

# North Korea conducts 'very important test', says KCNA

**● The statement did not provide further details on the test**

AFP | Seoul

**N**orth Korea said yesterday it had carried out a "very important test" at its space launch centre, as Pyongyang ramps up pressure on Washington over stalled nuclear talks.

The announcement of Saturday's test at the Sohae satellite launch site came just hours after US President Donald Trump said he would be "surprised" by any hostile action from the North.

"A very important test took place at the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground on the afternoon of December 7, 2019," a spokesman for North Korea's Academy of the National Defence Science said.

The result of the latest test will have an "important effect" on changing the "strategic position" of North Korea, the spokesman said in a statement carried by the official KCNA news agency.

The statement did not provide further details on the test.

Sohae, on North Korea's northwest coast, is ostensibly a facility designed for putting satellites into orbit.

But Pyongyang has carried out several rocket launches there that were condemned by the US and others as disguised long-range ballistic missile tests.

Satellite imagery taken on December 5 showed a large container box at the site that was "a decent indicator of an impending engine test", Jeffrey Lewis of the US-based Middlebury Institute of International Studies had said ahead of Pyongyang's statement.

Rocket engines are easily repurposed for use in missiles



The latest test comes as North Korea is ramping up pressure ahead of its end-of-year deadline for the US to propose a new offer to kickstart stalled nuclear talks

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A SPOKESMAN FOR NORTH KOREA'S ACADEMY OF THE NATIONAL DEFENCE SCIENCE

ed activities as Kim Jong Un's end-of-year deadline for sanctions relief approaches," he said.

#### End-of-year deadline

A senior US administration official said, "We have seen the reports of a test, and are coordinating closely with allies and partners".

It comes as Pyongyang is ramping up pressure ahead of its December 31 deadline for the US to propose a new offer to kickstart stalled nuclear talks.

Hours before North Korea announced its latest test, Trump had emphasised his "very good relationship" with North Korean leader Kim.

"Well, we'll see about North Korea. I'd be surprised if North Korea acted hostilely," he said on Saturday afternoon in Washington DC.

"(Kim) knows I have an election coming up. I don't think he wants to interfere with that. But we'll have to see."

Following his first summit with Kim in June 2018, Trump said Kim had agreed to destroy "a major missile engine test-

and the international community has called Pyongyang's space programme a fig leaf for weapons tests.

North Korea dismantled the test stand at Sohae amid a rapid rapprochement in 2018 but reassembled it this year, Lewis said, adding, "Still, we had not seen any activity at the test stand" until now.

"It is clear that this is one more sign that North Korea is conducting more missile-relat-

# Smoke haze settles over Australian capital as bushfires burn

**● Australian fire season is more extreme this year due to a prolonged drought and the effects of climate change.**

Sydney

**S**moke haze from bushfires raging in Australia spread to the capital yesterday, as firefighters raced to contain more than 140 blazes ahead of a heatwave forecast early this week.

Australia is experiencing a horrific start to its fire season, which scientists say began earlier and is more extreme this year due to a prolonged drought and the effects of climate change.

Residents of Canberra in the country's southeast woke up to see the capital shrouded in haze Sunday, joining those in Sydney who have endured weeks of toxic air pollution caused by bushfire smoke.

Officials said favourable



The scale of this year's bushfire devastation has been widely described as unprecedented



Nearly 50 reinforcements from the United States and Canada have been flown in to support fatigued firefighters

weather conditions had given them a chance to bring several blazes under control before the forecast return of strong winds and high temperatures Tuesday.

Among those is a "mega fire" burning across 250,000 hectares within an hour's drive of Sydney, Australia's largest city, where ash from the fires has occasionally fallen. Firefighters are now

bracing for Tuesday, when temperatures are expected to reach above 40 Celsius in parts of New South Wales state -- worst-hit by the bushfires -- and gusting westerly winds are likely to fan the flames.

"Today (fire) crews will be doing what they can to consolidate and strengthen containment lines, which in some areas

will include backburning," NSW Rural Fire Service spokesman Greg Allan said.

But the state's Bureau of Meteorology warned that the massive fires are "in some cases just too big to put out at the moment".

"They're pumping out vast amounts of smoke which is filling the air, turning the sky orange & even appearing like

# Naughtiest sin?

PM Johnson admits cycling on the pavement



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson. (Courtesy of Irish Examiner)

Reuters | London

**B**ritish Prime Minister Boris Johnson said yesterday that the naughtiest thing he was prepared to admit to was breaking the law by cycling on the pavement.

When asked by Sky what the naughtiest thing he was ready to admit to was, Johnson initially asked advisers

for suggestions before saying: "I think, I, you know, I may sometimes, when I was riding a bicycle every day, which I used to do, I may sometimes

have not always have obeyed the law about cycling on the pavement."

"I want you know how firmly and how strongly I disapprove of people who cycle on the pavement and I think it is wrong and I feel bad about it. But I might sometimes have scooted up onto the pavement rather than dismounting before."

Asked if he was nervous about narrowing polls, Johnson said: "Of course, we are fighting for every vote. I think that this is a critical moment for this country."

# Thousands of protesters throng streets of Hong Kong

Reuters | Hong Kong

**T**housands of black-clad protesters from all walks of life thronged the streets of Hong Kong on Sunday in a sign of broad support for anti-government demonstrations that have roiled the Chinese-ruled city for six months.

With chants of, "Fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong," anti-government activists, young and old, marched from Victoria Park in the bustling shopping district of Causeway Bay to Chater Road near the heart of the financial district.

Authorities gave the green light to Civil Human Rights

Front (CHRF) to hold the rally, the first time the group has been granted permission for a protest since Aug. 18.

"I will fight for freedom until I die because I am a Hong Konger," said June, a 40-year-old mother dressed in black seated on the grass in Victoria Park. "Today is about standing with Hong Kong, and the international community."

fatigue among frontline firefighters -- who in both states are almost all volunteers -- as weather there provided a brief respite from weeks of battling blazes.

"We're just looking to wind down and recover and prepare for the next round, whenever that may be," a Queensland Fire and Emergency Service spokesman said.

Since the crisis began in September, six people have been killed, more than 700 homes destroyed and an estimated two million hectares (almost five million acres) scorched.

Though the human toll has been far lower than the deadliest fire season in 2009 -- when almost 200 people died -- the scale of this year's devastation has been widely described as unprecedented, as Australians grapple with the impacts of a changing climate.

Official data shows 2019 is on track to be one of the hottest and driest years on record in Australia.