

Kim could end up like Gaddafi

Warns Trump as he tries to convince North Korea for talks, denuclearization

AGENCIES

Donald Trump has warned Kim Jong-un that North Korea will be "decimated" if it does not agree a nuclear deal, and that Mr Kim himself will be treated in the same manner as slain Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

In comments to reporters that initially appeared designed to reassure Kim, amid reports of potential brinksmanship from North Korea, the US president said his safety would be reassured and that he would remain in control of his country, following any deal with Washington. Yet he then suggested if a deal was not forthcoming, the North Korean leader might be treated much more harshly.

"The Libyan model was a much different model. We decimated that country. We never said to Gaddafi, 'Oh, we're going to give you protection,'" he said. "We went in and decimated him, and we did the same thing with Iraq."

He added: "That model would take place if we don't make a deal."

Trump's comments came after North Korea abruptly pulled out of a meeting planned for Wednesday

with South Korea, and suggested it may also not participate in the summit with Trump, scheduled to take place in Singapore on 12 June.

Trump suggested Kim's apparent about-face may have been at the behest of Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

"It could very well be that he's influencing Kim Jong Un," Trump said, citing a recent meeting between

the pair, their second in a month's time. "We'll see what happens."

North Korea claimed it was angered over a joint US-South Korea military exercise, but some observers suggested Pyongyang was returning to the kind of diplomacy it had displayed before at the time of other proposed talks.

Others said it was possible that secret preparation discussions, understood



Trump says China might be behind North's change of tone

N Korea 'declines' S Korea media for nuclear site event



his national security adviser, John Bolton, who had raised the prospect of pursuing a "Libya model" in relation to getting North Korea to abandon its weapons programme.

Bolton was referring to a announcement made by Gaddafi in December 2003, when, after the US and UK invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, he announced he was

giving up his WMD programme and seeking better relations with the West.

Trump appeared to have confused that process, with what happened to the Libyan leader in 2011, when he was overthrown and killed after Libyans joined the Arab Spring protests, and were supported militarily by Nato.

He was hunted down and killed by opponents in the city of Sirte, after his convoy was struck by Nato planes. Hillary Clinton, the then US secretary of state, said of his death: "We came, we saw, he died."

Trump again said a deal will make Kim "very strong". "He would be there, he would be running his country, his country would be very rich," he added.

Reuters said Trump then said Kim would face such a fate, if he failed to agree to a deal. The president did not provide specifics, but added: "We cannot let that country have nukes. We just can't do it."

Meanwhile, North Korea has declined to accept a list of South Korean journalists hoping to observe the closure of its nuclear test site, South Korea said yesterday, raising new questions about the North's commitment to reducing tension.

UK royal wedding today

Prince Charles to walk Meghan down the aisle

AFP, Windsor

Prince Charles will be the one to walk Meghan Markle down the aisle when she marries his son Prince Harry, palace officials said yesterday as final preparations were under way on the eve of the royal wedding.

The bride had initially hoped her father Thomas Markle would take on the role, but confirmed Thursday he would not attend as he is recovering from a heart operation after being caught up in a paparazzi fiasco involving staged pictures.

Although many thought her mother Doria Ragland could step in, Kensington Palace said her future father-in-law would take on the responsibility at today's ceremony.

Markle's mum will on Friday meet Queen Elizabeth II for the first time at Windsor Castle, where the nuptials will take place.

In the weeks running up to the wedding, organisers have been caught off guard by the chaos surrounding the family of the bride-to-be, with palace staff referring to it as the "Markle Debacle", Britain's Daily Mirror

reported.

Despite the pre-ceremony fiasco, Meghan was smiling as she arrived for Thursday's dress rehearsal involving military marches and a dry-run of the carriage procession that will whisk the couple around Windsor to greet the crowds after their wedding at St George's Chapel, in the castle grounds.

Meanwhile, Violet Bakery in east London yesterday was applying finishing touches to the "ethereal" lemon and elderflower wedding cake, which it said would be displayed in a special "installation", according to Kensington Palace.

Details about Markle's wedding dress remain a closely-guarded secret, and will not be revealed until the bride arrives for the service.

Diehard royalists have already started camping out in the town to secure the best viewing spots along the carriage route, with dozens expected to sleep on the streets overnight.

Despite the rocky build-up, at least Britain's unpredictable weather looks set to behave, with a forecast for clear skies and mild temperatures.



EBOLA FEARS IN EAST AFRICA

High alert as DR Congo toll rises

AFP, Kinshasa

The Democratic Republic of Congo joined with world agencies and neighbouring countries yesterday in boosting the response to an Ebola outbreak in the sprawling country's northwest, as the toll mounted.

The health ministry declared it had activated an "action plan" in the city of Mbandaka after a case of Ebola occurred there.

In Geneva, a World Health Organization (WHO) emergency panel met to determine whether the outbreak should be categorised as "a public health event of international concern" -- a move that would step up global action.

The death toll rose by two to 25 out of 45 cases, WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic told reporters. Fourteen of the cases have been confirmed in laboratory tests.

Alarm bells sounded on Thursday after the outbreak, previously reported in a remote rural area, notched up its first confirmed case in a city -- bad news for rolling back the notorious virus.

Separately, the UN's migration agency said it was helping DRC's health ministry to send disease-tracking experts and medical staff to monitor travellers at 16 border points.

A regional bloc, the East African Community -- five of whose six members have borders with the DRC -- said it was on "high alert" over the outbreak and had put in place measures to screen travellers arriving from that country.



A demonstrator uses a sling during a protest where Palestinians demand the right to return to their homeland, at the Israel-Gaza border, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. Inset, A demonstrator in Buenos Aires, Argentina holds a cartoon during a protest against the killings in Gaza.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWSIN brief

US Senate confirms Hasep as CIA chief

AFP, Washington

The US Senate on Thursday confirmed Gina Hasep as the first female CIA director, despite deep reservations among some lawmakers that her past involvement in the torture of terror suspects was a red flag. President Donald Trump's pick to lead the Central Intelligence Agency passed on a vote of 54-45, with half a dozen opposition Democrats bucking their party and supporting the controversial Hasep's nomination.

UK mulls sending more troops to Afghanistan

AFP, London

Britain could substantially boost its troop numbers in Afghanistan following demands from US President Donald Trump that Nato members "pay their fair share". The Times reported yesterday. Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson is believed to have asked Prime Minister Theresa May for 400 more soldiers to be sent to help the fight against the Taliban, adding to the 600 already training Afghan forces.

Russian ex-spy skripal leaves hospital

AFP, London

Former Russian spy Sergei Skripal, who was poisoned with a nerve agent in Britain, triggering a diplomatic crisis with Russia, has been discharged from hospital, the facility said yesterday. Skripal and his daughter Yulia, who was visiting from Moscow, collapsed on March 4 on a bench in Salisbury in western England where the former double agent lives. Britain has accused Russia of being behind the poisoning.

EU moves to save Iran deal

AFP, Brussels

The European Union took formal steps yesterday to shield its firms from US sanctions on Iran as part of efforts to save the international nuclear deal with Tehran.

EU leaders meeting Thursday in Bulgaria gave the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, the all-clear amid a deepening rift with Washington.

The commission yesterday said it "launched the formal process to activate the blocking statute by updating the list of US sanctions on Iran falling within its scope."

The commission said it hopes the statute will be in force before August 6 when the first batch of reimposed US sanctions take effect.

President Donald Trump last week pulled Washington out of the 2015 international deal with Iran to curb its nuclear programme in return for easing sanctions.

The statute, which the 28 EU member states and the European Parliament must endorse, is aimed at

reassuring European firms that invested in Iran after the deal.

"The blocking statute forbids EU companies from complying with the extraterritorial effects of US sanctions," the commission said.

It also "allows companies to recover damages arising from such sanctions from the person causing

Invokes 'blocking statute' to shield EU firms from US sanctions

Washington seeks global 'coalition' against Tehran

them, and nullifies the effect in the EU of any foreign court judgements based on them," the executive added.

Brussels took steps on three other fronts to shore up the Iran deal, signed not just by the EU but EU members Britain, France and Germany, along with China and Russia.

The "blocking statute" is a 1996

regulation originally created to circumvent Washington's trade embargo on Cuba, which prohibits EU companies and courts from complying with specific foreign sanction laws.

Since the US withdrawal, the remaining parties have all pledged to stick to the deal if Tehran respects its terms. Beijing and Moscow have also stepped up efforts to save the deal.

Tehran has warned it is ready to resume no-holds-barred "industrial-scale" uranium enrichment unless Europe can provide solid guarantees to preserve Iran's economic benefits under the deal.

On other fronts, the commission moved Friday to remove hurdles for the European Investment Bank (EIB) to finance activities outside the EU, such as in Iran.

The commission said it is also encouraging EU member states to explore the idea of "one-off bank transfers" to the Central Bank of Iran. The approach, it said, could ensure Tehran receives its oil-related revenues if US sanctions target EU firms active in oil transactions with Iran.

CURB ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN MYANMAR

Jailing of Muslims strokes concerns

REUTERS, Yangon

When Cho Nwe Soe went to a Yangon court last month with her husband, she expected he would be fined for organising prayers in the street without a permit last year, and that they could go back home to prepare for Ramadan - the Muslim holy month.

Instead, her 41-year-old husband Aung San Lin and six other Myanmar Muslims, who last year organised the Ramadan street prayers after local madrassas were shuttered by Buddhist nationalists, were sent to jail for three months.

"I went insane. I didn't know what to do," said Cho Nwe Soe, wiping away her tears. She was speaking at the teashop the couple have run together for 12 years in Yangon's eastern Thaketa township, home to many of the city's Muslims.

The prison terms have unsettled many Muslims in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, and prompted human rights monitors to urge the government of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi to guarantee religious freedoms.

Global attention on the position of Muslims in Myanmar has largely focused on the Rohingya minority in the western state of Rakhine, after an army crackdown sent nearly 700,000 fleeing to Bangladesh. Activists say the jailing of the prayer leaders is a reminder that Muslims across the Southeast Asian nation face forms of discrimination and curbs on basic rights.



Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) shake hands with German Chancellor Angela Merkel after a press conference during their meeting in Sochi, yesterday. In the meeting, Putin said he would stand up to any attempts by US President Donald Trump to block Nord Stream 2 pipeline project. The project will allow Russia to export more natural gas to northern Europe.

PHOTO: AFP

ROW OVER GOVT FORMATION IN KARNATAKA

India SC orders 'floor test'

AFP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday ordered Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party to hold a vote of confidence within a day in a key state where it has been allowed to form a government despite its lack of a majority.

Modi's nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) inflicted a major blow against the opposition Congress by emerging as the largest single party in the southern state of Karnataka following polls held last week.

But its 104 seats left it short of a majority in the 224-member state assembly. Congress, whose numbers were cut from 122 to 78 seats, formed a coalition with a regional party and staked claim to form a government with at least 115 members.

However, the state governor, a former BJP leader, controversially gave Modi's party the first chance to form a government, sparking a political storm in India.

The court ordered the "floor test", or vote

of confidence, to be held by 4:00 pm (1130 GMT) on Saturday.

"The test will be as per the rules of the house. There will be no secret ballot," the Supreme Court justices said.

As leaders from both parties traded accusations, BJP chief in the state BS Yeddyurappa took an oath of office on Thursday after a special late-night sitting of the Supreme Court rejected a Congress move to block the ceremony.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi called the BJP's actions a "mockery of our constitution" while BJP leader Amit Shah decried the Congress protests as "a murder of democracy."

The judge bench said it would rule at a later date whether the governor's decision to invite the BJP to form a government was unconstitutional.

Karnataka, home to 60 million people and the wealthy global IT hub of Bangalore, was the last major state held by the Congress.

