

N Korea has 'right' to test weapons

Pyongyang tells UN, accuses US of 'double standards'

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea fired a missile towards the sea off its east coast yesterday, South Korea's military said, as Pyongyang called on the United States and South Korea to scrap their "double standards" on weapons programmes to restart talks.

The missile was launched from the central north province of Jagang at around 6:40 am, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. Japan's defence ministry said it appeared to be a ballistic missile, without elaborating.

The latest test underscored the steady development of North Korea's weapons systems, raising the stakes for stalled talks aimed at dismantling its nuclear and ballistic missile arsenals in return for US sanctions relief.

The launch came just before North Korea's ambassador to the United Nations urged the United States to give up its hostile policy towards Pyongyang and said no one could deny his country's right to self defence and to test weapons.

South Korea's President Moon Jae-in ordered aides to conduct a detailed analysis of the North's recent moves.

The US Indo-Pacific Command said the launch highlighted "the destabilising impact" of the North's illicit weapons programmes, while the US State Department also condemned the test. At the UN General Assembly, North Korea's UN envoy, Kim Song, said the country was shoring up its self-defence and if the United States dropped its hostile policy and "double standards," it would respond "willingly at any time" to offers to talks.

"But it is our judgment that there is no prospect at the present stage for the US to really withdraw its hostile policy," Kim said.



Anti-government protesters run for shelter after police used a water cannon to disperse the crowd during a demonstration in Bangkok yesterday, as activists call for the resignation of Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha over the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis. Inset, an anti-government protester displays ping pong bombs during the demonstration in Bangkok.

PHOTO: AFP

MORE NEWS

Delivery driver charged with murder of UK teacher

A 36-year-old delivery driver appeared in court in Britain yesterday, charged with the murder of a young primary school teacher whose death sparked renewed calls to improve women's safety. Sabina Nessa's death, like that of 33-year-old Sarah Everard in March, put pressure on the government to do more to protect women and girls in public spaces. Koci Selamaj, who is of Albanian origin, was arrested on Sunday in connection with the killing of Nessa, 28, and charged on Monday evening. Nessa's body was found in southeast London on September 18. She disappeared after walking through a park to meet a friend the previous day.

Pregnant mum, kids among 91 rescued off Spain coast

A pregnant Algerian mother and her five children were among 91 migrants rescued off the coast of Alicante in southeastern Spain overnight, the Red Cross said yesterday. The sea route to mainland Spain and its Balearic and Canary Islands is fraught with danger, with the International Organization for Migration saying at least 1,025 people have died in 2021 in "the deadliest year on the migratory route to Spain". The woman "was eight months pregnant," a Red Cross spokeswoman told AFP, saying she had been taken to hospital suffering from stomach pains, while her five children were with their father. Most of the arrivals were from Algeria.



Greenland FM axed over independence remarks

Greenland's pro-independence foreign minister Pele Broberg was demoted on Monday after saying that only Inuits should vote in a referendum on whether the Arctic territory should break away from Denmark. Prime Minister Mute Egede, who favours autonomy but not independence, said the ruling coalition had agreed to a reshuffle after a controversial interview by the minister of the autonomous Arctic territory. Broberg was named business and trade minister and Egede will take on the foreign affairs portfolio. The prime minister, who took power in April after a snap election, underscored that "all citizens in Greenland have equal rights" in a swipe at Broberg. Broberg in an interview to Danish newspaper Berlingske said he wanted to reserve voting in any future referendum on independence to Inuits.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Iran crossed nuke 'red lines'

Israeli PM tells UNGA; Tehran rejects his speech as 'full of lies'

AGENCIES

Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said Monday Iran had breached all the "red lines" aimed at curbing its nuclear weapons program, but that Israel "will not allow" Tehran to get the bomb.

In his first address to the United Nations General Assembly, Bennett claimed the Islamic republic had in recent years taken "a major leap forward" in its nuclear production capacity and ability to enrich weapons-grade uranium.

"Iran's nuclear weapon program is at a critical point, all red lines have been crossed," said Bennett, who took office in June.

"There are those in the world who seem to see Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons as an inevitable reality, as a done deal, or they have just become tired of hearing about it," the 49-year-old premier told the world body.



"Israel doesn't have that privilege. We cannot tire. We will not tire. Israel will not allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon."

Iran rejected Bennett's speech as "full of lies."

Israel "desperately attempts to portray Iran's conventional weapon capabilities or its exclusively peaceful nuclear program, which is under the most robust verification of the International Atomic Energy Agency, as a challenge to regional stability," Payman Ghadirkhomi, the second

secretary for Iran's UN mission, told the assembly.

"This is but a hypocritical move to distract attention from the real danger posed to regional peace and security by this regime, particularly its nuclear-weapon arsenals and clandestine and unsafeguarded nuclear installations and activities."

Ghadirkhomi also slammed Israel for "hampering" the establishment of a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East, as well as for its activities in the Palestinian territories.

Iran, which says its nuclear program is for civilian purposes, said Friday that it expected talks to resume soon on reviving a 2015 landmark agreement scaling back its program in exchange for sanctions relief.

The agreement started to fall apart in 2018 when the US withdrew from it and reinstated sanctions. Iran in turn again started to ramp up its nuclear activities.

'Blah, blah, blah'

Activist Greta Thunberg lambasts leaders over climate crisis

AGENCIES

Greta Thunberg is not very optimistic about the climate talks held in Italy this week, the environmental youth activist said as she arrived at the venue in Milan yesterday.

Thousands of young people, including Thunberg, will converge on Milan this week, with some 400 from about 190 countries set to meet policymakers, either remotely or in person, to hammer out proposals to tackle global warming, reports Reuters.

She quoted statements by Boris Johnson: "This is not some expensive, politically correct, green act of bunny hugging," and Narendra Modi: "Fighting climate change calls for innovation, cooperation and willpower" but said the science did not lie.

Carbon emissions are on track to rise by 16% by 2030, according to the UN, rather than fall by half, which is the cut needed to keep global heating under the internationally agreed limit of 1.5C, reports The Guardian.

"Build back better. Blah, blah, blah. Green economy. Blah, blah, blah. Net zero by 2050. Blah, blah, blah," she said in a speech to the Youth4Climate summit in Milan yesterday. "This is all we hear from our so-called leaders. Words that sound great but so far have not led to action. Our hopes and ambitions drown in their empty promises."

The Cop26 climate summit starts in Glasgow, UK, on 31 October and all the big-polluting countries must deliver tougher pledges to cut emissions to keep the goal of 1.5C within reach.



SEPTEMBER 29

1923 - Britain began to govern Palestine under a mandate from the League of Nations.

1938 - Germany, France, Britain and Italy signed the Munich agreement, in which the German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland, was surrendered to Nazi Germany.

1957 - Many people were killed in the first nuclear waste disaster to cause large loss of life. An explosion at the Mayak Chemical Combine in Russia formed a nuclear cloud five miles wide.

SOURCE: REUTERS



Pigeons fly at dawn in front of the lava and smoke, following the eruption of a volcano on the Canary Island of La Palma, in El Paso, Spain yesterday. Spain's government classified La Palma as a disaster zone yesterday, a move that will trigger emergency subsidies and other support measures.

PHOTO: REUTERS

TRUCKER SHORTAGE SPARKS FUEL HOARDING

UK puts army on standby to ease supply chain crisis

REUTERS, London

The British government says it is putting the military on standby as part of further measures to address a supply chain crisis which has led fuel pumps to run dry amid panic-buying by motorists.

The move to mobilise the army comes after a widespread shortage of truck drivers, which has led to serious supply problems for retailers and restaurants in the past few months, has meant plentiful stocks of fuel have not reached filling stations.

A warning of fuel supply shortages at the end of last week has led to panic buying, with long lines of cars waiting for hours to fill up, and resulted in pumps in cities across Britain running dry.

The government had already announced plans to issue temporary visas for 5,000 foreign truck drivers, suspend competition laws and entice former drivers back into the industry as part of measures to deal with the labour shortage.

It said it would now put a limited number of military tanker drivers on a state of readiness to be deployed if necessary.

"While the fuel industry expects demand will return to its normal levels in the coming days, it's right that we take this sensible, precautionary step," business minister

Kwasi Kwarteng said in a statement late on Monday.

"If required, the deployment of military personnel will provide the supply chain with additional capacity as a temporary measure to help ease pressures caused by spikes in localised demand for fuel."

The army tanker drivers will receive specialised training before deploying to help deal with supply chain issues, the government said.

The demand for fuel has meant that 50% to 90% of pumps were dry in some areas of Britain, according to The Petrol Retailers Association (PRA).

The fuel industry says there is no shortage, and the issue is transporting petrol and diesel to forecourts.

"As many cars are now holding more fuel than usual, we expect that demand will return to its normal levels in the coming days, easing pressures on fuel station forecourts. We would encourage everyone to buy fuel as they usually would," said a joint statement from fuel firms. However, hauliers, gas stations and retailers say there are no quick fixes as the shortfall of truck drivers - estimated to be around 100,000 - was so acute, and because transporting fuel demands additional training and licensing.

Murders rose 30pc in US in 2020: FBI

AFP, Washington

The number of murders in the United States rose by around 30 percent in 2020 over the previous year, to some 21,500, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) said Monday.

A number of large US cities had already reported an increase in the number of homicides last year but the FBI figures provided the first picture of the situation nationwide.

It was the steepest rise in the number of murders since the FBI began collecting data in the 1960s, but the total number of such killings still remained below that of the 1980s.

The number of murders last year rose sharply from June, with no part of the United States was spared -- although the southern state of Louisiana continued to have the highest murder rate in the country.

According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report, 77 percent of the murders in 2020 were committed with a firearm, up from 74 percent in 2019.

Experts have not provided a clear explanation for the rise in the number of murders last year but have pointed to the destabilizing impact of the Covid pandemic and a rise in gun sales.

The FBI said some 16,000 federal, state, county, city, university, college and tribal agencies had submitted data to the crime report.

The FBI has not released homicide statistics so far for 2021, but the numbers from several large cities indicate there has been no let-up in the increased murder rate.

According to World Bank figures, there were 6.5 murders per 100,000 inhabitants in the United States in 2018, compared with 35 in Mexico, 27 in Brazil, eight in Russia and one per 100,000 in France and Germany.

CONGO SEX ABUSE

WHO 'heartbroken' after probe findings

REUTERS, Geneva

The World Health Organization's regional director for Africa said yesterday that the agency was "heartbroken" by the findings of an independent commission on sex abuse in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"We in the WHO are indeed humbled, horrified and heartbroken by the findings of this inquiry," Matshidiso Moeti said at a news briefing.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the commission's report made for "harrowing reading". The commission found that some 21 of 83 alleged perpetrators were employed by the WHO, and that the abuses, which included nine allegations of rape, were committed by both national and international staff. Alleged victims "were not provided with the necessary support and assistance required for such degrading experiences", the report said. In an investigation published last year, more than 50 women accused aid workers from the WHO and leading charities of demanding sex in exchange for jobs during the 2018-2020 Ebola crisis.

China lets US siblings return home

AFP, Shanghai

An American brother and sister barred from exiting China since 2018 in an apparent bid to pressure their father to return and face criminal allegations have finally left the country, Beijing and Washington confirmed yesterday.

Neither side gave a reason for the sudden lifting of a Chinese exit ban on Victor and Cynthia Liu, but the development could add to accusations in the United States that President Joe Biden's government was engaging in "hostage diplomacy" with China.

The siblings' release came shortly after the US Justice Department last Friday announced a deal to defer prosecution of felony fraud charges against Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou.

"We welcome Cynthia and Victor Liu's return to the United States on Sunday," a state department spokesperson told AFP in an emailed statement, confirming they had returned to the US.

The spokesperson did not comment on the circumstances of their return. A Chinese foreign ministry

HOSTAGE DIPLOMACY



spokesperson also confirmed they had departed.

Beijing said in 2018 that the siblings, along with their mother Sandra Han, were barred from leaving due to suspected "economic crimes".

The US-born Victor had been set to start his second year at Georgetown University while Cynthia was heading back to work with consulting firm McKinsey & Company, The New York Times reported at the time.

It quoted the siblings saying they were being prevented from leaving

to compel their father, a former executive at a Chinese state-owned bank, to return to the country and face criminal charges.

Their mother was allegedly being held in a secret site known as a "black jail", the Times had reported.

Neither the State Department nor the Chinese foreign ministry gave updated details on Han's status.

"We oppose the use of coercive exit bans against people who are not themselves charged with crimes," the State spokesperson said.

"We will continue to advocate on behalf of all American citizens in the PRC subject to arbitrary detention and coercive exit bans."

Meng, the Chinese tech giant's chief financial officer, had been under house arrest since 2018 in Vancouver where she was arrested on a US extradition warrant. Days later, China arrested two Canadians, former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor.

All three returned to the respective countries at the weekend following the deal in Meng's case.