

India to Produce Russian Arms Despite U.S. Warning



Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar attend a news conference following their talks in New Delhi, India, April 6, 2021.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- Russia and India are discussing "additional" production of Russian military equipment in India, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Tuesday, in a move that could irk the United States which frowns upon countries engaged in defense trade with Moscow.

Speaking at a joint news conference with India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Lavrov did not specify what kind of equipment could be made in India.

Officials from both countries have said their governments have been discussing for some years the possibility of making Russian military helicopters in India.

"We have confirmed our determination towards the development of military-technical cooperation," Lavrov told the briefing, adding there was an inter-governmental commission dealing with the subject.

"It has its own plans, and the prospects for additional production of Russian military equipment on India's territory are under discussion," he said.

India has made Russian MiG fighter planes and Su-30 jets under license and the two countries have collaborated to develop and produce supersonic BrahMos cruise missiles in India.

While joint defense production would fit with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship make-in-

India program, it could rile the United States, which has been targeting Russia's defense and intelligence sectors with trade sanctions.

Lavrov said the United States has been trying to discourage countries from buying Russian weapons, but U.S. objections did not feature during his talks with Jaishankar, which had focused on deepening military ties.

Washington has already warned New Delhi that it could face sanctions if it goes through with the purchase of Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile systems under a deal struck in 2018, though it has not made the same threat over other Indian arms purchases from Russia.

Last year, the United States sanctioned Turkey for buying S-400 systems. India made an initial payment of \$800 million in 2019, and the first set of missile batteries is expected to be delivered towards the end of this year.

Jaishankar said ties with Russia were time-tested and that the two sides also discussed a summit meeting between Modi and President Vladimir Putin later this year.

"India-Russia ties are characterized by consistent ability to identify and update shared interests," he said.

Russia has traditionally been India's main arms supplier but Delhi has turned to the United States and Israel in recent years for supplies of attack helicopters, transport planes and high-tech drones and other surveillance equipment.

China: Drills Near Chinese Taipei to Become Regular



China's aircraft carrier Liaoning departs Hong Kong, China, July 11, 2017.

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) -- A Chinese carrier group is exercising near Chinese Taipei (Taiwan) and such drills will become regular, China's navy said late on Monday.

Chinese Taipei has claimed an increase in Chinese military activity near it in recent months, as China steps up efforts to assert its sovereignty over the island.

China's navy said the carrier group, led by the Liaoning, the country's first aircraft carrier put into active service, was carrying out "routine" drills in the waters near Chinese Taipei.

The aim is to "enhance its capability to safeguard national sovereignty, safety and development interests", it said. "Similar exercises will be conducted on a regular basis in the future," the navy added, without elaborating.

China's statement follows Chinese Taipei's claim of a new incursion by China's air force into the island's air defense identification zone on Monday.

Japan's Defense Ministry said on Sunday that the Liaoning, accompanied by five escort ships, had transited the Miyako Strait on their way to the Pacific.

China's widely-read Global Times, published by the official People's Daily, noted the Nanchang, the first of a powerful new fleet of Type 055 destroyers that entered service last year, was part of the carrier group.

"The combination of aircraft carriers and Type 055 large destroyers will become a standard configuration of Chinese aircraft carrier task groups in the future," it added.

The Liaoning and its sister ship the Shandong have carried out drills or sailed near Chinese Taipei before.

In December 2019, shortly before presidential and parliamentary elections in Chinese Taipei the Shandong sailed through the sensitive Taiwan Strait.

Chinese Taipei is China's most sensitive territorial issue and a potential military flashpoint. China has never renounced the use of force to bring the island under its control.

Meanwhile, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is committed to peacefully resolving a diplomatic row with China over the disputed South China Sea, his spokesman said on Tuesday.

"We will continue to resolve the issues on Julian Felipe through diplomatic channels and through peaceful means," said a statement from Duterte read by his spokesman Harry Roque.

China has maintained that Whitsun Reef, known as Julian Felipe Reef in the Philippines, was a traditional fishing ground where its vessels were seeking shelter from adverse weather.

The toning down of the Philippine response comes a day after its foreign ministry said it would protest daily if China refused to withdraw boats.

News in Brief

DALLAS (AP) — Authorities have identified six people found dead in a suburban Dallas home in what police said was an apparent murder-suicide plot. The Allen Police Department said investigators believe brothers Tanvir Towhid, 21, and Farhan Towhid, 19, made a pact to kill their parents, sister and grandmother before killing themselves. The bodies were found early Monday by officers performing a welfare check, Sgt. Jon Felty said. "It appears that the two brothers had entered into an agreement," Felty said. The victims were identified as Altafuna Nessa, 77; Iren Islam, 56; Towhidul Islam, 54; and Farbin Towhid, 19. Felty said one of the brothers wrote a lengthy post on social media in which he said he and his brother had a plan to kill their family members and then themselves. He also wrote that all of his decisions were based on weighing pros and cons, including the decision to kill his family.

KYIV (Dispatches) -- President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on NATO on Tuesday to lay out a path for Ukraine to join the Western military alliance. Zelenskyy's comments drew an immediate rebuke from Moscow, which said Kyiv's approach to NATO could further inflame the situation in Donbass, where violence has increased in recent days. Pro-Russian separatists have fought since 2014 against Ukrainian forces in the Donbass, a conflict that Kyiv says has killed 14,000 people. Kyiv reported two more soldiers killed on Tuesday. "NATO is the only way to end the war in Donbass," Zelenskyy told NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in a phone call, according to a statement from Zelenskyy's office. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said those living in eastern Ukraine would not accept NATO membership, and that rhetoric could further destabilize the Donbass region. "So far we're not seeing an intention by the Ukrainian side to somehow calm down and move away from belligerent topics," he said. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, speaking during a visit to India, said Russia was worried by statements coming out of Kyiv, and was in touch with European countries about them.

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Dutch police arrested a suspect Tuesday in the theft last year of two valuable paintings by Vincent van Gogh and Frans Hals from different museums, a spokeswoman said. The paintings, however, remain missing. In a statement posted on Twitter, police spokeswoman Maren Wouder said a 58-year-old man was arrested at his home in the Dutch town of Baarn, 40 kilometers (25 miles) southeast of Amsterdam. His identity was not released, in line with Dutch privacy guidelines. Van Gogh's "The Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring 1884" was snatched from the Singer Laren museum east of Amsterdam in the early hours of March 30, 2020. The museum was closed at the time due to a coronavirus lockdown. The 25-by-57-centimeter (10-by-22-inch) oil-on-paper painting shows a person standing in a garden surrounded by trees with a church tower in the background. The Hals work, "Two Laughing Boys," was stolen some five months later from Museum Hofje van Mevrouw van Aerden in Leerdam, 60 kilometers (about 35 miles) south of Amsterdam.

ROME (Reuters) -- There is a link between AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine and very rare blood clots in the brain but the possible causes are still unknown, a senior official for the European Medicines Agency (EMA) said in an interview published on Tuesday. However, the EMA later said in a statement that its review of the vaccine was ongoing and it expected to announce its findings on Wednesday or Thursday. An AstraZeneca spokesman declined to comment on the matter. "In my opinion, we can now say it, it is clear that there is an association (of the brain blood clots) with the vaccine. However, we still do not know what causes this reaction," Marco Cavaleri, chair of the vaccine evaluation team at the EMA, told Italian daily Il Messaggero. The EMA has repeatedly said the benefits of the AstraZeneca shot outweigh the risks as it investigates 44 reports of an extremely rare brain clotting ailment known as cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) out of 9.2 million people in the European Economic Area who have received the vaccine.

KHARTOUM (Reuters) -- The death toll from days of tribal clashes in Sudan's West Darfur has risen to 50, with 132 wounded, the West Darfur State Doctors' Committee said on Tuesday. The government declared a state of emergency in the state on Monday after three days of clashes in El Geneina, the state capital. The United Nations said on Monday that at least 40 people had been killed and 58 injured. The bloodshed is the latest in a resurgence of violence in the Darfur region since the signing of a peace agreement late last year and the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers. Residents and an internal UN security bulletin seen by Reuters reported the use of heavy weaponry and rocket-propelled grenades, with pictures and videos from residents showing plumes of smoke rising from El Geneina neighborhoods. In January, at least 129 people were killed and 108,000 people remain displaced after similar clashes in El Geneina between members of the Masalit and Arab tribes.

Indonesia Searches for Dozens Missing After Cyclone



Women clear flood debris in the village in Waiwerang, on Adonara Island, easter Indonesia, April 6, 2021.

JAKARTA (Reuters) -- Rescuers searched for dozens missing in the remote islands of southeast Indonesia on Tuesday, as reinforcements arrived to help in the aftermath of a tropical cyclone that killed at least 119 people.

Helicopters were deployed to aid the search, and ships carrying food, water, blankets and medicine reached ports previously blocked by high waves whipped up by tropical cyclone Seroja, which brought heavy rain and triggered deadly floods and landslides on Sunday.

Indonesia's disaster agency BNPB revised upwards the death toll from the cyclone in the East Nusa Tenggara islands, after earlier saying 86 had died. Seventy-six

people were still missing.

"The rescue team is moving on the ground. The weather is good," BNPB spokesman Raditya Jati told a news briefing.

Search and rescue personnel, however, had trouble transporting heavy equipment for use in the search.

"Search for victims is constrained, the existing heavy equipment cannot be sent to their destination, especially in Adonara and Alor," the head of BNPB, Doni Monardo, said.

The Adonara and Alor islands were among the islands worst hit by the cyclone, with 62 and 21 people dead respectively.

Aerial images from Adonara on

Tuesday showed brown mud and flood water covering a vast area, burying houses, roads and trees.

The military and volunteers arrived on the islands on Tuesday and were setting up public kitchens, while medical workers were brought in.

Video taken by a local official in Tanjung Batu village on Lembata, home to the Ile Lewotolok volcano, showed felled trees and large rocks of cold lava that had crushed homes after being dislodged by the cyclone.

Thousands of people have been displaced, nearly 2,000 buildings including a hospital were impacted, and more than 100 homes heavily damaged by the cyclone.

Two people died in nearby West Nusa Tenggara province.

There were also concerns about possible COVID-19 infections in crowded evacuation centers.

In neighboring East Timor, at least 33 were killed in floods and landslides and by falling trees. Civil defense authorities were using heavy equipment to search for survivors.

Some residents of Lembata island may have also been washed away by mud into the sea.

A volcano that erupted on Lembata last month wiped out vegetation atop the mountain, which allowed hardened lava to slide towards 300 houses when the cyclone struck, a senior district official said, hoping help was on the way.

Trilateral Talks on Nile Dam Make No Progress



Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam is seen as it undergoes construction work on the river Nile in Guba Woreda, Benishangul Gumuz Region, Ethiopia September 26, 2019.

CAIRO (Middle East Eye) -- Talks aimed at breaking a deadlock over Ethiopia's construction of a dam on the Nile ended without success on Tuesday, according to Egypt's foreign ministry.

The three-way discussions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's capital Kinshasa between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) had been aimed at resolving differences over a project Addis Ababa says is key to its economic development and power generation.

Egypt fears the dam will imperil its supplies of Nile water, while Sudan is concerned about the dam's safety and water flows through its own dams and water stations.

Before the meetings began, Egypt had said they represented the last chance to restart negotiations before Ethiopia begins to fill the dam for the second year in a row after seasonal rains start this summer.

Sudan's Foreign Minister Mariam al-Sadiq al-Mahdi told reporters on Tuesday that Ethiopia's insistence on such unilateral moves represented a violation of international law.

Ethiopian Minister of Water Seleshi Bekele did not respond to texts and calls seeking comment.

Sudan and Egypt were aligned on a proposal to include the European Union, the United States and the United Nations in the negotiations, as an addition to current African Union mediators.

Egypt said Ethiopia rejected the proposal during the meeting, as well as other suggestions to restart negotiations.

"This position reveals once again Ethiopia's lack of political will to negotiate in good faith," Egypt's statement said.

Sudan, which is also locked in a border dispute with Ethiopia, had been hosting Egypt for air force training exercises that concluded on Saturday.

Last week, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi said there would be "inconceivable instability in the region" if Egypt's water supply were affected by the dam.

"Without a new approach to negotiations, there becomes space for Ethiopia to impose a fait accompli and put all the peoples of the region in grave danger," said Mahdi.

1,800 Prisoners on the Run in Nigeria After Militant Attack

YENAGOA, Nigeria (Reuters) -- More than 1,800 prisoners are on the run in southeast Nigeria after escaping when heavily armed gunmen attacked their prison using explosives and rocket-propelled grenades, the authorities said.

Nigerian police said it believed a banned separatist group, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), was behind the attack in the city of Owerri, but a spokesman for the group denied involvement.

The secessionist movement in the southeast is one of several serious security challenges facing President Muhammadu Buhari, including a decade-long takfiri insurgency in the northeast, a spate of school kidnappings in the northwest and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

Buhari said the attack, in a city near the oil-rich Niger Delta region that is the mainstay of Africa's top crude exporter and biggest economy, was an "act of terrorism". He ordered security forces to apprehend the fleeing prisoners.

The attackers stormed the facility at around 2:15 a.m. (0115 GMT) on Monday, according to the Nigerian Correctional Service said.

"The Owerri Custodial Centre in Imo state has been attacked by unknown gunmen and forcefully released a total

of 1,844 inmates in custody," its spokesman said in a statement late on Monday.

The police said attackers used explosives to blast the administrative block of the prison and entered the prison yard.

"Preliminary investigations have revealed that the attackers... are members of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)," said Frank Mba, a spokesman for the Nigeria Police Force.

IPOB wants independence for a region in southeast Nigeria it calls Biafra. One million people died in a 1967-70 civil war between the Nigerian government and secessionists there.

In recent months security in the region has deteriorated. Several police stations have been attacked since January, with large amounts of ammunition stolen and reports of the IPOB's paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), clashing with the military.

But an IPOB spokesman told Reuters the group did not carry out the prison raid.

"IPOB and ESN were not involved in the attack in Owerri, Imo state. It is not our mandate to attack security personnel or prison facilities," the IPOB spokesman said in a phone call.