

North Korea wants sanctions eased to restart US talks

Claims South Korea's intel chief

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea wants international sanctions banning its metal exports and imports of refined fuel and other necessities lifted before it restarts denuclearisation talks with the United States, South Korean lawmakers said yesterday.

The North has also demanded the easing of sanctions on its imports of luxury goods to be able to bring in fine liquors and suits, the lawmakers said after being briefed by Park Jie-won, head of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), South Korea's main intelligence agency.

The briefing came a week after the two Koreas restored hotlines that North Korea suspended a year ago, the first hint in months that North Korea might be more responsive to engagement efforts.

"As a precondition to reopen talks, North Korea argues that the United States should allow mineral exports and imports of refined oil and necessities," Ha Tae-keung, a member of the parliamentary intelligence committee, told reporters, citing Park.

North Korea's state-run media made no mention yesterday of any new request for the lifting sanctions to restart talks.

North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests since 2006 and test-fired missiles capable of hitting the US. However the country has not tested a nuclear weapon or its longest-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) since 2017.

After a review of North Korea policy, the Biden administration said it would explore diplomacy to achieve the goal of complete denuclearisation of North Korea but would not seek a grand bargain with Kim.



A view shows burning buildings as people try to contain a fire in Melikler, Isparta Province, Turkey, in this still image obtained from social media drone video yesterday. Firefighters using planes and helicopters, and locals with buckets of water, battled wildfires raging for a seventh day near southern resorts in drought-hit Turkey. Eight people have been killed in the wildfires so far.

PHOTO: REUTERS

STUDY ON SEX-SELECTIVE PRACTICES WORLDWIDE

4.7m fewer girls to be born over next 10 yrs

AFP, Paris

An estimated 4.7 million fewer girls are expected to be born globally in the next 10 years because of sex-selective practices in countries with a cultural preference for male offspring, a trend that could undermine social cohesion in the long term, research showed yesterday.

The research suggested that the projected shortfall in the number of girls being born will lead to a surplus of young men in around a third of the global population by 2030, which could lead to increased anti-social behaviour and violence.

To model what short- and long-term effect sex selection will have on societies, an international team of researchers analysed data from more than three billion births over the last 50 years.

Focusing on 12 countries where the male-to-female ratio had increased since 1970 and another 17 where that ratio was at risk of increasing due to social or cultural trends, they simulated two scenarios.

The first assumed an increase in the rate of sex selection, based on statistical evidence.

The second scenario assumed increased sex selection in certain countries, based on observed trends and decreased fertility, but for which specific data were lacking.

In scenario 1, countries saw a shortfall of 4.7 million in the number of girls being born by 2030. For scenario 2, the figure jumped to more than 22 million globally by 2100.

US slams junta's polls plan

Urges Asean pressure; UK slams military for extending emergency

AGENCIES

The United States said that Myanmar's junta was playing for time with a two-year election timeframe as Secretary of State Antony Blinken prepared to encourage Asean to appoint an envoy.

Blinken is participating virtually in a week of talks involving foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the latest bid by President Joe Biden's administration to engage a region at the frontlines of US competition with China.

Ahead of the Asean talks, Myanmar's junta chief promised to hold elections and lift a state of emergency by August 2023, extending an initial timeline given when the military deposed elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1.

The announcement is a "call for Asean to have to step up its effort because it's clear that the Burmese junta is just stalling for time and wants to keep prolonging the calendar to

its own advantage," said a senior US official, using Myanmar's former name of Burma.

"All the more reason why Asean has to engage on this and live up and uphold the terms of the five-point consensus that Myanmar also signed up to."

POST COUP MYANMAR

Britain on Monday called on Myanmar to return to democracy after military ruler Min Aung Hlaing took on the role of prime minister in a caretaker administration six months after the army seized power.

"The decision by the military to extend the so-called state of emergency in Myanmar is unjustifiable and a blatant attempt to solidify their undemocratic power grab," foreign minister Dominic Raab wrote on Twitter.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing attended

a meeting with Asean members on the crisis in April that led to the so-called consensus statement that called for an immediate end to violence and a regional special envoy.

But the junta leader later distanced himself from the statement, no envoy has been appointed and more than 900 people have been reported killed in the six-month crackdown on dissent.

Asean is not known for its collective diplomatic clout and its meetings have frequently pitted the United States and China against each other as they seek influence.

The US official said Blinken would address Beijing's "coercion" against Asean nations in the dispute-rife South China Sea and also highlight human rights concerns within China.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited Southeast Asia last week, where he hammered in on the South China Sea, saying Beijing's claims had no basis in international law.

NEWS IN brief

110 charged with insulting king in one year of Thai protests

More than 100 protesters have been charged under Thailand's royal insult laws since last July, when rallies across the kingdom began demanding reforms to the unassailable monarchy, a lawyer representing the activists and an AFP tally showed yesterday. A mostly youth-led movement kicked off last summer, fuelled by discontent with the government of Thai Premier Prayut Chan-O-cha, a former military chief who first came to power in a coup in 2014. A year since those rallies began, 110 protesters have been charged under lese majeste laws for their role in the movement, which called for Prayut to step down, a rewrite to the military-scripted constitution, and for royal reforms and at their peak drew tens of thousands to the streets. If found guilty, they face sentences of three to 15 years in jail per charge.

Missing Belarus activist found hanged in Ukraine

A missing Belarusian activist has been found hanged in a park in the Ukrainian capital Kiev, police said on Tuesday, adding they had opened a murder probe. Shishov headed the Belarusian House in Ukraine, an NGO helping his compatriots flee repression in Belarus. The activist went jogging in Kiev on Monday morning but did not return and could not be reached on his mobile phone. Friends of Shishov said he had been followed by "strangers" while jogging recently. Belarus strongman Alexander Lukashenko has been cracking down on any form of dissent since mass protests erupted after last year's elections, deemed unfair by the West. The United Nations yesterday called on the Ukrainian authorities to conduct a thorough investigation on the incident.

Saudi intensifies rights crackdown: Amnesty

Saudi Arabia has intensified a crackdown on dissidents and rights activists after a respite that coincided with the country's G20 presidency last year, Amnesty International said yesterday. Saudi authorities "have brazenly intensified the persecution of human rights defenders and dissidents and stepped up executions over the past six months, following a lull... during Saudi Arabia's G20 presidency," the rights group said in a statement. At least 13 people have been prosecuted, sentenced or had their sentences ratified "following grossly unfair trials before the Specialised Criminal Court," Amnesty said. It said recorded executions fell by 85 percent last year, but that "at least 40 people" were put to death between January and July this year, "more than during the whole of 2020."

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



A resident (R) sitting on a boat helps a man (C) walking through a road submerged by floodwaters following heavy monsoon rains in Ghatal, Paschim Medinipur district, about 100 km from Kolkata. Photo was taken on Monday.

TALIBAN OFFENSIVE IN AFGHANISTAN

Civilian toll mounts

Army urges civilians to evacuate city besieged by Taliban; militants accused of 'war crimes'

AFP, Kandahar

Residents were urged yesterday to evacuate a besieged Afghan city as the army prepared a major offensive against Taliban insurgents after three days of heavy fighting.

The Taliban have seized control of much of rural Afghanistan since foreign forces began the last stage of their withdrawal in May, but are now focused on capturing provincial capitals, where they are meeting stiffer resistance.

Fighting is raging for Lashkar Gah, the capital of southern Helmand province, with the United Nations saying at least 40 civilians were killed in the last 24 hours.

"Please leave as soon as possible so that we can start our operation," General Sami Sadat, commander of the 215 Maiwand Afghan Army Corps, said in a message to the city of 200,000 delivered via the media. "I know it is very difficult for you to leave your houses -- it is hard for us too -- but if you are displaced for a few days, please forgive us."

The loss of Lashkar Gah would be a massive strategic and psychological blow for the government, which has pledged to defend cities at all costs after losing much of the rural countryside to the Taliban over the summer.

Fighting was also reported in various parts of the country including Herat and Kandahar.

Washington and London meanwhile accused the Taliban of committing atrocities that may amount to "war crimes" in the town of Spin Boldak, which the insurgents captured last month along the border with Pakistan.

Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission earlier said the insurgents had indulged in revenge killings there of at least 40 people.

Fighting across the country has displaced around 80,000 children from the start of June, humanitarian organisation Save the Children said yesterday.



MONSOON DELUGE IN INDIA

16 more killed in West Bengal

AFP, Kolkata

At least 16 people have been killed and a quarter of a million people displaced from their homes after heavy monsoon rains lashed eastern India, officials said yesterday, as the air force joined rescue efforts.

The latest deaths in West Bengal came a few days after 11 people were also killed in the state as the torrent of water swept away homes and triggered landslides.

Flooding and landslides are common during India's treacherous monsoon season from June to September and causes widespread devastation.

Two river banks were breached and flooding affected at least half a million people in six districts in West Bengal over the past two days, the state's disaster management minister Javed Ahmed Khan told AFP.

Five of the 16 people killed were swept away in the flood and the rest died when their mud houses collapsed, officials said.

Authorities have set up more than 40 relief centres for the displaced in the flood-affected districts, senior state official Harekrishna Dribedi, said.

This year's monsoon, which had earlier inundated the western coast, has claimed the lives of at least 250 people so far. Last month, at least 200 people died in Maharashtra after landslides sent torrents of mud onto villages.

ATTACK ON ISRAELI-LINKED TANKER

US vows 'collective response'

Iran vows retaliation; ultraconservative Raisi inaugurated as president



decisively respond to any possible adventurism," Khatibzadeh said in a statement.

Iran's foreign ministry also summoned the British chargé d'affaires and Romanian ambassador to object to the "baseless" allegations over the ship, state news agency IRNA said.

The incident came ahead of yesterday's inauguration of the ultraconservative Ebrahim Raisi as Iran's new president, replacing Hassan Rouhani who had tried to improve relations with the West.

The attack on the tanker comes as Israel, which sees Iran as its primary adversary, and Iran have engaged in a secret war of attacking on each other's interests across the region.

Raisi yesterday said he would take steps to lift "tyrannical" sanctions imposed by the United States, after winning the formal endorsement of the country's supreme leader to take office later this week.

Raisi, who will be sworn in tomorrow and will then have one week to present his cabinet to parliament for a vote of confidence, is expected to adopt a "hard line" approach in the Vienna talks.

Quotes of the day



"We will seek to lift the tyrannical sanctions imposed by America. But we will not tie the ... economy to the will of foreigners."

Ebrahim Raisi, Iran's incoming president



"The decision by the military to extend the so-called state of emergency in Myanmar is unjustifiable."

DOMINIC RAAB, UK'S FOREIGN MINISTER