

WORLD

US ready to use 'full range' capabilities to defend S Korea

Reuters | Seoul

A top US military officer reaffirmed yesterday that the United States is ready to use the "full range" of its capabilities to defend South Korea from any attack, a joint statement after a meeting with officials in Seoul said.

Senior US defence officials are gathering in Seoul for annual meetings as the two countries face intensifying threats from North Korea to stop joint military drills and for the United States to change its approach in denuclearisation talks.

The United States is also seeking a greater financial contribu-



US Joint Chiefs Chairman General Mark Milley

tion from South Korea for hosting American troops, while urging Seoul to revoke its decision to scrap an intelligence-sharing pact with Japan known as GSO-MIA, which Washington fears

would undermine trilateral cooperation.

General Mark Milley, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, met his South Korean counterpart General Park Han-ki for

the annual Military Committee Meeting (MCM) yesterday.

Both sides discussed ways to maintain solid defence posture and a planned transfer of wartime operational control to South Korea, the joint statement said, even as they have scaled back joint exercises to expedite negotiations with North Korea.

Milley reiterated the "continued commitment to providing extended deterrence", the statement said.

"He affirmed that the United States remains prepared to respond to any attack on the Korean Peninsula, using the full range of US military capabilities."

Kuwait's government submits resignation

Reuters | Kuwait

Kuwait's prime minister has submitted his cabinet's resignation to the ruling emir of the Gulf Arab state, a government spokesman said yesterday.

The resignation came after Kuwaiti lawmakers on Tuesday submitted a motion for a no-confidence vote against Interior Minister Sheikh Khalid al-Jarrah al-Sabah.

The emir still has to accept the resignation in order for it to be final. He would then request a new cabinet to be formed.

Lawmakers had questioned Sheikh Khalid over alleged abuse of power, charges he rejected. The country's public works minister resigned on Friday after being grilled by



Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah is the Emir of Kuwait

parliament about flood damage in the desert country following heavy rainfall.

Ten lawmakers had filed a no-confidence motion against her, according to local media.

The assembly's speaker, Marzouq al-Ghanem, told state news agency KUNA yesterday that the emir does not intend to dissolve parliament.

Hong Kong students arm themselves for showdown

Reuters | Hong Kong

Pro-democracy protesters paralysed parts of Hong Kong for a fourth day yesterday, forcing schools to close and blocking highways as students built barricades and stockpiled makeshift weapons, setting the stage for campus showdowns.

China's *Global Times* tabloid, owned by the state-run *People's Daily*, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, said on *Twitter* that the Hong Kong government was expected to announce a weekend curfew after some of the worst violence in decades in the Chinese-ruled city.

It deleted the post after a short time. Its editor said there was "not sufficient" information to back it up.

Thousands of students hun-



Hardcore protesters have bolstered their arsenal of molotovs and bricks with an unlikely array of weapons

tered down on several campuses, surrounded by piles of food, bricks, petrol bombs, arrows

with heads wrapped in cladding, catapults and other homemade weapons.

Police said the Chinese University, in the New Territories, had become a "weapons factory and an arsenal" with bows and arrows and catapults.

"Their acts are another step closer to terrorism," Chief Superintendent (Public Relations) Tse Chun-chung told a briefing, referring to protests on all campuses.

He also said police would temporarily avoid directly clashing with "high-spirited rioters" to give themselves a breather and avoid injuries.

Police said arrows were fired at officers from Hong Kong Polytechnic University in the morning.

Several universities announced there would be no classes on campuses for the rest of the year.

Death toll in Australia bushfires rises to four

Burrell Creek | Australia

The death toll from devastating bushfires in eastern Australia has risen to four after a man's body was discovered in a scorched area of bushland, police said Thursday.

Three others have perished in bushfires in New South Wales, the state worst affected by a series of catastrophic fires that broke out along the eastern seaboard late last week.

Residents found the body -- believed to be a 58-year-old man last seen on Friday -- near the New South Wales town of Kempsey, one of several areas hit by the fires in recent days.

More than 100 blazes were

burning on Thursday but a respite from tough conditions has seen the danger from many fires downgraded and residents returning to sift through the remains of their homes.

Hundreds of houses have already been damaged or destroyed and more than one million hectares (2.5 million acres) of land burnt in the blazes.

Challenging conditions were expected to flare again in Queensland and New South Wales at the weekend as the temperature rises and winds pick up, and many blazes are still proving difficult to contain.

Venice braces for more high water as alarms sound

Venice

Venice braced itself for more rising waters yesterday as Italy's government prepared to take emergency measures for the canal city struck by an exceptional tide this week.

Venetians awoke to sirens indicating that the high waters were expected to exceed 130 centimetres (50 inches), enough to bring the salty dirty water back again into the UNESCO city's historic centre.

On Tuesday, the highest tide in 50 years ripped through the historic Italian city, peaking at 1.87 metres (six feet).

As authorities on Thursday prepared to assess the extent of the damage to Venice's cultural treasures, such as St Mark's Basilica where water had invaded the crypt, locals remained defiant.

"It's my living, what can I do?" Stefano Gabbanoto, 54, replied when asked why he was opening his newspaper kiosk knowing he would have to close up soon.

He said he would continue to sell the colourful plastic high

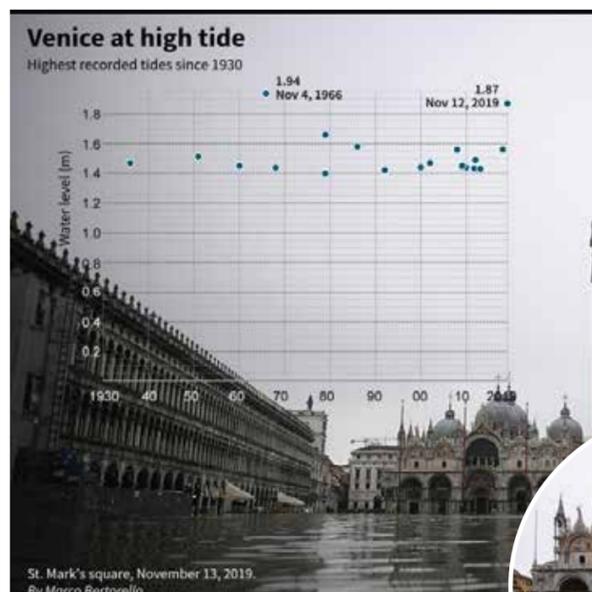


Chart showing maximum documented high tide levels in Italy's Venice

boots stacked in bins around the kiosk even once it was shut.

Under the arches of the Ducal Palace, a couple from Hong Kong posed for photos and video in the

chilly morning sun.

"This was planned a long time ago so we couldn't change it," groom Jay Wong, 34, said. His bride, Sabrina Lee, "looks cold," he admitted.

"Actually this is a good experience," Wong said. "It's an adventure."

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte was set to meet Venice's mayor and emergency responders before visiting businesses affected by the tide.

On Wednesday, Conte called the flooding "a blow to the heart of our country",



Venice is a city in northeastern Italy and the capital of the Veneto region. It is situated on a group of 118 small islands that are separated by canals and linked by over 400 bridges

while several museums remain closed to the public.

Tuesday's "acqua alta," or high waters, submerged around 80 percent of the city, officials said.

Only once since records began in 1923 has the water crept even higher, reaching 1.94 metres in 1966.

A 78-year old was killed by an electric shock inside his home.

Venice is home to a mere 50,000 residents but receives 36 million global visitors each year.

A massive infrastructure project called MOSE has been under way since 2003 to protect the city, but it has been plagued by cost overruns, corruption scandals and delays.

"This engineering solution that will end up costing nearly 6 billion euros has got to work," Transport Minister Paola De Micheli said on Radio Capital.

The plan involves 78 gates that can be raised to protect Venice's lagoon during high tides -- but a recent attempt to test part of the barrier caused worrying vibrations and engineers discovered parts had rusted.

with the government expected to declare a state of emergency over the natural disaster.

Mayor Luigi Brugnaro has estimated the damage at hundreds of millions of dollars (euros),