

US 'ruining mood'

Warns North Korea, says peace talks not the result of US pressure

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

North Korea has accused the US of "ruining the mood" of peace and reconciliation ahead of Donald Trump's historic summit with Kim Jong-un.

The regime said the public was being misled by claims the negotiations were being driven forward by increased political pressure and sanctions.

North Korea also warned the US not to interpret their "peace-loving intention" as a sign of "weakness".

The US President and his officials have repeatedly suggested that their tough policy towards North Korea has been a decisive factor in getting Kim Jong-un to the table.

"They said there were two alternatives: Let them have what they have, or go to war," Trump said last month. "And now we have a much better alternative than anybody thought even possible."

In a statement, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) said the US was trying to "aggravate the situation on the Korean peninsula".

"The US is deliberately provoking the DPRK at the time when the Korean penin-



sula is moving towards peace and reconciliation thanks to the historic north-south summit and the Panmunjom Declaration," said a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"This act cannot be construed other than as a dangerous attempt to ruin the hard-won atmosphere and bring the situation back to square one."

At last month's summit Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in signed an agreement seeking a formal end to the Korean War and the "complete denuclearisation" of the peninsula.

More recently, Trump indicated a date and location had been agreed for his meeting with Kim Jong-un but did not give

details. The summit is expected to take place later this month or in early June and Trump has previously proposed the demilitarised zone as a venue.

North Korea is also considering the release of three Korean-Americans accused of anti-state activities.

Trump will meet the South Korean leader at the White House on 22 May to "continue their close coordination on developments regarding the Korean Peninsula."

US President Donald Trump has threatened to abandon the agreement when it comes up for renewal on May 12, demanding his country's European allies "fix the terrible flaws" or he will re-impose sanctions.

US will regret if it quits

Warns Rouhani; report says Trump team tried to discredit the 2015 accord

AFP, Websites

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani yesterday said that if the United States quits the nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers then Washington would regret it "like never before".

US President Donald Trump has threatened to abandon the agreement when it comes up for renewal on May 12, demanding his country's European allies "fix the terrible flaws" or he will re-impose sanctions.

"If the United States leaves the nuclear agreement, you will soon see that they will regret it like never before in history," Rouhani said in a televised speech in northwestern Iran.

"Trump must know that our people are united, the Zionist regime (Israel) must know that our people are united," Rouhani added.

The nuclear deal was struck in 2015 between Iran and UK, China, France, Germany, Russia and the US, then led by Barack Obama.

Under the pact, sanctions were lifted in return for a commitment not to pursue a nuclear bomb, but Iran says it is not reaping the rewards

despite complying with the deal.

Rouhani did not specify how Iran would react if the US pulls out of the deal. But he said he had given "the necessary orders", notably to Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, in anticipation of Trump's decision.

IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL



In another development, according to the British news outlet The Observer, aides to the US President Donald Trump hired an Israeli private intelligence agency to organize a "dirty ops" campaign against key people from the Obama admin-

istration who helped negotiate the Iran nuclear deal.

As part of an effort to discredit the deal, the Trump administration officials contacted private investigators in May last year to "get dirt" on Ben Rhodes, who had been one

that these were "extraordinary and appalling allegations" but they also reflect a "high level of desperation" by Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu - "not so much to discredit the deal but to undermine those around it."

According to The Guardian, sources said that officials linked to Trump's team contacted investigators days after Trump visited Tel Aviv a year ago, his first foreign tour as US president. Trump reportedly promised Netanyahu that "Iran would never have nuclear weapons."

According to the documents seen by The Observer, investigators contracted by the private intelligence agency were told to dig into the personal lives and political careers of Rhodes and Kahl to find if they had "benefited personally or politically" from the peace deal.

Although sources have confirmed that contact and an initial plan of attack was provided to private investigators by representatives of Trump, it is not clear how much work was actually undertaken, for how long or what became of any material unearthed, added The Guardian.

RISING TENSIONS IN KASHMIR

Rebel professor among 10 killed

AFP, Srinagar

Indian soldiers shot dead five Kashmir militants including a rebel university teacher in a gunfight yesterday that triggered violent protests in which five civilians were killed.

Thousands took to the streets in south Kashmir to show support for the slain militants. Government forces opened fire to break up the protests, director general of police Shesh Paul Vaid said. Hundreds of people were injured in the protests, according to doctors.

Government forces swooped on the village of Badigam, in Shopian district south of the capital Srinagar, following a tip-off about armed militants holed up inside a house.

The rebels refused an offer to surrender, triggering a fierce gun battle, Vaid told AFP.

A special appeal was made to Mohammad Rafi Bhat to surrender, a Kashmir University sociology teacher who only went underground with the rebels on Friday.

A top commander of Hizbul Mujahideen, a key rebel group, was also among the dead.

Russian service women march during a rehearsal for the Victory Day parade at Red Square in Moscow, Russia, yesterday. This year's Victory Day parade on May 9 will commemorate the 73rd anniversary of the Russian victory over Germany in WWII, a war in which Russia lost an estimated 20 million military and civilian lives.

PHOTO: REUTERS



NEWS IN brief

Coal mines collapse kills 23 in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

Twenty-three people were killed and 11 wounded after gas explosions tore through two neighbouring coal mines in Balochistan, Pakistan, officials said yesterday. Provincial mines minister Saleh Baloch told AFP that all miners in both accidents had been accounted for and rescue operations had ended.

'Thousands' detained in Saudi Arabia: HRW

AFP, Dubai

Saudi Arabia has detained thousands of people for years without trial, Human Rights Watch said yesterday, slamming the country's powerful crown prince for the "arbitrary detentions". Official data from the interior ministry, analysed by HRW, showed that authorities had detained 2,305 people for more than six months without referring them to court. More than 1,870 had been held for more than a year and 251 for more than three years with their cases still "under investigation," HRW said.

Malaysia halts people-smuggling ship

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia has arrested more than a dozen members of an alleged people trafficking syndicate after intercepting a ship carrying 127 Sri Lankan migrants believed to be bound for Australia and New Zealand, authorities said Saturday. Maritime authorities on Tuesday halted the modified tanker named "Etra" in Malaysian territorial waters off southern Johor state.

7 Indians abducted in Afghanistan

REUTERS, Kabul

Seven Indian engineers and an Afghan national working for a power plant in northern Baghlan province of Afghanistan were kidnapped yesterday, officials said. A spokesman for Baghlan police said the engineers were travelling to a government-run power station in a minibus when unknown gunmen abducted them and their Afghan driver.

Rape-killing in India: Main suspect nabbed

AFP, New Delhi

Indian police yesterday said they have arrested the main suspect in the gang rape and gruesome murder of a teenage girl. Dhanu Bhuiyan was found at a relative's house where he was hiding after he and accomplices allegedly burned the girl alive Friday in a remote district of the eastern state of Jharkhand. Police said Bhuiyan became enraged after the local village council ordered him to do 100 sit-ups and pay a 50,000 rupee (\$750) fine for the victim's gang rape.



Pak minister injured in gun attack: aide

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's interior minister Ahsan Iqbal has been shot in the arm in a suspected assassination attempt at a public meeting in Punjab province but will survive, his aide said yesterday.

"Ahsan Iqbal was targeted and shot in the arm," Asim Khan, a special aide to the politician, told AFP. "He is out of danger and being taken to a medical facility in Lahore. The attacker has been arrested."

Malik Ahmed Khan, a spokesman for the Punjab government, told AFP Iqbal had been attending the meeting in his constituency in Narowal district when he was shot in the right arm.

"The attacker was about to fire a second shot when police and people in the meeting overpowered him," Khan said, adding that Iqbal was undergoing surgery and confirming his life was not in danger.

The suspected attack on Iqbal comes as the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) struggles to regain its footing ahead of the coming general elections.

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif was deposed by the Supreme Court last year over graft allegations and has been banned from politics for life, while foreign minister Khawaja Asif was also removed by the Islamabad High Court late last month for violating election laws.

Anger in France, UK over Trump's gun law speech

REUTERS, Paris

US President Donald Trump caused anger in France and Britain by suggesting looser gun laws could have helped prevent deadly attacks in Paris in 2015 and linking knife crime in London to a handgun ban.

In a speech to the National Rifle Association (NRA) on Friday, Trump mimicked the shooting of victims in the Paris rampage and said if civilians had been armed "it would have been a whole different story."

The French government issued its strongest criticism of Trump since he took office and one minister urged the leader to apologise, at a time when President Emmanuel Macron has been reinforcing bilateral ties following a state visit.

"France expresses its firm disapproval of President Trump's comments about the Paris attacks on November 13, 2015 and demands that the memory of the victims be respected," the foreign office said.

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said he hoped Trump "would come back on his words and express regret".

"His comments are shocking and not worthy of the president of the world's greatest superpower," Le Maire told BFM television yesterday.

Trauma surgeons in London, meanwhile, said Trump had missed the point when, in the same speech, he linked knife crime there to an absence of guns.

Trump, who is due to visit Britain on July 13, told NRA members that a "once very prestigious" London hospital, which he did not name, had become overwhelmed with knife attack victims.

"They don't have guns. They have knives and instead there's blood all over the floors of this hospital," he said. "They say it's as bad as a military war zone hospital. Knives, knives, knives, knives," he said, making stabbing gestures.

Russia braces for Putin 4.0

AFP, Moscow

Vladimir Putin will be inaugurated today for his fourth Kremlin term under the shadow of hugely strained ties with the West and a crackdown on the opposition, with Alexei Navalny and hundreds more detained at the weekend.

Opposition leader Navalny was held along with nearly 1,600 of his supporters on Saturday during nationwide rallies against Putin as police and paramilitary activists used force to break up demonstrations in Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

Putin, who has ruled Russia for 18 years and used his last term to annex Crimea in 2014 and launch a military campaign in Syria on the side of Bashar al-Assad the next year, has promised to improve living standards at home during his next Kremlin stint.

But he has remained silent on the issue of his succession -- despite this being an inevitable concern as the constitution bars him from running again when his fourth term ends in 2024.

Putin has struggled to revive an economy that crashed after Moscow was hit with Western sanctions over its annexation of Crimea in 2014, followed by a fall in global oil prices in 2016.

Despite this, his victory in the March election was never in question and the prospect of an inaugura-

tion in the Kremlin's gilded Andreyevsky hall has generated little excitement.

This year Putin's minders are reportedly planning a fairly low-key inauguration ceremony that will not include a lavish Kremlin reception in an apparent effort to eschew any bad publicity.

Protest leader Navalny, who was barred from challenging Putin in the March election, had called on Russians to stage a day of rallies across the country on Saturday under the catchy slogan "Not our Tsar".

Political analysts said that Moscow's attitude towards the West -- which has only hardened over the crises in Ukraine and Syria, as well as accusations of spy poisoning in the UK and election meddling in the US -- was also unlikely to change under Putin 4.0.

"For Putin any concession is a sign of weakness, so there shouldn't be any expectation of a change in foreign policy," said Konstantin Kalachev, the head of the Political Expert Group think tank in Moscow.

Kalachev suggested the president could leave the Kremlin before he serves out the six years.

"He will stay in power, but not necessarily in the presidency," he said.

"For Putin to write his place in history, he needs to pick the right moment to go. Serving another six years is a road to nowhere. He will leave in a way that takes everyone by surprise."



A Lebanese woman casts her vote at a polling station in the Lebanese town of Jezzine, south of the capital Beirut, yesterday during the first parliamentary election in nine years. Polling stations opened at 7:00am across the small country, which has an electorate of around 3.7 million, and were due to close 12 hours later, with results from all 15 districts expected the following day.

'A storm's coming'

Porn star taunts fake Trump on SNL

AFP, Washington

Stormy Daniels, the real one, took on Donald Trump, depicted by Alec Baldwin, on comedy show Saturday Night Live and taunted him saying the only way to end the furor over their alleged tryst was for him to resign.

Daniels drew screams and applause when she appeared in the opening skit of SNL. She took a call at Trump's request from his personal lawyer Michael Cohen, played by comedian Ben Stiller.

In a skit that got playfully raunchy at times, Trump asked Daniels what it would take to make the whole thing go away.

"A resignation," she said with a smile.

Trump persisted and rattled off what he called a series of achievements as president, including progress in the Korean nuclear crisis. Why can't he resolve things with Daniels, too, he asked.

"Sorry, Donald. It's too late for that. I know you don't believe in climate change. But a storm's comin', baby," she said.

Trump has denied allegations from Daniels, a porn star whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, that they had an affair in 2006. But Cohen has admitted he paid her \$130,000 just days before the 2016 election. Trump has denied the affair or knowing anything about the payment, until his new lawyer Rudy Giuliani acknowledged shockingly this week that Trump had in fact reimbursed Cohen for that payoff, which arguably may have violated federal campaign finance laws.