

Trump Sees 'Substantial Chance' of No Kim Summit



A man watches a TV screen showing file footage of U.S. President Donald Trump, right, and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, left, during a news program at the Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, May 23, 2018.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- U.S. President Donald Trump said there was a "substantial chance" his summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un would not take place as planned on June 12.

Trump raised doubts about the Singapore summit in talks with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who came to Washington to urge Trump not to miss a rare opportunity with North Korea.

If the summit is called off or fails, it would be a major blow to what Trump supporters hope will be the biggest diplomatic achievement of his presidency, and a huge disappointment for the president himself.

"There's a very substantial chance ... it won't work out. And that's OK," Trump told reporters. "That doesn't

mean it won't work out over a period of time. But it may not work out for June 12. But there is a good chance that we'll have the meeting."

Trump's Oval Office remarks were the strongest sign from him yet about the possibility of a delay or cancellation of what would be the first-ever summit between the leaders of the U.S. and North Korea.

Aides said Trump has privately been wondering whether Kim is serious about the summit after the abrupt change in tone.

Moon's national security adviser, Chung Eui-yong, had told reporters en route to Washington he believed there was a "99.9% chance" the Trump-Kim summit would take place as scheduled.

Before seeing Trump, Moon met with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and

national security adviser John Bolton and urged them to speed preparations for the Trump-Kim summit.

Trump reiterated his suggestion that Kim's recent meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping had influenced Kim to harden his stance ahead of the summit.

"President Xi is a world-class poker player," Trump said.

Nevertheless, invited foreign journalists began a long journey up North Korea's east coast Wednesday to witness the slated destruction of the country's nuclear test site.

In a surprise announcement Pyongyang said earlier this month that it planned to "completely" destroy the Punggye-ri facility in the country's northeast, a move welcomed by Washington and Seoul.

Punggye-ri has been the staging ground for all six of the North's nuclear tests, including its latest and by far most powerful one in September last year, which Pyongyang said was an H-bomb.

The demolition is due to take place sometime between Thursday and Friday, depending on the weather.

Last week Pyongyang threatened to pull out if Washington pressed for its unilateral nuclear disarmament.

As the date draws near, the differences between the two sides are coming into sharp relief.

Washington has made it clear it wants to see the "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization" of the North.

Pyongyang has vowed it will never give up its nuclear deterrence until it feels safe from what it terms U.S. aggression.

Venezuela Expels U.S. Diplomat After New Sanctions



Venezuela leader Nicolas Maduro has expelled U.S. diplomats Todd Robinson and Brian Naranjo.

CARACAS (Dispatches) -- President Nicolas Maduro Tuesday ordered the expulsion of the top U.S. diplomat in Venezuela in retaliation for a new round of sanctions over Venezuela's election.

The 55-year-old successor to Hugo Chavez won re-election easily, to which President Donald Trump responded with an executive order limiting Venezuela's ability to sell state assets.

Accusing U.S. charge d'affaires Todd Robinson of being involved in "a military conspiracy," Maduro ordered him and another senior diplomat, Brian Naranjo, to leave within 48 hours.

He gave no details of the accusations, but said the U.S. Embassy had been meddling in military, economic and political issues, and vowed to present evidence to the nation shortly.

"Neither with conspiracies nor with sanctions will you hold Venezuela back," Maduro said, at an event in downtown Caracas at the headquarters of the election board.

Earlier Tuesday, Venezuela's foreign ministry called the sanctions "a crime against humanity." Maduro's administration, which has long said a U.S.-led "economic war" is to blame for a deep crisis in the OPEC nation, said the new sanctions violated international law.

"Venezuela once again condemns the systematic campaign of aggression and hostility by the U.S. regime to punish the

Venezuelan people for exercising their right to vote," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "These arbitrary and unilateral measures constitute a crime against humanity."

Maduro, whose second term will begin next January, won 68% of the vote. Electoral council chief Tibisay Lucena, who is on individual U.S. and European Union sanctions lists, certified Maduro's victory in a presentation Tuesday.

The latest U.S. sanctions appeared to target in part Citgo, a U.S.-based oil refiner owned by Venezuela state oil company PDVSA. More obstacles to PDVSA's ability to sell oil abroad could restrict already-dwindling foreign exchange earnings, worsening the economic crisis and pressuring Maduro.

While it only applies to U.S. citizens and residents, a U.S. official told reporters Monday that the Trump administration has also tried to convince China and Russia to stop issuing new credit to Venezuela. The two have provided billions of dollars in funding for Venezuela in recent years.

But they appeared unlikely to heed the U.S. warnings. Beijing said Tuesday it believed the United States and Venezuela should resolve their differences via talks, while Moscow said it would not comply with the sanctions.

In its statement Tuesday, Venezuela's foreign ministry blamed the U.S. "blockade" of the country for "blocking the population's access to basic goods."

Ukraine Tests Missile System Supplied by U.S.



A Ukrainian serviceman launches a missile during a test of the U.S. anti-tank missile systems at a shooting range in an unknown location on May 22, 2018.

KIEV (Reuters) -- Ukraine tested its Javelin missile systems for the first time since receiving the weapons from the United States to boost its defenses in its conflict with separatists.

Washington has been one of

Kiev's staunchest supporters since Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent outbreak of fighting in Ukraine's eastern Donbass region that has killed more than 10,000 people.

Kiev and Washington believe the

anti-tank systems will help Ukraine build its long-term defense capacity.

The United States says Javelins cannot effectively be used to take territory, but Russia says supplying them will further destabilize the situation by encouraging the use of force.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko announced the first test of the missiles on Twitter: "Finally this day has come," he said. "I am grateful to (the United States) ... for the firm decision that Ukraine should be armed."

The tests were carried out in northern Ukraine, away from the eastern front line. Intermittent clashes in eastern regions have continued despite a notional ceasefire and diplomatic peace efforts.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which monitors the implementation of Ukraine's much-violated 'Minsk' peace agreement, warned Tuesday of an escalation in fighting along the front line.

"I call strongly upon the sides to immediately stop the fighting ... and do their utmost to protect the civilian population," OSCE Special Representative Martin Sajdik said in a statement.

Kashmir Tensions Soar Between Pakistan and India

SRINAGAR, India (AP) -- Tensions soared Wednesday along the volatile frontier between India and Pakistan in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, as rival soldiers shelled dozens of villages and border posts for a sixth straight day.

A total of five civilians and a soldier were killed on both sides, officials from the two countries said, in escalating violence in the disputed region that both countries blame the other for initiating.

Indian police said Pakistani soldiers continued targeting dozens of Indian border posts and villages with mortars and automatic gunfire in the Jammu region. At least four civilians were killed and 30 others injured on the Indian side, said a top police officer, S.D. Singh.

In Pakistan, two security officials said Pakistani and Indian troops exchanged

fire near the country's Sialkot city in eastern Punjab province. They said the two sides traded fire over the past 48 hours, killing a civilian and a soldier.

The officials said several people were also wounded, including three border guards. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to reporters.

As in the past, each country accused the other of initiating the latest border skirmishes along the rugged and mountainous Line of Control, as well as a lower-altitude 200-kilometer boundary separating Indian-controlled Kashmir and the Pakistani province of Punjab, where the latest fighting occurred.

This year, soldiers from the two nations have engaged in fierce border skirmishes along the rugged and mountainous Line of Control, as well as a lower-altitude 200-kilometer boundary separating Indian-controlled Kashmir and the Pakistani province of Punjab, where the latest fighting occurred.

India and Pakistan have a long history of bitter relations over Kashmir, which both claim. They have fought two of their three wars since 1947 over their competing claims to the region.

temporary shelters or to the houses of friends and relatives living in safer places.

Dozens of schools in villages along the frontier have been closed and authorities advised residents to stay indoors as shells and bullets rained down. Some damage to houses was also reported on the Indian side.

During the month of Ramadan, millions of Muslims around the world fast everyday from dawn to dusk. The practice of fasting, which reminds Muslims of those less fortunate, is also meant to increase spiritual discipline.

Denmark's Muslim Union reacted to the minister's remarks by saying that Muslims were capable of functioning in the Danish society "even when we fast."

The chairwoman of Finland's Muslim Union, Pia Jardi, called Stojberg's comment about fasting Muslims "a completely absurd idea."

Danish Minister's Ramadan Comment Sparks Outcry



Danish Minister of Integration Inger Stojberg is shown in parliament in Copenhagen in 2016.

COPENHAGEN (Dispatches) -- A Danish government minister has sparked outcry after calling fasting Muslims a "danger" to the society and urging them to take time off work during the month of Ramadan.

Immigration Minister Inger Stojberg said on Monday that fasting throughout the working day raised challenges for the society. She claimed that Muslims doing certain jobs, such as bus drivers, may be unable to focus if they have not eaten.

"I want to call on Muslims to take leave from work during the month of Ramadan to avoid negative consequences for the rest of the Danish society," Stojberg wrote in a tabloid newspaper.

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The chairwoman of Finland's Muslim Union, Pia Jardi, called Stojberg's comment about fasting Muslims "a completely absurd idea."

"There's no information or statistics to show that bus drivers or other Muslim

workers would somehow behave dangerously while fasting," she said. "In most Muslim countries, stores and businesses continue operating normally."

Hammershoy Splittorff, a spokesman for Arriva — one of Denmark's main bus operators — said there was no history of bus accidents during Ramadan, and "so de facto it's not a problem for us."

A Muslim integration consultant, Natasha al-Hariri said Stojberg was "stirring up a debate based on no figures, no statistics, and no anecdotes."

Members of the minister's own anti-refugee center-right Liberal Party, which leads the current government, however, distanced themselves from her remarks.

"In Denmark, there's room for everybody... as long as you mind your duties and take responsibility for your actions," The New York Times quoted Fatma Oktem, a party member and former member of the parliament as saying.

Earlier, Stojberg had said the "a significant proportion" of refugees "cheat, lie and abuse our trust."

The minister also made headlines last year, when posted a picture of herself on Facebook with a cake celebrating the passing of the country's 50th immigration restriction. "Today, the 50th restriction was passed on immigration. This must be celebrated!" she wrote.



PARIS (Reuters) -- Workers at France's state-owned SNCF rail company on Wednesday resoundingly rejected President Emmanuel Macron's planned overhaul of the railways in an internal ballot organized by labor unions. The unions, which called the vote days after Air France employees forced the resignation of Air France-KLM's chief executive, hope it will inject fresh energy into rolling strikes and weaken the government's negotiating hand. "This vote totally discredits the SNCF management," Laurent Brun, head of the CGT's rail division, told a news conference. "It would be a mistake to ignore this warning." The government has dismissed the ballot as a petition with no legal significance. The CGT's Brun said 95% of those who voted rejected the reform. In all, some 90,000 of 150,000 SNCF employees voted, he added. The strikes have brought disruption but not paralyzed the transport network. So far, there has been no sign from Macron that he will back down on the biggest and most disputed reform so far in his one-year-old presidency. Transport Minister Elisabeth Borne signaled there would be no turning back. "I don't think it was very responsible of the unions to have people believe the reform might not happen," she told Europe 1 radio before the result was announced.

TRIPOLI (MEE) -- Libyan protesters shut down on Wednesday the eastern Ragaba oilfield which had 5,000 barrels per day of crude production feeding Brega port, said a spokesman for the owner, state-run Sirte Oil. The protesters had been threatening to shut down oilfields and pipelines passing through their remote home region of Marada unless authorities improve state services. The Sirte Oil company, part of state oil firm NOC, had been producing 61,000 bpd until its closure this morning, the spokesman said. Marada is also home to a pipeline of the Waha oil company, a NOC joint-venture with foreign firms, feeding the Es Sider port. Waha pumps around 260,000 bpd, officials have said. In a statement, a group of youths said they will shut down oil production in their area unless authorities urgently looked into their grievances of an absent state, lack of health care and other services, and Marada town's lack of road links to other communities. Armed men have twice blown up the pipeline near Marada since December as security in the remote eastern area is volatile.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Preparations for possible summit meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin have not advanced since the two men spoke on the phone on March 20, Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov said Wednesday. Trump proposed during a telephone conversation in March that the two leaders should meet.

YAOUNDE (AFP) -- Cameroonian authorities summoned the U.S. ambassador in the country on Wednesday, sources said, days after he accused government forces of abuses against separatists in English-speaking regions. Government and diplomatic sources told AFP that the foreign ministry had summoned Ambassador Peter Barlerin. Barlerin alleged on May 18 that government forces had carried out "targeted killings" and other abuses against militants demanding independence for two English-speaking regions. A top civil servant abducted in a southwestern English-speaking region of Cameroon over the weekend has been freed, a local official said Monday. "On the side of the separatists," he also stressed, "there have been murders of gendarmes, kidnapping of government officials, and burning of schools." The crisis began in 2016, when activists in the Anglophone minority stepped up a campaign for greater autonomy. The Anglophone minority accounts for about a fifth of the country's population of 22 million.

PARIS (AP) -- France's interior minister has ordered the evacuation of some 2,300 migrants camped in Paris amid a standoff with City Hall over how to handle the long-running problem. Interior Minister Gerard Collomb said in a statement Wednesday that he ordered police to work out an evacuation operation soon that would "reconcile" the demands of a tough new immigration law and appeals by aid groups to give the migrants shelter. Tent camps have mushroomed in recent weeks along canals in eastern and northeastern Paris, raising concerns for safety and public hygiene. Two migrants drowned this month. Mayor Anne Hidalgo has appealed to the government for help. The city has already cleared out some 28,000 migrants from Paris camps since 2015. Collomb criticized Paris City Hall for refusing to evacuate them and urged a long-term plan for migrants streaming regularly into the French capital.

BERLIN (AP) -- Berlin police say more than a dozen groups are planning weekend protests against a rally by the right-wing nationalist Alternative for Germany being staged under the motto "Germany's Future." Police said Wednesday that the party, known as the AfD, expects some 10,000 people for the Sunday afternoon rally with speeches from some of its top leaders. It is due to start at the capital's main train station and end at the landmark Brandenburg Gate. So far, 13 counter-demonstrations are planned in nearby areas and around the city under slogans like "never again" and "stop the hate, stop the AfD." For security reasons police are not announcing in advance how many officers they will have on hand to keep the two sides separate, but say there will be a significant presence.