

Two Koreas Agree to Reconnect Rail, Road Links



In this April 20, 2018 file photo, a South Korean army soldier passes by a signboard showing the distance to North Korea's capital Pyongyang and to South Korea's capital Seoul from Imjingang Station in Paju, South Korea, near the border with North Korea.

SEOUL (Reuters) -- North and South Korea agreed Monday to begin reconnecting rail and road links, another step in an improving relationship that has raised U.S. concern about the possible undermining of its bid to press the North to give up its nuclear program. The agreement on transport links came during talks in the border village of Panmunjom, aimed at following up on the third summit this year between South Korea's President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, last month. "The South and North reached the

agreement after sincerely discussing action plans to develop inter-Korean relations to a new, higher stage," said a joint statement released by the South's Unification Ministry. They agreed to hold ceremonies in late November or early December to inaugurate work on reconnecting the railways and roads that have been cut since the 1950-53 Korean War. The two sides will carry out joint field studies on the transport plans from late this month, according to the joint statement. They also agreed to discuss late this month a plan to pursue a bid to co-

host the 2032 Olympic Games. The talks were led by the South's Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon and Ri Son Gwon, chairman of the North's committee for peaceful reunification that handles cross-border affairs. "We are at a very critical moment for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the advancement of inter-Korean relations, and there's also a second North Korea-U.S. summit coming up," Cho told reporters before leaving for Panmunjom. Talks between the two Koreas are running in parallel with U.S. efforts to press North Korea to give up nuclear weapons and missiles that the North says can hit the U.S. mainland. Kim held an unprecedented summit with U.S. President Donald Trump in June in Singapore and the two sides are arranging a second meeting, which Trump said would likely happen after U.S. congressional elections on Nov. 6. But despite the meeting between Kim and Trump, the United States is still pursuing a policy of "maximum pressure" to get North Korea to give up its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programs. Trump said on Wednesday South Korea would not lift sanctions on North Korea without U.S. approval. The rail and road initiative and the joint Olympics bid were agreed by Moon and Kim at their latest summit, in the North Korean capital, Pyongyang.

Merkel Allies Suffer Worst Election Loss Since 1950



Party leader Robert Habeck, center, and Anton Hofreiter, right, celebrate on the election party of the Green party in the state parliament in Munich, Germany, Sunday, Oct. 14, 2018, after the polling stations for the Bavarian state elections have closed.

BERLIN (Reuters) -- Chancellor Angela Merkel's Bavarian allies suffered their worst election result since 1950 Sunday, bleeding votes to the far-right in a setback that risks widening divisions within Germany's crisis-prone national government. The Christian Social Union won 35.5 percent of the vote, an exit poll for broadcaster ARD showed, losing its absolute majority for only the second time since 1962 an outcome sure to stoke infighting in the conservative party, already a difficult partner for Merkel in Berlin. "Of course today is not an easy day for the CSU. We did not achieve a good result," Bavarian Premier Markus Soeder told a gathering of his party. "We accept the result with humility," he said, adding that the CSU nonetheless wanted to form a stable government as soon as possible. The result, which saw the pro-immigration Greens come second and the far-right Alternative for Germany enter the state Assembly for the first time, means the CSU will need to form a coalition a humiliation for a party used to ruling alone. The Greens, who more than doubled their share of the vote to 18.5 percent, attracted support from more liberal CSU voters and from those who traditionally vote for the left-leaning Social Democrats (SPD), who won

just 10 percent. CSU leader Horst Seehofer has been a thorn in Merkel's side since her 2015 decision to open Germany's borders to more than 1 million migrants, gradually shifting his party to the right in an ultimately futile effort to counter the rise of the AfD. Michael Weigl, political scientist at the University of Passau, said personal attacks on Merkel by Seehofer who is the federal interior minister and his hard-line rhetoric against asylum seekers were to blame for the CSU's weak result. "This created a political climate of polarization from which the Greens and the AfD benefited the most, with their clear stances on immigration," Weigl said. "For the CSU, this strategy backfired. I expect that Seehofer will have to step down as interior minister." The AfD won 11 percent of the vote, the exit poll showed. The Free Voters, a protest party that is the CSU's most likely coalition party, won 11.5 percent. The CSU has ruled out an alliance with the AfD. Divisions between Merkel's Christian Democratic Union and the CSU conservative sister parties - have widened further since an inconclusive national election forced them into a coalition in March with the Social Democrats.



LONDON (Guardian) -- Activists have blockaded a site in Lancashire where the first fracking in the UK for seven years has taken place. A group from Reclaim the Power used a van to block the entrance to the site on Preston New Road near Blackpool at 4.30am on Monday, after the shale gas company Cuadrilla announced its intention to finally start fracking on the site. One protester climbed to the top of a scaffold and later locked his neck to it. Another protester locked herself to the base of the scaffold. A spokesperson for Cuadrilla said on Monday morning that all the equipment needed to frack was already on the site and at about 1pm the company said it had started the process. "Cuadrilla is pleased to confirm that it has started hydraulic fracturing operations at our Preston New Road shale gas exploration site," it said. "Hydraulic fracturing of both horizontal exploration wells is expected to last three months, after which the flow rate of the gas will be tested." Preston New Road has been a focal point for protests since October 2016, when the government overturned a decision by Lancashire county council and gave Cuadrilla consent to extract shale gas at two wells on the site.

MORONI (Reuters) -- Protesters barricaded roads with tree trunks, stoned cars and clashed with soldiers in the Indian Ocean island nation of Comoros on Monday in demonstrations against President Azali Assoumani's bid to extend term limits, officials said. Assoumani's move to compete in presidential polls in early 2019 has angered people on the archipelago's Anjouan island as it would deny them taking over the presidency under a system that rotates the post among the country's three main islands. President Assoumani a former military officer, joins a string of African leaders in countries such as Rwanda, Uganda and Cameroon who have extended presidential term limits or amended the constitution in order to remain in power. In August, Assoumani - from the island of Grande Comore - said a June referendum had resulted in the extension of presidential term limits and an end to the rotating presidency. The opposition called the referendum illegal. Under the old system, the island of Anjouan would have been in line to hold the presidency in 2021. The "yes" vote allows Assoumani to run for two more, five-year terms, starting from the early election next year, rather than being required to step down when his present term ends in 2021.

Floods Kill At Least 13 People in Southwest France



Rescue workers evacuate residents from a neighborhood after flash floods hit the southwestern Aude district of France after several months' worth of rain fell in just a few hours overnight, in Trebes, France, October 15, 2018.

PARIS (AP) -- Flash floods tore through towns in southwest France, turning waterways into raging torrents that killed at least 13 people, nine of them in just one town, authorities said on Monday. People had to be flown by helicopter to safety from the roofs of their homes as overnight storms dumped the equivalent of several months of rain in just a few hours.

Worst hit was the town of Trebes, east of the medieval walled city of Carcassonne. The rains that swept in from the Mediterranean killed nine people there, Interior Ministry spokesman Frederic de Lanouvelle said. He told BFMTV that the floods in the Aude region also killed four other people in other locations, left one person missing and seriously injured five others.

In the town of Villegailhenc, witness Ines Siguet said the waters rose so quickly that people were stranded on the roofs of their homes and had to be helicoptered to safety. She posted video of a ripped-up road where a bridge used to be, torn away by a flood torrent that cut the town in half. "There's nothing left. There's just a hole," the 17-year-old resident told The Associated Press. "It was very violent." Other roads also were flooded, leaving the town cut off, she said. Siguet's school was shut down amid the destruction. Two people were killed in the town, according to the Aude regional government. Alain Thirion, the prefect of Aude, said some of the dead appeared to have been swept away by floodwaters. In the town of Conques-sur-Orbiel, the river rose by more than six meters (20 feet), he said. Floodwaters were in some cases too powerful for emergency services to get through, even on boats, he said. Television images showed waters coursing through towns and villages, with cars stranded in the floods and piled up on top of each other like children's toys. The French government rushed hundreds of rescue workers into the flood zone and helicopters buzzed overhead. Schools were closed and authorities were urging people to stay home.

India's Missile Deal With Russia Irks U.S.



From left to right: Pentagon chief James Mattis, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj and Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in New Delhi, Sept. 6, 2018.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- India's decision to buy Russian anti-aircraft weapons threatens to jeopardize a landmark defense cooperation agreement with the United States, senior Republican senators warned this week. "It does affect that," Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., told the Washington Examiner. "When you talk about buying Russian weaponry, we've been very clear on what that means." India inked a deal to purchase S-400 anti-aircraft systems last week. The sale could provoke sanctions mandated by a federal law cracking down on Russia's defense industry, though Indian officials maintain that the threat doesn't worry them. The deal, U.S. senators say, undercut the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, or COMCASA, the security and intelligence-sharing agreement signed to great fanfare last month. That agreement -- signed in New Delhi by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, and their Indian government counterparts last month -- paved the way for the transfer of sensitive military equipment and real-time intelligence-sharing with India. But India's top army general downplayed

the significance of the pact during negotiations with the Russians. "When Russians asked about the American sanctions, my reply was, 'Yes, we do appreciate that there could be sanctions on us, but we follow an independent policy,'" Army chief Bipin Rawat said during a speech last Sunday. "You can rest assured. While we may be associating with America in getting some technology ... we follow an independent policy." India has a history of nonalignment dating back to the Cold War, when it refused to partner directly with the United States or the Soviet Union. In that era, India also developed a heavy reliance on Soviet military equipment that has necessitated an ongoing relationship with the Russian defense industry. With that in mind, Mattis lobbied Congress to grant him the authority to waive sanctions on the purchase of Russian arms, in part to facilitate the agreement with India. Lawmakers expected that waiver to be invoked for deals involving legacy systems -- no one wants a U.S.-India confrontation over ammunition for Kalashnikov rifles, for instance. They did not expect India to purchase a major new weapons system, even as Russia partners with China in opposition to U.S. interests around the world.

BERLIN (Reuters) -- A Moroccan man convicted of helping three of the Sept. 11 attackers as they plotted to strike New York and Washington was flown from a Hamburg jail on Monday to the city's airport in preparation for his deportation to his home country. Mounir al-Motassadeq, who was convicted in 2006 of membership in a terrorist organization and accessory to murder for his part in the plot, was expected to be put on a flight to Marrakesh, Morocco. The 44-year-old was flown by helicopter to the airport, and then escorted from the helicopter by two heavily armed police officers into a waiting area pending the afternoon flight, the dpa news agency reported. Motassadeq, who denied knowing his friends were preparing the attacks on the U.S., was sentenced to the maximum 15 years, but received credit for time served after his November 2001 arrest.

JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) -- The U.S. military claims it has conducted an airstrike that killed four al-Shabab extremists after "partner forces came under small arms fire." The U.S. Africa Command says Sunday's airstrike was carried out near the community of Araara in Lower Juba region in the south. The statement says no U.S. service members were on the ground during the Somali-led operation and that according to its assessment no civilians were injured or killed in the airstrike. The U.S. military claims it has carried out more than two dozen airstrikes, including drone strikes, this year against the Al-Qaeda-linked al-Shabab, the deadliest extremist group in sub-Saharan Africa. Somalia Sunday marked the first anniversary of al-Shabab's deadliest attack, a truck bombing in the capital, Mogadishu, that killed well over 500 people.

BOSTON (AP) -- Responding to years of derision by President Donald Trump and other critics, Senator Elizabeth Warren Monday released a report on a DNA analysis that provides strong evidence she does, in fact, have Native American heritage. The analysis on the Massachusetts Democrat was done by Stanford University professor Carlos D. Bustamante. He concluded Warren's ancestry is mostly European but says "the results strongly support the existence of an unadmixed Native American ancestor." Bustamante, a prominent expert in the field of DNA analysis, determined Warren's pure Native American ancestor appears "in the range of six to 10 generations ago." That meshes with Warren's narrative that her great-great-grandmother, O.C. Sarah Smith, was at least partially Native American. That would make Warren 1/32nd Native American.

China Warns Australia Not to Be Led by U.S.

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- China has issued a stern new direct warning to Australia, saying we're walking a "tightrope" between the U.S. and China. In a blistering editorial, state media outlet The China Daily warned the nation not to be "led by the nose by America, cautioning the Morrison government against adopting a "Cold War" mentality. It said there was a "fragile peace" in the region which could be "shattered by the slightest misstep". The editorial was written in response to renewed criticism from Australia and Japan over China's position in the South China Sea. It comes after President Donald Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton, said the Morrison government would be increasing its naval co-operation with the U.S. in the tense region. "Canberra and Tokyo should not

Speaking in a radio interview on the Hugh Hewitt Show aired last week, Bolton said Trump believed China had taken advantage of the international order for far too long and not enough Americans had stood up to it. "We've got to do more first to establish for the Chinese that we do not acknowledge the legitimacy of any of (their claims to the South China Sea)," Bolton said. He said Trump's tough approach to China had left Beijing "confused". "They've never seen an American president this tough before. I think their behavior needs to be adjusted in the trade area, in the international, military and political areas, in a whole range of areas," he said. Last week, Canberra and Tokyo together condemned what they claimed as Chinese government militarization in the region. "Canberra and Tokyo should not

allow the resurgence of the Cold War paranoia that has already taken hold of the U.S., shape their actions," The China Daily editorial said. "(Australian leaders) should realize the full significance of a return of the full-scale mistrust of the Cold War, as it will create a fragile peace that risks being shattered by the slightest misstep. "They should be aware that letting the U.S. lead them by the nose as it pursues a confrontational strategy toward China is really not in their best interests." So far, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has sought to maintain the peace with both America and China. Last month, when American and Chinese vessels narrowly avoided collision in the South China Sea, Morrison said Australia would provide a calming influence on rising tensions between the two countries.