation will weather these challenges with determination, trust in God and self-reliance."

Ayatollah Khamenei added that foreigners' call for interview with Iranian nuclear scientists means "interrogation" and emphasized that he would not allow aliens to speak with Iranian scientists in the nuclear domain and "other sensitive majors."

"Firm resolve" and "lack of inaction" are the only way to counter the "brazen enemy," said the Leader, addressing nuclear officials. (Agencies)

Chinese Vice President Holds Talks with Tanzanian Counterpart

BEIJING - Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao held talks with Tanzanian Vice President Mohamed Gharib Bilal in Beijing on Wednesday.

China is willing to enhance cooperation with Tanzania in infrastructure, energy development, aviation and industrial park development to boost the comprehensive partnership of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, Li told Bilal.

Li applauded both countries as all-weather friends, partners and brothers. Bilal said his country values the brotherhood with China and is willing to learn from China's experiences in reform and opening-up, welcoming Chinese businesses to invest in Tanzania. Prior to the talks at the Great Hall of the People, Li held a red-carpet ceremony to welcome Bilal. (Xinhua)

Germany's Knauf Starts \$52 Million Project in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - The German company Knauf has started a new US \$52.5 million investment project at two of its plants in Bukhara in Uzbekistan. The project follows the signing of a new agreement in 2014 by Knauf and Uzbekistan's building materials company Uzstroyateriali JSC to boost economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Germany.

Knauf has already invested \$51 million in Uzbekistan. It has two plants in Bukhara: JV JSC Bukharagips, which produces dry building mixes, and Knauf Gips Bukhara, which produces gypsum wallboard, the Global Gypsum online portal reported. The 60,000 tons per year capacity Bukharagips plant started operations in August 2009, while the 20

million cubic meters per year capacity Knauf Gips Bukhara plant was built in 2011.

Knauf has launched a consulting centre at the Samarkand State Architecture and Construction Institute in September 2014 in Samarkand. This is Knauf's second consulting centre in Uzbekistan. The first was opened in June 2008 under Tashkent State Architecture and Construction Institute, which has proven its efficiency in training skilled builders. The centre will provide training to all interested parties on the use of modern construction materials. The training programs are designed for various groups, including individuals who repair their houses on their own as well as professionals. (ICA)

Pakistan, Turkmenistan to Sign Trade Mous as Nawaz Begins Ashgabat Visit

ISLAMABAD - Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during his visit to Turkmenistan said Pakistan's priority is to expand trade and economic relations with central Asian countries, said a report published on Radio Pakistan.

While talking to the president of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, the premier said that there is tremendous potential for cooperation between Pakistan and Turkmenistan in various fields such as trade and economy. President Berdimuhamedov said that both countries share similar views on regional peace and stability. He added that the two countries can increase cooperation in telecommunication, agriculture and other sectors. He also highlighted the need for more dis-

tinguished people-to-people contact between Turkmenistan and Pakistan. PM Nawaz arrived in Turkmenistan's capital Ashgabat today on a two-day official visit. He was received by Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov at the airport. PM Nawaz is also scheduled to lead delegation-level talks apart from his one-on-one meeting with Turkmen president. During the visit, a number of memorandums of understanding (MoUs) pertaining to trade, bilateral cooperation and economy will also be signed by the leaders. The Turkmen president will moreover host a dinner in honour of PM Nawaz. The PM is also scheduled to visit Bishkek and Kyrgyzstan tomorrow. (Monitoring Desk)