

Turkey's Erdogan Threatens Daily Over Syria Arms Video



Caner COŞKUN

Images and video footage showing trucks belonging to Turkey's state intelligence service carrying weapons to Terrorists in Syria were published in a Turkish daily.

ANKARA (AFP) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened a daily which published footage showing trucks belonging to the state intelligence service carrying weapons to rebels in Syria, vowing it will pay a "heavy price".

"The slander against the National Intelligence Organization and the illegitimate operation (against MIT trucks) is an espionage activity at one point," Erdogan told state-run TRT television late Sunday. "This newspaper was also involved in this espionage activity."

"The person who made the story will pay a heavy price. I will not let him get away with it," said the president, who has threatened other media outlets in the run-up to this week's tense parliamentary election.

The footage published on the opposition Cumhuriyet daily's website on Friday shows inspectors search-

ing a metallic container watched by security officers, a prosecutor and sniffer dogs.

The daily claimed the trucks were carrying mortar shells, ammunition for light and heavy weapons as well as hundreds of grenade launchers hidden under boxes of antibiotics marked as "fragile".

Turkish prosecutors swiftly opened an investigation into the daily on charges of "obtaining information on state security", "political and military espionage" and "propaganda for a terrorist organization".

Cumhuriyet editor-in-chief Can Dundar hit back the Erdogan, tweeting, "We are not civil servants but journalists. Our duty is not to hide the state's dirty secrets but to call it to account in the name of people."

"The person who committed this crime will pay a heavy price," he added, referring to the president. "We will not let him get away with it,"

Turkey has vehemently denied aiding terrorists in Syria including the Islamic State (IS) group, claiming the intercepted aid was bound for the Turkmen minority in Syria.

In an interview with AFP, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu claimed the release of the images was an election ploy, and denounced what he called an "illegal action" against Turkey's interests.

He said Turkey had helped the rebel Free Syrian Army without specifying if it has supplied them militarily.

Tensions are mounting in the run-up to the June 7 parliamentary elections, with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) seeking to prolong its 13-year hold on power.

The ruling party denies rebels fighting in Syria and accused dozens of prosecutors, soldiers and security officers involved in searching the trucks last year of attempting to bring it down through such claims.

NATO Flexes Muscles in Baltics, Poland

VILNIUS (AFP) - US-led NATO drills began Monday in the Baltic states and Poland, a move intended to reassure Russia's nervous neighbors amid tensions over Ukraine.

Russia's increased military presence in the Baltic Sea and regional airspace since its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine last year has jangled nerves in the area, which lay behind the Iron Curtain 25 years ago.

More than 6,000 troops from 13 NATO countries are participating in the Saber Strike 2015 drills in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, all EU and NATO members.

"This is one of the biggest exercises in Lithuania since we joined NATO" in 2004, Major General Almantas Leika, commander of Lithuania's land forces, told reporters in Vilnius.

"The huge allied presence demonstrates solidarity with the countries of this region," he said, adding that Lithuania is hosting the com-

mand centre for the drills.

NATO has been guarding the skies over the three small Baltic states since 2004, when they joined the defense alliance but lacked the air power to monitor their own airspace.

Last month, the Baltic trio formally asked NATO to permanently deploy several thousand troops in their region as a deterrent to Russia.

NATO has not yet replied to the request, military spokesman Lithuanian Captain Mindaugas Neimontas told AFP.

The exercises, organized by the US Army in Europe, will run until June 19 and include Abrams tanks and B-52 bombers, General Leika said.

The drills take place after Russia last week began conducting unexpected war games involving 12,000 troops and 250 aircraft, at the same time as NATO planes joined Nordic air forces for a drill in Sweden's sub-Arctic north.

France, Germany Urge Revision of EU Asylum Plan

PARIS (AFP) - European powerhouses France and Germany on Monday called on the EU to revise its plan to admit asylum seekers landing in Europe, saying there was insufficient "balance".

"Deep discussions are necessary at the European level" to achieve a balance between "responsibility" and "solidarity", said a joint statement from the French and German interior ministers.

They said efforts taken by countries in welcoming asylum-seekers should be "better taken into account".

On Wednesday, the European Commission asked member states

the European budget, all the financial and legal measures possible to boost surveillance of the external borders.

France and Germany proposed the establishment of so-called "hotspots" to process asylum-seekers close to the point of entry to identify them and then decide where to place them.

"Part of the asylum-seekers in obvious need of protection will be relocated in other member states, using the redistribution ratio agreed," said the Franco-German proposal.

"Irregular migrants" will quickly be returned or removed, according to the proposal, adding that "better

South Korea, US Kick Off Major Drills



This handout photo released by the South Korean Defense Ministry shows a South Korean navy vessel firing an anti-ship missile during a naval drill off the east coast of South Korea, May 19, 2015. (© AFP)

SEOUL (Press TV) - South Korean and US forces have launched major anti-submarine military drills off South Korea's island of Jeju in response to what they call provocations by North Korean submarines.

The three-day naval drills, announced by South Korea's Defense Ministry on Monday, comes weeks after North Korea declared it had successfully

test-fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM).

"This is the largest joint anti-submarine exercise the allies have ever staged, in terms of its scale and the number of vessels involved," said a Defense Ministry spokesman, whose name was not mentioned in the report.

The official further said that more than 10 warships, including a South

Korean Aegis destroyer, as well as submarines, surveillance aircraft and helicopters would be utilized during the naval drills.

The ministry also announced that a separate joint live-fire exercise was being conducted with South Korean artillery units, naval vessels and warplanes just off the east coast of Goseong County, south of the border with North Korea.

The military maneuvers take place amid growing concerns in Washington and Seoul over what they perceive as the expansion of Pyongyang's nuclear arms and ballistic missile programs.

In addition to its launch of the SLBM, North Korea has recently revealed that it has gained the ability to miniaturize a nuclear warhead to fit on high-precision, long-range rockets.

North Korea has always expressed outrage over the joint military maneuvers by the neighboring South and the US in the region, describing them as the main source of tensions.



Migrants are helped to safety from a wooden-hulled ship to a Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel from British Royal Navy ship HMS Bulwark during a rescue mission in the Mediterranean Sea in May.

to admit 20,000 Syrian refugees from outside Europe and process another 40,000 asylum seekers from Syria and Eritrea landing in Italy and Greece.

The distribution would be bound by complex rules: national economic output, population, unemployment rates and the number of refugees already admitted to an individual country.

But Paris and Berlin said: "Additional solidarity is only possible if the member states at the first point of entry... take, with support from

contacts" needed to be established with their countries of origin to ensure an easier returns process.

"Migrants that do not belong in either category will have their situation examined within the framework of the common asylum procedures, in the country of first entry," proposes the Franco-German plan.

Additionally, the two countries called for "solutions to limit secondary migration movements" which is putting at risk the idea of sharing the burden between EU states.



TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's pension system has been hacked and more than a million cases of personal data leaked, authorities said on Monday, in an embarrassment that revived memories of a scandal that helped topple Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his first term in office.

Japan Pension Service staff computers were improperly accessed by an external email virus, leading to the leak of some 1.25 million cases of personal data, the system's president, Toichiro Mizushima, told a hastily called news conference.

He apologized for the leak, which he said involved combinations of names, identification numbers, birth dates and addresses.

The pension service was setting up a team to investigate the cause and prevent a recurrence, Mizushima said.

BEIJING (Press TV) - China is set to conduct military drills near the border with neighboring Myanmar.

That was reported by China's official Xinhua news agency citing "official sources" on Monday, saying the drills would begin on Tuesday.

However, aside from the date of the drills, no other information was given, including what types of weapons would be used or the purpose of the military exercises.

The upcoming maneuvers come amid recent tensions between China and Myanmar.

Beijing said last month that five people were injured after two explosive devices reportedly from Myanmar hit Chinese territory.

In March, China summoned the Myanmar ambassador to Beijing after a warplane belonging to the Myanmar military killed four people in China's southwestern border area.

MOSCOW (Press TV) - A senior Russian Foreign Ministry official has emphasized that Moscow reserves the right to deploy nuclear weapons on its territory, including stationing them in Crimea.

"Russia obviously retains the right, if needed, to deploy its nuclear weapons anywhere on its national territory, including on the Crimean Peninsula," said Russian Foreign Ministry's Director of the Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Mikhail Ulyanov in a Monday interview with RIA Novosti.

Ulyanov's remarks were reportedly made in reaction to recent comments by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin, who said the deployment of Russian arms in Crimea would be in violation of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) - Romania has slashed its sales tax on food and non-alcoholic drinks in a move the government hopes will generate jobs, boost consumer spending and help the poor.

The tax drop from 24 percent to 9 percent in a country where people spend about one third of income on food came into effect Monday.

It applies to all sectors of the food industry, from producers to supermarkets and restaurants, with analysts predicting prices will fall by 12 percent.

It will cost the budget about 5 billion lei (\$1.23 billion) but Prime Minister Victor Ponta said better tax collection would offset most of it.

The government plans to reduce the sales tax for other goods and services to 20 percent from 24 percent starting Jan 1.

U.S. Criticized for Attempt to Shift Blame for Ruptured DPRK-U.S. Talks

PYONGYANG - A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) released a statement on Saturday as regards the fact that the U.S. is trying to escape from the responsibility for its totally foiled policy toward the DPRK.

It is a well-known fact that the DPRK had long called for the

resumption of dialogue without preconditions, making sincere efforts for it, but the U.S. prevented it, raising unreasonable "preconditions", the statement said, adding:

As the DPRK has consistently clarified, its military capabilities for self-defence based on nuclear force are neither means for threatening anyone

nor a bargaining chip for something.

The DPRK's nuclear weapons serve as self-defensive deterrent to cope with the constant nuclear threat and military invasion from the U.S. and as a force of justice to decisively repel the enemy's invasion and deal a merciless retaliation in case a war breaks out.