

Obama Warning over Netanyahu 'Unjustified'

JERUSALEM - A senior official in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rightwing Likud party on Friday rejected fresh US criticism of the premier as unjustified and hypocritical. Tzahi Hanegbi, chairman of the influential foreign affairs and defence committee in parliament, was responding to remarks by US President Barack Obama published Thursday in news magazine The Atlantic. Obama restated concerns about comments that Netanyahu made during a hotly-contested March general election and warned of repercussions. In a polling-day bid to engage rightwing voters, he warned that Arab Israelis



were going to the polls "in droves" - a comment for which he later apologized.

"It appeared that Arab Israeli citizens were somehow portrayed as an invading

force that might vote, and that this should be guarded against," Obama

said. Obama also pointed to a Netanyahu statement ruling out the establish-

ment of a Palestinian state if reelected, though he has since sought to backtrack. "When something like that happens, that has foreign policy consequences," the American president said. Hanegbi countered that Obama's remarks were "inappropriate". "I think his approach has no justification and no small measure of hypocrisy," he told Israeli public radio. "We don't hear a word of criticism about our neighbours, for example the world record-holder in executions, Iran, with whom he is actually making supreme attempts at reconciliation," he said, referring to efforts to strike a nuclear deal. (AFP)

Russian Missile Producer Appeals against EU Sanctions



MOSCOW - Russian missile manufacturer Almaz-Antey said on Friday it had filed an appeal against European Union sanctions imposed on it over the crisis in Ukraine. The state-owned firm is one of a number of Russian defense firms placed

under sanctions by the EU and the United States. The EU accuses Moscow of supplying pro-Russian separatists in east Ukraine with heavy weaponry, including surface-to-air missiles produced by Almaz-Antey. The Kremlin denies pro-

viding the rebels with manpower or equipment, and Almaz-Antey said it would appeal against the sanctions in the General Court of the European Union. "The inclusion of our company on the sanctions list is groundless," ... (More on P4)... (26)

Obama Says He Has 'Personal Interest' in Reaching Iran Nuclear Deal

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Barack Obama, in an interview published on Thursday, said he has a "personal interest" in making sure world powers and Iran could reach a deal that prevents Tehran from having a nuclear weapon. "Look, 20 years from now, I'm still going to be around, God willing. If Iran has a nuclear weapon, it's my name on this," Obama told The Atlantic magazine. "I think it's fair to say that in addition to our profound national security interests, I have a personal interest in locking this down," Obama added. World powers and Iran reached a framework agreement on Tehran's nuclear programs last month and are in negotiations aimed at inking a comprehensive



deal by the end of June. In the interview, Obama also expressed concerns that Saudi Arabia, one of America's closest Arab allies, could build a nuclear infrastructure to match the infrastructure Iran will be allowed to keep in place as part of its agreement with the great powers, The Atlanta reported. "Their covert - presumably - pursuit of a nuclear program would greatly strain the relationship you've got

with the United States," Obama said of the Saudis. Obama met with leaders of Gulf nations at presidential retreat at Camp David last week, reassuring them of America's "iron-clad commitment" to the security of the Gulf nations. The U.S. would consider using military force to defend the Gulf countries in the event of an external threat to their territorial integrity, Obama said. (Xinhua)

6 Killed as Blast Rips Through Saudi Mosque

RIYADH - Six worshippers were killed and several others injured in a suicide blast that targeted a Shiite mosque in the eastern Saudi Arabia on Friday, Al Arabiya News reported. As many as 150 Shiite worshippers were inside "Imam Ali" Mosque in Qudaih area of the Saudi city of Qatif when the blast went off. Several Twitter accounts

for the Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the blast. An interior ministry spokesman said an investigation has been launched into the incident and that more details will follow. Last November, three masked gunmen killed five Shiites and injured nine others in the eastern town of Aldaloh in ... (More on P4)... (27)

IS Militants Seize Control of Last Syrian Border Point with Iraq

DAMASCUS - The Islamic State (IS) militants seized control of the last border point between Syria and Iraq on Thursday, as part of the recent progress the terror group has been making in both countries, a monitor group reported. The IS terror group has become in control of the Syrian side of the al-Tanf, also known as al-Walid, border-crossing between the

Syrian desert and Iraq, following the withdrawal of the Syrian forces from that border point, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Other activists reported that the Syrian border guards set the buildings and officers there on fire ahead of their withdrawal. With the fall of the al-Tanf in the hands of the IS, the ... (More on P4)... (28)

Syrian Airstrikes Kill 40 Militants in Aleppo

DAMASCUS - At least 40 militants were killed Thursday by Syrian aerial bombardment on rebel-held areas in the northern city of Aleppo, a monitor group reported. Three commanders were among those killed when a Syrian aircraft dropped a crude barrel bomb and fired a missile into the militants' position in the al-Sha'ar neighborhood

in Aleppo, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The London-based watchdog group said the death toll could rise due to the large number of critically wounded people, adding that tens of prisoners, who were incarcerated by the rebels, were also killed as the prison was near the targeted area. Aleppo, ... (More on P4)... (29)

Civilian Casualties on Rise in Yemen



GENEVA - At least 1,037 civilians have been killed between March 26 and May 20 in Yemen as a result of widespread and protracted violence affecting the country, a UN agency said Friday. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) revealed that 2,453 civilians had been injured, among whom 130 were women and 234 children. The total death toll for the country has now reached more than 1,850. As the plight of civilians worsens, OHCHR spokeswoman Cecile Pouilly said "4,000 inmates are reported to have fled detention facilities since the conflict began, with many having been killed or injured."

According to reports, several prisons have been affected by fighting amid deteriorating detention conditions because of endemic lack of food, water, fuel and sanitation facilities in the country. Reports suggest that prisoners have been denied basic rights, including the right to le-

gal representation and family access. Outbreaks of scabies and mycosis further confirm the worsening health environment in these prisons and detention facilities, where the risk of diseases spreading is increasing due to severely affected waste-management systems. While last week's five-day ceasefire offered some respite to Yemenis, allowing aid to reach vulnerable populations, the humanitarian crisis continues to grow in the war-torn country. In light of this, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has launched an 84 million U.S. dollars appeal to address some of the prevalent humanitarian issues, which have been compounded by a resumption of violence since the humanitarian pause ended last Sunday. According to IOM, over 550,000 people have now been displaced by the conflict, with large numbers heading towards the Horn of Africa. (Xinhua)

Fresh Fighting Erupts in East Ukraine

KIEV - Three Ukrainian servicemen have been killed and 12 wounded in the latest clashes between government forces and Russian-backed separatists, further eroding a three-month-old ceasefire, Kiev's military said on Friday. Military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said government forces had come under attack from separatists using large-caliber guns and mortar in several parts of the east and southeast, including near the rebel-controlled city of Donetsk. "In the past 24 hours we have lost three Ukrainian heroes, and another 12 have been wounded," Lysenko told a briefing. There was no word on casualties among the separatists, who Kiev, NATO and

Western countries say are being provided with arms and men by Russia, something Moscow denies. Ukraine's largest steel company, Metinvest, said one worker had been killed and two wounded when its Avdiyivka coke plant, which is on government-controlled territory, was hit by heavy shelling on Thursday. The plant is not able to receive supplies of raw materials or ship out finished products, and damage to equipment has further hampered production, Metinvest said in a statement. A surge in violence is putting further pressure on a fragile ceasefire brokered by Russia, Germany and France in a peace deal last February in Minsk, Belarus. (Reuters)

U.S. Sending 2,000 Anti-Tank Weapons to Iraq

WASHINGTON - U.S. Defense Department announced Thursday it is sending 2,000 anti-tank weapons to Iraq to help Iraqi forces in fighting the Islamic State (IS). The weapons will arrive as early as next week, the department spokesman Steve Warren said in a statement, adding that the U.S. is also expediting the delivery of ammunition and other equipment in order to counter IS' increasing reliance on vehicle-borne bombs. Over the last 30 days, the U.S. also helped deliver coalition donations of 22 million rounds of small

arms ammunition and 12,000 mortar rounds to the Iraqi army, Warren said. Since Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's visit to Washington in April, the U.S. has also delivered 250 mine-resistant, ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles, 2,000 Hellfire missiles, 10,000 sets of body armor and helmets, and millions of rounds of ammunition, including small arms, tank artillery and anti-tank weapons. The weapons are for the central government of Iraq to distribute to its army, ... (More on P4)... (30)

Neighbour News

Iran Backs UN-Brokered Yemen Talks, Warns of Foreign Meddling

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian official has pledged the Islamic Republic's support for the UN-brokered talks on Yemen, but slammed any foreign interference in the negotiations aimed at ending the crisis in the Arab country. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, the Iranian deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, made the remarks after a meeting with the UN envoy to Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in Tehran on Thursday. He described talks with the UN envoy as positive and constructive, reiterating Iran's support for the Yemen negotiations due to be held in the Swiss city of Geneva next week. "We announced that we will certainly try to contribute to the

UN's success in this regard, and will use our contacts with different Yemeni groups and will make efforts, so that the Yemenis can reach a conclusion in their negotiations," Amir-Abdollahian said. He, however, warned against foreign interference in the dialog, saying, "We expect the UN [not to allow] those who are beating the drums of war in Yemen to disrupt the Geneva talks." The Iranian diplomat also called for the implementation of Tehran's four-point peace plan, which includes intra-Yemeni dialog and a ceasefire, and said that the Islamic Republic disapproves of any foreign meddling in the talks, adding that such interference can delay an end to the war in the impoverished Arab country. (Agencies)

Uzbek-Kazakh Demarcation Commission Holds Meeting

TASHKENT - A regular meeting of the Joint Uzbek-Kazakh demarcation commission with the participation of government delegations of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Kazakhstan was held in Samarkand from May 18 to 22. During the meeting

the sides discussed and agreed on a series of final documents on demarcation of the Uzbek-Kazakh state border. The talks were held in a constructive spirit and friendly atmosphere, the press service of the Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan said. (Monitoring Desk)

Chinese Defense Minister Meets Italian Air Force Chief

BEIJING - Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan met with visiting Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force Pasquale Preziosa in Beijing Friday. China-Italy relations have steered onto a fast track since the establishment of all-round strategic relationship in 2004 while military-to-military ties have developed smoothly, Chang said. China is

willing to enhance understanding and trust between the two countries and boost practical cooperation for the development of the two militaries, Chang said. Preziosa hailed the traditional friendship and close cooperation between the two militaries, hoping both sides create more conditions for better communication and cooperation. (Xinhua)

Pakistan Denies Selling Nukes to Saudi Arabia: Foreign Ministry

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan on Thursday rejected reports that the country has planned to sell nuclear weapons to Saudi Arabia. The Sunday Times of London had claimed that Saudi Arabia had taken the 'strategic decision' to acquire 'off-the-shelf' atomic weapons from Pakistan, citing unnamed American officials.

According to the report, the kingdom wants to get nuclear weapons to counter Iran after the recent nuclear deal it reached with the West. The Pakistani Foreign Ministry rejected the report. "There has been an entirely baseless and mischievous campaign in the international media regarding Pakistan's indigenous nuclear program. The Sunday Times story appears to be part of that malevolent campaign and is utterly unfounded," the Foreign Office Spokesperson Qazi Khalilullah said. He said at his weekly briefing that Pakistan has robust command and control structure and comprehensive export controls, add-

ing Pakistan supports objectives of non-proliferation as well as nuclear safety and security. "As a responsible nuclear state, Pakistan is fully aware of its responsibilities. Pakistan's nuclear program is purely for its own legitimate self-defence and maintenance of a credible minimum deterrence," the spokesman said. When asked if Pakistan supports Saudi Arabia's right to peaceful nuclear energy under NPT, he said all parties to the NPT have the right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. "This right has been granted to them by the treaty. It is, therefore, not for me to comment on that," Khalilullah said. Saudi Arabia has also dismissed the reports that it wants to buy nuclear weapons from Pakistan as mere "speculation." A Saudi Defense Ministry official was quoted as saying that such reports are not new and that the ministry does not comment on rumors and speculation. (Xinhua)