

Montreal

British and US bans on laptops and tablet computers in the cabin of flights are not sustainable in the long term, the head of the association representing airlines said yesterday.

"The current measures are not acceptable as a long-term solution to whatever threat they are trying to mitigate," said Alexandre de Juniac, director general of the International Air Transport Association said.

"Even in the short term, it is difficult to understand their effectiveness. And the

commercial distortions they create are severe," he said in a speech in Montreal.

"We call on governments to work with the industry to find a way to keep flying secure without separating passengers from their personal electronics."

Washington last week banned electronic devices bigger than mobile phones on direct flights to the United States from 10 airports in seven Middle Eastern countries and Turkey.

Britain followed with a similar ban from five countries from the Middle

East and northern Africa, and Turkey.

US officials said the measure was intended to thwart possible attacks on airliners with small explosive devices hidden in consumer electronics.

In theory, it would be harder to hide a bomb in checked luggage because these are usually scanned with more sophisticated equipment.

De Juniac lamented a lack of consultation with the airline industry and "little coordination by governments" in the

measure's rollout.

He pointed to pushback from airlines and their passengers who are questioning the security measure, especially after other Western nations chose not to impose a ban.

"Why don't the US and the UK have a common list of airports?" he said. "How can laptops be secure in the cabin on some flights and not others (from the same airport)."

"And surely there must be a way to screen electronic equipment effectively at airport checkpoints," he concluded. (AFP)

Pakistan extends secret military courts



Representative picture

Preparatory meeting of Foreign Ministers at the summit

Islamabad

An expired Pakistani law allowing secret military courts to try civilians on terror charges was extended by the Senate for another two years yesterday, despite stringent criticism from rights groups. The law expired in January with the controversial tribunals having hanged 12 people and ordered the executions of 149 more.

The courts will now be revived as soon as Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain

signs the amendment to extend them into law, a senior government official said. The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) slammed the move.

"The nationwide concern at a number of recent attacks in the country seems to have once again been misdirected toward a seriously flawed counter terrorism strategy that weakens the rule of law and the struggle for justice," said Sam Zarifi, ICJ's Asia director.

Kids exposed to lead show less intelligence

Miami

Children in New Zealand who were exposed to high levels of lead have grown up to be less intelligent adults than their counterparts who were not as affected, researchers said.

The decades-long study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) shows that the effects of lead, a metal and potent neurotoxin,

can be long-lasting.

The research involved more than 500 people living in the southeastern city of Dunedin in the 1970s and 1980s, an era when leaded gasoline (petrol) was common and the exhaust from vehicles meant most people were exposed to high levels of lead. New Zealand's lead levels were consistently higher than international standards during this time.

Electronics ban on flights not a longterm solution: IATA boss

A Libyan traveller packs his laptop in his suitcase before boarding his flight for London at Tunis-Carthage International Airport

No peace deal in Syria without US role: opposition

Geneva

Apolitical deal to end the Syrian conflict is not possible without a strong US role, the opposition's chief negotiator said, warning that Washington's absence was threatening ongoing peace talks.

Lead negotiator for the main opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC), Mohamad Sabra, said in an interview late Monday that the UN-backed talks in Geneva remained "stalled".

"There can be no real and viable political solution without the presence of the Americans," he said.

The United States has a "moral duty" to throw its weight behind efforts to end the six-year conflict, he added.

Years of diplomatic initiatives have failed to end



US armoured vehicles at Raqa in northern Syria

the war, which has killed more than 320,000 people and displaced millions since it started in March 2011 with protests against President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Washington has long been the biggest backer of the Syrian

opposition, but it appears to be putting far less diplomatic muscle towards the rebel cause since President Donald Trump came to power in January.

Two UN-backed taskforces co-chaired by the United

States and Russia and aimed at securing ceasefires and access for humanitarian aid in Syria seem to be having less impact.

At the same time, regime supporters Russia and Iran along with rebel-backer Turkey

have been pushing separate negotiations in Astana since January after gains on the ground by Damascus turned the tables in the conflict.

'No partner'

While urging Washington to be

more fully engaged in the peace process, Sabra warned that a deal would be impossible "if the Russians do not withdraw their (military) support for the regime."

Russia's entry into the conflict in September 2015 -- when it began launching air strikes to shore up Assad's forces -- played a significant role in turning the tide for the Syrian regime. "Until now, we don't have a partner in these negotiations," he insisted.

The government has ruled out discussing Assad's possible departure, while the HNC says it will refuse any deal that leaves him in power.

Sabra insisted that "once the transitional government is formed," Assad's regime would end, and he "and his clique will be referred to a fair trial" for their crimes. (AFP)