

North Korea: 3.5 Million Volunteers for Army



This picture of February 14, 2016 shows Korean People's Army (KPA) Vice Marshal Hwang Pyong So (3R) delivering a speech at a ceremony in Pyongyang.

SEOUL (Dispatches) -- North Korea said on Saturday that nearly 3.5 million workers, party members and soldiers volunteered to join or rejoin its army to resist new UN sanctions and to fight against the United States in the current geopolitical tension between Pyongyang and Washington.

Rodong Simmun, North Korea's official newspaper, said the volunteers had offered to join or rejoin the People's Army after the Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) issued a statement on Monday condemning new sanctions imposed by the United Nations in retaliation for North Korean missile tests.

Earlier this week, nuclear-armed North Korea threatened to strike the United States and its Pacific territory of Guam.

KCNA said on Wednesday a mass rally was held in Pyongyang to support the government. In August 2015, 1 million North Koreans offered to enlist or re-enlist

in the army when a mine exploded in the demilitarized zone between the two Koreas, raising additional tensions.

Xi Urges Trump to Avoid Inflaming Tensions

Chinese leader Xi Jinping urged U.S. President Donald Trump on Saturday to avoid rhetoric that could exacerbate tensions with North Korea as an escalating war of words raised global alarm.

Xi made the plea in a phone call hours after Trump ramped up his warnings to Pyongyang, saying Pyongyang would "truly regret" taking hostile action against the United States.

The Chinese foreign ministry said Xi urged Trump to avoid "words and deeds" that would "exacerbate" the already-tense situation, exercise restraint and seek a political settlement.

Trump has been engaged all week in verbal sparring with the North over its weapons and missile programs, as U.S. media reported

Pyongyang has successfully miniaturized a nuclear warhead.

The Republican billionaire has progressively ramped up the tone throughout the week and on Friday declared that the U.S. military is "locked and loaded."

Japanese media said Tokyo was deploying its Patriot missile defense system following Pyongyang's threat to fire ballistic missiles over the country towards Guam.

Satellite photos posted by defense expert Joseph Bermudez suggested that North Korea could be preparing for fresh submarine-based ballistic missile tests.

Trump had earlier brandished a threat of unleashing "fire and fury" on Pyongyang, then noted Thursday maybe that statement "wasn't tough enough."

The North's official KCNA news service in an editorial blamed Trump for "driving the situation on the Korean peninsula to the brink of a nuclear war," calling the U.S. "the heinous nuclear war fanatic."

The saber-rattling has sparked worldwide concerns that a miscalculation by either side could trigger a catastrophic conflict on the Korean Peninsula.

Russia and Germany have also urged both sides to tone down the rhetoric.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Moscow was "very alarmed" at Trump's tough talk, and said Washington should take the first step toward cooling tensions.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said diplomacy was the answer.

"Germany will very intensively take part in the options for resolution that are not military but I consider a verbal escalation to be the wrong response," she said.

French President Emmanuel Macron also warned against an "escalation of tensions" over North Korea.

In a statement, Macron said the international community needed to work to get all sides to "resume the path of dialogue without conditions."

UK Probes Transatlantic Anti-Muslim Campaign



At least six mosques in London have received threatening letters or suspicious packages in the last year.

LONDON (Dispatches) -- British counter-terrorism police are investigating an apparent transatlantic anti-Muslim campaign after hate mail and suspicious packages were sent from a location near Sheffield to mosques in London, South Yorkshire and the U.S.

Handwritten notes were received by three mosques and other addresses across London in July, the Guardian reported on Saturday. They all bore a Sheffield postmark, as did hate mail received by at least four U.S. mosques earlier this year, and by three UK mosques in July last year.

Forest Gate mosque, Coventry Cross mosque in Bromley-by-Bow, and Shackleton Lane mosque in Dalston all received letters last month saying the sender would be visiting the mosques.

In July 2016, packages containing white powder were sent to the parliamentary office of Nazir Ahmed, an independent peer, and three mosques in Leyton, Finsbury Park and Tottenham, as well as the Bank of England.

"In 2016 this person targets three mosques in London, in 2017 also three mosques," said Steve Rose, who is responsible for content at Faith Matters, a community action group

working to counter extremism.

The letters contained offensive language directed towards Pakistani Muslims.

A letter sent to a New Jersey mosque threatened to kill Muslims and featured an offensive cartoon. According to TellMama, a reporting service for cases of anti-Muslim abuse, similar letters targeted mosques in New York, Georgia, and Kentucky this spring.

The Guardian said it has seen letters with the same pseudonym received by mosques in Washington DC, New Jersey and Alabama, all sent in February, with the latest letter received by the Islam Center in South Dakota in mid-June. "Maybe other mosques got them but didn't report it," Rose said.

On February 28, the Dar al-Hijrah Islamic Center in Falls Church, Virginia, received a letter that contained threats of violence and offensive cartoons. It was sent with two first-class UK stamps.

The police were exploring the possibility that the letters were linked to the earlier suspicious packages and letters reported in London, South Yorkshire and the U.S.

Rose urged people attending mosques to remain vigilant and report any threats to the police.

Three Killed in Post-Election Crisis in Kenya

NAIROBI (AFP) -- Three people, including a child, have been shot dead in Kenya during opposition protests which flared for a second day Saturday after the hotly disputed election victory of President Uhuru Kenyatta.

Demonstrations and running battles with police broke out in isolated parts of Nairobi slums after anger in opposition strongholds against Tuesday's election that losing candidate Raila Odinga claims was rigged.

Interior Minister Fred Matiangi blamed the unrest on "criminal elements" looting and robbing businesses and assured Kenyans that "there is no need for alarm", urging them to return to their daily lives.

The uncertainty gripping the nation provided a grim reminder of a disputed 2007 election which led to two months of ethnopolitical violence that left 1,100 dead and 600,000 displaced.

Kenyatta was declared the victor in the presidential election Friday night with 54.27 percent to Odinga's 44.74, with protests erupting in the opposition leader's strongholds in Nairobi and the western city of Kisumu almost immediately.

Local government official Wilson Njega confirmed one person had been shot dead outside Kisumu in protests, while an AFP reporter saw three patients with gunshot wounds in the city's hospital.

At the hospital Truphena Achieng said his



Kenyan police chase protestors in Mathare slum in Nairobi on August 9, 2017, a day after general elections.

brother had been shot and injured "and yet he was just standing outside our house where people were demonstrating ... we don't know why police were shooting."

In the southwestern town of Siaya, a police officer speaking on condition of anonymity said a man had been shot dead in a demonstration, but "we have not managed to collect the body ... because of resistance from protesters."

On Saturday morning, an AFP photographer saw the body of a nine-year-old boy whose family said he had been shot in the back while

watching the protests from a fourth floor balcony in Mathare, a slum in the capital.

Human Rights Watch on Saturday urged police to show restraint.

Odinga, 72, is a veteran opposition politician seen as having taken his last shot at the presidency, which he has sought four times. He believes elections in 2007, 2013 and now 2017 were snatched away from him.

Politics in Kenya is largely divided along tribal lines, and the winner-takes-all nature of elections has long stoked communal tensions.

Cambodia, Laos Vow to Recall Troops From Border

PHNOM PENH (AFP) -- The leaders of Cambodia and Laos vowed Saturday to recall troops from a disputed border area where tensions have been flaring for months, after the premiers held an emergency meeting.

Some 30 Laos soldiers have been stationed in Cambodia's northern Stung Treng province since April to halt the construction of a road, according to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.

The spat escalated on Friday when Hun Sen started sending military vehicles up to the area, giving Laos an ultimatum to retreat in six days or face military action.

But on Saturday Hun Sen flew to Vientiane for an urgent meeting with his Laos counterpart.

After the talks the pair announced the

issue had been resolved in a joint press conference, broadcast live on Hun Sen's Facebook.

The neighbors said they would ask border officials to work on demarcating the disputed patch of their 540-kilometer land border, where territorial squabbles are fairly common.

"I have ordered relevant authorities to pull back troops by tomorrow morning," Laos' premier Thongloun Sisoulith said through a translator.

Hun Sen hailed the agreement as a "big success for both nations" and ordered his soldiers to turn around.

Following Hun Sen's orders on Friday, a convoy of Cambodian troops and multiple rocket launchers rolled through the capital Phnom Penh on their way north, eliciting cheers from onlookers.

The swell of nationalist fervor comes as Hun Sen readies for a political battle in next year's general election.

The 65-year-old, a shrewd political operator who has held office for 32 years, often draws on heavily nationalist rhetoric to drum up support, especially ahead of election season.

He likes to portray himself as the savior of country that was ravaged by decades of civil war and foreign invasions.

But he will face a tough challenge from an opposition that has tapped into growing frustration over the corruption and inequality that have flourished during his rule.

Border issues are often highly politicized in Cambodia, with Hun Sen especially vulnerable to criticism of being too lenient in territorial agreements with Vietnam.

Contaminated Eggs Scandal Spreads to Asia



Millions of eggs have been pulled from supermarket shelves across Europe since the discovery of fipronil was made public on August 1.

HONG KONG (AFP) -- A scandal involving insecticide spread to 15 EU countries, Switzerland and as far away as Hong Kong

as the European Commission called for a special meeting on the growing crisis.

Ministers and food safety chiefs from around the European Union are set to meet on September 26 in a bid to get countries to stop "blaming and shaming" each other over the scare involving the chemical fipronil.

Millions of eggs have been pulled from supermarket shelves across Europe and dozens of poultry farms closed since the discovery of fipronil, which can harm human health, was made public on August 1.

The issue has sparked a row between Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, the three countries at the epicenter of the crisis, about how long they knew about the problem.

Brussels said the 15 affected EU countries were Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Sweden, Britain, Austria, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Denmark, along with non-EU Switzerland.

But in a sign the crisis is going global, Brussels also announced that Hong Kong had received some tainted eggs from the Netherlands, with the southern Chinese city becoming the first place in Asia known to be affected.

Hong Kong health minister Sophia Chan said Saturday authorities were "strengthening" inspections of eggs from Europe.

As well as dealing with the immediate food safety issue, the EU is also seeking to calm tensions over the egg row after a series of divisive crises in the bloc in recent years, from Brexit to migration.

Previous food scandals include contamination of chickens and eggs by dioxin in 1999, which began in Belgium, and mad-cow disease -- cattle feed contaminated by the ground-up carcasses of animals infected with a deadly brain disorder -- which ran from roughly 1986-1998 and started in Britain.



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- Sen. Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) fired back at President Trump, saying Congress "obviously isn't authorizing war in Venezuela" after Trump said he wouldn't rule out using a military option in the country.

"No, Congress obviously isn't authorizing war in Venezuela," Sasse, a member of the Senate Armed Services committee, said in a statement.

In remarks to reporters at his New Jersey golf club Friday, Trump said he wouldn't rule out a "possible military option" in Venezuela. "Venezuela is not very far away, and the people are suffering and they're dying," he continued. "We have many options for Venezuela, including a possible military option if necessary."

Trump declined to say whether American troops would lead a possible military effort in Venezuela, saying: "We don't talk about it."

"But a military operation, a military option is certainly something that we could pursue," he said.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Libyan military commander Khalifa Haftar was due to arrive in Moscow Saturday ahead of a meeting with Russia's foreign minister, RIA news agency reported, citing a Russian negotiator. Haftar is expected to meet Sergei Lavrov on Monday, Lev Dengov, head of the Russian contact group on Libya, told RIA. It was not clear what the pair would be discussing.

At the end of July, Haftar and Libya's Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj committed during talks in France to a conditional ceasefire and to elections, but a Italian naval mission aimed to help the country curb migrant flows has fuelled tension this month. Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army controls much of eastern and southern Libya.

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- The U.S. Marine Corps is temporarily grounding all of its aircraft following the crash of an Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft in Australia that killed three troops, officials said.

Marine Corps Commandant General Robert Neller instructed all aviation units to conduct an "operational reset" for a 24-hour period where no flight operations will occur, the Marines said in a statement.

A Japan-based Marine MV-22 Osprey crashed Saturday during an exercise off the Australian coast, killing three service members. The reset will take place over the next two weeks depending on the schedules and needs of the Marines' various air units.

KATHMANDU (AFP) -- Floods and landslides caused by torrential monsoon rains have killed at least 25 people in the last two days across Nepal, officials said Saturday.

Heavy rains have hit more than a dozen districts in the country's far eastern region as well as some areas in the west since Friday morning, the home ministry said.

Flooding has occurred across the densely populated lowlands that border India, while some remote districts in the hilly areas of the far east have been hit by landslides triggered by the monsoon rains.

Telephone and electricity lines have also been affected by the heavy downpour making it difficult to confirm the full extent of the damage in remote areas, the police chief added.

MOSCOW (AFP) -- The Russian government has nominated former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, a close friend of President Vladimir Putin, to join the board of Rosneft, the energy giant under Western sanctions.

Schroeder was among seven nominees in a decree signed by Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev published on the Russian government's website late Friday. The names will go to a shareholders' vote in late September in a move to increase Rosneft's board from nine to 11.

Schroeder was nominated as a non-executive director of Rosneft, a company born out of Yukos, a state entity that later came under the control of government opponent Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Rosneft, Russia's biggest oil producer, is 50% state-owned.

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) -- Around a hundred Barcelona residents gathered on the Spanish city's beach on Saturday to protest the unchecked growth of mass tourism to the popular vacation destination.

The protest was organized by a local residents' group under the theme "Recover the beach for everyone!" They say the influx of tourists has increased the price of rents and driven a spike in rowdy behavior by party-seeking foreigners.

Tensions have been growing between authorities and radical leftist groups who launched a campaign of vandalism against mass tourism in Barcelona and other parts of Spain.

Spain, a country of 46 million, received 75.3 million tourists in 2016. The number of arriving tourists increased by 12% in the first six months of this year.