

N Korea brings world closer to war

Says US at UNSC, threatens to 'utterly destroy' regime, calls for isolation

AFP, United Nations

The United States warned North Korea's leadership will be "utterly destroyed" if war breaks out but its call for nations to cut ties with Pyongyang was rejected by Moscow while Beijing sidestepped talk of an oil embargo.

Washington urged tough action at an emergency meeting of the Security Council held Wednesday to respond to North Korea's launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

"The dictator of North Korea made a choice yesterday that brings the world closer to war, not farther from it," US Ambassador Nikki Haley told the council.

"If war comes, make no mistake: The North Korean regime will be utterly destroyed."

But her call for nations to "cut off all ties with North Korea" was rejected by Moscow, with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov saying Russia saw the proposal "negatively".

"We have repeatedly stated that the pressure of sanctions has been exhausted," Lavrov told reporters in Minsk yesterday.

US President Donald Trump derided Kim Jong-Un as a "sick puppy" and threatened "major" new sanctions after Pyongyang tested its third ICBM -- which it claimed was capable of striking anywhere in the United States.

The test ended a two-month lull in missile tests that had raised hopes for the open-

PYONGYANG'S MOST POWERFUL ICBM TEST



North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un is seen as the newly developed intercontinental ballistic rocket Hwasong-15's test was successfully launched, in this undated photo released by North Korea in Pyongyang, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

ing of diplomatic talks. The North said the weapon could land anywhere in the continental United States, and France said Europe was also in striking distance.

Kim said the test of the Hwasong-15 weapons system had helped his country achieve the goal of becoming a full nuclear power, sparking global condemnation.

Haley said Trump had called Chinese President Xi Jinping and urged him to "cut off the oil from North Korea", a move that would deal a crippling blow to North Korea's economy.

But China's foreign ministry sidestepped questions about the US call for an oil embargo, with spokesman Geng Shuang telling reporters that Beijing upholds UN

resolutions and backs the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

Beijing has backed a slew of sanctions that include bans on imports of North Korean coal, iron ore and seafood. The UN also barred the hiring of North Korean guest workers and capped exports of refined petroleum products.

But China has refused to turn off its pipeline shipping crude to North Korea.

Beijing fears that taking tougher actions could cause the regime to collapse, triggering a refugee crisis across its border with the North and eliminating a strategic buffer separating China from the US military in South Korea.

China has proposed that the North stop missile and nuclear tests in exchange for a freeze of US military exercises -- a suggestion Washington has repeatedly rejected.

There are also concerns in Seoul -- which is within range of Pyongyang's artillery -- that Trump might be considering military action against the North that could trigger a full-scale war.



EFFORTS TO AVERT FRESH POLLS IN GERMANY

Merkel in key talks with SPD's Schulz

AFP, Berlin

Chancellor Angela Merkel was scheduled to hold first talks with Social Democrat chief Martin Schulz yesterday hoping to end Germany's political stalemate, but the atmosphere is poisoned by disobedience within her ranks.

Held at the invitation of President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the talks at 8:00pm (1900 GMT) will explore if both sides are ready to launch negotiations on forming Germany's next government.

After September's elections left Merkel without a majority, the SPD had stubbornly ruled out renewing an alliance with her as it suffered a humiliating loss at the polls.

But as Merkel's bid at forming a coalition with the ecologist Greens and pro-business FDP fell apart, the SPD came under pressure to relent and avert snap elections.

Spiegel weekly noted that the meeting, which also ropes in Horst Seehofer -- the leader of Merkel's Bavarian allies -- was crucial for the veteran leader.

But the talks are clouded by a political storm sparked this week by a member of her conservatives, Agriculture Minister Christian Schmidt, who flouted the government's line by voting in favour of approving a disputed weedkiller during an EU meeting.

The action, which Schmidt said he took unilaterally, was condemned as a "breach of trust" by the SPD, which has been junior coalition partner in Merkel's cabinet since 2013.

Russia rejects US call to cut ties

China reluctant to cut off oil to North Korea

Europe in reach of N Korea missiles: France



A handout picture provided by the Saudi Royal Palace on Wednesday, shows Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz (R) meeting with British Prime Minister Theresa May in Riyadh. PHOTO: AFP

Avert Yemen 'catastrophe'

British PM urges Saudi Arabia to ease blockade

AFP, Riyadh

British Prime Minister Theresa May has implored Saudi leaders to ease a blockade on war-torn Yemen to "avert a humanitarian catastrophe", her office said yesterday, echoing urgent appeals from the United Nations.

A Saudi-led coalition battling Iran-backed Huthi rebels has only partially lifted a crippling aid blockade on Yemen, which was imposed earlier this month in response to a missile fired by the Huthis that was intercepted near Riyadh airport.

May met both Saudi King Salman and powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman late on Wednesday on the second leg of her Middle East tour, with the worsening crisis in Yemen topping her agenda.

"The prime minister made clear that the flow of commercial supplies on which the

country (Yemen) depends must be resumed if we are to avert a humanitarian catastrophe," May's office said.

Saudi Arabia is Britain's largest trading partner in the Middle East, and London has signed off on more than £3.3 billion (\$4.4 billion/3.7 billion euros) worth of arms sales to Riyadh since March 2015.

That was the month that Riyadh launched its intervention against the Yemeni rebels who still control the capital Sanaa and much of the north of the country.

The war has since killed around 8,600 people, while a further 2,000 have died of cholera.

UN officials say Yemen could face the world's largest famine in decades unless the crippling blockade is lifted.

The Saudi-led coalition, which began its military intervention in Yemen in 2015, has accused Iran of supplying ballistic missiles

CROAT WAR CRIMINAL'S COURTROOM SUICIDE

UN tribunal seeks answers

REUTERS, The Hague

A UN tribunal that was stunned by the courtroom suicide of a Bosnian Croat war criminal yesterday said it was working with Dutch investigators to piece together how he smuggled a fatal dose of poison into the high-security building.

Slobodan Praljak, 72, died on Wednesday at a hospital in The Hague within hours of drinking a vial of liquid during the reading of his appeals judgment at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Preliminary testing confirmed that the cause of death was "drinking a liquid that can kill," spokesman Vincent Veenman of the public prosecutors office in The Hague said.

"We cannot yet say what that substance was. Further testing is needed," he said.

A 5-member ICTY appeals bench upheld Praljak's conviction on charges of crimes against humanity over persecution, murders and expulsions of Bosnian Muslims from

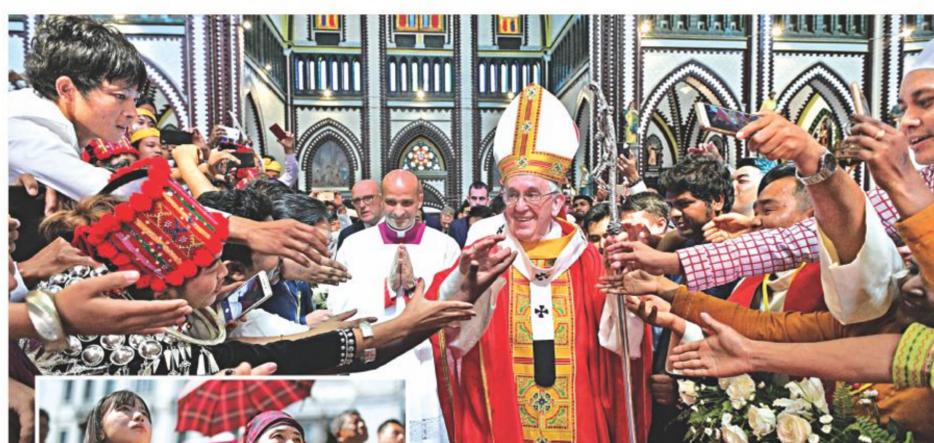
territory captured by nationalist Bosnian Croats and the brutal imprisonment of wartime detainees. It also upheld his 20-year prison sentence.

Dutch prosecutors said the inquiry was focused on assisted suicide and violation of the Medicines Act. It will also try to determine how the poison was smuggled into the court.

Stricter procedures at the UN detention unit were adopted following the 2006 death of suspect Slobodan Milosevic, the former Serbian and Yugoslav president. Milosevic, who died of a heart attack before his verdict on genocide and war crimes charges, had banned medication in his cell which may have worsened an existing heart condition.

The dramatic events unfolded in the last minutes of the court's final ruling before it closes next month after 24 years.

Previously, two defendants awaiting their ICTY trial, both Serbs, committed suicide by hanging themselves in their UN cells, according to court documents.



This picture taken and released yesterday by the Vatican press office shows Pope Francis at a mass at St Mary's Cathedral in Yangon. Inset, Two women kneel in prayer outside St Mary's Cathedral. PHOTO: REUTERS



HARASSMENT CLAIMS

Matt Lauer 'truly sorry'

REUTERS, New York

"Today" show host Matt Lauer said "truly sorry" for what he called his "troubling flaws" in a statement read out on the popular NBC morning show yesterday, a day after the network fired him for inappropriate sexual behavior.

As his 20 years as a fixture of US morning television came to an abrupt end, the married 59-year-old found himself joining the fast-growing ranks of powerful men in US entertainment, politics and media to be felled in recent months by accusations of sexual misconduct.

Lauer said in his statement that some of the accusations against him were "untrue or mischaracterised" without explaining further but said that "there is enough truth in these stories to make me feel embarrassed and ashamed."

He was fired after a female colleague complained to NBC officials on Monday evening about a pattern of inappropriate sexual behavior that began while they were on assignment at the 2014 Sochi winter Olympics in Russia, according to NBC statements.

Argentine court sentences 48 in 'Dirty War' trial

AFP, Buenos Aires

An Argentine court sentenced 48 former military personnel to prison on Wednesday for involvement in so-called "death flights" and other crimes committed at a notorious torture center when a junta ruled the country.

The trial is part of an effort to probe torture and crimes against humanity committed at the ESMA Naval Mechanics School. Only a fraction of an estimated 5,000 opponents of the regime, which ruled from 1976-1983, survived being sent there.

Twenty-nine people were handed life sentences, 19 received sentences of between eight and 25 years, and six were acquitted.

Among those who received life were Mario Daniel Arru and Alejandro Domingo D'Agostino, two ex-pilots convicted of involvement in "death flights" in which people were killed by being thrown out of airplanes into the Rio de la Plata or the sea.

CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE ANDES

Peru farmer brings German energy giant in the dock

AFP, Berlin

A German court yesterday ruled that it would hear a Peruvian farmer's case against energy giant RWE over climate change damage in the Andes, a decision labelled by campaigners as a "historic breakthrough".

Farmer Saul Luciano Lliuya's case against RWE was "well founded," the court in the northwestern city of Hamm said in a statement.

Lliuya argues that RWE, as one of the world's top emitters of climate-altering carbon dioxide, must share in the cost of protecting his hometown Huaraz from a swollen glacier lake at risk of overflowing from melting snow and ice.

RWE's power plants emitted carbon dioxide that contributed to global warming,

increasing local temperatures in the Andes and putting the father of two's property at risk from flooding or landslides, Lliuya argues.

Now the court must decide whether "the accused's contribution to the chain of events depicted here is measurable and calculable," they added.

He wants RWE to pay 17,000 euros (\$20,000) towards flood defences for his community in Peru's northern Ancash region. The 37-year-old also wants the German company to reimburse him for the 6,384 euros he himself has spent on protective measures.

Lliuya bases his claims on a 2013 climate study which found that RWE was responsible for around 0.5 percent of global emissions "since the beginning of industrialisation".



Saul Luciano Lliuya stands before the lagoon formed under the almost disappeared ice and snow mass on the Churup Glacier in the White Mountain in the Huascarán National Park in Ancash, Peru. Picture was taken in 2015. PHOTO: AFP



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