

Drop missile defence plan in South Korea

China, Russia jointly urge US

REUTERS, BEIJING

China and Russia yesterday urged the United States not to install a new anti-missile system in South Korea, after Washington said it was in talks with Seoul in the wake of nuclear arms and missile tests by North Korea.

Speaking at joint press briefing with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the United States should respect "legitimate concerns" of China and Russia over the missile system.

"This move goes beyond the defensive needs of the relevant countries. If it is deployed it will directly impact China's and Russia's respective strategic security," Wang said.

"Not only does it threaten the resolution of the peninsula nuclear issue, it quite possibly could pour oil on the fire of an already tense situation, and even destroy strategic equilibrium on the peninsula."

North Korea's actions should not be used as an excuse to make moves that would escalate tensions, especially the US deployment of an anti-missile system, Lavrov said, according to an interpretation in Chinese.

The United States and South Korea have begun talks on possible deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system after North Korea tested its fourth nuclear bomb on Jan 6 and conducted missile tests.

The nuclear test and missile launches are in violation of UN resolutions against North Korea backed by Russia and China. US and South Korean officials have expressed concern that the North could attempt a fifth nuclear test in a show of strength ahead of its Workers' Party congress, which begins on May 6.



A Syrian family runs for cover amid the rubble of destroyed buildings following a reported air strike on the rebel-held neighbourhood of Al-Qatarji in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, yesterday. Story on page 16.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWSIN brief

11 dead in chopper crash off Norway

AFP, Oslo

At least 11 people died yesterday when a helicopter transporting 13 people from a North Sea oil platform crashed off the coast of western Norway, rescue services said. "Eleven people found, none alive. Search continuing for the two others," the Sola rescue centre tweeted around three hours after the crash. The chances of finding the two alive were seen as slim.

16 punished over Afghan hospital bombing

REUTERS, Washington

The US military yesterday announced that it has taken disciplinary action against 16 service members over a deadly Oct 3 air strike in Afghanistan that destroyed a hospital run by the international medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres. The disclosure of the nonjudicial punishments came during the release of the findings of a US military investigation into the incident.

Iranians vote in run-off elections

AFP, Teheran

Voting was extended yesterday in second round elections for almost a quarter of the seats in Iran's parliament, a crucial showdown between reformists and conservatives seeking to influence the country's future. The polls will decide who has the most power when lawmakers are sworn in next month, opening or potentially closing a path to social and political change in the Islamic republic.

US man gets 10 years for spying in N Korea

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday sentenced a detained Korean-American, Kim Dong-Chul, to 10 years hard labour on charges of subversion and espionage, China's official Xinhua news agency said. The announcement comes at a time of elevated military tensions on the Korean peninsula following several missile tests by North Korea.

Kenya calls for end to ivory trade

Set to torch millions of dollars worth of ivory, rhino horns

AGENCIES

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta yesterday demanded a total ban on trade in ivory to end trafficking and prevent the extinction of elephants in the wild.

"To lose our elephants would be to lose a key part of the heritage that we hold in trust. Quite simply, we will not allow it," Kenyatta said in the keynote speech at a meeting which groups African heads of state and conservationists to boost awareness of the threat of poaching.

"We will not be the Africans who stood by as we lost our elephants."

Africa is home to between 450,000 to 500,000 elephants, but more than 30,000 are killed every year on the continent to satisfy demand for ivory in Asia, where raw tusks sell for around \$1,000 (800 euros) a kilo (2.2 pounds).

He is hosting a summit of African leaders, business people and scientists in Nanyuki, central Kenya, to discuss how to save elephants from extinction.

Experts warn Africa's elephants could be extinct within decades.

After the Giants Club summit ends today, Kenyatta will set fire to more than 100 tonnes of ivory.

"It will be a pleasure to burn it and do my part to destroy any possibility that poachers and their accomplices might benefit from the slaughter of Kenya's elephants," he said in a

statement published on Kenya's Daily Nation.

"Ivory means death; death for our elephants, our God-given heritage, and our tourism sector," he wrote.

The bonfire will be the largest-ever torching of ivory, involving 105 tonnes from thousands of dead elephants, dwarfing by seven times any stockpile burned before. Another 1.35 tonnes of rhino horn will also be burned.

It is a grand statement: on the black market, that quantity of ivory could sell for over \$100 million (88 million euros), and the rhino horn could raise as much as \$80 million (70 million euros).

Rhino horn can fetch as much as \$60,000 per kilo, more than gold or cocaine.

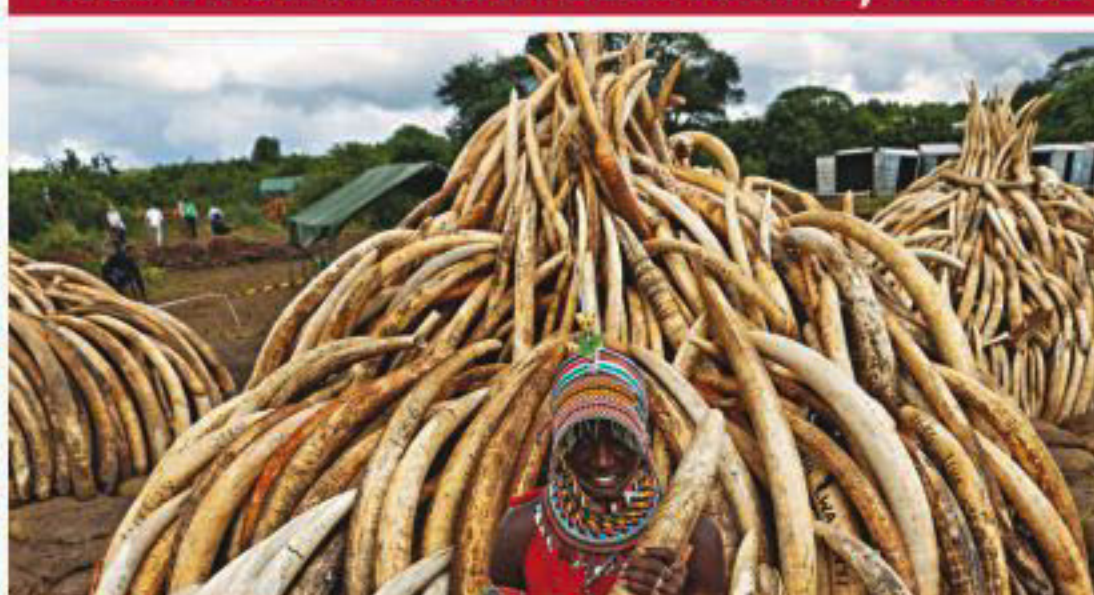
The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) banned the ivory trade in 1989.

China, which has tightened its laws on ivory imports, allows the resale of ivory bought before the 1989 ban, but activists say the trade in legal ivory acts as a cover for illegal imports and call for a complete ban on sales.

The patron of the summit, UK-based newspaper proprietor Evgeny Lebedev, told BBC News it was aimed at raising funds for conservation and coming up with strategies to tackle conflicts between the animals and people.

"Very possibly by 2025, these magnificent creatures will be completely extinct," he said.

HOPE FOR AFRICAN ELEPHANTS, RHINOS



28 tigers killed in 2016 in India: report

AFP, New Delhi

More tigers have been killed in India already this year than in the whole of 2015, a census showed yesterday, raising doubts about the country's anti-poaching efforts.

The Wildlife Protection Society of India, a conservation charity, said 28 of the endangered beasts had been poached by April 26, three more than last year.

Tiger meat and bones are used in traditional Chinese medicine and fetch high prices.

India is home to more than half of the world's tiger population with 2,226 in its reserves according to the last count in 2014.

The figures come after a report by the WWF and the Global Tiger Forum said the number of wild tigers in the world had increased for the first time in more than a century to an estimated 3,890.

Zuma should face 783 graft charges

Rules South Africa court

AFP, Pretoria

South African President Jacob Zuma should face 783 corruption charges that were dropped in 2009, a judge said yesterday, piling further pressure on the embattled leader.

The charges, relating to a multi-billion dollar arms deal, were dropped by the chief state prosecutor in a move that cleared the way for Zuma to be elected president.

"The decision... to discontinue the charges against Mr Zuma is irrational and should be reviewed," Pretoria High Court judge Aubrey Ledwaba said. "Mr Zuma should face the charges as applied."

The prosecutor had justified dropping the charges by saying that tapped phone calls between senior officials in then-president Thabo Mbeki's administration showed political interference in the case.

The recordings, which became known as the "spy tapes", were kept secret but finally released in 2014 to the main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), after a five-year legal battle. It called for the National Prosecuting Authority to immediately revive the 783 charges of corruption dating back to 1999. But the legal wrangling is set to continue, with the ruling likely to go to appeal.

Last month Zuma survived an impeachment bid in parliament after South Africa's top court found that he violated the constitution over the use of public funds to upgrade his private residence, but the ruling African National Congress (ANC) used its majority to easily defeat the motion.



Demonstrators protest in the street outside Republican US presidential candidate Donald Trump's campaign rally in Costa Mesa, California on Thursday. Protests at the California rally reportedly turned violent, with 20 people arrested after a police car window was smashed and rocks were thrown.

PHOTO: AFP

Not mission impossible now

Experts say Trump is on the way to be the GOP nominee

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump's path to victory in the Republican presidential nomination race, dismissed as inconceivable by many in the run up to the primaries, is actually appearing more credible, political experts said Thursday.

Can he secure the 1,237 delegates needed to prevail and avoid a chaotic contested convention?

It is no longer a mission impossible, but he will need to thread the needle if he is to be the Republican who challenges the likely Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in November.

Winner-take-all Indiana, which votes next on May 3, will be key. And California, the largest state in the union, which votes June 7 on the last day of Republican primaries, is absolutely crucial.

"If we win Indiana, it's over," a confident Trump, 69, told a rally in Evansville Thursday.

After the celebrity billionaire crushed his opposition by sweeping all five states that held primaries Tuesday, the nomination was increasingly being seen as Trump's to lose.

The math may be formidable, but it is doable. Trump currently stands at 991 delegates, 80 percent of what he needs.

Ten of the 50 states have yet to vote, including Indiana and California.

Of the remaining 502 delegates up for grabs, Trump needs 49 percent. Essentially, if he maintains the same level of voter support in the remaining contests he has had so far, victory is assured.

"I think he can likely get to 1,237," Christine Barbour of Indiana University at Bloomington said of Trump, adding "I'd say they (Cruz and Kasich) are in for the duration and we won't know anything until California."

A New York Times projection says Trump will probably secure as many as 1,289 delegates, including 154 of California's huge trove of 172 delegates.

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2016



'I am truly sorry'

Ex-Auschwitz guard breaks silence for the first time

AFP, Berlin

A 94-year-old former SS guard on trial for complicity in 170,000 murders at Auschwitz yesterday broke his silence for the first time since the war, telling victims: "I am truly sorry."

"I have been silent all my life," Reinhold Hanning told a court in the western town of Detmold, more than 70 years after the end of World War II.

"I want to tell you that I deeply regret having listened to a criminal organisation that is responsible for the deaths of many innocent people, for the destruction of countless families, for the misery, distress and suffering on the part of victims and their relatives," according to remarks carried by national news agency DPA.

"I am ashamed that I let this injustice happen and have done nothing to prevent it. I apologise formally for my behaviour. I am truly sorry," said the white-haired, bespectacled widower, who owned a dairy store after the war.

Hanning stands accused of having watched over the selection of which prisoners were fit for labour, and which should be sent to gas chambers. He is also deemed to have been aware of the regular mass shooting of inmates at the camp, as well as the systematic starvation of prisoners.

US 'drops planned Pak fighter jet subsidy'

BBC ONLINE

The US will no longer subsidise the sale of eight F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan, a senior state department official has told the BBC.

The decision means that Pakistan will have to pay more than \$700m (£480m) - two-and-a-half times the original cost - if it wishes to buy the aircraft. It comes after Congress refused to approve funding for the deal.

Some US lawmakers had accused Pakistan of not doing enough to fight militants. India also objected to the sale. However, Pakistan has argued that the jets are needed for anti-terror operations, and so the US should help with funding the purchase.

People close to the deal say it is highly unlikely that Pakistan will be willing to pay the full cost of the fighter jets, so it seems to be off for all practical purposes.

A senior US state department official, who asked to remain anonymous as he was not authorised to speak on the matter, says the Obama administration is still very much in favour of selling the fighter jets to Pakistan as it believes it is in the national interest of the United States.

However, Pakistan would have to bear the full cost of the F-16 fighter jets if it wished to proceed, he said. The original arrangement had been that Pakistan would pay close to \$270m, with the US foreign military financing budget paying for the rest.



South Sudan forms unity govt

President Salva Kiir shares power with ex-rebels in step towards peace

AFP, Juba

South Sudan's transitional unity government was sworn into office yesterday, with President Salva Kiir sharing power with ex-rebels in a key step in a long-delayed peace process.

Under terms of the August 2015 peace deal, the 30 ministerial posts are split between Kiir, former rebel chief turned first vice president Riek Machar, opposition and other parties.

"We are going to work together," Kiir said after the ministers were sworn into office, and he shook hands with Machar. "We must learn how to forgive and we must learn how to apologise."

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the naming of the ministers was an "important milestone" in the peace process, urging the parties "to cease immediately all hostilities". The transitional government is to remain in place until October 2018.

Machar returned to the capital Juba on Tuesday and was immediately sworn into the post of vice president -- a position he was sacked from five months before war broke out. Fighting erupted in December 2013 when Kiir accused Machar of plotting a coup, claims he always denied.



The conflict, which has torn open ethnic divisions, has been characterised by horrific rights abuses, including gang rapes, the wholesale burning of villages and cannibalism.

Ensuring they work together in a unity government, and that the thousands of rival armed forces now in separate camps inside the capital keep their guns quiet, will be a major

challenge. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and more than two million driven from their homes in the conflict, which has reignited ethnic divisions and been characterised by gross human rights abuses.