

Russia Denies Compromising Dossier on Trump



U.S. president-elect Donald Trump, left, and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Kremlin said on Wednesday it was “total nonsense” that Russian officials had assembled a file of compromising information on U.S. President-elect Donald Trump.

Two U.S. officials said on Tuesday evening that the heads of four U.S. intelligence agencies had last week presented Trump with classified documents which included unverified claims that Russian intel-

ligence operatives had compromising information about him.

Addressing reporters on a conference call, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the dossier containing the claims was a hoax which had been dreamt up to further harm U.S.-Russia relations, which are already at their lowest level since the Cold War.

“It is an attempt to damage our bilateral relations. It is pulp fiction,” said Peskov, who also roundly dismissed as false assertions in the dossier that he himself was heavily involved in running a Russian campaign to undermine defeated presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

“You have to react to this with a certain humor, but there’s also a sad side to this. Hysteria is being whipped up to maintain a political witch hunt.”

Peskov said the Kremlin did not engage in compiling compromising dossiers on anyone and was focused on building relations with Russia’s foreign partners instead.

On Tuesday evening, Trump dismissed the reports that Russia had compromising information on him. “FAKE NEWS - A TOTAL POLITICAL WITCH HUNT!” he wrote in a Twitter post.

Asked to respond to the prospect of new U.S. sanctions affecting Russia’s oil and gas sector, Peskov said such measures, if they happened, would damage Russia, bilateral ties, and the global economy.

U.S. Says Might Not Shoot Down North Korean ICBM, Eying Intel

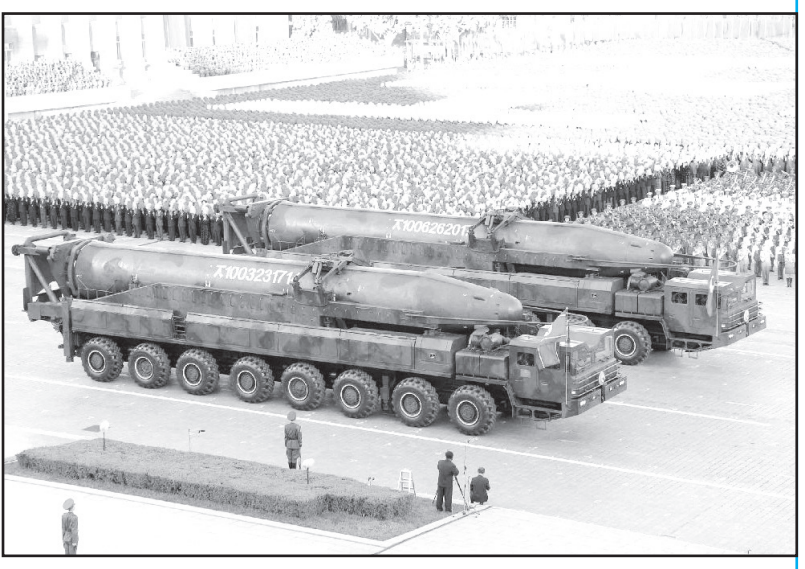
WASHINGTON (Dsipatches) - The U.S. military might monitor a North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile test and gather intelligence rather than destroy it, as long as the launch did not pose a threat, Defense Secretary Ash Carter has said.

North Korea declared on Sunday it could test-launch an ICBM at any time from any location set by leader Kim Jong Un, saying a hostile U.S. policy was to blame for its arms development.

“If the missile is threatening, it will be intercepted. If it’s not threatening, we won’t necessarily do so,” Carter said in his final news briefing before President Barack Obama’s administration leaves office on Jan. 20.

“Because it may be more to our advantage to, first of all, save our interceptor inventory, and, second, to gather intelligence from the flight, rather than do that (intercept the ICBM) when it’s not threatening.”

The top U.S. military officer,



Missiles during a mass military parade at Kim Il-Sung square in Pyongyang. North Korea was marking the 70th anniversary of its ruling Workers’ Party

Marine General Joseph Dunford, who will stay in his role as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, concurred with Carter at the event but did not enter into specifics. Carter’s language left open the possibility of U.S. military action in

any scenario.

Carter’s remarks came just over a week after U.S. President-elect Donald Trump vowed that North Korea would never fulfill its threat to test an ICBM. Trump said in a Jan. 2 tweet: “It won’t happen!”

26 Dead in Days of DR Congo Clashes Over Slain Militia Chief



Soldiers attend a decoration ceremony for new lieutenants at a military academy in the city of Kananga, capital of central DR Congo province of Kasai-Central, on January 11, 2013

KINSHASA (AFP) - Over two dozen people have been killed since the start of the year in clashes pitting the Democratic Republic of Congo’s security forces against supporters of a slain tribal chief, a local governor said in a statement.

“The death toll since the start of 2017 is 26 people killed including four civilians, nine members of the security forces and 12 militia fighters,” Kasai-Central provincial governor Alex Kan-

de said in a statement seen by AFP on Wednesday.

The wife of one of the militia leaders was also killed, Kande added.

The latest casualties add to a soaring toll of at least 140 dead in spiraling clashes in central DR Congo since tribal chief Kamwina Nsapu was killed in mid-August, according to the UN.

In a statement last week, the UN Office for the Coordination of Human-

tarian Affairs said tens of thousands of civilians were caught in a “cycle of violence” in the mineral-rich nation’s central provinces.

“The situation is worsening by the day,” it said.

In his statement, governor Kande said: “Kamwina Nsapu’s movement has morphed in total anarchy into a deadly guerrilla force.”

He accused Kamwina Nsapu’s supporters of forcibly recruiting minors and of using women and children as human shields in their fight against the government.

“Six AK-47 (rifles) and 14 home-made shotguns have been seized,” the governor’s statement said.

On Monday, fresh clashes erupted when schools reopened in Kananga, the provincial capital of Kasai-Central, pitting the security forces against Nsapu’s supporters, who sought to prevent children from attending classes, a local official said on condition of anonymity.

After the clash the bodies of three adults, most likely militia fighters, were found in a river, the official added.

Taiwan Scrambles Jets, Navy as China Aircraft Carrier Enters Taiwan Strait



FILE PHOTO: China’s Liaoning aircraft carrier with accompanying fleet conducts a drill in an area of South China Sea, in this undated photo taken December, 2016.

TAIPEI (dispatches) - Taiwan scrambled jets and navy ships on Wednesday as a group of Chinese warships, led by its sole aircraft carrier, sailed through the Taiwan Strait, the latest sign of heightened tension between Beijing and the self-ruled island.

China’s Soviet-built Liaoning aircraft carrier, returning from exercises in the South China Sea, was not encroaching in Taiwan’s territorial waters but entered its air defense identification zone in the southwest, Taiwan’s defense ministry said.

As a result, Taiwan scrambled jets and navy ships to “survey and control” the passage of the Chinese ships north through the body of water separating Taiwan and China, Taiwan defense ministry spokesman Chen Chung-chi said.

Taiwan military aircraft and ships have been deployed to follow the carrier group, which is sailing up the west side of the median line of the strait, he said.

Taiwan’s top policymaker for China affairs urged Beijing to resume dialogue, after official communication channels were suspended by Beijing from June.

“I want to emphasize our government has sufficient capability to protect our national security. It’s not necessary to overly panic,” said Chang Hsiao-yueh, minister for Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council, during a news briefing in response to reporters’ questions on the Liaon-

ing.

“On the other hand, any threats would not benefit cross-Strait ties,” she said.

China has said the Liaoning was on an exercise to test weapons and equipment in the disputed South China Sea and its movements complied with international law.

On the weekend, a Chinese bomber flew around the Spratly Islands in a show of “strategic force”, a U.S. official said.

The latest Chinese exercises have unnerved Beijing’s neighbors, especially Taiwan which Beijing claims as its own, given long-running territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin said China’s ships “couldn’t always remain in port” and the navy had to hone its capabilities.

“The Taiwan Strait is an international waterway shared between the mainland and Taiwan. So, it is normal for the Liaoning to go back and forth through the Taiwan Strait in the course of training, and it won’t have any impact on cross-Strait relations,” Liu said at a briefing on Asia-Pacific security.

China claims most of the energy-rich waters of the South China Sea, through which about \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade passes every year. Neighbors Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims.

Islamophobic Attacks Target Cape Town Mosques

CAPE Town (Press TV) - South African authorities have announced rare incidents of Islamophobic attacks on two mosques in the major city of Cape Town, where places of worship were defaced with blood sprayed on walls.

The announcement came in a statement by Western Cape provincial government, which censured the two attacks since Saturday on mosques in Kalk Bay and Simonstown as “despicable.”

According to the official statement cited in an AFP report, “Both incidents made calculated use of Islamophobic methods, including blood and, in the Simonstown case, a pig’s head.”

It further said the two attacks may have been related, adding, “The similarity of the cases, and proximity of the mosques, raises concerns that the two incidents may be linked.”

The report quoted Imam Achmat Sity of the 110-year-old Jamiah mosque in Kalk Bay as saying that the caretaker at the house of worship had discovered the act of vandalism early Monday morning. “He opened the mosque for

first prayers and found the walls sprayed with blood and also the pulpit. It was like from a syringe,” Sity said, adding that inscription plaques had been ripped from the walls and were strewn on the floor.

“It was very disturbing,” he added, but emphasized that nothing was stolen from the mosque.

In the Saturday attack against the Simonstown mosque, the report said, a bloody pig’s snout was left on the entrance gate.

The developments came despite South Africa’s history of relative religious tolerance. This is while Western Cape premier, Helen Zille, insisted that “Acts of religious or racial prejudice have no place in our province and nation,” as quoted in the report.

Moreover, the provincial branch of the country’s ruling party of African National Congress (ANC) also slammed the attacks as “disgusting” and urged South Africans “to stand united in protecting the culture of coexistence.”

Muslims in South Africa constitute nearly 1.5 percent of the country’s total population.

News in Brief

TEHRAN (Press TV) - The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is to discuss the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar next week, a Malaysian official says.

The official said on Wednesday that Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, who recently called on the global community to help stop the “genocide” of the Rohingya, would chair the meeting in Kuala Lumpur, which is scheduled to be held on January 19.

Fifty-six OIC representatives are reportedly expected to take part in the meeting.

Myanmar’s western state of Rakhine has been the scene of communal violence at the hands of Buddhist extremists since 2012.

The plane was traveling from Koltsovo airport in Russia’s Yekaterinburg when it crashed 16 miles from a village called Tiksi.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. prosecutors have charged relatives of former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon with conspiracy to bribe a government official.

Ban’s younger brother and his nephew stand accused of offering money to a Middle Eastern official, through an American middleman.

They allege the two men bribed the official to use state funds to buy their building project.

Ban served as UN secretary general from 2007 until 2016.

He was succeeded by former Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Guterres on 1 January 2017. Ban is now being seen as a possible future president in his home country of South Korea.

NEW YORK (Reuters) - An atmospheric river of moisture has swept parts of California and Nevada with another bout of heavy rains and snow, swelling streams to flood stage and piling up wind-blown snow drifts several feet high in the mountains.

The National Weather Service issued a blizzard warning for ski resort communities in the greater Lake Tahoe area, including the towns of Truckee and South Lake Tahoe, California, and neighboring Nevada enclaves of Stateline and Incline Village.

Snow accumulations of 5 to 10 feet (1.5 to 3 meters) were forecast above elevations of 7,000 feet, with fierce wind gusts reaching 100 miles (160 km) per hour along the ridge of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, the Weather Service reported.

GENEVA (Reuters) - Peace talks in Geneva to resolve the decades-long division of Cyprus are ‘on track’, the U.N. envoy for the island said on Wednesday, saying many issues dividing the sides had been resolved.

Espen Barth Eide said however that there was ‘still work to do’ in the reunification negotiations between estranged Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

“We have dealt with some of the most difficult issues. We have touched upon almost all of them, we have solved many of them and we are close to resolving some other issues.

Some tremors were also felt in various parts of the east coast, including Sandakan and Tawau as well as in the state capital, according to the Straits Times.

MANILA (Dispatches) - The 7.3-magnitude earthquake that has struck under the Celebes Sea off southern Philippines was far too deep to cause any damage and casualties or generate a tsunami, authorities reportedly said.

Renato Solidum of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said that the quake, which was centered 138 miles southeast of Sulu province, was slightly felt in southern General Santos city.