

North Korea Says Will Never Give Up Nukes to Counter U.S.



This photo provided by the North Korean government shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, left, delivers a speech during a parliament in Pyongyang, North Korea, Sept. 8, 2022.

SEOUL, South Korea (Dispatches) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has stressed his country will never abandon the nuclear weapons it needs to counter the United States.

The remarks came during a key parliamentary meeting, where legislators passed a new law governing the use of nuclear weapons, as reported by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

Kim described it as a move to bolster the country's nuclear status and make clear that such weapons will not be bargained, accusing the U.S. of pushing hard to weaken the North's defenses.

"We will never give up nuclear weapons and there is absolutely no denuclearization, and no negotiation and no bargaining chip to trade in the process," Kim was quoted as saying in the KCNA.

The new law passed by the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) rules out

the resumption of any talks regarding Pyongyang's denuclearization.

It also includes a provision that requires North Korea's military to "automatically" carry out a nuclear strike if the command and control system of the nuclear force is threatened by "hostile forces".

Kim pointed out that legalizing the nuclear weapons policy has "great significance in drawing a line so that we can no longer bargain over our nuclear power."

He lashed out at the U.S. for pressuring his country through sanctions to give up its nuclear weapons, calling it a "misjudgment and miscalculation" that won't materialize even in a "hundred years."

The North Korean leader added that the "political and military conditions of the Korean Peninsula," as well as the global political environment, must change for any adjustment in Pyong-

yang's nuclear policy.

The legislation comes amid reports that the country is gearing up to conduct a new nuclear test.

In late July, Kim revealed that Pyongyang had made full preparations to use nuclear weapons in any military confrontation with arch-foes, the United States, and South Korea.

He said Washington was continuing "dangerous, illegal hostile acts" with South Korea against the North some 70 years after the war, adding that it sought to justify its behavior by "demonizing" the country.

He also accused the United States of double standards over its military activities in the region.

"The duplex act of the United States, which is misleading all the routine actions of our armed forces as 'provocation' and 'threat' while holding large-scale joint military exercises that seriously threaten our security, is literally a robbery," he said at the time.

South Korea on Thursday made an offer of talks with North Korea on reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean war, in a move to de-escalate tensions.

Pyongyang, however, rejected the overtures, saying the US and its allies maintain "hostile policies" such as sanctions and military drills that undercut any efforts to make peace.

Tensions between the two estranged neighbors have heightened in recent years, fueled by South Korea's growing alliance with the US and Washington's sanctions against Pyongyang.

North Korea has carried out many weapons tests this year, including the launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) for the first time since 2017.

California Wildfire Doubles in Size



A CalFire firefighter uses a drip torch during a firing operation to build a line to contain the Fairview Fire near Hemet, California, on September 8, 2022.

WASHINGTON (AFP) - A wildfire burning outside Los Angeles has doubled in size in less than 24 hours, firefighters said Thursday as they endured yet another day of blistering heat in the western United States.

Thousands of people have been told to evacuate in the face of the growing Fairview Fire, which has now spread to 19,000 acres (7,700 hectares).

"Active fire behavior occurred in the east, south, and north portions of the incident," Cal Fire said.

"Fire will become active with pri-

mary movement to the east. Steep drainages will aid the spread with the up canyon/up slope winds and heavy fuels."

Two people are known to have died in the blaze, which erupted on Monday, the midpoint of a heat wave which has lasted more than a week and seen temperatures repeatedly exceed 110 Fahrenheit (43 Celsius) in parts of California, Nevada and Arizona.

The searing heat has put enormous strain on California's electrical grid, as households crank up the air conditioning.

That has led to daily calls for consum-

ers to conserve power to avoid blackouts, including text alerts sent to mobile phones.

The grid operator has hailed public cooperation which it said has helped keep the lights on throughout the state all week.

Another "Flex Alert" was issued Thursday, asking for thermostats to be raised, and major appliances to be switched off during peak hours.

Thursday's call was of longer duration than previous alerts, with a request to conserve power between 3:00 pm and 10:00 pm -- two hours longer.

"The state and much of the West is enduring a historically long and record-breaking heat wave, straining the grid from high electricity use," California Independent Service Operator said.

"The Flex Alert is in effect for extended hours because of projected supply deficiencies during that time."

Forecasters say the heat wave will begin to dissipate over the coming days, but warned California was not out of the woods yet.

"Dangerous heat also continues to impact the Golden State as high temperatures are once again forecast to reach well into the triple digits both today and Friday, particularly over interior valley regions," the National Weather Service said.

UN: Human Progress Retreats to 2016 Levels by COVID, Other Crises

NEW YORK (Al-Jazeera) - Back-to-back global crises have set back human development by five years, a new report by a United Nations agency has warned.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) said on Thursday that, for the first time since its creation in 1990, the Human Development Index (HDI) has declined for two consecutive years straight in 2020 and 2021 amid crises such as COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine – HDI being a measure of countries' life expectancies, education levels and standards of living.

"What we see is an unprecedented decline," the UNDP's Ulrika Modder said.

"The world has definitely seen such challenges before. We have seen pandemics, wars, affecting more than one country actually the entire world. But what has happened now and what is represented in the report is an uncertainty complex," she said. "So many of these challenges happening at the same time".

HDI has steadily risen for decades, but began sliding in 2020 and continued its fall last year, erasing the gains of the preceding five years, the paper said.

The UNDP said nine out of 10 countries recorded a decline in their HDI score in either 2020 or 2021 and more than 40 percent declined in both years, with the lives of people in South Sudan, Chad and Niger declining the most.

"If you look at the countries at the bottom of this list, there's one common factor – and that is conflicts," said Hiba Morgan, who has extensively covered events in some of these countries.

"There is another factor that is common amongst those three countries that are on the bottom of the list and that is the impact of climate change. We've seen South Sudan facing floods for three consecutive years that has led to the displacement of tens of thousands of people that has submerged dozens of villages in various states around the country."

"The world is scrambling to respond to back-to-back crises. We have seen with the cost of living and energy crises that, while it is tempting to focus on quick fixes like subsidizing fossil fuels, immediate relief tactics are delaying the long-term systemic changes we must make," Achim Steiner, UNDP administrator, said.

"We are collectively paralyzed in making these changes. In a world defined by uncertainty, we need a renewed sense of global solidarity to tackle our interconnected, common challenges."

The coronavirus pandemic was a major driver of the decline, but the report noted a compounding number of crises – political, financial and climate-related – have not allowed time for populations to recover.

While some countries had begun to recover from the pandemic, many others in Latin America, Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean had not yet turned the corner before a new crisis hit: the war in Ukraine.

While the fallout from Russia-Ukraine war on food and energy security has not yet been calculated into this year's index, "without any doubt, the outlook for 2022 is grim", Steiner said.

A large contributor to the HDI's decline is a global drop in life expectancy – down from 73 years in 2019 to 71.4 years in 2021.

Zelensky, Blinken Meet on U.S. Assistance for Ukraine



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (right) poses with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during their meeting in Kyiv, Ukraine, Sept 8, 2022.

KYIV - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Thursday met with visiting U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken to discuss the details of the \$2.2 billion package, of which \$1 billion will go to Ukraine, U.S. assistance for Ukraine, the presidential press service said.

During the talks in Kyiv, the parties talked about U.S. financial, economic and military aid for Ukraine, in particular, the security assistance of \$675 million announced by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin earlier in the day.

Zelensky thanked the U.S. government for the recent decision to provide Ukraine with \$6 billion in grant aid, which includes \$3 billion in security assistance and \$3 billion in financial support earmarked through the World Bank.

Speaking about military assistance from the United States, Zelensky said that American weapons, especially the HIMARS multiple-launch rocket systems, have strengthened Ukraine's positions in the conflict with Russia.

Zelensky and Blinken also discussed the prospects of increasing defense support for Ukraine and the launch of the Lend-Lease program.

Blinken arrived in Kyiv earlier in the day for his second visit since the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in February this year.

China Warns Supplying Weapons Will Not Bring Peace to Ukraine

Chinese deputy permanent representative to the United Nations Geng Shuang warned on Thursday that supplying weapons to Ukraine will not bring peace.

More than six months after the out-

break of the Ukraine crisis, fierce fighting is still raging on and more weapons and ammunition are flowing to the battlefield, giving rise to a worrying prospect of a prolonged and expanded conflict, said Geng Shuang, Xinhua news agency reported.

Since the beginning of the crisis, China has consistently emphasized that supplying weapons will not bring peace and that adding fuel to fire will only complicate the problem.

The harsh reality and humanitarian consequences of the past six months have fully demonstrated this, he told a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine.

Equally worrying is the scenario that a large number of weapons and ammunition falling into the wrong hands, causing endless trouble, and creating security risks in Ukraine and in the wider region. Relevant negative impact has already begun to emerge, he said.

"China has always maintained that dialogue and negotiation is the most realistic and feasible way to resolve the crisis. Only by seeking common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security can there be long-term stability and security in Europe and the rest of the world," he said.

The Ukrainian crisis has once again proved in a brutal way that pursuing power politics, seeking absolute security, being obsessed with military power, and creating division and confrontation cannot bring peace and stability, nor reconciliation and tranquility. All parties concerned should remain in contact and communication, and leave room for diplomatic negotiations, so as to create conditions for a political settlement and achieve the cessation of hostilities at an early date, he added.

India, China to Withdraw From Disputed Border Area



Indian and Chinese troops have begun to withdraw from the border areas of Gogra and Hotsprings in the western Himalayas.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Indian and Chinese soldiers will disengage at a disputed area along a remote western Himalayan border by Sept. 12, India's foreign ministry said on Friday, after more than two years of a standoff following a deadly clash.

The disengagement, which comes after several rounds of talks between senior military officials, is part of efforts by New Delhi and Beijing to avoid an escalation in tension between the nuclear-armed Asian giants that went to war over their border in 1962.

The pull-out, also confirmed by China, comes ahead of a meeting in Uzbekistan next week that Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi are expected to attend.

Indian and Chinese soldiers began withdrawing from the Gogra-Hot

Springs area in Ladakh in the western Himalayas on Thursday, a process that would be complete by early next week, India's foreign ministry said.

"The two sides have agreed to cease forward deployments in this area in a phased, coordinated and verified manner, resulting in the return of the troops of both sides to their respective areas," Foreign Ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said in a statement.

All temporary structures in the area erected by both militaries will also be dismantled as part of the agreement, he said.

Following a deadly clash in June 2020 that killed at least 20 Indian and four Chinese troops, similar buffer arrangements have been implemented in other areas in Ladakh where soldiers were deployed in close proximity.

News in Brief

TUNIS (Reuters) - At least eight migrants died and another 15 were missing after a boat sank off Tunisia, as they tried to cross the Mediterranean to Italy, State Monastir Radio said. The coastguard rescued 14 migrants who had been on the overcrowded boat, which sank off Chebba town in Mahdia region. A security official said that the boat set off from El Awabed coast in Sfax region this week. He added that most of migrants in the boat are Tunisians. The coastline of Sfax has become a major departure point for people fleeing poverty in Africa and the Middle East for a chance at a better life in Europe. In recent months, dozens of people have drowned off the Tunisian coast, with an increase in the frequency of attempted crossings from Tunisia and Libya toward Italy.

LISBON (Reuters) - Angola's Constitutional Court made a final ruling on Thursday to dismiss a complaint filed by the runner-up in the Aug. 24 election seeking to annul the results that gave victory to the ruling MPLA. After the country's most closely fought election, the electoral commission declared last week the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) the winner, prolonging its nearly five decades of uninterrupted rule and handing President Joao Lourenco a second term.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Thousands of people in Haiti's capital and other major cities have organized new protests to demand safer streets, more affordable goods and the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry. The occasional crack of gunfire mixed with the shouting and clapping of protesters as they marched through streets blocked by rocks, trucks and burning tires. Haitians have organized a growing number of protests amid an increase in gang-related kidnappings and killings, a spike in the prices of basic goods and a severe lack of fuel amid an inflation rate that has hit 30%.

BUCHAREST (Reuters) – A Romanian Navy dredger hit a drifting mine it was trying to defuse in bad weather, but the crew of 75 were unharmed by the explosion, the defense ministry said. Mines began floating in the Black Sea after Russia launched special military operation in Ukraine, and Romanian, Bulgarian and Turkish military diving teams have been defusing those drifting in their waters.

ISLAMABAD (AFP) – United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has appealed for "massive" global support for Pakistan where unprecedented floods have killed nearly 1,400 people and made more than a million people homeless. Guterres made the appeal as he landed in the Pakistani capital early on Friday morning and was received by Hina Rabbani Khar, the state minister for foreign affairs. The UN chief later met Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and other top officials.