



North Korea Fires Two More Missiles, Warns U.S. Over Sanctions



FILE - This photo provided by the North Korean government shows what it says a test launch of a hypersonic missile on Jan. 11, 2022 in North Korea.

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea fired at least two ballistic missiles on Friday, the third test in two weeks, just hours after criticizing a U.S. push for new sanctions over the previous launches.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it had detected what it presumed were two short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) launched eastward from North Pyongan Province on the west coast of North Korea.

The launch would be the third since New Year's day. The previous two were of "hypersonic missiles," North Korean state media reported, capable of high speeds and manoeuvring after launch.

In contrast to Friday's tests, each of those earlier launches involved a

single missile which were fired from Jagang Province, neighboring North Pyongyang.

North Korea defended the missile tests as its legitimate right to self-defense and said the United States was intentionally escalating the situation by imposing new sanctions, state media reported earlier on Friday, citing the foreign ministry.

North Korea's recent development of a "new-type weapon" was just part of its efforts to modernize its national defense capability, and did not target any specific country or harm the security of neighboring countries, the foreign ministry said in a statement on the KCNA state news agency.

The statement warned of an unspecified "stronger and certain reac-

tion" if the United States adopts a confrontational stance.

On Friday, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called North Korea's latest missile tests "profoundly destabilizing" and stated that Washington is working with South Korea, Japan and the United Nations to respond to the move.

"We are very focused with allies and partners in making sure that they and we are properly defended and that there are repercussions, consequences for these actions by North Korea," Blinken said, after North Korea reportedly fired two ballistic missiles early Friday.

South Korea's army leadership said the weapon was fired toward the east but did not provide other details. Japan's Prime Minister's Office and the Defense Ministry also said they detected the North Korean launch and said it was possibly a ballistic missile.

Earlier, North Korea said its missile tests were its legitimate right to self-defense and warned of a strong response if Washington pressed ahead with its provocative move to impose new sanctions on Pyongyang.

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden on Wednesday imposed its first sanctions. Washington also called on the United Nations Security Council to take action against several North Korean individuals and entities accused of violating resolutions that ban North Korea's missile and nuclear weapons development.

Lavrov: Russia Expects U.S., NATO to Give Written Response on Security Guarantees



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov attends his annual news conference in Moscow, Russia, Friday, Jan. 14, 2022.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Moscow expects that the United States and NATO will furnish written responses on the issue of security guarantees, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said at a press conference on Friday on the results of Russia's diplomatic activities in 2021.

"We expect our colleagues to give responses, written responses, putting their proposals on paper like we did. Meanwhile, we will certainly continue activities to make sure that we are prepared for any kind of developments," he pointed out.

"On the whole, we are confident that if there is goodwill and willingness to make compromises, then it's always possible to find a mutually acceptable solution," the Russian top diplomat stressed.

Lavrov noted that at the beginning of last year, Moscow and Washington had managed to extend the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) for five years without any conditions, which was what Russia had called for.

"We appreciated this step by the Biden administration, which was actually one of the first taken after the formation of the Democratic administration," the Russian foreign minister noted.

According to him, Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia and Joe Biden of the United States emphasized the need for dialogue on all issues related to strategic stability at their meeting in Geneva last June.

Russia Will Sever Ties With U.S. If It Sanctions Putin

On Thursday, the Kremlin warned of a complete rupture of U.S.-Russia ties if Washington moves to sanction Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"The imposition of sanctions against the head of state and against the head of Russia, I repeat once again, is an outrageous measure that is comparable to a break in relations," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said.

This came after top Senate Democrats on Wednesday, led by Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey, unveiled a new sanctions bill that would penalize Russia if it invades Ukraine.

"This legislation makes it absolutely clear that the US Senate will not stand idly by as the Kremlin threatens a re-invasion of Ukraine," Menendez, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said in a statement.

Train Derails in India's West Bengal State; 9 Dead



This image from video shows rescuers looking inside derailed coaches after a passenger train derailed in Jalpaiguri, West Bengal state, Thursday, Jan. 13, 2022. At least three people died and more than 25 were injured.

NEW DELHI (AP) — Rescuers found four bodies overnight as they cleared the 12 mangled coaches of a train that derailed in India's West Bengal state, raising the death toll to nine, a railroad official said Friday.

At least 45 people were injured in the accident as the coaches went off the rails and three capsized, said Rajiv Jain, a railroad ministry spokesman.

The rescue work was completed and the track was being cleared to restore train services in the region, Jain said.

Images from the scene after the accident showed passengers stuck in twisted metal and debris as rescuers tried to pull them out.

The train was on its way to Gauhati in Assam state from Bikaner, a city in Rajasthan state,

when the accident occurred in Jalpaiguri district.

All of the injured were being treated in a hospital, senior police officer Debarshi Dutta said.

Senior railway official Guneet Kaur said the cause of the accident was being investigated. She said the government would provide financial compensation to families of the deceased and all of the injured.

Accidents are common on India's massive but aging railway network. Safety standards have been an ongoing concern on the state-run system, which operates 9,000 passenger trains and carries about 23 million passengers every day.

In 2016, 127 people were killed when 14 coaches derailed in Uttar Pradesh state in one of India's worst train accidents.

French Teachers Stage Massive Walk-Out Over COVID Confusion



Teachers and school personnel march during a demonstration in Marseille, southern France, on January 13, 2022, to denounce the "indescribable mess" caused by the government's new measures to curb the spread of Covid-19.

PARIS (AFP) - Huge numbers of French teachers went on strike Thursday, with the biggest teachers' union saying half of primary schools were closed as staff demand clarity from the government on coronavirus measures.

Late on Tuesday, after Prime Minister Jean Castex hosted union leaders, Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer promised some five million high-grade FFP2 masks would be made available mainly to kindergarten teachers and several thousand substitute staff recruited to help "face the crisis".

Coming as France's presidential election campaign gets under way ahead of an April vote, the

walkout is awkward for President Emmanuel Macron's government which has prided itself on keeping schools open to ease pressure on parents through the pandemic.

Tens of thousands also took to the streets, with the interior ministry saying almost 78,000 teachers and other education workers protested nationwide, including 8,200 in Paris.

While the education ministry said almost 40 percent of primary school teachers had walked out, top union Snuipp put the figure at 75 percent with one primary school in two closed for the day.

The strike "demonstrates the growing despair in schools", Snuipp

said in a Tuesday statement announcing the strike.

They complain that their members are unable to teach properly, are not adequately protected against coronavirus infection and frequently hear about changes to health precautions via the media rather than from higher-ups.

"The government announces things, but no-one thinks about what it means for staff on the ground," Olivier Flipo, the head of a Paris school, told AFP this week.

"They're asking hellish things of us and it's all going to the dogs".

With many pupils off sick and difficulty combining distance learning with in-person classes, "it's not school that's open, but a kind of 'daycare'," Snuipp said.

Macron's presidential election challengers have seized on the walkout, with far-left and Socialist candidates Jean-Luc Melenchon and Anne Hidalgo joining marchers in Paris.

The acting party chief of the far-right National Rally Jordan Bardella said the strike showed "the problem above all is Emmanuel Macron".

Motivated by long queues for tests outside pharmacies, the government this week eased rules on COVID checks for students who have been exposed to an infected person, with Prime Minister Jean Castex announcing the changes on Monday's evening news.

UK's Prince Andrew Stripped of Royal, Military Titles Over Sex Abuse

LONDON (Reuters) - The Royal Family removed Prince Andrew's military links and royal patronages on Thursday and said he will no longer be known as "His Royal Highness", as the son of Queen Elizabeth fights a U.S. lawsuit in which he is accused of sex abuse.

Andrew, 61, the Duke of York, was forced to step down from public duties in 2019 because of his connections to convicted U.S. sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, and after a disastrous BBC TV interview which the prince had hoped would clear his name.

Thursday's move by the royal family means he will now lose all his royal connections.

"With the queen's approval and agreement, The Duke of York's military affiliations and royal patronages have been returned to the queen," Buckingham Palace said in a statement.

"The Duke of York will continue not to undertake any public duties and is defending this case as a private citizen."

On Wednesday, Andrew's lawyers failed to persuade a U.S. judge to dismiss a civil lawsuit in which Virginia Giuffre accuses him of sexually abusing her when she was a teenager.

U.S. District Judge Lewis Kaplan said Giuffre, 38, could pursue claims that Andrew battered her and intentionally



The prince Andrew has been officially stripped of his military affiliations and royal patronages, the Buckingham Palace in a statement issued Thursday.

caused her emotional distress while Epstein - a financier who killed himself in jail in August 2019 while awaiting his sex trafficking trial - was trafficking her.

BREST, France (Reuters) - Sweden has decided to withdraw its troops this year from a European special forces mission to the Sahel region, and will review its UN contribution, its foreign minister said. "We have already decided that this year we will withdraw (from) the force of Takuba," Ann Linde told reporters on Friday on the sidelines of an EU foreign ministers meeting in western France.

PRAYAGRAJ, India, (Reuters) - Hundreds of thousands of Hindu worshippers gathered on Friday for a holy bathe despite a 30-fold rise in coronavirus cases in the past month. Hindus believe a bathe in the holy river on the Jan. 14 Makarsankranti festival washes away sins. A large number of devotees were taking a dip in the sacred river where it flows through the eastern state of West Bengal, which is reporting the most number of cases in the country after Maharashtra state in the west.

PARIS (AFP) - At least 108 civilians have been killed this month in a series of airstrikes in the war-torn northern Tigray region of Ethiopia, the United Nations said Friday. The UN also warned of a looming humanitarian disaster in the region, with its food distribution operations on the verge of grinding to a halt. The UN human rights office urged the Ethiopian authorities to ensure the protection of civilians, saying disproportionate attacks hitting non-military targets could amount to war crimes. Northern Ethiopia has been beset by conflict since November 2020 when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray after accusing the region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), of attacks on federal army camps.

LONDON (Al-Jazeera) - The United Nations has voiced concern at recent incidents of hate speech and incitement to violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia, fearing inflammatory acts will escalate ahead of elections this year. Bosnian Serbs celebrated their national day on Sunday, marking the creation of the Republika Srpska (RS) - Bosnia's Serb entity that was declared three decades ago. It was one of the events seen as putting the country on the path to the war in Bosnia in the 1990s, which killed approximately 100,000 people and forced two million others from their homes.

MOSCOW (AFP) - Turkey and Armenia on Friday welcomed "constructive" talks between their special envoys, who met for the first time in Moscow in a bid to mend historically strained ties. Armenia and Turkey have no diplomatic relations, a closed border and a long history of hostility rooted in mass killings of Armenians under the Ottoman Turks during World War I. Armenian envoy Ruben Rubinyan and his Turkish counterpart, Serdar Kilic, met "in a positive and constructive atmosphere" on Friday, their foreign ministries said in identical statements. No concrete measures were announced after the 90-minute talks in the Russian capital.