

## North Korea unveils new nuclear warheads

Vows to produce more weapons-grade material as US air carrier arrives in S Korea

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea unveiled new, smaller nuclear warheads and vowed to produce more weapons-grade nuclear material to expand the country's arsenal, state media KCNA said yesterday, as a US aircraft carrier arrived in South Korea for military drills.

KCNA released photos of the warheads, dubbed Hwasan-31s, as



Kim Dong-yup, a former South Korean naval officer who teaches at Kyungnam University, said the warheads were most likely designed for use with at least eight different delivery platforms listed in posters on the wall.

"Those are not limited to tactical missiles but appear to be a miniaturised, lightweight and standardised warhead that can mount on various vehicles," he said.

"Now that the delivery vehicles are nearly ready, they would churn out warheads to secure second strike capabilities - perhaps hundreds, not dozens - while running centrifuges even harder to get weapons grade nuclear material," he added.

Kim Jong Un ordered the production of weapons-grade materials in a "farsighted way" to boost its nuclear arsenal "exponentially" and produce powerful weapons, KCNA said.

He said the enemy of the country's nuclear forces is not a specific state but "war and nuclear disaster themselves," and the policy of expanding arsenal is solely aimed at defending the country.

Experts say the images could indicate progress in miniaturising warheads that are powerful yet small enough to mount on intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of striking the US.

"It has something more powerful in a smaller space. That's worrisome," said Kune Y. Suh, professor emeritus of nuclear engineering at Seoul National University, comparing the new warheads to the 2016 version.

**Xi hails ME thaw in call with Saudi crown prince**

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping lauded what he called the easing of tensions in the Middle East during a call with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman yesterday, state media reported.

Beijing brokered an agreement between Tehran and Riyadh on March 10 to restore diplomatic ties following a seven year freeze.

Long bitter rivals, Iran and Saudi Arabia have engaged in a series of proxy conflicts in the region, such as the protracted fighting in Yemen.

In his first comments on the matter to be made public since the deal was struck, Xi said the dialogue promoted by China would "play a major role in strengthening regional unity and cooperation".

Crown Prince Mohammed yesterday "expressed the Kingdom's appreciation for the Chinese initiative to support efforts to develop neighbourly relations" between the two sides, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

Saudi Arabia and Iran are now preparing to reopen embassies in each other's capitals, with a meeting between their two top diplomats due before the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, Saudi state media said Monday.

A trilateral statement issued after the deal said the Saudi and Iranian delegations "expressed their appreciation and gratitude to the leadership and government of the People's Republic of China for hosting and sponsoring the talks".

## China ramping up bailout loans to 'Belt and Road' nations

Says report by researchers from WB, Harvard Kennedy School, AidData and Kiel Institute for the World Economy

AFP, Beijing

China has handed out \$240 billion worth of bailout loans to 22 developing countries at risk of default over the past two decades, with the trend accelerating in recent years, a report said yesterday.

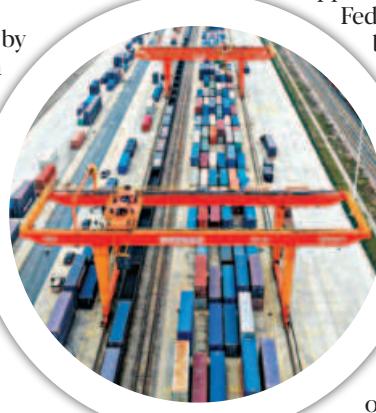
Almost all the funds went to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Turkey -- mostly low- and middle-income nations that have received Chinese loans for infrastructure development, according to the study.

The 40-page report by the US-based research lab AidData, the World Bank, the Harvard Kennedy School and the Kiel Institute for the World Economy showed bailout loans had accelerated between 2016 and 2021, with Beijing doling out 80 percent of its rescue lending in that period.

Around the world, BRI nations have come under strain as soaring inflation and interest rates, compounded by the lingering impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, have hurt their ability to repay debts. The bailouts allow the countries to extend their loans and remain solvent, the report said.

China says more than 150 countries have signed up to the BRI, a trillion-dollar global infrastructure push unveiled by President Xi Jinping a decade ago.

Beijing says the initiative aims to deepen



friendly trade relations with other nations, particularly in the developing world.

But critics have long accused China of luring lower-income countries into debt traps by offering huge, unaffordable loans.

"China has developed a system of 'Bailouts on the Belt and Road' that helps recipient countries to avoid default, and continue servicing their BRI debts, at least in the short run," the report said.

In comparison to the International Monetary Fund and the vast liquidity support extended by the US Federal Reserve, China's bailouts remain small but are growing quickly, according to the AidData report.

"Beijing has targeted a limited set of potential recipients, as almost all Chinese rescue loans have gone to low- and middle-income BRI countries with significant debts outstanding to Chinese banks," its authors wrote.

The report warned that Chinese loans tend to be more opaque compared with other international lenders of last resort -- and often come at an average interest rate of five percent, compared with a typical two percent rate on an IMF loan.

Many such agreements were so-called "rollovers", in which the same short-term loans are repeatedly extended to refinance debts about to come due.

China's foreign ministry yesterday

hit back at the criticism, accusing "some people" of "hyping up so-called Chinese 'debt traps' and opaque loans, and slinging mud at China, something that we absolutely do not accept".

"China... has never forced any party to borrow money, has never forced any country to pay, will not attach any political conditions to loan agreements, and does not seek any political self-interest," spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular press briefing.

China this month agreed to restructure its loans to Sri Lanka, clearing the way for an IMF bailout of the island nation that lists Beijing as its biggest bilateral creditor.

### BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

For a decade, Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative has poured billions of dollars into infrastructure projects each year: paving highways from Papua New Guinea to Kenya, constructing ports from Sri Lanka to West Africa and providing power and telecoms infrastructure for people from Latin America to Southeast Asia.

First announced in 2013 under Chinese leader Xi Jinping, the initiative has been seen as an extension of the country's sharp ascent to global power, reports CNN.

"Beijing is ultimately trying to rescue its own banks. That's why it has gotten into the risky business of international bailout lending," said study co-author Carmen Reinhart in the AidData post.

China is negotiating debt restructurings with countries including Zambia, Ghana and has been criticised for holding up the processes.

In response, it has called on the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to also offer debt relief.

**EU AGENCY STUDY**  
Cancer-causing compounds found in everyday food

AFP, Paris

Cancer-causing chemical compounds called nitrosamines have been detected in a range of everyday foods and could pose a health risk to consumers, the European Food Safety Agency warned yesterday. The 10 nitrosamines -- which are not intentionally added to food but which can form during its preparation and processing -- are carcinogenic and also genotoxic, which means they may damage DNA, according to a new study conducted by the European Union agency. "Our assessment concludes that for all age groups across the EU population, the level of exposure to nitrosamines in food raises a health concern," said Dieter Schrenk, chair of the EFSA's panel on contaminants in the food chain. "Based on animal studies, we considered the incidence of liver tumours in rodents as the most critical health effect," he added. Nitrosamines have been detected in foods including cured meat, processed fish, cocoa, beer and other alcoholic drinks, the EFSA said.

**Girls' education activist arrested by Taliban**



AFP, Kabul

The founder of a project that campaigned for girls' education in Afghanistan has been detained by Taliban authorities in Kabul, his brother and the United Nations said yesterday. The Taliban government

last year barred girls from attending secondary school and later university, making Afghanistan the only country in the world to issue such restrictions on education. Matiullah Wesa, the head of PenPath was stopped by men outside a mosque after prayers on Monday evening, his brother Samiullah Wesa told AFP. "When Matiullah asked for their identity cards, they beat him and forcefully took him away," he said. "He has been arrested for his activities in the education sector."

### ISMAILI CENTRE

**Two killed in knife attack in Lisbon**

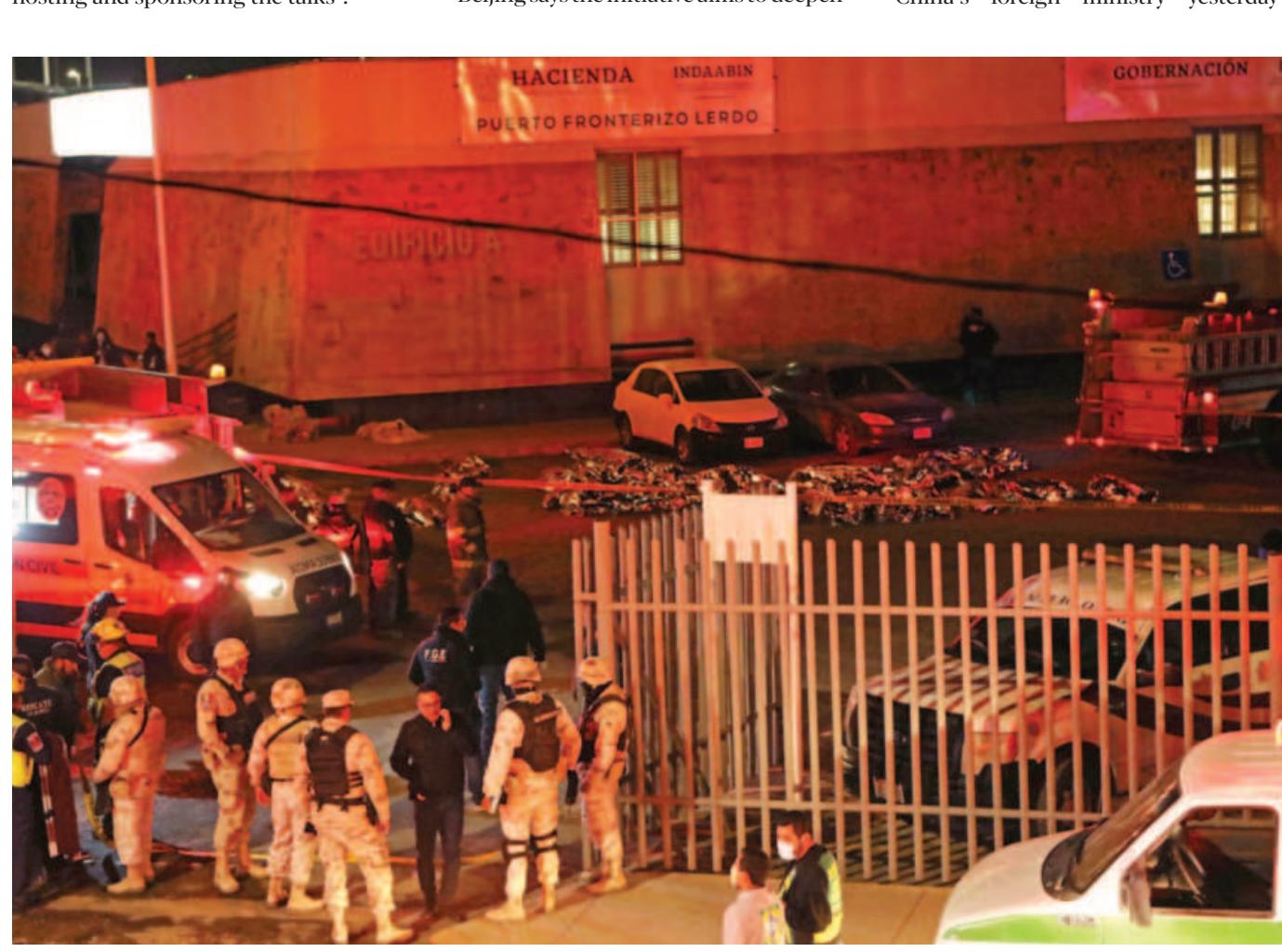
AFP, Lisbon

Two people died yesterday following a knife attack at an Islamic centre in the Portuguese capital Lisbon that wounded several others, police said. Prime Minister Antonio Costa said it was "premature to make any interpretation of this criminal act." "Everything points to this being an isolated incident," he told reporters. Images on Portuguese television showed armed police outside the Ismaili Muslim centre. "The attack left several people wounded and, for the moment, two dead," police said in a statement, adding that the suspected assailant had been shot and arrested. Police said they arrived at the building just before 11:00 am after being warned that a knife attack was underway. "The police come across a man armed with a large knife. Orders were given to the attacker to cease the attack, which he disobeyed, advancing towards the police, knife in hand," the police statement added. "Faced with the serious and ongoing threat, the policemen used firearms against the person," it added.



Students hold placards during a demonstration, as part of the tenth day of nationwide strikes and protests against French government's pension reform in Paris, France yesterday. The slogan reads "Macron, your Rolex in our strike funds".

PHOTO: REUTERS



Firefighters and police rescue migrants from an immigration station in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state, Mexico early yesterday, where at least 39 people were killed and dozens injured after a fire at the immigration station.

**Act against ex-PM Imran**  
Pakistan PM urges parliament

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif yesterday appealed to parliament to act against predecessor Imran Khan over accusations that his party was involved in violence that erupted when police tried to arrest him for alleged corruption.

The clashes occurred earlier this month after Khan's supporters prevented police and paramilitary forces from detaining him over allegations he unlawfully sold state gifts during his 2018-22 tenure as premier. He denies any wrongdoing.

"Did you ever see law enforcement officers going to serve a court summons on someone and then being attacked with petrol bombs?" Sharif asked lawmakers in a speech telecast live.

"I'm appealing to this parliament that these things need to be taken care of immediately. This house has to take action today if we want to save Pakistan," he said, adding: "Enough is enough. Now law has to take its course."