

## 'Pro-US' and 'confrontational'

### N Korea slams South's new leader, fires ballistic missile

REUTERS, Seoul

A major North Korean propaganda website yesterday denounced South Korea's incoming president Yoon Suk-yeol, who has vowed to take a tougher line on weapons tests by Pyongyang, describing him as "pro-United States", and "confrontational".

The North's state media have yet to make formal comments on Yoon, a conservative who is set to take office on May 10, but the website Uriminzokkiri issued scathing criticism ahead of his inauguration.

"Yoon Suk-yeol had aroused shock with such preposterous remarks as 'preemptive strike' and 'main enemy,' and stirred up confrontational madness trumpeting a 'stronger South Korea-US alliance,'" it said.

It was referring to comments by Yoon that he would allow a pre-emptive strike on North Korea if signs of attack were imminent, and his description of the neighbouring nation as a "main enemy".

That description of the North has been shunned by outgoing progressive President Moon Jae-in, who had sought to improve relations.

North Korea fired a ballistic missile toward the sea off its east coast on Wednesday, South Korea and Japan said, about a week after Pyongyang vowed to develop its nuclear forces "at the fastest possible speed".

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said it detected the launch at about noon in the Sunan area of the North's capital of Pyongyang, home to an international airport and the area from which the North said it had fired its largest intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the Hwasong-17, on March 24.



Israeli security forces detain a protester at the compound that houses Al-Aqsa Mosque, known to Muslims as Noble Sanctuary and to Jews as Temple Mount, in Jerusalem's Old City yesterday. The police said they had repelled "dozens of rioters" who had been "throwing stones and other objects" at the security forces.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Why EU may find it tough to squeeze out Russian oil

REUTERS, London

The European Union has proposed a phased embargo of Russian oil but may find it tricky to implement, given Europe's complex distribution network and challenges in tracking crude once it is blended or refined. The plan, if agreed by member states, would take effect in six months for crude, and in eight months for diesel and other oil products.

### HOW WATERTIGHT WILL ANY EU SANCTIONS BE?

Under the proposal, Hungary and Slovakia would be granted a longer period - until the end of 2023 - to adapt to the embargo. This means that countries in the EU would still be able to purchase Russian oil via Hungary and Slovakia, unless the plan is ratified to prevent both countries from buying more oil than they need.

European countries might still continue buying Russian cargoes from other third countries without being aware of its origin. Oil can usually be traced to its origin based on its chemical make up, such as sulphur content and density. However, some buyers have been deceived in the past by forged documents, hiding the origin of cargoes from countries under sanctions, including Iran and Venezuela, according to industry sources.

### RUSSIAN OIL PURCHASES

At least 26 major European refiners and trading companies have suspended spot purchases or intend to phase out a combined 2.1 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian imports, according to JP Morgan. European companies including Shell, Shell, TotalEnergies, TTEF, Repsol, Repsol and BP, no longer buy any refined products with Russian content. And BP's contracts state any deal with a seller that violates its policy will be invalid, according to trade information detailed in the Platts



trading window.

### CARGOES OF RUSSIAN OIL

Even with all those documents in place, there is no guarantee of eliminating any traces of Russian hydrocarbons once it enters the EU's main oil importing hub, the Amsterdam-Rotterdam-Antwerp (ARA) complex - made up of eight ports spread across two countries, 96 terminals, and 6,300 storage tanks owned by hundreds of international oil companies. "Some products processed in European refineries will continue to contain Russian oil," Shell says. In ARA, the blended Russian oil may show up in customs data simply as fuel from the Netherlands, said Cuneyt Kazokoglu, head of oil demand analysis at FGE.

### WHERE DOES THE OIL GO?

Fuel can be loaded onto cargoes and re-exported to other regions and countries. It can go by barge to other terminals within the same port, or head down the Rhine river to Switzerland, France and Germany. This can hide the fuel's origin, traders said. From the ARA hub, oil products can be distributed through Nato's Central European Pipeline System (CEPS), which links to six maritime ports and 11 refineries across the continent, three rail and 16 truck-loading stations,

and six international airports.

Buyers are increasingly requesting breakdowns on the origin of blended oil from storage sites, industry sources said, to make their own decision on whether they can accept it. But fully traceable origin documentation is not always readily available in a reasonable time frame before a deal takes place.

Some shipping charterers provide a certificate detailing where fuel was produced or processed. While a country's customs authority would have access to that data with imported cargoes, the documents are considered confidential.

Shell previously classified goods of Russian origin as those with 50% or more of their content from fuel produced in Russia. But the firm recently tightened its restrictions on buying Russian oil, saying it would no longer accept refined products with Russian content, including blended fuels, according to clauses in its trading contracts.

The restriction, however, only applies to platforms where companies are allowed to insert their own clauses, and would exclude the gasoil contract on the major ICE exchange, one source familiar with the matter said.

## India's J&K gets redrawn constituencies

REUTERS, New Delhi

India yesterday published a new list of redrawn political constituencies for the former state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), giving greater representation to the Muslim-majority region's Hindu areas and paving the way for fresh elections.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government broke up J&K into two federal territories in 2019 as part of a move to tighten its grip over the region, which is at the heart of more than 70 years of hostility between India and Pakistan.

Anticipating protests in a region fighting Indian rule for decades, the government put many political leaders under house arrest and cut off internet connections when it announced the move to split the state.

J&K originally comprised the mainly Muslim Kashmir Valley - the bone of contention between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan - the Hindu-dominated Jammu region, and the remote Buddhist enclave of Ladakh.

The government said a delimitation commission had finalised 90 assembly constituencies for J&K, excluding Ladakh, with 43 seats for Jammu and 47 for Kashmir. Earlier, Jammu had 37 seats and the Kashmir valley 46.

The commission said it had been difficult to accommodate competing claims from various sides, citing in a statement the region's "peculiar geo-cultural landscape". Indian Home Minister Amit Shah said in January that elections would be held in J&K soon after the delimitation process was completed.

## 5-YEAR JAIL SENTENCE Myanmar junta court rejects Suu Kyi appeal

REUTERS



The Supreme Court in military-ruled Myanmar on Wednesday struck down an appeal from deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi against a five-year jail sentence she was handed last week on corruption charges. "The appeal was summarily rejected," said a source with knowledge of the proceedings, adding that the court dismissed the appeal as soon as it was lodged without hearing arguments from either side. The Nobel laureate had been found guilty last week, in the first of 11 corruption cases brought against her. She has been under house arrest on charges ranging from corruption to treason, and potentially carrying a combined sentence of 190 years.

## HEAVY RAINS, FLOODS 22 killed, 40 hurt in Afghanistan

REUTERS, Kabul

Heavy rain and flooding has killed 22 people, destroyed hundreds of homes and damaged crops in Afghanistan, which is already facing a humanitarian crisis, a disaster management official said yesterday. The Taliban government, struggling to cope with the disaster that has affected more than a third of its provinces, will approach international relief organisations for help, officials said. "Due to flooding and storms in 12 provinces, 22 people have died and 40 injured," said Hassibullah Shekhani, head of communications and information at Afghanistan's National Disaster Management Authority. The rain and flooding was particularly severe in the western provinces of Badghis and Faryab and the northern province of Baghlan, en suffering from drought in recent years, made worse by climate change, with low crop yields raising fears of serious food shortages.

## SPIKE IN COVID CASES Beijing urges millions to work from home

AFP, Beijing



The streets of Beijing's business district were deserted yesterday as the government called for people to return to work remotely, with scores of subway stations shut after a national holiday muted by coronavirus curbs. Chinese authorities have stuck to their zero Covid policy of lockdowns and mass testing as they battle the biggest outbreak since the early days of the pandemic, with entire neighbourhoods in the capital sealed over handfuls of infections. Beijing reported 50 local cases yesterday, a day after it said people in Chaoyang, its most populous district, should work from home. Those among the district's 3.5 million residents who needed to visit their offices were encouraged to drive themselves and avoid gatherings. At least one other Beijing district has also encouraged residents to work from home, while dozens of subway stations across the capital remained closed.

## 'FOREIGN CONSPIRACY' PROBE

### Pak to form inquiry commission

DAWN ONLINE

Pakistan's Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb announced yesterday that the government had decided to form an "independent" inquiry commission to probe the alleged "foreign conspiracy" that former prime minister Imran Khan has been claiming was behind the ouster of his government.

The minister told a press conference in Islamabad that the commission will "fairly decide that the narrative of foreign conspiracy was all drama and the real character behind it was Imran Khan".

"These allegations are an attempt to cause irreparable damage to the country," the information minister said.

Predicting the post-inquiry scenario, Aurangzeb said anyone who levelled such allegations "will be dealt as per the law" in light of the decision made by the inquiry commission.

She reiterated that the commission would be independent and its probe report would be brought before the public. "This drama should now end."

The minister said the terms of reference of the inquiry commission would be placed before the cabinet for approval in its next meeting.

No one including Imran Khan would be able to raise an objection to the name of the commission's head, Aurangzeb added.



Farmers shout slogans during a protest against the Punjab state government and Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) for frequent power cuts and rise in the prices of essential commodities, in Amritsar, India yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP