

## N Korea ready for nuke talks: China

AFP, Beijing

North Korea expressed willingness Wednesday to rejoin long-stalled nuclear talks, according to its ally China, but the United States, Japan and South Korea called for action instead of words.

China, which has faced US pressure to rein in North Korea, quoted the regime's veteran negotiator Kim Kye-Gwan as saying Pyongyang was willing to engage in any form of dialogue to resolve the nuclear issue peacefully.

Kim, during talks in Beijing, said the dialogue could take place through six-party talks, which began in 2003 but have been dormant since 2008, China's foreign ministry said in a statement.

It was the second such statement by North Korea. Choe Ryong-Hae, a close confidant of the North's leader Kim Jong-Un, made similar comments last month during a visit to Beijing in which he met President Xi Jinping.

But the United States, South Korea and Japan -- allies who form one half of the six-way talks along with China, Russia and North Korea itself -- insisted that Pyongyang live up to earlier promises.

"We will judge the DPRK by its actions, not its words," the allies said in a statement after their envoys on North Korea met in Washington, referring to the North by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Tensions over the North's nuclear programme soared in February after it carried out a third underground atomic blast, angering the international community and triggering tightened UN sanctions supported by China.



In this picture taken on Wednesday, residents are seen at their near a dump site in Manila. The Philippines financial capital banned disposable plastic shopping bags and styrofoam food containers yesterday, as part of escalating efforts across the nation's capital to curb rubbish that exacerbates deadly flooding.

PHOTO: AFP

## France tells Google to change privacy policy

AFP, Paris

France yesterday threatened Google with a fine of up to 150,000 euros (\$198,000) if it does not bring its privacy procedures into line with French law on data protection within three months.

In a move that France hopes will be followed by other European states, the national data protection agency Cnil said the US Internet giant had failed to provide it with sufficient assurances about the storing and use of data it obtains from users.

"The information received in respect to this have so far been too imprecise or vague," Cnil President Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin told AFP.

She said that Google must set a clear limit on the length of time it can store the data

obtained from web surfers and seek prior approval from them before installing cookies on their devices.

France's move follows Google's introduction last year of a new privacy policy which enables it to track users activity across its search engine, gmail, the Google+ social networking platform and other services it owns, which include YouTube.

The changes make it easier for Google to collect and process data that could be used by advertisers to target individuals with offers tailored to their specific interest, thereby increasing the company's revenue potential.

The changes have been widely criticised because of the implications for privacy but the pressure on Google to change how it operates has been limited to date.

## UN won't quit Somalia: Ban

AFP, Mogadishu

UN chief Ban Ki-moon expressed outrage at a "despicable" Islamist attack on a UN compound in Somalia which left 16 dead but vowed that the organisation would not end its work in the troubled country.

Al-Qaeda-linked Shebab insurgents killed nine people as they shot and blasted their way into the UN compound in Mogadishu Wednesday, the most serious attack on the United Nations there in recent years.

Three foreigners including two South Africans in the UN compound died, along with a Somali UN worker, two Somali security guards and three civilians in the surrounding streets, officials said. Seven attackers also died in the assault.

Ban telephoned Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud soon after the attack, UN spokesman Martin Nesirky said.

"The secretary general said the United Nations would not be deterred from delivering its mandate," said Nesirky, in a statement released from Beijing where Ban is on an official visit.

The 15-nation Security Council also expressed outrage -- but stressed its resolve "that terrorist acts in Somalia will not lessen the council's resolve to support Somalia's transition to peace and stability".

The insurgents, who boasted about the killings of "infidels", used a pickup truck laden with explosives and suicide attackers to blast their way into the fortified base.

## UNESCO warns over Syrian heritage sites

AFP, Phnom Penh

UNESCO yesterday added six ancient sites in Syria including a fortress of Saladin and a Crusader castle to the endangered World Heritage list, warning that more than two years of civil war had inflicted heavy damage.

"Due to the armed conflict situation in Syria, the conditions are no longer present to ensure the conservation and protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of the six World Heritage properties," UNESCO said.

Syria has six World Heritage Sites: the ancient cities of Damascus, Bosra and Aleppo, the oasis of Palmyra, the castles of Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din -- which counts as one site -- and the ancient villages of northern Syria.

All six were placed on the list of World Heritage in Danger by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization committee at its annual meeting in Phnom Penh.

"The decision is meant to rally support for the safeguarding of the sites," UNESCO spokesman Roni Amelan told AFP.

Experts say fierce fighting and deteriorating security have left the country's extraordinary archaeological heritage susceptible to damage and looting.

UNESCO said its information on the scale of the destruction was "partial" and came from unverified sources including social media and a report from Syrian authorities which it said "does not necessarily reflect the actual situation".

Aleppo's old city, in particular, has "witnessed some of the conflict's most brutal destruction," it said, adding that the old citadel had been "caught in the line of fire".

## Spy drones used in US: FBI

AFP, Washington

Unmanned drones are roaming American skies conducting surveillance on people in the United States, albeit in a "very minimal way," the head of the FBI revealed to Congress on Wednesday.

Federal Bureau of Investigation director Robert Mueller said his agency's use of a small number of aerial drones is relatively new, and that the bureau has only begun to draw up policy and operational guidelines for the devices.

Mueller said the drones conduct surveillance, but that they were "seldom" used.

Other agencies are known to be using the high-technology gadgets, including the Department of Homeland Security, which uses drones to patrol the US border with Mexico.



PHOTO: AFP

Indonesian motorists travel under a blanket of haze in Pekanbaru city, capital of Riau province on Sumatra island yesterday. Indonesia yesterday accused Singapore of acting "like a child" over choking smog from forest fires in Sumatra that has triggered the city-state's worst environmental crisis in more than a decade, as the two nations held talks.

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