

North Korea Approves Deterrent Steps Against South Korea-U.S. Drills



An artillery drill in an undisclosed location in North Korea, 9 March 2023

PYONGYANG (Dispatches) – North Korea has decided to take “important, practical” measures for the “offensive use” of war deterrents, state media said Sunday, with the United States and South Korea set to launch their joint military exercise this week.

The decision was made at an enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission of the ruling Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK), presided over by leader Kim Jong-un, according to the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

Washington and Seoul are scheduled to kick off the Freedom Shield (FS) exercise Monday for an 11-day run, along with a large-scale field maneuver, called the Warrior Shield, Yonhap News agency reported.

“The meeting discussed and adopted the important practical steps for making more effective, powerful and offensive use of the war deterrent of the country in coping with the present situation in which the war provocations of the U.S. and South Korea are reaching the red-line,” the KCNA said in an English-language dispatch.

It did not specify what the practical measures would be.

North Korea is widely expected to conduct weapons tests timed with the allies’ combined military exercises, which Pyongyang has long denounced as a rehearsal for an invasion.

Kim inspected a “fire assault drill,” simulating its attack on the enemy’s airfield, last week in a bid to check the “actual war” readiness posture of its military.

His younger sister Kim Yo-jong earlier warned her country is ready to take “overwhelming” actions against military activities by the U.S. and the South.

The North also discussed issues of resolving rural problems at the key military meeting, the KCNA said.

They discussed “detailed duties for accelerating rural development, regional construction and grand socialist construction,” as well as “measures for implementing them and ways for using military forces,” it said.

Observers said North Korea appears to have discussed ways to dispatch the Korean People’s Army to help with the construction of homes in rural areas and other projects aimed at improving people’s lives.

More Coverage Disruptions at BBC as Lineker Crisis Deepens



A person cycles outside the BBC headquarters in central London, Britain, March 11, 2023.

LONDON (AP) – The BBC’s sports coverage faced a second day of severe disruptions Sunday as dozens of staff refused to work in solidarity with top soccer host Gary Lineker, who was suspended by the broadcaster after he tweeted criticism of the British government’s asylum policy.

Pressure was mounting on the BBC to resolve the crisis, with growing calls for its bosses to step down over allegations of political bias and suppressing free speech.

The BBC suspended Lineker, one of English soccer’s most lauded players and the corporation’s highest-paid presenter, on Friday after he tweeted a criticism of the UK government’s new migration policy and compared the its language about migrants to that used in Nazi Germany.

That triggered a huge backlash, and many of the BBC’s sports presenters and reporters walked out of their jobs Saturday in support of Lineker.

As a result, several daytime soccer shows were pulled at the last minute and “Match of the Day,” a popular late-night program showing high-

lights of Premier League games that day and regarded as something of a British institution since the 1960s, aired with no commentary and only featured shortened footage. Usually lasting around an hour and a half, Saturday’s “Match of the Day” only aired for 20 minutes.

No presenters are expected to accompany Sunday’s coverage of the Women’s Super League and “Match of the Day 2.”

Tim Davie, the BBC’s director-general, apologized for the disruption.

“It’s been a difficult day and I’m sorry that audiences have been affected and they haven’t got the programming,” Davie said on Saturday. “We are working very hard to resolve the situation and make sure that we get output back on air.”

The controversy began with a tweet on Tuesday from Lineker’s account describing the government’s plan to detain and deport migrants arriving by boat as “an immeasurably cruel policy directed at the most vulnerable people in language that is not dissimilar to that used by Germany in the 30s.”

Rights Group: Europe Closing Doors to Refugees, Anti-Migrant Wave Obvious, Widespread

BRUSSELS (Anadolu) – European countries are closing their doors to those seeking asylum and endangering them by being involved in “unlawful and illegal” practices, according to an official from a global rights group.

“Many European countries are closing their doors to people seeking their protection and engaging in very harmful, dangerous practices that are non-compliant with human rights law or refugee law that put people in grave danger,” Emilie McDonnell, UK advocacy and communications coordinator at Human Rights Watch, told Anadolu in an exclusive interview.

McDonnell said sentiments European countries harbor toward refugees were becoming evident and common.

“There certainly is (a wave against migrants). And it is not something that is new. But it’s certainly becoming more widespread, more obvious,” she said.

The UK government has introduced new legislation against illegal migrants, calling for a ban on those who cross the English Channel by boat to claim asylum in Britain. The legislation also calls for the detention of refugees and plans for their removal to their home countries or Rwanda or any other nations which the UK deems safe.

The human rights advocate dubbed the legislation a “sweeping bill” that strips most asylum seekers of appeal rights, only being able to appeal after they have been removed and sent or expelled to another country as well as being unable to access the UK’s modern slavery protection.

While there are exceptions in the bill related to unaccompanied children, the government can still choose to remove them, or they would be in detention until they are adults — expelling and not giving them access to the asylum procedure.

Regarding loopholes in the legislation, McDonnell said the bill allows very few limited appeal rights and

she fears there is a grave risk that people would be expelled and removed to countries that are not safe.

“All of this legislation is part of a broader context in the UK which is that the UK government is very much demonizing and fueling hatred, fear, and division against asylum seekers and migrants in the UK,” she added.

It would be disastrous and have devastating effects on migrants, particularly people of color in the UK, she said.

The highest number of people crossing the English Channel are those seeking protection from countries and places where persecution, wars and human rights abuses are rife. Asylum seekers cannot be returned to those countries as they are not safe, she said.

Very limited safe routes exist for individuals who want to arrive in the UK. Afghans were the highest number crossing the channel in boats in the last quarter of 2022.

But schemes that the government set up for Afghans to travel safely are plagued with problems and not functioning properly, she said.

“Only 22 Afghans have been resettled during 2022 under the UN resettlement pathway that the UK government set up, and none under the pathway that the UK government set up for people who worked with the British in Afghanistan and for vulnerable people,” she said. Women and girls who are at risk have no safe routes to get to the UK either, said the Human Rights Watch official.

Britain takes far fewer asylum seekers than other European countries, while France and Germany take the majority of asylum claims.

But Human Rights Watch has documented the “awful and deplorable” condition of asylum seekers in encampments, especially in northern France.

McDonnell termed the new legislation a “breach” of the UK’s international obligation to the UN’s 1951 Refugee Convention.

News in Brief

PARIS (Al Jazeera) – The French Senate has approved President Emmanuel Macron’s unpopular pension reform plan as hundreds of thousands of protesters rallied in cities across the country to oppose the changes. Senators voted late on Saturday to adopt the reforms by 195 votes to 112, bringing the package — whose key measure is raising the retirement age by two years to 64 — closer to becoming law. “After hundreds of hours of discussions, the Senate adopted the pension reform plan. It is a key step to make a reform happen that will guarantee the future of our pension system,” Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne wrote on Twitter. She added she was “totally committed to ensure the text will be definitively adopted in the coming days”. Now that the Senate has adopted the bill, it will be reviewed by a joint committee of lower and upper house legislators, probably on Wednesday. If the committee agrees on a text, a final vote in both chambers is likely to take place on Thursday. But the outcome of that still seems uncertain in the lower chamber, the National Assembly, where Macron’s party needs allies’ votes for a majority. If the government fears it will not have enough votes in the lower house, it is still possible for it to push the text through without a parliamentary vote via a rarely used and highly controversial constitutional tool known as article 49.3.

PARIS (AFP) – Thousands of tons of garbage has piled up on streets across the French capital after a week of strike action by dustbin collectors against government pension reforms, city hall said Sunday. Three incineration plants outside the capital have been hit by the work stoppages that have left entire pavements covered in black bags and overflowing bins. The capital’s household waste agency Sycotom said it has been re-routing dustbin lorries to other storage and treatment sites in the region and has yet to resort to calling in the police. City hall employees have for the last week been picking up rubbish in just half of Paris’s districts. The strike has hit some of the most exclusive areas including the 5th, 6th and 16th districts. Other districts are served by private firms which have not gone strike. According to the hard-left CGT union, refuse collectors and drivers can currently retire from 57 years of age, but would face another two years of work under the reform plans which still grant early retirement for those who faced tough working conditions. Life expectancy for the garbage workers is 12-17 years below the average for the country as a whole, the CGT says.

BEIJING (AP/RT) – China on Sunday reappointed Yi Gang as head of the central bank in an effort to reassure entrepreneurs and financial markets by showing continuity at the top while other economic officials change during a period of uncertainty in the world’s second-largest economy. His official duties lie in “implementing monetary policy,” or carrying out decisions made by a policymaking body whose membership is a secret. But the central bank governor acts as spokesperson for monetary policy, is the most prominent Chinese figure in global finance and is in charge of reassuring bankers and investors at a time when China’s economy is emerging from drastically slower growth. At the March 5 opening of the annual session of China’s parliament, the National People’s Congress, China announced plans for a consumer-led revival of the struggling economy, setting this year’s growth target at “around 5%.”

China’s National People’s Congress (NPC) also appointed General Li Shangfu, who has been sanctioned by the U.S. for dealings with Russia, as the country’s new defense minister on Sunday. In 2018, the U.S. blacklisted Li as the then-head of the Equipment Development Department for “significant transactions” involving the transfer of Su-35 fighter jets and S-400 air defense systems-related materiel from Russia to China.

GENEVA (Reuters) – Discovering the origins of COVID-19 is a moral imperative and all hypotheses must be explored, the head of the World Health Organization said, in the clearest indication yet that the UN body remains committed to finding how the virus arose. A U.S. agency was reported by the Wall Street Journal to have assessed the pandemic had likely been caused by an unintended Chinese laboratory leak, raising pressure on the WHO to come up with answers. Beijing denies the assessment which could soon become public after the U.S. House of Representatives voted this week to declassify it. “Understanding #COVID19’s origins and exploring all hypotheses remains: a scientific imperative, to help us prevent future outbreaks (and) a moral imperative, for the sake of the millions of people who died and those who live with #LongCOVID,” Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Twitter late on Saturday. He was writing to mark three years since the WHO first used the word “pandemic” to describe the global outbreak of COVID-19.

JOHANNESBURG (Reuters) – Cyclone Freddy battered central Mozambique on Sunday after making landfall for a second time in a month, breaking records for the duration and strength of tropical storms in the southern hemisphere.

Communications and electricity supply in the storm area have been cut so the extent of the damage and number of casualties were not clear. More than 171,000 people were affected after the cyclone swept through southern Mozambique last month, killing 27 people in Mozambique and Madagascar. More than half a million are at risk of being affected in Mozambique this time, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). After passing the port town of Quelimane, the storm was continuing inland towards the southern tip of neighboring Malawi, satellite data showed. However, the national power company Electricidade de Moçambique said that by mid-afternoon electricity had been restored in most areas, with the exception of Milange, Lugela, Maganja da Costa, Namanjavira and parts of the city of Mocuba. Meanwhile, at least six people have died in Peru over the last few days as a powerful cyclone unleashed torrential rain, battering hundreds of homes and causing major disruptions in northern areas of the Latin American country, the authorities said. The government has declared a state of emergency as it seeks to bring relief to regions of Peru hit by Cyclone Yaku. They include Lambayeque, Piura and Tumbes. The National Institute of Civil Defense (Indeci) said flooding caused by the cyclone had claimed six lives, Reuters reported.

Thousands Take Part in New Greece Protest Over Train Crash

ATHENS, Greece (AP) – Thousands of people protested on Sunday against safety deficiencies in Greece’s railway network nearly two weeks after dozens were killed in the country’s deadliest train crash.

The demonstrators also demanded punishment for those responsible for the head-on collision between a passenger train and a freight train that killed 57 people Feb. 28. Police said that more than 8,000 people in Athens gathered outside Parliament to protest on Sunday.

The protesters later marched to the offices of privatized train operator Hellenic Train. The company, which has been owned by Italy’s Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane since 2017, isn’t responsible for the maintenance of the railway network. State-owned Hellenic Railways is in charge of upkeep.

Authorities shut down four subway stations on two lines running through central Athens because of the protest.

The rally was organized by civil servants, a pro-communist union and university students.

In Thessaloniki, Greece’s second-largest city, about 5,000 people demonstrated, listened to speeches and shouted slogans, such as “we will be the voice for all the dead.”

Sunday’s rallies, which passed



Protesters take part in a rally following a train collision in central Greece, in front of the parliament, in Athens, March 12, 2023.

off without serious incident, weren’t as well-attended as similar events earlier in the week, when more than 30,000 had turned out in Athens and more than 20,000 in Thessaloniki. Police said four people were detained in Athens.

A memorial service was conducted for 12 students of Thessaloniki’s Aristotle University, Greece’s largest, who were killed in the train crash.

An inexperienced stationmaster accused of placing the trains on the same track has been charged with negligent homicide and other offenses, and the country’s transportation

minister and senior railway officials resigned the day after the crash.

Revelations of serious safety gaps on Greece’s busiest rail line have put the center-right government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on the defensive. He has pledged the government’s full cooperation with a judicial inquiry into the crash.

Elections are due later this spring and opinion polls released over the past week have shown the ruling conservatives’ lead over the left-wing opposition shrink almost by half compared with polls published before the crash.

Ukraine, Russia Say Hundreds of Troops Killed in Battle for Bakhmut

KYIV (Dispatches) – Ukraine and Russia have claimed that hundreds of enemy troops were killed in the fight for Bakhmut, with Kyiv fending off unabating attacks and a small river that bisects the town now marking the new front line.

Serhiy Cherevatyi, a Ukrainian military spokesperson, said that 221 pro-Moscow troops were killed and more than 300 wounded in Bakhmut. Russia’s defence ministry said that up to 210 Ukrainian soldiers were killed in the broader Donetsk part of the frontline.

While Moscow did not specify Bakhmut casualties, the eastern Donetsk town, now nearly deserted, has been the site of one of the bloodiest and longest battles of the year-long war.

Both sides have admitted to suffering and inflicting significant losses in Bakhmut, while the exact number of casualties is difficult to independently verify.

British military intelligence said on Saturday that Russia’s Wagner group has taken control of most of the eastern part of Bakhmut — an advance that the group’s founder Yevgeny Prigozhin claimed on Wednesday.

“In the city centre, the Bakhmutka River now marks the front line,” the British Defence Ministry said in its daily intelligence bulletin.

Ukraine insisted that it was holding on in Bakhmut and was giving a “decent rebuff” to Russian forces, with the commander in charge of defending Bakhmut saying its protection was key for a Ukrainian counter-strike.

Moscow says capturing Bakhmut would punch a hole in Ukrainian defenses and be a step towards seizing all of the Donbas industrial region, a major target. Kyiv says the battle is grinding down Russia’s best units.

Prigozhin said that he is now 1.2 km (0.75 mile) away from the administrative centre of the city. The center is on the west side of the Bakhmutka River.

Since the onset of the war, the United States and Ukraine’s other Western allies have sent Kiev tens of billions of dollars worth of weapons, including rocket systems, drones, armored vehicles, tanks, and communication systems.

In the latest news, the Pentagon announced to seek more than \$300 billion from the U.S. government for Ukraine’s weapons procurement and R & D (research and development) in the upcoming 2024 fiscal year.

Western countries have also imposed a slew of economic sanctions on Moscow. The Kremlin has said the sanctions and the Western military assistance risk prolonging the war that recently completed one year.