

# North Korean Leader Urges 'Drastic Boost' in Missile Production



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visits the typhoon-struck area of Ogye-ri, Anbyon county, Kangwon province, North Korea, in this undated photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on August 14, 2023.

SEOUL (AFP) -- North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for a "drastic boost" in missile production during visits to key weapons factories, state media said Monday, as South Korea and the United States prepared for joint drills next week.

The tour of the plants from Friday to Saturday came after Kim called for stepping up war preparations at a key military meeting last week.

Kim's two-day inspections included visits to factories producing tactical missiles, large-caliber control multiple rocket launcher shells, as well as armored combat vehicles, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

During the tactical missile factory visit, Kim "expressed satisfaction" as the plant had "perfected the scientific and technological issues arising in production" and pushed ahead with the modernization of the weapons.

"He set forth an important goal to drastically boost the existing missile production capacity" and underlined the factory's role in "speeding up" war preparations, KCNA said.

Kim stressed the "need to ensure boost in the production of shells" and personally drove a armored combat vehicle, according to the report.

Photos carried by the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper showed a beaming Kim seated in the driver's seat of a

"newly-developed utility combat armored vehicle" as he took it out for a test drive surrounded by three officials.

Kim also inspected a factory producing transporter erector launchers -- vehicles for transporting and launching tactical missiles -- and stressed the importance of developing and producing the mobile platforms.

The North Korean army should have an "overwhelming military force" and be "fully prepared for coping with any war at any moment" against the enemy, Kim said, adding they must "surely annihilate them if they launch an attack," KCNA reported.

The inspections come as South Korea and the United States prepare for the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield (UFS) exercise set to take place August 21 through August 31.

North Korea views such exercises as rehearsals for an invasion and has repeatedly warned it would take "overwhelming" action in response.

Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff on Monday described the upcoming joint drills as "a tough and realistic exercise to strengthen the combined defense posture and alliance response capabilities."

Leaders from South Korea, the United States, and Japan are also set to hold a trilateral summit in Washington on Friday, as they seek to bolster security cooperation against North Korea.

Last week, Kim presided over a meeting with key military officials, calling for stepping up war preparations "in an offensive way" including boosting weapons production and conducting more drills.

## Niger Junta to Try Ousted President for 'High Treason'



A woman holds the image of ousted Nigerien President Mohamed Bazoum during a protest outside the Nigerien embassy in Paris on August 5, 2023.

NIAMEY, Niger (Dispatches) -- Niger's military regime vowed late Sunday to prosecute ousted president Mohamed Bazoum for "high treason" and slammed West African leaders for imposing sanctions on the country.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imposed sanctions on Niger in response to the coup and has not ruled out using force against the army officers who toppled Bazoum on July 26.

The West African bloc has approved the deployment of a standby force in Niger as soon as possible but indicated that it remains committed to finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Niger's military leaders said they would prosecute Bazoum "for high treason and undermining the internal and external security of Niger", according to a statement read out by Colonel-Major Amadou Abdramane on national television.

Bazoum, 63, and his family have been held at the president's official Niamey residence since the coup.

The military said sanctions imposed on Niger had made it difficult for people to access medicines, food and electricity, and were "illegal, inhumane and humiliating".

The comments came just hours after religious mediators met with coup leader General Abdourahmane Tiani, who indicated his regime was open to a diplomatic breakthrough.

But Tiani said it was "painful" that ECOWAS had issued an ultimatum to restore Bazoum without hearing "their side

of the matter", the statement added. The Muslim leaders visited Niamey with the blessing of Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, who is also head of ECOWAS.

Tinubu has adopted a firm stance against the coup, the sixth to hit an ECOWAS member state since 2020.

The bloc has severed financial transactions and electricity supplies and closed borders with landlocked Niger, blocking much-needed imports to one of the world's poorest countries.

On July 30, it issued a seven-day ultimatum to restore Bazoum or face the potential use of force, but the deadline expired without the new rulers backing down.

Demonstrations in favor of the new military rulers have become a common sight in Niamey.

Thousands of people attended concerts on Sunday at the Seyni Kountche Stadium in support of the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP), the generals who have taken power. The crowd brandished the flags of Niger as well as those of Burkina Faso, Mali and Russia.

The prospect of a military intervention to reinstate Bazoum has divided ECOWAS members and drawn warnings from foreign powers including Russia and Algeria.

Niger's neighbors Mali and Burkina Faso, also ruled by military governments who seized power in coups, have said an intervention would be tantamount to a declaration of war on them.

## Argentina Voters Give Outsider Shock Election Win



Argentine presidential candidate Javier Milei of La Libertad Avanza alliance arrives to vote during primary elections in Buenos Aires on August 13, 2023.

BUENOS AIRES (Reuters) -- Argentine voters punished the country's two main political forces in a primary election, pushing a rock-singing libertarian outsider candidate into first place in a huge shake-up in the race towards presidential elections in October.

With some 90% of ballots counted, far-right libertarian economist Javier Milei had 30.5% of the vote, far higher than predicted, with the main conservative opposition bloc behind on 28% and the ruling Peronist coalition in third place on 27%.

The result is a stinging rebuke to the center-left Peronist coalition and the main Together for Change conservative opposition bloc with

inflation at 116% and a cost-of-living crisis leaving four in 10 people in poverty.

"We are the true opposition," Milei said in a bullish speech after the results. "A different Argentina is impossible with the same old things that have always failed."

Voting in the primaries is obligatory for most adults and each person gets one vote, making it in effect a dress rehearsal for the Oct. 22 general election and giving a clear indication of who is the favorite to win the presidency.

The October election will be key for policy affecting Argentina's huge farm sector, one of the world's top exporters of soy, corn and beef,

the peso currency and bonds, and ongoing talks over a \$44 billion debt deal with the International Monetary Fund.

The economic crisis has left many Argentines disillusioned with the main political parties and opened the door for Milei, who struck a chord especially with the young.

"Inflation is killing us and job uncertainty doesn't let you plan your life," said Adriana Alonso, a 42-year-old housewife.

As polls closed in the early evening after voting system glitches caused long lines in capital Buenos Aires, all the talk in campaign hubs was about Milei, a brash outsider who has pledged to shutter the central bank and dollarize the economy. "Milei's growth is a surprise. This speaks of people's anger with politics," said former conservative President Mauricio Macri as he arrived at Together for Change's election bunker.

In the most important leadership race, within the Together for Change coalition, hard-line conservative Patricia Bullrich, a former security minister, beat out moderate Buenos Aires Mayor Horacio Larreta, who pledged to get behind her campaign.

Economy Minister Sergio Massa won the nomination for the ruling Peronist coalition, as expected, and could perform more strongly in October if he can win over more moderate voters.

## Chinese Defense Minister to Visit Russia as Ties Thrive

BEIJING (AFP) -- Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu will visit Russia and Belarus this week, his ministry said on Monday, as relations between Beijing and Moscow flourish with high-level visits and phone calls.

Li has refused to hold meetings with U.S. counterparts until Washington lifts sanctions on him, imposed for his procurement of Russian military technology.

An aide to Vladimir Putin said last month the Russian president was planning to visit China in October, and in March President Xi Jinping made a state visit to Moscow and declared relations between the two countries were entering a new era.

China and Russia also held joint naval exercises in July as Li called for closer bilateral cooperation between the two navies.

Speaking from Beijing with Nikolai Yevmenov, head of the Russian navy, Li said he hoped both countries could "strengthen communication at all levels", according to a readout from the Chinese defense ministry.

China and Russia are strategic allies, with both sides frequently touting their "no limits" partnership and economic and military cooperation.

Their ties became even closer after Russia began its military campaign in Ukraine in February last year and the Western economic sanctions that ensued.

"At the invitation of Russian Defense Minister (Sergei) Shoigu and Belarusian Defense Minister (Viktor) Khrenin, from August 14 to 19, State Councilor and Defense Minister Li Shangfu will go to Russia to attend the 11th Moscow Conference on International Security and visit Belarus," a Chinese defense ministry spokesperson said.

Li's visit to Russia will include a speech at the international security forum, as well as meetings with leaders of defense departments from Russia and other countries, the spokesperson said.

China's top diplomat Wang Yi spoke by phone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov last week, hailing "practical cooperation" between the two countries.

Wang told Lavrov that Beijing and Moscow "should continue to maintain close strategic coordination, promote world multipolarization and the democratization of international relations", according to a Chinese foreign ministry statement.

China has sought to position itself as a neutral party in the Ukraine conflict while maintaining close ties with strategic ally Russia.

Beijing has offered Putin diplomatic and financial support since Russian tanks rolled over the border into Ukraine but has refrained from overt military involvement or sending lethal arms.

## Kenya Launches Probe Into Abuse by British Troops



The British army training in Kenya with local people employed to provide various scenarios.

NAIROBI (Dispatches) -- The Kenyan government has launched an inquiry into allegations of abuse by the British army, which MPs say could have implications for the future role of UK troops in the country.

The investigation will examine the activities of the British Army Training Unit Kenya (Batuk), whose soldiers have been accused of murder, sexual abuse, and damaging land close to its base in Nanyuki, about 125 miles (200km) north of the capital, Nairobi.

Kelvin Kubai, a Kenyan lawyer, called the inquiry a "significant" move. "It's the first time that British army activities are being reviewed in this way," he said, since the country gained independence from the UK in 1963.

Kenya's parliamentary defense committee, which is leading the inquiry, will this month put out a call for the public to submit petitions of any alleged crimes or wrongdoings by the army. Investigations will begin in October. The committee will call on Batuk to respond to the claims,

and is expected to submit a report of its findings to parliament by the end of the year.

The report will include recommendations that could have consequences for a defense deal between Kenya and the UK, which allows British troops to train in Kenya.

"This will have serious consequences for the defense cooperation agreement, because if we realize that there's been a lot of activity that spits in the face of [the treaty], it gives us room to re-look at the agreement," said Nelson Koech, the chair of the defense committee, "and even to exit."

The 2012 murder of Agnes Wanjiru is expected to be included in the wide-ranging review. The 21-year-old mother was last seen with British troops at a hotel near the barracks. Her body was found in a septic tank at a nearby lodge with stab wounds. A 2019 inquest in Kenya concluded that British soldiers were responsible for her murder and ordered further investigations. No one has been charged.

### News in Brief

PARIS (AFP) -- French police have launched an investigation into two bomb scares at the Eiffel Tower this weekend that forced the monument to be evacuated twice in the same day, prosecutors said on Monday. The landmark tower became the target of false bomb threats on two occasions on Saturday and was cleared of visitors each time. Paris detectives are leading the probe into suspected "threats to lives" and "falsely claiming that a dangerous explosive incident has occurred or will occur", the prosecutors' office said. The charges carry a prison sentence of up to two years for those convicted. The threats were made via posts on gaming site juxxvideo.com and on moncommissariat.fr, a platform for online contact between citizens and police. The Eiffel Tower, the French capital's main tourist magnet, attracted 5.8 million visitors last year.

LONDON (Guardian) -- Incidents of vehicles being driven the wrong way on England's motorways rose to almost 900 in the last 12 months, an increase of 13%, according to figures described as "frightening". Alarmed motoring groups called for technological interventions to reverse the increase in these potentially lethal driving errors, which are thought to be linked to an overreliance by drivers on satnav devices. National Highways figures showed the reports of "oncoming vehicles" on its motorway network rose to 872 in the year to 19 June, up 102 on the previous year. The data, released in response to a Freedom of Information request by PA news agency, relates to unconfirmed reports of wrong-way driving received by National Highways' regional operations centers. Edmund King, president of the Automobile Association, said: "The increase in the number of vehicles being driven in the wrong direction on motorways is frightening and can be fatal."

BEIJING (Reuters) -- China will hold joint military training with Thailand from mid-August to early September in Thailand, China's defense ministry said in a statement on Monday. The training between the two armies will focus on anti-terrorism and is part of the annual planning between the two militaries, said the statement.

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- Billionaires and social media business rivals Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk threw new online jabs at each other, with the Meta founder declaring the owner of X -- formerly known as Twitter -- was not treating a proposed charity cage match seriously. "I think we can all agree Elon isn't serious and it's time to move on," Zuckerberg wrote on his Threads social platform. "I offered a real date... Elon won't confirm a date, then says he needs surgery, and now asks to do a practice round in my backyard instead." Musk quickly responded on X, the platform he bought last year that was previously called Twitter. "Zuck is a chicken," Musk posted. The Tesla boss said he would head to Silicon Valley Monday: "Can't wait to bang on his door tomorrow." When an X user suggested Zuckerberg was getting cold feet about the match, Musk referred to a popular U.S. fast food chain known for its chicken offerings. "He can't eat at Chick-fil-A because that would be cannibalism," Musk posted.

DEHRADUN, India (AFP) -- At least 24 people have been killed, nine of them in a temple collapse, and dozens more are feared missing after intense rains caused floods and landslides in India, officials said Monday. Days of torrential downpours have washed away vehicles, demolished buildings and destroyed bridges in the northern states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Flooding and landslides are common and cause widespread devastation during India's treacherous monsoon season, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity. The monsoon brings South Asia around 80 percent of its annual rainfall and is vital both for agriculture and the livelihoods of millions. But it also brings destruction every year in the form of landslides and floods.

WARSAW (AFP) -- Poland has arrested two Russians for allegedly distributing propaganda leaflets for mercenary group Wagner in the country's two biggest cities, Warsaw and Krakow, the interior minister said on Monday. "Both were charged with... espionage and arrested," minister Mariusz Kaminski said on Twitter, which has been rebranded as X. The Polish counter-intelligence agency named the two men as Alexei T. and Andrei G., without providing further personal details. It said both Russians were detained on Friday after they distributed "around 300 leaflets in public places in Krakow and Warsaw". The leaflets contained links to "recruitment websites" for the Wagner mercenary group, which has played a key role in Russia's war on Ukraine. "The Russians had on them more than 3,000 propaganda leaflets promoting the Wagner group. The material was given to them in Moscow," the agency said. The suspects, who had planned to leave Poland on Saturday, were set to receive "up to 500,000 rubles" (\$5,000) for their activities, it added.