

US accuses China of cyber spying

AFP, Singapore

US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel yesterday accused China of waging cyber espionage against the United States, raising pressure on Beijing over the issue ahead of a key summit between their leaders.

The Pentagon chief, speaking at a Singapore security forum attended by senior Chinese military officials, pointedly blamed the Chinese government and armed forces for repeated intrusions into sensitive US information systems.

"The United States has expressed our concerns about the growing threat of cyber intrusions, some of which appear to be tied to the Chinese government and military," he told an annual conference known as the Shangri-La Dialogue.

Hagel pressed Beijing to adhere to "international norms of responsible behaviour in cyberspace", while acknowledging that the establishment of a joint cyber security working group was a positive step in fostering dialogue.

The Singapore conference took place ahead of the June 7-8 meeting between US President Barack Obama and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in California, the first meeting between the two leaders since Xi took office in March.

Hagel's remarks came just days after China's defence ministry dismissed a Pentagon report accusing Chinese hackers of accessing US weapons designs.

The report was the most explicit statement yet from Washington that it believes China's cyber spying is focused on the US government and corporations.



TORNADOS STRIKE OKLAHOMA AGAIN

A storm chaser stops to take photos of the dramatic moment when two lightning strikes hit the ground in Oklahoma, USA. A new series of tornadoes has swept through Oklahoma, killing at least nine people. The tornadoes struck near Moore, where 24 people were killed by a violent tornado nearly two weeks ago. Inset, an overturned tractor-trailer.



PHOTO: REUTERS

ODDLY enough

'Hitler' teapot goes viral



AFP, Los Angeles

A tea kettle which some think resembles Adolf Hitler has soared in price to over \$200 on eBay, after it sold out online following protests over a billboard promoting the otherwise innocent product.

Pictures went viral of the Michael Graves Bells and Whistles Stainless Steel Tea Kettle. The \$40 kettle on Thursday fetched prices as high as \$245.90.

'Obama' surfs Internet from China cafe

AFP, Beijing

President Barack Obama appears to be a regular customer of a Chinese Internet cafe, reports said, after the manager forged an identity card in the US leader's name to help surfers avoid China's web rules.

The card has a full-face picture of Obama, lists his correct birthday and address, while stating his ethnicity as "Kenyan", pictures showed. As part of their efforts to control the web, China's Communist rulers require Internet cafes to register users' identity numbers before letting them go online.

IRAQ VIOLENCE

More than 1,000 killed in May

REUTERS, Baghdad

More than 1,000 people were killed in violence in Iraq in May, making it the deadliest month since the sectarian slaughter of 2006-07, the United Nations reported yesterday, stoking fears of a return to civil war. Nearly 2,000 people have been killed in the last two months as al-Qaeda and Sunni Islamist insurgents, invigorated by the Sunni-led revolt in Syria and by Sunni discontent at home, seek to revive the kind of all-out inter-communal conflict that killed tens of thousands five years ago.

"That is a sad record," Martin Kobler, the UN envoy in Baghdad, said in a statement.

This week multiple bombings battered Shia and Sunni areas of the capital Baghdad, killing nearly 100 people.

US slams Russia over Syria arms deal

Battle looms in Qusayr; Syria rocket hits Lebanon

AFP, Damascus

US Secretary of State John Kerry has strongly condemned Russia's pledge to sell an advanced missile system to Damascus, questioning Moscow's commitment to end the Syrian conflict, as concern grew for civilians trapped in the battle for a key Syrian town.

Speaking from Washington, Kerry warned that the planned delivery of S-300 air defence missiles to Damascus was "not helpful" as the US and Russia pressed on with their joint efforts to set up a peace conference, dubbed Geneva 2, to try to end the Syrian conflict.

Kerry said the delivery would have a "profoundly negative impact on the balance of interests and the stability of the region, and it does put Israel at risk".

It is "not helpful to have the S-300 transferred to the region while you are trying to organise this peace and create peace," he added, questioning whether Russia was fully committed to ending Syria's two-year-old conflict.

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, in Washington for talks with Kerry, also appealed to Russia to consider.

In a television interview broadcast Thursday, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad appeared to imply that Russia had already started to deliver sophisticated S-300 missile systems under a contract with Syria.

Russia's Vedomosti and Kommersant newspapers said Moscow might not deliver the missiles this year, rejecting claims they had already arrived.

Russian news agency Interfax reported that Moscow could supply 10 ultra-modern MiG-29 fighter jets to Syria under a possible contract being discussed with Damascus.

Syrian troops and Hezbollah allies meanwhile pressed ahead with their assault on the strategic town of Qusayr as hundreds of rebels reportedly broke through army lines to join the battle.

The Syrian opposition said Friday that hundreds of rebel reinforcements, most of them close to the Muslim Brotherhood, had now reached Qusayr.

Meanwhile, six rockets fired from Syria hit Lebanon's eastern Bekaa region yesterday, causing no casualties, in the latest spillover from the more than two-year conflict in Lebanon's larger neighbour, a security source said.

Russian smoking ban comes into force

BBC ONLINE

A law banning smoking in some public places and restricting tobacco advertising is due to come into effect in Russia from yesterday.

Smoking will be banned at workplaces, housing block stairwells, buses and commuter trains and within 15m of train stations and airports. In 2014, the ban will be extended to restaurants, bars, ships and trains.

Russia has one of the highest smoking rates in the world with around 40% of its population smokers.

The anti-smoking legislation was signed by President Vladimir Putin in February as part of his plan to improve public health, raise life expectancy and promote economic growth.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said almost 400,000 Russians died from smoking-related diseases last year.

While experts say the law is nothing new to Russia, they stress that what is important is how it is applied.

The legislation will also restrict cigarette sales and ban advertising and sponsorship of events by tobacco companies.

There will be price increases too, says the BBC's Steven Rosenberg in Moscow. He says you can buy packets of cigarettes in Russia for less than \$1 (60p).

From 1 June 2014, all cafes, bars, restaurants, hotels, shops, markets, shopping centres and long-distance journeys on ships and trains will become smoke free.



TURKEY TURMOIL

A woman asks police to stop as Turkish protestors and riot policemen clash yesterday during a protest against the demolition of Taksim Gezi Park in Istanbul. The clashes raged for the second day in Istanbul amid raging anti-government demonstrations.

PHOTO: AFP

Huge asteroid flies past Earth

BBC ONLINE

An asteroid that measures nearly 2.7km (1.7 miles) across has flown past Earth.

The space rock, which is called 1998 QE2, is so large that it is orbited by its own moon.

It made its closest approach to our planet at 20:59 GMT, but scientists had said there would be no chance it would hit.

Instead it kept a safe distance - at closest, about 5,800,000 km.

That is about 200 times more distant than the asteroid "near-miss" that occurred in February - but Friday's passing space rock is more than 50,000 times larger.

Prof Alan Fitzsimmons, an astronomer at Queen's University Belfast, said: "It's a big one. And there are very few of these objects known - there are probably only about 600 or so of this size or larger in near-Earth space.

Researchers have so far spotted more than 9,000 near-Earth asteroids.

Last Tiananmen prisoner freed

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Chinese authorities have released the last prisoner convicted of "counter-revolutionary" charges in connection with the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations.

Jiang Yaqun, 73, who has Alzheimer's disease, was released from a Beijing prison without a home or family to go to, or a source of income, the San Francisco-based Dui Hua Foundation said on Thursday, citing an undated notice posted on the website of Jingshan neighbourhood council.

Tuesday will mark the 24th anniversary of the day that Chinese soldiers quashed the largely student-led pro-democracy movement by opening fire on demonstrators, killing hundreds of people.

Fearing a crisis of legitimacy, China's ruling Communist party has since forbidden open discussion of the events of 4 June 1989 in classrooms, the media and online.

In July 1990, the Beijing high people's court sentenced Jiang, the in his mid-40s, to death with a two-year reprieve, Dui Hua said. While the details of his case remain unknown, his sentence had been reduced five times.

Dui Hua believe Jiang was released some time in October or November last year, based on the Jingshan website notice.



Queen's coronation plot revealed

MAIL ONLINE

How very different it might all have been. Instead of celebrating the 60th anniversary of her coronation today, the Queen might be reviewing a very different life.

For a sinister palace conspiracy was secretly hatched to try to stop her becoming sovereign in the years before the death of her father, George VI.

At the heart of this sensational plot was her uncle - the former Edward VIII, who had abdicated in shame in 1936.

The plan was a simple one. The Duke of Windsor, as he was titled after giving up the throne, would return to Britain to become Regent - on the grounds that his niece (in her early 20s) was too young to reign. Once on the throne again, it would be difficult to dislodge him.

Looked at with the benefit of hindsight, such an idea now seems outrageous and implausible - yet it might have worked.

For during the late-Forties, when the plot began to form, paranoia reigned at Buckingham Palace. The old guard who surrounded George VI were appalled at the thought that the apple of his eye, his elder daughter Princess



Queen Elizabeth II after her coronation.

Elizabeth, was in love with a penniless Greek princeling called Philip.

Even more unsettling was the suspected powerful influence of Philip's fiendishly ambitious uncle, Earl Mountbatten, and the threat that he could become the new power behind the Throne.

The House of Windsor was at a low ebb. The King, battered by the years of war, had been negligent about his health and, according to Winston Churchill, was 'walking with death'.

There were a lot of negotiations among different parties to carry out the plan as reports revealed but ultimately

it wasn't carried out.

What stopped the Duke making his play for the Throne? A loss of nerve? Or had he grown to love the fleshpots of New York, Palm Beach and the Cote d'Azur too much?

Whatever the truth - and a brief visit to London didn't help because it reminded the Duke how bloody awful the British weather could be - there was no coup, no usurpation.

Had the Duke of Windsor successfully won the Regency, it's fair to suppose Queen Elizabeth II would not be celebrating the 60th anniversary of her Coronation today.



Edward VIII

US, Iran trade barbs over terrorism charges

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran rejected a US State Department report that accused Tehran of increasing its support for terrorism overseas to levels not seen for two decades, saying it is the United States that backs terrorists in the Middle East.

"Iran itself has been the victim of state-sponsored terrorism, which has claimed the lives of thousands of innocent Iranian people," said Alireza Miryousefi, spokesman for Iran's UN mission.

"Iran has been actively engaged in counterterrorism activities by all possible means and is a party to many counterterrorism international legal instruments," he said on Friday.

The State Department report on Thursday cited a series of actual and planned attacks in Europe and Asia linked to Hezbollah, Iran's Lebanon-based ally, including a July 2012 bombing in Bulgaria that killed five Israeli citizens and a Bulgarian, and wounded 32 others.

Last July, Iran's UN ambassador denied his country's involvement in the Bulgaria bombing, which he accused Israel of carrying out. "We have never, and will not, engage in such a despicable attempt on ... innocent people," Ambassador Mohammed Khazaee said.

"It should be mentioned that the US government has no merit to label other nations of sponsoring terrorism as it has a long ... record (of) supporting terrorist groups in our region as well as Israeli state terrorism," Miryousefi said.

US and European officials and intelligence agencies say Iran and Hezbollah have stepped up their military backing for the besieged government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

NEWSIN brief

34 militants killed in Pak clashes

AFP, Islamabad

At least 34 militants and three soldiers were killed in gunfights in a restive Pakistani tribal region where troops have now gained control of strategic heights, officials said Friday.

The clashes took place in an area between the tribal districts of Kurram and Khyber, in the villages of Para Chamkani and Maidan, during an operation against

Manning trial begins tomorrow

REUTERS, Washington

The American soldier accused of the biggest leak of classified information in US history, which prosecutors say put lives at risk, goes on trial tomorrow in a case that raises questions about the limits of secrecy and openness in the Internet era.

Private First Class Bradley Manning, 25, is charged with providing more than 700,000 documents to WikiLeaks, an anti-secrecy website. The military trial at Fort Meade, Maryland, about 30 miles (50 km) northeast of Washington, is expected to

Drone strikes kill 7 in Yemen

REUTERS, Aden

Two drone strikes killed seven suspected al-Qaeda militants in southern Yemen yesterday morning, a local official said, nine days after US President Barack Obama said he would only use such strikes when a threat was "continuing and imminent".

Washington views al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as the movement's most dangerous wing after it attempted to launch bomb attacks on international airliners. The official said the seven were in two cars driving in the al-Mahfad district of Abyan Governorate in southern Yemen where the Islamist militant group has a strong presence.

IMF releases 1.7b euros for Greece

AFP, Washington

The International Monetary Fund released 1.74 billion euros (\$2.26 billion) in fresh funds for Greece Friday after the country passed the third review of its performance under the joint IMF-EU bailout program.

Earlier Friday the European Financial Stability Facility also released another aid installment, worth 7.2 billion euros, to help recapitalise Greece's stricken banks. The funding is part of the 173-billion-euro, four-year program to put Athens's finances on a stable path. The IMF so far has released 6.57 billion euros to Greece under the program.

First SARS-like virus case in Italy

REUTERS, Rome

Italy reported its first case of the SARS-like coronavirus on Friday, a 45-year-old man who had been travelling in Jordan, the health ministry said.

Saudi Arabia has been the most affected by the virus, with 39 cases and 25 deaths so far, according to data from the World Health Organisation. The virus, which can cause coughing, fever and pneumonia, has spread from the Gulf to France, Britain and Germany. The WHO has called it the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV).

Mugabe given poll deadline

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A Zimbabwean court has ordered Robert Mugabe to hold elections before the end of July, adding to a political dispute over the timing and funding of the vote in the country.

"The elections should take place no later than 31 July 2013," the chief justice of the constitutional court, Godfrey Chidyausiku said, on Friday.