

US won't rush on denuclearisation

Trump appears to play down any hope of major breakthrough during talks with N Korean leader

REUTERS, Hanoi

US President Donald Trump and North Korea's Kim Jong Un hold a second summit this week with no real expectation of a final deal on ridding the North of nuclear weapons but hope raised yesterday for an official peace on the peninsula at long last.

The two leaders are due to meet in the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi, on Wednesday and Thursday, eight months after their historic summit in Singapore, the first between a sitting US president and a North Korean leader.

There they pledged to work toward the complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, but their vague agreement has produced few results. US Democratic senators and security officials have warned Trump against cutting a deal that would do little to curb North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Trump, speaking in Washington on the eve of his departure for Vietnam, said he believed he saw eye to eye with Kim and that they had developed "a very, very good relationship".

But he appeared to play down any hope of a major breakthrough, saying he would be happy as long as North Korea maintained its pause on weapons testing.

"I'm not in a rush. I don't want to rush anybody," Trump said. "I just don't want testing. As long as there's no testing, we're happy."

Trump, Kim to meet in Hanoi on Wednesday
Two sides might agree to formal end of Korean War



North Korea conducted its last nuclear test, its sixth, in September 2017. It last tested an intercontinental ballistic missile in November 2017.

Before the freeze, the North conducted a series of tests that it says has given it powerful nuclear bombs and missiles capable of delivering them to the US mainland.

The United States has for years demanded North Korea's complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation, before any concessions will be granted. North Korea denounced that stance as unilateral and "gangster like".

But in recent days, Trump has signalled a possible softening, saying he would love to be able to remove tough sanctions if there was meaningful progress on denuclearisation.

Trump said he and Kim expected to make progress at the summit and again held out the promise that denuclearisation would help North Korea develop its economy.

He scoffed at critics of his handling of North Korea, and added that Chinese President Xi Jinping has been supportive of US efforts.

A South Korean presidential spokesman told reporters in Seoul the two sides might agree to a formal end of the war, which the North has long called for as a major step towards normalising ties.

"The possibility is there," the spokesman, Kim Eui-kyeom told a briefing in Seoul when asked if an end-of-war declaration was on the agenda.



Colombian soldiers escort a member of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces of Venezuela who deserted to Colombia with his dog in Cututa yesterday. More than one hundred Venezuelan soldiers have deserted and crossed into Colombia. Inset, US Vice President Mike Pence arrives in Bogota, Colombia to take part in a meeting of the Lima Group to discuss a joint strategy on Venezuela's crisis.



PHOTO: AFP

Human rights losing ground in the world

Says UN chief, raises alarm over hate speech

AFP, Geneva

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres yesterday launched a new global strategy to combat hate speech, a growing scourge he said has "poisoned" debate on crucial challenges like migration.

Guterres announced the effort, which will be led by his special adviser on genocide prevention Adama Dieng, at the UN Human Rights Council.

"Hate is moving into the mainstream -- in liberal democracies and authoritarian systems alike," he said in a speech at the opening of the council's 40th session.

"Some major political parties and leaders are cutting and pasting ideas from the fringes into their own propaganda and electoral campaigns," he added.

Governments across the world have watched with concern as racist and other hate speech have coarsened the political climate.

France and Germany have raised particular alarm in recent weeks over resurgent anti-Semitism.

Guterres said human rights are losing ground in the world and targeted his rebuke at the vast campaign he said was mobilised against the UN's Global Compact on Migration, a non-binding text that aimed to set out best practices for managing refugee and migrant flows.

"We have seen how the debate on human mobility, for example, has been poisoned with false narratives linking refugees and migrants to terrorism and scapegoating them for many of society's ills," Guterres said.

He condemned "an insidious campaign sought to drown the Global Compact on Migration in a flood of lies about the nature and scope of the agreement".

The UN chief noted that the campaign "failed".

But 17 countries either abstained or voted against the compact at the General Assembly in December and debate over the text fuelled bitter political debate especially in Europe.

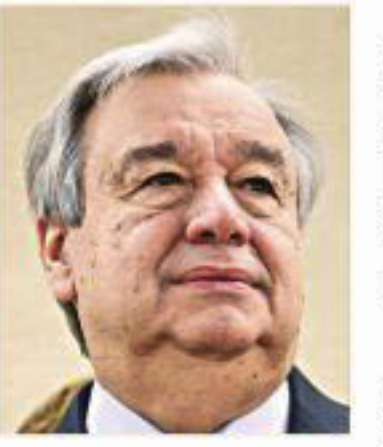


PHOTO: AFP

CORRUPTION CASE

Pak court rejects ex-PM's bail plea

REUTERS, Islamabad

A Pakistani court yesterday rejected a plea by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to be released on bail and have a seven-year prison term over the ownership of a steel mill in Saudi Arabia suspended, court documents showed.

Sharif is currently serving a seven-year sentence imposed last year for failing to disclose the source of income that allowed him to acquire the Al-Azzia Steel Mills in Saudi Arabia. He has appealed.

Yesterday's ruling related to an additional plea for bail on medical grounds after Sharif was admitted to hospital for treatment for a heart condition.

The court ruled his condition didn't qualify him for bail because all medical facilities were available to him.

"We're surely disappointed by this decision," Sharif's aide, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, told reporters, adding that a government medical board had called for urgent treatment. But he said his party would respect the court decision.

"We have always respected court decisions," he said. "We will take all necessary legal recourse."

Pakistan's Supreme Court removed three-time premier Sharif from office in July 2017 for not disclosing part of a salary drawn from his son's company and he was later convicted in two separate cases of failing to disclose sources of income.



Palestinians take part in a rally in support of President Mahmoud Abbas, in Nablus, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday.

Give peace a chance

Pak PM reassures Modi he will immediately act if Delhi provides intel on Kashmir attack

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday asked his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi to "give peace a chance" and assured him that he "stands by" his words and will "immediately act" if New Delhi provides Islamabad with "actionable intelligence" on the Pulwama attack.

Khan's remarks came a day after Modi in a rally in Rajasthan said, "There is consensus in the entire world against terrorism. We are moving ahead with strength to punish the perpetrators of terrorism... The scores will be settled this time, settled for good... This is a changed India, this pain will not be tolerated... We know how to crush terrorism."

Recalling his conversation with Khan during a congratulatory call after he became Pakistan's premier, Modi said he told him "let us fight against poverty and illiteracy" and Khan gave his word - saying he is a Pathan's son - but went back on it.



PHOTO: AFP

A statement released by the Pakistan Prime Minister's Office said, "PM Imran Khan stand by his words that if India gives us actionable intelligence, we will immediately act."

PM Modi should "give peace a chance", Khan said in the statement.

Earlier on February 19, Imran Khan also assured India that he would act against the perpetrators of the deadly Pulwama terror attack, carried out by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terror group, if it shares "actionable intelligence" with Islamabad, but warned New Delhi against launching any "revenge" retaliatory action.

India said Khan's offer to investigate the attack if provided proof is a "lame excuse".

"It is a well-known fact that Jaish-e-Mohammad and its leader Masood Azhar are based in Pakistan. These should be sufficient proof for Pakistan to take action," the ministry of external affairs said.



Senior Kolkata cop blames Mamata in 'suicide note'

NDTV ONLINE

The alleged suicide of a senior police officer in Kolkata has become fodder for attack by the BJP on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. The party's Mukul Roy has demanded Banerjee's arrest for abetment to suicide and has demanded a CBI probe into the case.

"This is for the first time in the history of West Bengal that a senior IPS officer committed suicide and blamed the government or a party leader," Roy said.

In the alleged suicide note that is viral on social media, the officer, Gaurav Dutt, accused Mamata Banerjee of abetting his suicide by keeping him on "compulsory waiting" - a punitive step when an officer is not given a posting - and for withholding his dues after he retired on December 31, 2018.

How the 'suicide note' went viral is not clear. Dutt was a 1986 batch IPS officer.

On Tuesday, his wife returned home to find him in a pool of blood at his Salt Lake home. His wrists were slit. He was immediately taken to the hospital but did not survive.

The state government is tight-lipped about the incident. Sources claim that none of the dues mentioned in the alleged suicide note were pending and Dutt was on compulsory waiting because of disciplinary proceedings initiated him.

Dutt was suspended for nine months from February 2010 for "conduct unbecoming of an officer". According to reports, he was suspended after the wife of a constable complained that Dutt had tortured her husband because he had refused the officer's sexual advances.

In 2012, he had again faced disciplinary action for alleged financial irregularities.

PROTEST AGAINST OUTSIDERS

Indian state tense after two killed

AFP, Guwahati

India sent 1,000 paramilitary reinforcements to a tense northeastern state and bolstered other security measures yesterday after two people were killed by police firing in a protest against moves to give residency rights to outsiders, officials said.

Authorities also cut mobile internet services and blocked SMS messages in the Arunachal Pradesh state capital Itanagar and other badly hit regions amid fears of new unrest.

Violence broke out Friday during protests by groups opposed to a reported plan to give permanent resident certificates to some tribes who have been established in the state for decades.

The protests spread and government properties and vehicles around Itanagar were attacked.

One crowd threw stones and ransacked the residence of the state deputy chief minister late Sunday and were marching on the chief minister Pema Khandu's residence when police opened fire, killing two people.

Khandu yesterday sought to ease the anger, saying the government was not moving forward with the proposal that would make six tribal groups eligible for quotas of jobs and college places reserved for locals.

Brexit delay would be 'rational': EU's Tusk

REUTERS, Sharm El-sheikh

European Council President Donald Tusk said yesterday that delaying Brexit beyond the scheduled exit date of March 29 would be a "rational solution" as there was no majority in the British parliament to approve a divorce deal.

"I believe that in the situation we are in, an extension would be a rational decision, but Prime Minister May still believes she will be able to avoid this scenario," Tusk told a news conference in Egypt a day after seeing the British leader.

Tusk said May and he discussed "legal and political context of a potential extension" of Britain's two-year limit on Brexit negotiations that expires on March 29.

"For me, it's absolutely clear that there is no majority in the House of Commons to approve a deal. We will face an alternative, chaotic Brexit, or an extension," Tusk said.

"The less time there is until the 29th of March, the greater the likelihood of an extension. And this is an objective fact, not our plan or our objective, but an objective fact."



PHOTO: AFP

Britain should give up Chagos Islands

Says Int'l Court of Justice

AFP, The Hague

Britain should quickly give up control of the Chagos archipelago, the Indian Ocean islands that house the secretive US airbase at Diego Garcia but are claimed by Mauritius, the International Court of Justice said yesterday.

Judges in The Hague said in a legal "advisory opinion" on a decades-old dispute that Britain had illegally split the islands from Mauritius at independence in the 1960s, after which thousands of islanders were deported.

The court's view is not binding but it carries a heavy symbolic importance as it was specially tasked by the United Nations General Assembly to give its view on the row between London and Port Louis over the fate of the island chain.

It also comes as a stunning blow to London in a case that goes to the heart of historic issues of decolonisation and current questions about Britain's place in the world as it prepares to leave the EU. "The United Kingdom is under an obligation to bring an end to its administration of the Chagos Archipelago as rapidly as possible, thereby allowing Mauritius to complete the decolonisation of its territory," chief judge Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf said.

Then colonial power Britain split off the islands from Mauritius -- which lies around 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) away -- three years before Port Louis gained independence in 1968.

NEWS IN brief

Afghan peace talks kick off in Doha

AFP, Doha

US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad met with the Taliban's top political leader in Doha yesterday. Khalilzad tweeted that he and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a cofounder of the Islamist movement, had held a "working lunch" ahead of a fresh round of talks with the insurgent group.

Iraq received 14 French IS fighters from Kurds

AFP, Baghdad

Fourteen French nationals accused of fighting for the Islamic State group were transferred to Iraq by US-backed forces squeezing the jihadists' final Syrian bastion, an Iraqi government source said yesterday. The Syrian Democratic Forces have taken hundreds of foreign IS fighters into custody as they bear down on the jihadists' shrinking pocket of territory in eastern Syria.

French forces strike jihadists in Mali

AFP, Paris

French warplanes struck a group of jihadists in central Mali over the weekend, killing or wounding 15 of them, the defence ministry in Paris said yesterday. The raid -- the second in 48 hours -- took place north of Mopti on Saturday evening, as French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and Defence Minister Florence Parly were visiting Mali.

BITS OF HISTORY (FEBRUARY 25)

1921: Russian soldiers capture Tbilisi and declare the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.

2005: Peter Benenson, founder of the Nobel Prize-winning human rights group Amnesty International, died at 83.