

‘A daydream’ N Korean leader’s sister dismisses talks with US

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s powerful sister dismissed the idea of talks with the United States as “a daydream” yesterday, the eve of the first US-South Korean meeting on nuclear deterrence.

North Korea fired its most powerful ballistic missile yet last week, the solid-fuel Hwasong-18 intercontinental ballistic missile, the latest of a string of launches this year.

Seoul and Washington have ramped up defence cooperation in response to the North’s weapons tests, staging joint military exercises with advanced stealth jets and US strategic assets.

They will hold their inaugural meeting of the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) in Seoul today, which, according to the presidential office in Seoul, is aimed at “bolstering nuclear deterrence against North Korea”.

CHINA TALKS US envoy calls for ‘urgent action’ on climate

AFP, Beijing

US climate envoy John Kerry held four hours of talks with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing yesterday, calling for “urgent action” as the two countries revived stalled diplomacy on reducing planet-warming emissions.

Climate talks between the two biggest greenhouse gas emitters came to a halt last year after Nancy Pelosi, then-speaker of the US House of Representatives, enraged Beijing by visiting self-ruled Taiwan, which China considers to be part of its territory.

Kerry, a former secretary of state, has enjoyed comparatively cordial relations with China despite Washington and Beijing locking horns over Taiwan and other issues.

Kerry met his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua in Beijing yesterday, with two men speaking for around four hours, CCTV said.

Both countries “must take urgent action on a number of fronts, especially the challenges of coal and methane pollution,” Kerry wrote in a tweet after the talks. “The climate crisis demands that the world’s two largest economies work together to limit the Earth’s warming,” Kerry tweeted.

Mexico intercepts 500 migrants in two days

REUTERS, Mexico City

Mexican authorities on Sunday said they intercepted over 500 migrants in two days in the eastern state of Veracruz as authorities crack down on the transportation of migrants toward the United States in unsafe conditions.

Authorities found 206 migrants abandoned in a tractor-trailer on Saturday in the town of Puente Nacional, Veracruz, a source at the National Migration Institute (INM) said.

The town’s mayor Roberto Montiel wrote on Facebook that “over 180” migrants were found, including women and children, with some of the migrants presenting signs of dehydration.

Earlier on Sunday, the INM reported in a statement that authorities had intercepted 303 migrants in two operations on Friday morning in Veracruz.

At first, authorities found 107 migrants without regular migration status, including 20 minors, in a tractor trailer after it was pulled over on highway.

Six people were arrested for alleged roles in transporting the migrants, who hailed from Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, the INM’s statement said.

Also on Friday, authorities found 196 migrants, including 19 unaccompanied minors, packed into an improperly parked tractor-trailer detected on a road close to the city of Fortín de las Flores.

Five of the migrants were adults from Guatemala and another five adults from India, the INM statement said, without providing further details.



This video grab taken and released yesterday by the Russian Investigative Committee shows investigators working on the Kerch bridge -- linking Crimea to Russia -- which was heavily damaged following an attack. Russia yesterday said a Ukrainian attack on the bridge linking Moscow-annexed Crimea to the Russian mainland killed a civilian couple and wounded their child.

PHOTO: AFP

Record number of Chinese warships SPOTTED IN WATERS Says Taiwan; analysts say China’s ruling Communist Party continues intimidation campaign against Taipei

CNN ONLINE

A record 16 Chinese warships were spotted in waters around Taiwan in a 24-hour period late last week, the island’s Defense Ministry reported, in what analysts said was the latest sign of an intimidation campaign against Taipei by China’s ruling Communist Party.

The People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) activity in the 24 hours ending at 6:00 am local time Saturday followed exercises earlier last week that saw dozens of Chinese warplanes fly past the median line of the Taiwan Strait and into the key regions of Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ).

Over 72 hours in the middle of last week, 73 PLA aircraft either crossed the Taiwan Strait’s median line – an informal demarcation point that Beijing does not recognize but until recently largely respected – or entered the southeastern or southwestern parts of the island’s ADIZ.

During that same period, nine PLA vessels were reported in waters around Taiwan in three consecutive days.

The 16 Chinese ships around Taiwan on Friday into Saturday was the most since the island’s Defense Ministry began providing daily updates of PLA activity around the island in August 2022.

“It is a growing military effort,” Carl Schuster, a Hawaii-based analyst and former director of

operations at the US Pacific Command’s Joint Intelligence Center, told CNN yesterday.

The military operations indicate Beijing’s efforts are twofold, he said.

One, constant PLA activities around the island present its defenders with a range of possible attack routes to design defenses for, and two, to “practice, rehearse and train for the ‘moment’ should it come,” Schuster said.



That moment would be a possible Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

China’s ruling Communist Party claims the self-governing democracy as its territory despite never having controlled it, and has spent decades trying to isolate it diplomatically.

Beijing has not ruled out using force to take control of the island.

Chinese state media on Sunday touted the naval activity, noting the PLAN “breaking the record for the number of vessels deployed in its drills in the region,” in a story in Global Times.

“Analysts said Sunday that the recent intensive exercises

demonstrate the PLA’s capabilities in encircling the island,” the Global Times story said.

Neither Taiwan’s Defense Ministry nor the Global Times article gave details on what PLA warships were in waters around Taiwan.

But Chinese state-run media said the PLA exercises “likely featured amphibious landing training” and the story was

topped with a picture of a PLAN amphibious assault ship it said was taken “during a maritime real-combat training exercise recently.”

Schuster said he expects the PLA to keep increasing the pressure on Taiwan. “We will see more such exercises and next year’s will more complex and larger in terms of units involved and extent of their activities,” he said.

Meanwhile, China yesterday reacted with anger to a planned visit next month to the United States by “separatist” Taiwan presidential frontrunner Vice President William Lai, as the government in Taipei said it saw no reason to overreact to mere transit stops.

PITA’S 2ND PM BID Thai alliance reaffirms backing

REUTERS, Bangkok

An eight-party alliance seeking to form Thailand’s next government reaffirmed its backing for Pita Limjaroenrat to become premier, Pita said yesterday, despite his defeat last week in a parliamentary vote.

Pita, leader of election winners Move Forward, failed in his initial bid to win the requisite support of more than half of the combined lower house and military-appointed upper house or Senate. The legislature will hold another vote tomorrow.

After a meeting with the alliance, Pita said he was confident the Senate could not block his re-nomination for PM.

However, he added if he could not secure more votes from Senate in his second bid, he would let ally Pheu Thai party “take action”.

At the weekend, he raised the prospect of a political ally leading the new government if he fails to become prime minister.

Pheu Thai won the second-largest share of votes in the May 14 election.

Only 13 senators backed 42-year-old Pita in last week’s vote, with the rest voting against him or abstaining, which his party said indicated some were acting under duress.

Heatwaves scorch the globe

US fights numerous wildfires; China logs 52.2 Celsius

AFP, Rome

Temperatures reached new highs yesterday as heatwaves scorched parts of the Northern Hemisphere, triggering health warnings and fanning wildfires in the latest stark reminder of the effects of global warming.

From North America to Europe and Asia, people gulped water and sought shelter from the sweltering heat, with the mercury expected to reach new highs in several places in the next few days.

Europe, the globe’s fastest-warming continent, was bracing for its hottest-ever temperature this week on Italy’s islands of Sicily and Sardinia, where a high of 48 degrees Celsius (118 degrees Fahrenheit) is predicted, according to the European Space Agency.

China reported a new high for mid-July in the northwest of the country, where temperature reached 52.2C in the Xinjiang region’s village of Sanbao, breaking the previous high of 50.6C set six years ago.

In Cyprus, a 90-year-old man died as a result of heatstroke and three other seniors were hospitalised, health officials said.

In Japan, heatstroke alerts were issued in 32 out of the country’s 47 prefectures.

In western and southern states in the US, which are used to high temperatures, more than 80 million people were under advisories as a “widespread and oppressive” heatwave roasted the region. Southern California was fighting numerous wildfires, including one in Riverside County that has burned more than 7,500 acres (3,000 hectares) and prompted evacuation orders.

‘INAPPROPRIATE’ AFFAIR Singapore House Speaker, MP resign

AFP, Singapore

Singapore’s parliament Speaker and a woman MP yesterday resigned over an “inappropriate” affair, plunging the ruling party into further turmoil following a rare high-level corruption probe involving a cabinet minister. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said he accepted the resignations of Speaker Tan Chuan Jin and MP Cheng Li Hui to “maintain the high standards of propriety and personal conduct” of the People’s Action Party (PAP). He said they were in an “inappropriate relationship” that continued even after he had told them to stop in February. The political drama was the latest development to rock the PAP, which has ruled Singapore uninterrupted for 64 years.

South Korea flood death toll rises to 40

REUTERS, Seoul



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol yesterday blamed authorities’ failure to follow disaster response rules as the death toll from days of torrential rain rose to 40, including a dozen people found dead in a submerged underpass.

Deluges have pummelled central and southern regions since Thursday as the rainy season that started in late June reaches its peak. The interior ministry has also reported nine people missing and 34 injured across the nation. Twelve deaths occurred in a tunnel in Cheongju, 110km south of Seoul, where 16 vehicles were swamped by a flash flood on Saturday after a river levee collapsed.

Iran shuts education centre over ‘inciting riots’

AFP, Tehran

Iranian authorities have shuttered an educational centre accused of “inciting riots” during last year’s mass demonstrations triggered by the death in custody of a young woman, state media reported yesterday.

Nationwide protests rocked Iran following the September death of a 22-year-old Iranian Kurd, Mahsa Amini, in police custody after her arrest over violating the Islamic republic’s strict dress code.

“We prepared and issued a warrant for the closure of Gaj centre following the directive of the minister of education,” state news agency IRNA quoted Ahmad Mahmoudzadeh, head of Iran’s non-governmental schools, as saying.

Mahmoudzadeh said Gaj had “incited riots” during a Persian literature exam for students, without elaborating.



A woman looks out over “rice field art” - using seven colours of planted rice - of artwork from famous Japanese woodblock artist Shiko Munakata (1903-1975) to mark his 120th birth anniversary; and the oil painting “Girl with a Pearl Earring” by Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675); in the village of Inakadate, Aomori Prefecture, Japan yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP