



North Korea Tests New Missiles, Spurns Talks



People watch a television news screen showing file footage of North Korea missile launch this month.

SEOUL (Dispatches) -- South Korea said on Friday Pyongyang has fired two missiles into the sea off its eastern coast, shortly after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un rejected any further talks with Seoul over a recent joint military exercise with the U.S.

Pyongyang said some were "large-caliber multiple-launch guided rocket systems." The recent launch, the sixth in less than a month, came just a day after South Korean President Moon Jae-in urged North Korea and the United States to resume denuclearization talks.

The South Korean military said in a statement that the North fired two "unidentified projectiles" from a site near the city of Tongchon on Friday.

Those talks have been stalled since the failure of the last summit between Kim and his American counterpart Donald Trump who has so far refused to ease sanctions on North Korea.

South Korea's military officials said they were analyzing data they acquired through radar and other intelligence-gathering equipment to determine what type of projectiles had been launched.

The North is banned from ballistic missile launches under UN Security Council resolutions.

Seoul has described most of the North's previous launches as short-range ballistic

missiles, while Pyongyang said some were "large-caliber multiple-launch guided rocket systems."

conomic cooperation, denuclearization and the unification of the two Koreas by 2045. In an extended attack against President Moon, the North said in a statement that it has "nothing to talk any more with the South Korean authorities nor have any idea to sit with them again."

It called Moon an "impudent guy rare to be found," for hoping for a resumption of inter-Korean talks while continuing military drills with Washington.

A North Korean government spokesman also blamed Moon for the loss of dialogue momentum between the North and South. The unidentified spokesman said the stalemate in implementing pledges, made at a historic summit between Moon and Kim last year, was entirely the responsibility of Seoul.

He said that the joint U.S.-South Korea war games were a sign of Seoul's hostility towards Pyongyang.

The two Korea's are technically still at war since the 1950-53 Korean War ended with a truce, rather than a peace treaty.

The South's unification ministry reacted to North Korea's comments about Moon, saying they are "not in line" with inter-Korean agreements and unhelpful for developing relations between Seoul and Pyongyang.

The North's spokesman, however, did not rule out the possibility of talks with the United States. Pyongyang recently said its nuclear talks will be "strictly" between Pyongyang and Washington.

China Rejects Repeat of Tiananmen in Hong Kong



Chinese People's Armed Police units are massing at a sports stadium in Shenzhen, just a short drive from Hong Kong.

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- China has issued yet another stern warning against weeks-long protests in Hong Kong, saying it will not sit idly by and watch as the unrest continues.

The Chinese media, however, brushed off concerns about a possible "repeat" of the deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown 30 years ago if Beijing moves to end the unrest in Hong Kong.

The warning was issued on Thursday night by the Chinese ambassador to Britain, Liu Xiaomou, who accused foreign forces of instigating violent protest rallies in Hong Kong.

He also dismissed speculations that Beijing may instigate a military crackdown in the city, saying the government has "enough solutions and enough power to swiftly quell unrest" should it deem the situation "uncontrollable."

The Chinese-ruled territory was first hit by protests ten weeks ago, when people took to the streets to protest a proposed bill which would have allowed suspects to be extradited and stand trial in mainland China.

While the proposed bill has been suspended, protests have continued and morphed over time into unruly riots.

Hong Kong has been governed under a "one-country, two-system" model since the city -- a former British colony -- was returned to China in 1997.

Earlier this week, spokesman for the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council Yang Guang said the city had reached a "critical juncture" as rioters started showing signs of 'terrorism.'

AFP released images on Thursday, showing thousands of Chinese military personnel waving red flags and parading at a sports stadium in the city of Shenzhen, just across the border from Hong Kong.

Dozens of armored personnel carriers and supply trucks were also parked nearby.

U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton commented on the situation, with a reference to the bloody crackdown in the Tiananmen Square three decades ago.

An official Chinese newspaper, the Global Times, reacted to the remarks in an editorial, saying the Chinese government is "much mature" to repeat such an incident if it moves to put an end to the unrest in Hong Kong.

"The incident in Hong Kong won't be a repeat of the June 4th political incident in 1989," it said.

"China is much stronger and more mature, and its ability to manage complex situations has been greatly enhanced," the daily said.

Washington and Britain are both accused of interfering in Chinese internal affairs, since they have been openly endorsing the unrest.

Russia, Venezuela Agree on Visit by Warships



Russian warships sail during the Navy Day parade in Kronstadt near Saint Petersburg, Russia July 28, 2019.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Defense chiefs of Russia and Venezuela have signed an agreement overseeing visits by warships of both nations to each other's ports amid persistent U.S. efforts to undermine the government in Caracas.

The military agreement was signed in Moscow on Thursday between Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and his visiting Venezuelan counterpart Vladimir Padrino Lopez, the Interfax news agency reported.

Washington has repeatedly demanded that Moscow withdraw its support for President Nicolas Maduro. Russia has rejected the request, insisting that the U.S. is attempting to instigate a

coup against the Venezuelan president in defiance of international law. The U.S. threatened Russia with new sanctions last month over its support for Maduro. The White House's point man for Venezuela, Elliott Abrams, said the new sanctions against Moscow would be announced on July 25.

Russia said on Thursday the situation in Venezuela remains tense due to U.S. pressure on the South American country.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Washington ignored Moscow's calls to lift sanctions on sectors relevant to Venezuelans' social well-being.

Russia, she said, aimed to improve

the humanitarian situation in Venezuela.

Zakharova also accused the UK of preparing several dozen saboteurs at a base in neighboring Guyana for the "further destabilization of the situation" in Venezuela.

"They (the UK) are finishing the construction of a military base on one of the islands in the mouth of the river Essequibo (in neighboring Guyana), under the pretext of suppression of the smuggling of weapons and drugs," she said.

Zakharova added that a campaign to discredit Venezuela was being pursued, with the purpose to portray the country as a major drug threat in the region.

She stressed that accusations against Venezuela were not valid as they contradicted UN and US State Department reports, in which other countries are identified as "dominant drug suppliers in the Western Hemisphere."

Venezuela has been rocked by political unrest since Jan. 10 when President Maduro was sworn in for a second term. Tension escalated when parliament member Juan Guaido declared himself as interim president.

Russia, China and Iran have thrown their weight behind Maduro, as has Turkey.

Spain, Britain, France, Sweden, Germany, Japan and Denmark joined the U.S. and Canada in recognizing Guaido as Venezuela's interim leader.

Denmark Ridicules Trump's Idea to Buy Greenland



The harbor and town of Tasiilaq, Greenland, which is a self-ruling part of the Kingdom of Denmark.

COPENHAGEN (Reuters) -- Danish politicians on Friday poured scorn on the notion of selling Greenland to the United States, following reports that President Donald Trump had privately discussed the idea of buying the world's biggest island with his advisers.

Trump is due to visit Copenhagen in September and the Arctic will be on the agenda during meetings with the prime ministers of Denmark and Greenland, an autonomous Danish territory.

"It has to be an April Fool's joke. Totally out of season," former Prime Minister, Lars Lokke Rasmussen, said on Twitter.

The notion of purchasing the territory has been laughed off by some advisers as a joke but was taken more seriously by others in the White House, two sources familiar with the situation told Reuters on Thursday.

Talk of a Greenland purchase was first reported by the Wall Street Journal.

"If he is truly contemplating this, then this is final proof, that he has gone mad," foreign affairs spokesman for the Danish People's Party, Soren Espersen, told broadcaster DR.

"The thought of Denmark selling 50,000 citizens to the United States is completely ridiculous," he said.

Greenland, a self-ruling part of Denmark located between the North Atlantic and Arctic oceans, is dependent on Danish economic support.

"I am sure a majority in Greenland believes it is better to have a relation

to Denmark than the United States, in the long term," Aaja Chemnitz Larsen, Danish MP from Greenland's second-largest party, Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA), told Reuters.

"My immediate thought is 'No, thank you,'" she said.

Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, and Foreign Minister, Jeppe Kofod, were not available for comment but officials said they would respond later on Friday. The U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen was also not immediately available for comment.

"Oh dear lord. As someone who loves Greenland, has been there nine times to every corner and loves the people, this is a complete and total catastrophe," former U.S. ambassador to Denmark, Rufus Gifford, said on Twitter.

Greenland is gaining attention from global super powers including China, Russia and the United States, due to its strategic location and its mineral resources.

In May, U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, said Russia was behaving aggressively in the Arctic and China's actions there had to be watched closely as well.

A defense treaty between Denmark and the United States dating back to 1951 gives the U.S. military rights over the Thule Air Base in northern Greenland.

Greenland is part of Denmark with self-government over domestic affairs, while Copenhagen handles defense and foreign policy.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Two Russian pilots safely landed an airliner carrying 233 people in a cornfield outside Moscow after striking a flock of birds, prompting the Kremlin to hail them as heroes who will receive top state awards.

The Russian authorities have said it was a miracle that no one was killed when the Ural Airlines Airbus 321 came down in a field, southeast of Moscow, with its landing gear up after hitting a passing flock of gulls, disrupting the operation of the plane's engines.

Up to 74 people, including 19 children, were treated for injuries, six of whom have been hospitalized, Russian news agencies quoted the emergency ministry as saying.

Stacy Television said the incident was being dubbed the "miracle over Ramensk", the name of the district near Moscow where the plane came down, around one kilometer (0.62 miles) from Zhukovsky International Airport.

The Komsomolskaya Pravda tabloid praised pilot Damir Yusupov as a "hero," saying he had saved 233 lives, "having masterfully landed a plane without its landing gear with a failing engine right in a corn field."

"Some drew comparisons with U.S. Airways Flight 1549, which performed a landing on the Hudson River in New York in 2009 after striking a flock of geese."

"We congratulate the hero pilots who saved people's lives," Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said, adding that the Kremlin would see that the men were quickly given state honors.

"There's no doubt about this. They will be given awards."

ROME (AP) -- Three ailing migrants and a family member were evacuated Friday from a Spanish rescue ship anchored near a southern Italian island but 134 others remained stuck on the boat as Italy's political battle over migration raged on.

The humanitarian ship Open Arms had rescued 147 migrants in the Mediterranean Sea near Libya two weeks ago and won a legal battle to enter Italy's territorial waters despite a ban by right-wing Interior Minister Matteo Salvini.

Yet most of the migrants remained aboard the ship as Salvini stuck to his resolve to keep humanitarian vessels from docking in Italy.

"I'm not giving up, you can be sure of that," Salvini vowed in a tweet.

Despite offers by Spain and five other European Union nations on Thursday to take in the migrants, whom Salvini doesn't want to accept, it was unclear when or how the standoff might end.

The Open Arms was anchored a few hundred yards (meters) off Lampedusa island and one emergency worker said tempers among migrants were fraying as the delays dragged on.

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) -- Zimbabwe's police used tear gas, arrests and beatings Friday to quell anti-government protests in the capital, Harare.

Seven people were injured, including one in critical condition, and 80 people were arrested, said Nelson Chamisa, leader of the Movement for Democratic Change opposition party that organized the demonstrations.

"There is not going to be any rest until we achieve a people's government...we will continue to mobilize," said Chamisa at a press conference, following a day of clashes between police and opposition demonstrators.

Human rights groups criticized the police, saying they used excessive force against the protesters. The police, however, denied that they committed abuses.

"We are not impinging on people's rights," police spokesman Paul Nyathi said on the state television.

"People should engage in lawful activities and they should not be at places where they are not supposed to be."

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- July 2019 temperatures were the hottest ever recorded globally, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said Thursday, while satellite data showed polar ice shrank to its lowest levels.

According to the NOAA, the average global temperature for the month was 0.95 degrees Celsius (1.71 degrees Fahrenheit) above the 20th century average of 15.8 degrees Celsius (60.4 Fahrenheit), making it the hottest July in its records, which go back to 1880.

"Much of the planet sweltered in unprecedented heat in July, as temperatures soared to new heights in the hottest month ever recorded. The record warmth also shrank Arctic and Antarctic sea ice to historic lows," the agency said.

The findings confirmed data released by the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service on August 5, though the margin of the new record compared to the last, in July 2016, was greater according to the US data.

Searing heat waves saw records tumble across Europe last month, while in the U.S., nearly 150 million people struggled to stay cool from the Midwestern plains to the Atlantic coast and local media reported at least six deaths.

NEW DELHI (AFP) -- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned Thursday of the risks of an "unchecked population explosion" in the nation of 1.3 billion people, the first time he has raised the issue, and called for family planning measures.

India is the world's second-most populous country behind China with 1.4 billion, and its population is set to surpass its East Asian neighbour by 2024, according to the United Nations.

"It is time to accept the challenges up front... population explosion. It will bring a lot of challenges for the future generations of this country," Modi said in an Independence Day speech in the capital New Delhi.

"We have to think if we can do justice to the aspirations of our children. There is a need to have greater discussion and awareness on population explosion."

Brazil to Leave Mercosur If Kirchner Wins Elections

BRASILIA (Reuters) -- Brazil will pull out of the Mercosur trade bloc, if the opposition party wins Argentina's presidential elections later this year and closes the economy with protectionist policies, Brazil's Economy Minister, Paulo Guedes, said on Thursday.

Guedes also questioned how dependent Brazil's economy is on its Mercosur partner, which lurched into political and financial market crisis after President Mauricio Macri suffered a mauling in the presidential primary election on Sunday.

"If Cristina Kirchner gets in and closes the economy, we will leave Mercosur," Guedes said at an event in Sao Paulo hosted by Santander bank, referring to Argentina's Peronist vice presidential candidate and former president.

"Foreign trade is a warning sign, but our main concern is internal. Brazil is a continental economy, and we need to recover our own growth momentum. We are not so dependent on others," Guedes said.

Brazil and Argentina, along with Uruguay and Paraguay, are the four countries in the Mercosur trade bloc, which recently signed one of the world's biggest trade deals with the

European Union after 20 years of negotiations.

Guedes said Brazil should remain relatively insulated from the U.S.-China trade war, which is souring economic prospects and financial markets globally.

On Brazil's growth prospects, Guedes struck a customarily bullish tone, insisting the government must press ahead with its economic reform agenda, which includes a large-scale privatization process and ambitious tax reform program.

Guedes said that President Jair Bolsonaro, who many see as instinctively skeptical of selling state assets, is becoming more supportive of the privatization drive and committed to speeding it up.

One of the government's main priorities in the second half of the year will be reforming the country's complex tax system, which Guedes said must be simplified. This will include simplifying income tax, he added.

Brazil's tax burden, currently around 33% of gross domestic product, will not be immediately altered by the government's proposals. But ideally, Guedes said he would like to see it reduced to 20% over the next 15 years.