

US, South Korea close ranks after Kim's death

AFP, Washington

The United States swiftly closed ranks with its ally South Korea yesterday as the death of nuclear-armed North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Il landed President Barack Obama with a sudden foreign policy crisis.

Obama called his close friend President Lee Myung-Bak of South Korea at midnight on the US east coast as Washington and its regional allies digested the death of the Stalinist state's volatile 69-year-old leader.

"The president reaffirmed the United States' strong commitment to the stability of the Korean peninsula and the security of our close ally, the Republic of Korea," the White House said in a statement.

"The two leaders agreed to stay in close touch as the situation develops and agreed they would direct their national security teams to continue close coordination," the statement added.

In an earlier first reaction to Kim's death from a heart attack, announced

on Pyongyang's official media, a careful White House said it was "closely monitoring" the situation in a nation with a history of belligerence.

It said Washington had been in touch with Japan, as well as South Korea.

A State Department official said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was also briefed on Kim's death.

There was no direct word from Obama, who is locked in a domestic political showdown over taxes with Republicans.

US officials declined to be drawn into discussions of the US diplomatic or military response to Kim's death or its geopolitical implications.

They were aware that Kim had been ill, and that a political transition was under way in Pyongyang.

But privately, they have expressed concern about Kim's chosen successor, his third son Kim Jong-Un, and admit their knowledge of the isolated state's next ruler is limited.

A US lawmaker with a lead role on

Asia policy was less circumspect than Obama administration officials after hearing of Kim's demise, from what the North Korean KCNA agency said was a myocardial infarction and heart attack.

"Kim Jong-Il was the epitome of evil, a dictator of the worst kind who ruled his country with an iron fist and dished out constant pain and misery to his people," said Republican Representative Don Manzullo, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on East Asia.

Former State Department spokesman Philip J. Crowley warned on his Twitter feed meanwhile that uncertain days could lie ahead in northeast Asia as Kim Jong-Un "looks to prove himself".

"If North Korea were a normal country, the death of Kim Jong-Il might open the door to a Pyongyang Spring. But it is not a normal country."

Obama's White House has repeatedly stressed there is no daylight between it and its allies South Korea and Japan on policy towards North Korea.



This undated picture from the homepage of Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) released by Yonhap news agency in Seoul yesterday shows North Korean citizens in an undisclosed location mourning the death of their leader.

N Korea test fires short-range missile

AFP, Seoul

North Korea test-fired a short-range missile off its east coast yesterday, South Korea's Yonhap news agency said.

The agency quoted an unnamed government official as saying the missile launch was unrelated to the announcement that Kim had died Saturday of a heart attack.

"North Korea test-fired a short-range missile this morning... it has been closed monitored by our military authorities," the official was quoted by Yonhap as saying.

Seoul's defence ministry declined to confirm the report.

The missile is believed to have a range of about 120 kilometres, he said, adding the North was apparently trying to improve the weapon.

The communist country has frequently conducted short-range missile tests in recent years.

Kim Jong-Il



Ruled North Korea 1997 - 2011

- Took over leadership from his father Kim Il-Sung
- Historic June 2000 summit with then South Korean president Kim Dae-Jung
- Withdrew from nuclear non-proliferation treaty in 2003
- Conducted nuclear tests October 2006, May 2009

AFP

WORLD LEADERS REACT IN KIM'S DEATH

Spokesman for S Korean President
LEE MYUNG-BAK

President Lee urged the public to go about their usual economic activities without turbulence.

The two leaders (President Lee Myung-bak and President Barack Obama) agreed to closely co-operate and monitor the situation together.

White House spokesman
JAY CARNEY

We are closely monitoring reports that Kim Jong-Il is dead. The President has been notified, and we are in close touch with our allies in South Korea and Japan.

We remain committed to stability on the Korean peninsula, and to the freedom and security of our allies.

British Foreign Secretary
WILLIAM HAGUE

This could be a turning point for North Korea. We hope that their new leadership will recognise that engagement with the international community offers the best prospect of improving the lives of ordinary North Korean people.



Japanese Prime Minister
YOSHIHIKO NODA

I have ordered officials to beef up intelligence-gathering on North Korea, to work closely with the United States, China and South Korea, and to prepare for further unexpected developments. We will gather information to assess how this incident will affect the situation.



French Foreign Minister
ALAIN JUPPE

We are very watchful of the consequences of this succession, hoping that one day the people of North Korea will be able to find freedom. The death of a man is never something to be cheered, but it is the sad suffering of a people that is important.



Australian Foreign Minister
KEVIN RUDD

This time also presents an important opportunity to the new North Korean leadership to engage fully with the international community on how to improve their economy in order to properly feed their people.

SOURCE: BBC

Kim Jong-Un



North Korean designated successor

- Son of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il with third wife

Promotions in September 2010:

- Made four-star general by Kim Jong-Il
- Named one of two vice-chairmen of the Workers' Party of Korea central military commission
- Named member of the party's central committee

Sources: AFP/KCNA via KNS

AFP

NEWS IN brief

Nato defiant on Afghan night raids

AFP, Kabul

Nato said yesterday that US-led forces in Afghanistan will continue night raids, despite renewed objections from Afghan President Hamid Karzai after a pregnant woman was killed during an operation.

Afghan special forces will increasingly take the lead in such operations, spokesman for Nato's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Brigadier General Carsten Jacobson said, without giving a precise timetable.

Bahrain opposition urges talks

AFP, Manama

Bahrain opposition groups have urged the government to embark on "serious" dialogue to end the Gulf kingdom's crisis, condemning a harsh crackdown on sporadic but defiant Shiite protests.

In a statement late Sunday five opposition groups, led by the main Shiite formation, Al-Wefaq, said the regime of the Sunni-led government should launch political reforms to get the small nation out of political deadlock following the harsh clampdown in March on a month-long pro-democracy protest.

39 feared dead in Russian oil rig disaster

AFP, Moscow

The bodies of 14 crew from a sunken oil rig were located yesterday off Russia's Sakhalin island as searches for survivors went into a second day amid fears that 39 missing would not be found alive.

Officials earlier yesterday released conflicting figures of the death toll and the owner of the Kolskaya oil rig even claimed that rescuers had spotted a raft with around 15 possible survivors before backtracking.

15 found alive in Indonesia boat capsized

AFP, Watulimo

Indonesian rescuers found 15 people alive yesterday in the vicinity of a boat capsized, raising hopes of more survivors among 200 missing asylum seekers who were en route to Australia.

Thirteen of the survivors found on a dinghy 100 kilometres from the capsized are receiving medical treatment in a temporary shelter on the outskirts of Jember city in eastern Java and most cannot walk, an AFP correspondent said.

"I got on the boat in Java to go to Australia. After six hours in rough conditions, the boat capsized, and rescuers only found us days later," Pakistani Muhammad Mehdi told AFP at the shelter.

Two Indonesian men were found yesterday afternoon on Sendang Biru beach near eastern Java's Malang city and are suspected to be crew members who abandoned the sinking ship.

"But we cannot confirm that just yet," East Java provincial Disaster Management Agency chief Siswanto told AFP.

The fibreglass vessel had a capacity of 100 but was carrying about 250 migrants -- mostly Afghans and Iranians -- when it sank on Saturday, 40 nautical miles off eastern Java.

Rescuers had held out little hope of finding more survivors in bad weather and high seas.

Rally under watch

FROM PAGE 1

activists clashed with police, vandalised more than a dozen vehicles and set some of those afire.

Arifuzzaman Arif, 24, was killed when a bomb exploded in Motijheel area. Police action on opposition activists in the city sparked protests in some other parts of the country.

Police said they have already accused about 7,000 leaders and activists of BNP and Jamaat in 18 cases filed across the country for going on the rampage.

Arif's father Joynal Abedin also lodged a case accusing some unknown miscreants for his son's death.

Meanwhile, cops arrested six persons on charge of hurling bombs near BNP's central office yesterday afternoon. They also detained at least 67 more BNP and Jamaat activists from across the country for staging demonstrations in Khulna, Patuakhali, Sirajganj, Rajshahi, Faridpur, and Barisal.

Police on Sunday picked up 289 opposition activists from the capital. Of them, 120 were remanded yesterday for six days in connection with several cases.

Fifty-nine BNP-Jamaat leaders were named in the cases, while the rest unnamed.

The accused leaders include Jubo Dal president Moazzem Hossain Alal, general secretary Saiful Alam Nirab, Chhatra Dal president Sultan Salahuddin Tuku, general secretary Amirul Islam

Alim and vice-president Shahidul Islam Babaul, according to court sources.

About 100 leaders and activists yesterday attended BNP's rally -- heavily guarded by the members of law enforcement agencies.

Party leaders Nazrul Islam Khan, Abdul Moyeen Khan, Amanullah Aman, among others, addressed the rally.

A large contingent of police and Rab was deployed in Paltan, Bijoy Nagar and Kakrail areas to avoid any untoward incident.

Around noon, police seized the loudspeakers set in front of BNP central office and took position at the entrance of the office.

Our Rajshahi correspondent reports: police yesterday foiled the city BNP's demonstration programme and arrested eight persons including city unit Jubo Dal convener Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul.

Administrators

FROM PAGE 20

"We hope the ministry will give its formal advice tomorrow [today]," the senior official of the LGD said on condition of anonymity.

The appointments will also be published in the official gazette today.

The LGD and cooperatives ministry on Thursday appointed the district council administrators, all of whom are district-level Awami League leaders.

Civil society members as well as the main opposition BNP described the move as "undemocratic and unconstitutional".

770m Indians

FROM PAGE 20

Food Minister K V Thomas said the bill would be presented in parliament before the current session ends on Thursday.

Critics of the bill say India can ill afford such a costly programme at a time of slowing economic growth, near double-digit inflation and a yawning budget deficit.

There are already concerns that the government will fall short of its target of reducing the fiscal deficit to 4.6 percent of GDP in the current financial year.

"This bill is just another progressive-sounding legislation that fails to address key issues: the crumbling public distribution system and malnutrition among rural and urban poor," said food security analyst Sangita Sharma.

"Priority has been given to quantity and not to quality of food grains that will be handed out to the rural and urban poor," Sharma told AFP.

The food security bill carries enormous political significance for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's coalition government, which was re-elected in 2009 on the back of a strong pro-poor platform.

The subsidies will target 75 per cent of the rural population and up to 50 per cent of the urban population.

It guarantees a monthly supply of between three kilos (seven pounds) and seven kilos of grain per household, depending on their economic situation.

Existing food subsidy programs in India have been marked by rampant corruption, with little of the grain reaching its targeted recipients.

Sun 'stops chickenpox from spreading'

BBC ONLINE

Exposure to sunlight may help impede the spread of chickenpox, claim researchers.

The University of London team found chickenpox less common in regions with high UV levels, reports the journal *Virology*.

Sunlight may inactivate viruses on the skin, making it harder to pass on.

However, other experts say that other factors, including temperature, humidity, and even living conditions are equally likely to play a role.

The varicella-zoster virus is highly contagious, while it can be spread through the coughs and sneezes in the early stages of the infection, the main source is contact with the trademark rash of blisters and spots.

UV light has long been known to inactivate viruses, and Dr Phil Rice, from St George's, University of London, who led the research, believes that this holds the key why chickenpox is less common and less easily passed from person to person in tropical countries.

It could also help explain why chickenpox is more common in the colder seasons in temperate countries such as the UK - as people have less exposure to sunlight, he said.

He examined data from 25 earlier studies on varicella-zoster virus in a variety of countries around the world, and plotted these data against a range of climatic factors.

This showed an obvious link between UV levels and chickenpox prevalence.

Even initially confusing results could be explained - the peak incidence of chickenpox in India and Sri Lanka is during the hottest, driest and sunniest season.

However, Dr Rice found that, due to atmospheric pollution, UV rays were actually much lower during this season compared with the rainier seasons.

He said: "No-one had considered UV as a factor before, but when I looked at the epidemiological studies they showed a good correlation between global latitude and the presence of the virus."

Professor Judy Breuer from University College London said that while UV could well be contributing to the differences in the prevalence of chickenpox between tropical and temperate regions, there were other factors which needed to be considered.

