



(From left, clockwise) Demonstrators dressed as North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un (R) and US President Donald Trump (L) embrace during a peace rally in Seoul, yesterday. Thousands of South Koreans called for peace in a protest against an upcoming visit by the US president; Trump gestures to Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as they play golf at the Kasumigaseki Country Club in Kawagoe, north of Tokyo, Japan; and the leaders pose after they signed hats reading 'Donald and Shinzo, Make Alliance Even Greater' after the game.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

SAUDI ARABIA UNDER KING SALMAN

King Salman has overseen some important changes in Saudi Arabia since he inherited the throne from his elderly half-brother King Abdullah nearly three years ago. Following the arrest of dozens of figures including princes, ministers and a top business tycoon, here is a look back at some developments during his reign.

CHANGES AT THE TOP

On January 23, 2015, King Salman takes the throne at the age of 79 after the death of Abdullah, aged about 90. He makes key changes in the order of succession, choosing his nephew Mohammed bin Nayef as deputy crown prince and promoting his son Prince Mohammed bin Salman to defence minister. In June of this year, he raises his son, aged 31, to the position of crown prince.

WAR IN YEMEN

In March 2015, Saudi-led military coalition launches an air campaign to prop up Yemen's President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi against Shia Huthi rebels and their allies. Coalition members deploy troops in Yemen. Rights groups have harshly criticised the coalition for civilian casualties in its air strikes.

RUPTURE WITH TEHRAN

In January 2016, Saudi Arabia executes 47 people convicted of "terrorism", mostly Sunnis linked to Al-Qaeda, but also including prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr. His execution stirs a diplomatic crisis with regional rival Iran. Riyadh breaks off diplomatic relations with Tehran after its embassy and a consulate are attacked in the wake of Nimr's execution.

ECONOMIC REFORM

In April 2016, the Saudi government approves a major reform plan dubbed "Vision 2030", aimed at diversifying the oil-dependent economy. The plan involves privatising part of oil giant Aramco and creating a \$2 trillion sovereign wealth fund.

DEALS WITH WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump visits Saudi Arabia in May 2017 on his first foreign trip since taking office. Washington and Riyadh announce contracts worth more than \$380 billion, including a \$110 billion arms deal aimed at countering perceived threats from Iran and radical Islamists.



QATAR CRISIS

In June 2017, Saudi Arabia and several Gulf allies and Egypt sever diplomatic ties with Qatar, accusing it of supporting "terrorists" and being too close to Iran. They also take economic measures against Doha, including closing air and maritime links and sealing the country's only land border. Qatar rejects the accusations.

MORE RIGHTS FOR WOMEN

In December 2015, Saudi Arabia opens up elections to women as both candidates and voters for the first time. In September this year, a royal decree announces the end of a longstanding ban on women driving as of June 2018. The decree comes days after women are allowed into a sports stadium for the first time in the country's history.

CRACKDOWN

In September, authorities arrest at least 20 people, including prominent cleric Salman al-Awdah and Awad al-Qarni, in an apparent crackdown on dissent. Prominent Saudi journalist and writer Jamal Khashoggi says he has been banned from writing in Saudi-owned newspaper Al-Hayat, apparently for defending the Muslim Brotherhood in tweets.

INVESTMENT, MODERATION

In late October at an investment conference dubbed "Davos in the Desert", Riyadh unveils plans for hi-tech "giga projects" and seeks to promote the kingdom as a welcoming business destination. Authorities say they will start issuing tourist visas "soon". And in keeping with his public image as a bold reformer, Prince Mohammed pledges "a country of moderate Islam", breaking with the kingdom's reputation for exporting creed espoused by jihadists worldwide. SOURCE: AFP

Trump enters diplomatic minefield

ANN, AFP

North Korea and trade talks will top US President Donald Trump's agenda on his marathon tour of the region, as Air Force One whisks him between five countries in 12 days.

A crammed itinerary will see the president attend summits with communist bosses, a reception at Japan's imperial court and -- of course -- play nine holes of golf.

But his personal rapport with a rotating cast of the region's leaders is likely to determine the success or failure of his trip, with global repercussions.

Trump enjoys a friendly relationship with Japan's Shinzo Abe, and a frosty start to dealings with Xi Jinping has blossomed into a near-bromance with the Chinese leader praised as "powerful" and "pretty terrific."

But an uncertain welcome lies in store in South Korea -- which Trump has accused of appeasing a certain "Rocket Man" to the North -- and the Philippines, where any mention of human rights is liable to send President Rodrigo Duterte further into the arms of Beijing.

Trump ramped up his tough rhetoric against North Korea when he arrived in Japan yesterday, saying the United States and its allies are prepared to defend freedom and "no dictator" should underestimate US resolve.

In Seoul, Trump is scheduled to address

'NO GOOD MILITARY OPTIONS'

The only certain way to locate and secure all North Korea's nuclear weapons sites would be via a US ground invasion, the Washington Post reported Saturday, citing a letter from Pentagon officials sent to US lawmakers.

It said the letter, reportedly written by the vice director of the Pentagon's Joint Staff, noted that such a conflict could prompt Pyongyang to deploy biological and chemical weapons.

The US Defense Department sent the letter in response to a request from two members of Congress for details regarding "expected casualty assessments in a conflict with North Korea" for US and allied forces in Japan, South Korea and Guam as well as civilians, the Post said.

Tensions have soared over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs in recent months, goaded by Trump and Pyongyang leader Kim Jong-un's fiery exchanges of insults and warnings of conflict.

The Post reported that a statement from 16 lawmakers -- all but one of them Democrats -- obtained along with the Pentagon letter said the "assessment underscores what we've known all along: There are no good military options for North Korea." SOURCE: AFP

South Korea's parliament, raising concerns he could go off script and send tensions with the nuclear-armed North spiralling with an impromptu remark.

Before his tour, Trump's national security adviser, Lt Gen HR McMaster, indicated that Trump plans to discuss with Japanese and South Korean leaders how to respond to the North Korea issue, including a possible scenario in which the nuclear crisis escalates into a military conflict.

McMaster spoke with Yomiuri Shimbun

reporters and other journalists from countries Trump will visit on his first Asia tour.

McMaster however emphasised that Trump "will consult with leaders across the region to understand better what more we can do to resolve this crisis short of war, which obviously everyone wants to avoid." He added that "all of us are running out of time."

US is also considering relisting North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism, he said in an interview to The Korea Herald.

China is preparing to greet Donald Trump

TRUMP'S 12-DAY ASIA TOUR

- Japan November 5-7
- South Korea November 7-8
- China November 8-10
- Vietnam November 10-12
- Philippines November 12-13

Deposed Catalonia leader surrenders to Belgian cops

Secessionists getting most seats in election: polls

REUTERS, Brussels

Sacked Catalonia leader Carles Puigdemont and four associates turned himself in to Belgian police yesterday, the Brussels prosecutor's office said, following Spain's issuing of an arrest warrant.

He is wanted by Madrid for actions related to his push for the region's secession from Spain.

Puigdemont's move comes as two polls suggested pro-Catalonia independence parties will together take the most seats in December's regional election although they may fall just short of a majority needed to revive the secession campaign.

Parties supporting Catalonia remaining part of Spain would divide seats but garner around 54 percent of the vote, the polls suggested.

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy called the Dec 21 election after firing the

previous government and imposing direct rule over the autonomous region following a unilateral declaration of independence.

According to a GAD3 survey of 1,233 people conducted between Oct 30 and Nov 3 and published in La Vanguardia newspaper, pro-independence parties ERC, PDECat and CLUP would take between 66 and 69 seats in the 135-seat parliament.

A second poll taken over the same period for the conservative newspaper La Razon echoed the GAD3 survey, showing pro-independence parties would capture the most votes though still fall just shy of a parliamentary majority with 65 seats.

Other seats would be generally divided between parties supporting the region continuing to be part of Spain, but they parties are not allied.

Voter participation, however, will rise to a record of 83 percent, the poll showed.



Residents and tourists are transported by boats through floodwaters in the tourist town of Hoi An yesterday, one day after Typhoon Damrey made landfall in central Vietnam. At least 27 people have died and nearly two dozen are missing after the typhoon barreled into Vietnam, authorities said, ripping off roofs and submerging highways days before the country welcomes world leaders to the APEC summit. PHOTO: AFP

IS claims attack on Yemen govt bastion

15 people killed; 18 injured

AFP, Aden

The Islamic State group claimed a major attack on Yemen's government bastion of Aden yesterday which killed at least 15 people, wounded 18 others and sparked a hostage crisis.

IS and its extremist rival al-Qaeda have taken advantage of the war between Yemen's Saudi-backed government and the country's Shia Huthi rebels, who are allied with Iran, to bolster their presence across much of the south.

While Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has for years been the stronger presence in southern Yemen, IS has recently come forward to claim attacks on both the army and the country's Shias, whom it considers heretics.

The Islamic State group claimed yesterday's attack on the criminal investigations unit in an online statement released by the IS Aden and Abyan Wilayah, which said clashes were "still ongoing".

Security officials in the southern province of Aden, where the Yemeni government is based, said an explosives-rigged car blew up outside the investigations unit, killing six officers on the spot along with the driver.

Around 30 gunmen then stormed the unit and freed dozens of detainees from their holding cells, some of whom took up arms to fight alongside the militants, according to a high-ranking official.

Heartache for sale!

Vietnam market helps ex-lovers to share pain

AFP, Hanoi

At Vietnam's Old Flames market, curious customers peruse love letters and pick through perfumes, candles and clothes -- relics from failed relationships put on sale by forlorn lovers.

Entrepreneurial exes meet once a month, bringing their baggage -- emotional and literal -- to a converted cottage on a leafy Hanoi street to find a new home for items they can no longer bear to look at.

"(After a breakup) I'm very sad, I can't drink or eat... but after a while I pick myself up. The past is in the past," said Phuc Thuy, 29, who was selling clothes, purses and even a tube of toothpaste she acquired during a former romance.

The market has steadily grown since it opened in February, especially among Vietnam's social-media obsessed youth, unabashed about sharing intimate details of

their everyday lives.

"Young people are more open-minded and they want to share deeply and widely to overcome pain, without suffering alone," said founder Dinh Thang, as a visitor stumbled love songs on a guitar nearby.

He started the market after a few bitter breakups left him with unwanted paraphernalia from a now extinguished passion.

For those who haven't quite reached Thang's stage of emotional post-breakup enlightenment, he's set up a message board to pen notes to exes.

"To all my ex-lovers, I'm sorry because I feel like we never really knew each other," read one remorse-tinged message. Another was more succinct: "I'M FINE!!!"

Thang hopes the market will make the topic of breakups less taboo in Vietnam, a conservative communist nation of 93 million.



IS attack killed 75 displaced Syrians

AFP, Beirut

A car bombing by the Islamic State group killed at least 75 displaced people in eastern Syria, a monitor said yesterday, as the cornered extremists appeared to target fleeing civilians.

Saturday's attack in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor killed "at least 75 displaced civilians including children" and wounded 140, said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The scale of the attack showed that despite losing vast swathes of territory it held in Iraq and Syria, the group is still capable of mounting deadly attacks.

The displaced had fled battles in the province, where Syrian forces and the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), are fighting the jihadist group in separate offensives.

Fighting across Deir Ezzor province has sent thousands of civilians fleeing for their lives, some straight into the desert. Syrian and allied forces converged Saturday on hold-out IS fighters in the border town of Albu Kamal, the jihadists' very last urban bastion after Russian-backed regime forces seized Deir Ezzor city on Friday.

The jihadists, who in 2014 declared a "caliphate" spanning territory in Iraq and Syria roughly the size of Britain, have also lost most of the territory they once controlled in neighbouring Iraq, including second city Mosul.

On Friday, Iraqi forces retook the border town of Al-Qaim, also on the Euphrates river.

NEWS IN brief

US senator attacked, injured by neighbour

AFP, Washington

Republican Senator Rand Paul suffered minor injuries after being attacked at his home in Kentucky by a neighbor who tackled him from behind, according to a news report Saturday. State troopers arrived at Paul's home on Friday afternoon and arrested 59-year-old Rene Boucher.

Russian cops detain 260 at anti-Putin protest

AFP, Moscow

Russian police said they detained more than 260 activists in central Moscow yesterday for holding an unauthorised protest against President Vladimir Putin. The demonstration took place after opposition politician Vyacheslav Maltsev appealed on his website to hold protests across the country.

Suspected IS operative arrested in Mumbai

TNN, New Delhi

The Uttar Pradesh Anti Terrorist Squad (ATS) has arrested suspected IS terrorist Abu Zaid from the Mumbai Airport, police official said yesterday. Zaid was arrested on Saturday on his arrival from Saudi Arabia. He said Zaid formed a social media group to allegedly radicalise youths.

Five dead as floods hit Malaysia's Penang

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Five people have been killed and over 3,000 evacuated after a storm triggered serious flooding yesterday in Malaysia's Penang. The army was deployed to provide help after a torrential downpour sparked the worst inundations in the northern state.