



A Yemeni boy stands in the rubble of buildings destroyed in an air-strike by the Saudi-led coalition in the capital Sanaa yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

UN SANCTIONS ON NORTH KOREA US, China agree on draft resolution

AFP, Washington

The United States and China have agreed on a UN resolution on North Korea's nuclear "provocations," the White House announced Wednesday, with diplomats saying it would include fresh sanctions and could go to a Security Council vote soon.

Diplomats at UN headquarters in New York said Washington and Beijing, Pyongyang's main backer, had agreed on a draft resolution that contained "very tough measures."

The United States circulated the draft text to the other three permanent council members -- Britain, France and Russia -- on Wednesday and was set to formally present it to the full 15-member council soon, said the diplomats, who asked not to be named.

Negotiations on the draft resolution began six weeks ago after North Korea carried out its fourth nuclear test on January 6, claiming it had successfully developed a thermo-nuclear device.

During a meeting at the White House Wednesday, US National Security Advisor Susan Rice and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi agreed "on the importance of a strong and united international response to North Korea's provocations, including through a UN Security Council resolution that goes beyond previous resolutions," said a statement from National Security Council spokesman Ned Price.

"They agreed that they will not accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons state," added the statement.

Underscoring the importance that the US placed on the negotiations, the statement said that President Barack Obama dropped in on the meeting.

The announcement came despite substantial and very public disagreement between the US and China on the best way to handle North Korea.

Syria braces for 'crucial day'

Says UN envoy ahead of US-Russia brokered ceasefire

AGENCIES

The UN's Syria envoy said the war-torn country is facing a "crucial day" ahead of a deadline of midnight Friday for a partial truce brokered by Moscow and Washington.

Meanwhile, Russian warplanes bombed Syrian rebel-held areas in northwestern Syria and government forces pounded a suburb of the capital yesterday, ahead of the planned halt to fighting which rebels predicted Damascus and Moscow would ignore.

Damascus has agreed to the deal, as has the main opposition alliance, though it is only ready to commit for two weeks given its deep reservations. But the government and its allies will be permitted to forge on with strikes against jihadist militants of Islamic State and an al-Qaeda-linked group, the Nusra Front. The government also says the agreement could fail if foreign states supply rebels with weapons or insurgents use the truce to rearm.

The complexities of Syria's battle-

fields -- where moderate rebels often fight alongside jihadist groups like Al-Nusra -- have cast serious doubt on whether the ceasefire effort will succeed. "Tomorrow is going to be a very important, I will say a crucial day," UN envoy Staffan de Mistura told reporters

DEVELOPMENTS

Opposition accepts ceasefire but for 'two weeks'

Kurdish rebels say they would respect truce deal

Russia, regime pound rebels across the country

in Geneva.

Mistura said he would announce today a date for a new round of talks between Syria's warring parties. The last talks were called off this month before they got under way, with rebels saying they could not talk while government troops advanced and Russia bombed.

Turkey's position towards Syrian Kurdish forces is another potential

spoiler, and Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu yesterday said that Ankara would not be bound by the ceasefire if its national security is threatened.

Ankara regards the main Kurdish militia in Syria, the People's Protection Units (YPG), as an offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, which has waged a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state. A YPG spokesman yesterday said that Kurdish forces would respect the truce but would fight back if attacked.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has promised to do "whatever is necessary" to ensure the ceasefire is respected, although US President Barack Obama sounded a note of caution.

"If, over the next several weeks we can see some lessening of the violence... then that provides a basis for a longer-term ceasefire... and allows us to move forward to a political transition that ultimately is going to be necessary to bring an end to the civil war," Obama said on Wednesday.

Greece recalls ambassador from Austria in migrant row

Germany parliament toughens asylum rules

AGENCIES

Greece recalled its ambassador from Austria yesterday and warned it would not be treated as "Europe's Lebanon" as the migrant crisis strained relations between EU states to breaking point.

Talks between European Union (EU) interior ministers in Brussels descended into chaos due to the row over Austria's decision to call a western Balkans meeting this week without inviting Greece.

The EU's attempts to forge a unified response to the biggest migration crisis in its history are fraying as individual 28 member states increasingly take matters into their own hands to protect their borders.

The Greek foreign ministry hit out at what it called "19th-century" attitudes and said the envoy's recall was designed to "safeguard friendly relations between the states and peoples of Greece and Austria".

Athens was already seething over a series of border restrictions by Austria, Macedonia and Serbia along the migrant trail to northern Europe that has caused a bottleneck in Greece,

the main entry point to Europe from Turkey. The crisis caused by refugees and migrants from Syria, the Middle East and Africa shows no signs of abating with 100,000 arriving in Europe so far this year on top of one million in 2015.

Germany's parliament yesterday agreed on tougher asylum rules aimed at curbing a record-influx of refugees as senior aides of Chancellor Angela Merkel played down reports that ministry officials were expecting some 3.6 million migrants by 2020.

The Bundestag lower house of parliament passed a bundle of measures such as a two-year ban on family reunions for some asylum seekers that would also affect unaccompanied minors. It also agreed on a new law to facilitate the deportation of foreign nationals who commit crimes, in the wake of assaults on women on New Year's Eve which were widely blamed on migrants.

In a positive development, Nato yesterday managed to overcome sharp differences between long-time rivals Greece and Turkey to finalise an unprecedented naval mission



Egyptian leader 'put on sale' on eBay

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The President of Egypt has been put "on sale" on eBay after vowing that he would sell himself to help the country's economy.

Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the former army head who ousted his predecessor Mohammed Morsi, was widely mocked for his pledge as he laid out development plans on Wednesday.

"If it were possible for me to be sold, I would sell myself," he said in a speech on state television, where he also reportedly asked Egyptians to donate to public funds by text.

An eBay user quickly held the president to his word by putting him up for sale on a joke page.

Bids from more than 100 users quickly rocketed to \$100,300 (£72,000) but the page was taken down later on Wednesday.

"Hey world, we decided to sell the infamous Egyptian Field Marshal and military coup leader Mr Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on eBay to bail out the Egyptian economy so you don't have to," the description put by the seller read.

"The field marshal himself stated that if selling himself will help, he will not hesitate to do it. So, we are doing it for him, for us and for the humanity.

"Please, bid now to help Egypt gain its political and economic independence...you will not regret it!"

BBC's culture of 'fear' helped cloak Savile's sex abuse: probe

AFP, London

An inquiry into sexual abuse at Britain's BBC by late presenter Jimmy Savile yesterday found a culture of "fear" around whistleblowing that helped him hide his crimes for decades and persists to this day.

The report found Savile had abused 72 people -- both male and female and nearly half aged under 16 -- in studios, dressing rooms, lifts and canteens between 1959 and 2006.

His youngest victim was aged just eight.

Savile was one of Britain's top celebrities from the 1960s until his death aged 84 in 2011, famous for his shock of white hair, outlandish clothes and charity fundraising activities.

He used his position as host of some of the BBC's most popular programmes, including music chart show Top Of The Pops, to meet young fans and subsequently abuse them.

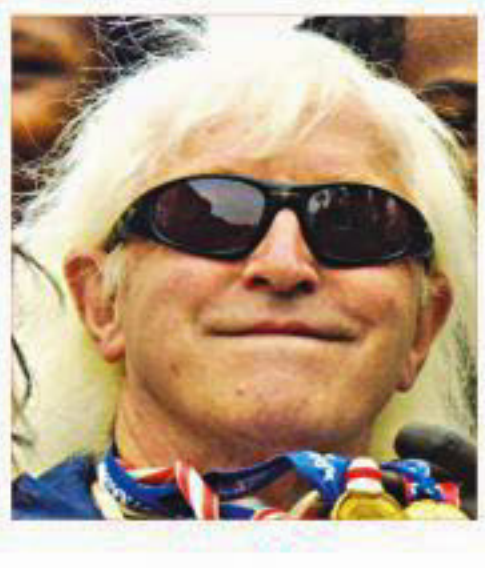
The allegations against him only became public after his death, prompting police to launch Operation Yewtree, an investigation into Savile and a string of other celebrities from a similar era.

This led to the conviction and imprisonment of five celebrities including children's TV presenter Rolf Harris and 1970s glam rocker Gary Glitter.

Thursday's 793-page report is only the latest to highlight the scale of abuse committed by Savile, which is thought to total hundreds of victims.

Janet Smith, the former High Court judge who led the inquiry, said the presenter had been "opportunistic and shameless" and that his "preferred target" was teenage girls.

She said some members of BBC staff were "aware" of Savile's abuse but did not report it due to an "atmosphere of fear" about whistleblowing at the broadcaster which



Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt speaks with the media in the premises of his residence after he was released from a prison, in Mumbai, India, yesterday. Dutt was released from prison after serving almost four years of a five-year sentence for possessing weapons supplied by gangsters behind deadly bomb blasts in Mumbai in 1993.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Australia to boost defence spending

Eyeing China, PM says his country to spend \$21.6b in next 10 years

REUTERS, Sydney

Australia will increase defence spending by nearly A\$30 billion (\$21.6 billion) over the next 10 years, seeking to protect its strategic and trade interests in the Asia-Pacific as the United States and its allies grapple with China's rising power.

Defence spending will rise to A\$195 billion, or 2 percent of GDP, by 2021-2022, as Australia buys new equipment including frigates, armoured personnel carriers, strike fighter jets, drones and submarines, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull told an armed forces audience in Canberra yesterday.

The defence strategic plan was designed in mind of the changing nature of regional security, particularly China's economic and military rise and an increased US focus on the Asia-Pacific, Turnbull said.

The announcement riled Beijing, where the Foreign Ministry expressed "dissatisfaction" with Australia's "negative" remarks on the South China Sea and its military development.

Analysts said the report illustrated the difficult balancing act Australia is engaged in. "It is going to require very deft and delicate diplomacy from Australia to ride two horses simultaneously -- have an ally in Washington and a friend in Beijing," said Professor James Curran, University of Sydney.

TENSION IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

'China needs defences in face of US provocations'

AFP, Beijing

China's defences in the South China Sea are "absolutely necessary", Beijing said yesterday, as it accused the US of militarising the region.

The defence ministry spoke out as tensions rose between the two powers over reports that Beijing has deployed surface-to-air missiles, fighter jets, and radar installations in the contested region.

"The US is truly the one pushing militarisation in the South China Sea," said ministry spokesman Wu Qian at a regular monthly briefing.

"China's building of defence facilities on the South China Sea islands and reefs is absolutely necessary."

Beijing claims almost the whole of the South China Sea -- through which a third of the world's oil passes -- while several other littoral states have competing claims, as does Taiwan.

"It is China's legitimate right to deploy defence facilities within its own territory -- no matter whether that deployment was in

the past or at the present, no matter whether for a temporary or long-term basis, and no matter what kind of equipment has been deployed."

A US official told AFP that Beijing has deployed surface-to-air missiles on Woody Island in the disputed Paracels chain -- apparently HQ-9s, which have a range of about 200 kilometres (125 miles).

Citing two unnamed US officials, American broadcaster Fox News said Tuesday that US intelligence services had spotted Chinese Shenyang J-11 and Xian JH-7 warplanes on the same island.

Reports also surfaced this week of probable radar installations on reefs in the nearby Spratly islands that would "exponentially improve" the country's monitoring capacities.

The United States has in recent months sent warships to sail within 12 nautical miles -- the usual territorial limit around natural land -- of a disputed island and reef transformed into an artificial island in what it says is a defence of the right to free passage.

LIBYA CRISIS UN decries 'war crimes' by all sides

AFP, Geneva

All sides in Libya's chaotic conflict are likely guilty of war crimes, including torturing, raping and executing prisoners, the UN said yesterday, urging the world to do more to bring the perpetrators to justice.

"A multitude of actors, both state and non-state, are accused of very serious violations and abuses that may, in many cases, amount to war crimes," UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a statement.

A report released yesterday documenting abuses committed in Libya between 2014 and 2015 warned the situation had deteriorated dramatically during that period.

IS using brutal metal tool to punish women

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

People in Mosul call it "the Biter" or "Clipper" -- a metal instrument newly introduced by Isis officials to punish women whose clothes they claim do not completely conceal their body. A former school director, who fled from the city earlier this month, describes the tool as causing agonising pain by clipping off pieces of flesh.

Fatima, a 22-year-old housewife who does not want to give her full name, said she had finally escaped from Mosul after several failed attempts because her children were starving and Isis had become more violent and sadistic compared with a year ago, especially towards women.

"The Biter has become a nightmare for us," Fatima said after reaching safety in Mabrouka Camp for displaced people near Ras al-Ayn in Kurdish-controlled north-east Syria. "My sister was punished so harshly last month because she had forgotten her gloves and left them at home."

IS insists that women be fully veiled, wear loose or baggy trousers, socks and gloves, and be accompanied by a male relative whenever they step outside their homes.

Fatima said that a month after the use of this metal tool to punish her sister "the bruises and scars are still visible on her arm." She quoted her sister as saying that "the biting punishment is more painful than labour pains." Other witnesses describe the Biter as operating like an animal trap, or a metal jaw with teeth that cut into the flesh.