

world

North Korea demands security guarantees for nuclear talks



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un welcomed by participants of the 14th National Conference of Teachers at an undisclosed location in North Korea

AFP | Seoul

North Korea yesterday demanded the United States provide security guarantees as a precondition to resuming deadlocked nuclear talks, dampening hopes for progress at a working-level dialogue expected in the coming weeks. Negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington have been gridlocked since a second summit between the North's leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump in February ended without a deal.

The pair agreed to restart working-level dialogue during an impromptu meeting at the Demilitarized Zone dividing the two Koreas in June, and Pyongyang last week offered to hold those talks in late September, a move the US said was "encouraging".

But hours later, Pyongyang carried out the latest in a series of weapons tests.

A senior official from the North's foreign ministry said yesterday that "discussion of denuclearization may be possible when threats and hurdles endangering our system security and obstructing our development are clearly removed beyond all doubt".

North Korea has always insisted that security guarantees would be necessary as part of any deal -- but it has not generally demanded them as a precursor to negotiations.

The director-general of the department of US affairs, who was not named, said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency that working-level talks were expected to be held "in a few weeks".

It was up to Washington whether it would prove to be an opportunity or "an occasion to precipitate crisis", he added. "A proposal that the US put forward at the negotiations may improve the relations and, on the contrary, may add to the hostility towards each other."

Pyongyang has also threatened to pull out of talks with Washington and has blasted senior US officials in recent months.

Despite the escalation in tensions, Trump has insisted his relationship with Kim remains unharmed, and the pair have exchanged personal letters in the absence of talks.

The North Korean leader asked Trump to visit Pyongyang in a letter sent last month, South Korea's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper reported yesterday, repeating an invitation issued at their last meeting in the DMZ.

At their first summit in Singapore last year, Kim and Trump adopted a vaguely-worded statement on the "complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula" but little progress has since been made on dismantling the North's nuclear programme.

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NORTH KOREA'S DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF US AFFAIRS

Indonesia arrests nearly 200 over forest fires

The fires, usually started by illegal burning to clear land for farming, have unleashed choking haze across Southeast Asia

AFP | Jakarta

Indonesia has arrested nearly 200 people over vast forest fires ripping across the archipelago, police said yesterday, as toxic haze sends air quality levels plummeting and sparks flight cancellations.

Jakarta has deployed thousands of personnel to battle blazes that are turning land into charred landscapes and consuming forests in Sumatra and Borneo islands, where thousands of schools have been shut over health fears.

The fires -- usually started by illegal burning to clear land for farming -- have unleashed choking haze across Southeast Asia, triggering diplomatic tensions with Indonesia's neighbours.

Yesterday, authorities said they had arrested some 185 people suspected of being involved in activities that led to out-of-control fires sweeping the country.

"Indonesian Police will enforce the law against anyone who is proven to have carried out forest and land burning, whether it was done intentionally or through negligence," National Police spokesman Dedi Prasetyo told reporters in Jakarta.

"This is a last resort. The most important thing is prevention." Four corporations were also being investigated, he added.

Last week, Indonesia sealed off dozens of plantations where



Smoke spreading from where the forest fire occurred as seen from above Riau province

smog-belching fires were blazing, and warned that owners -- including Malaysia and Singapore-based firms -- could face criminal charges if there was evidence of illegal burning.

Some of the most serious fires occur in peatlands, which are highly combustible when drained of water to be converted into agricultural plantations.

Thick haze in Borneo -- where air quality levels have plummeted to "dangerous" levels in some areas -- caused the cancellation of about a dozen flights Sunday,

national airline Garuda said. Rival Lion Air said about 160 Borneo flights had been affected at the weekend.

Meanwhile, nearly 150,000 people have been treated for acute respiratory infections linked to the haze in recent months, according to Indonesian health authorities.

While forest fires are an annual problem, the situation this year has been worsened by drier weather in Indonesia, with diplomatic tensions soaring as toxic smog drifts over to neighbour-

ing Malaysia and Singapore.

The haze pushed Singapore's air quality to unhealthy levels for the first time in three years at the weekend.

In 2015, Indonesia suffered its worst forest fires for almost two decades, which dramatically increased its greenhouse gas emissions.

Huge fires tearing through the Amazon are also compounding concerns about the long-term impact of such blazes on keeping global temperature levels stable.

S. Korea opposition party leader shaves head in protest

AFP | Seoul

South Korea's main opposition party leader shaved his head yesterday to protest against the controversial appointment of a new justice minister despite allegations of corruption against his family.

Law professor Cho Kuk began his duties as the justice minister last Monday as state prosecutors carry out a probe into his daughter's schooling and an investment in a private equity fund suspected of dubious operations. The appointment infuriated opposition lawmakers and



Main opposition Liberty Korea Party leader Hwang Kyo-ahn has his head shaved during a protest outside the presidential Blue House in Seoul

created an even sharper divide in parliament.

Yesterday, Hwang Kyo-ahn -- the main opposition Liberty Korea Party leader -- said he would shave his head to urge the resignation of "criminal Cho Kuk".

A stern-looking Hwang arrived outside the presidential Blue House and was shorn of his neatly parted black hair as the South Korean anthem blared in the background.

"I'm here to pledge my determination by shaving my head," Hwang told the crowd. "I will not step back."

Buzz off! Angry bees delay Air India flight

AFP | New Delhi

An Air India flight was delayed by several hours after a swarm of bees landed on the cockpit window, attacking ground staff when they tried to remove them, officials said.

The insects landed on the window just before the plane

was due to leave the eastern city of Kolkata on Sunday with 136 passengers, including Bangladesh's information minister.

Ground staff tried to shoo the insects off, angering them, and when attempts to use the windscreen wipers failed officials switched to 'plan b' and blasted them off with water.



A swarm of bees on the cockpit window of the Air India flight

"Fire tenders were deployed to spray water to dislodge the honey bees and they could be driven away after nearly an hour-long operation," airport official Kaushik Bhattacharya told AFP.

The flight to Agartala in north-eastern India eventually took off more than three and a half hours late.

NOTICE

With regard to the cancellation of the Wholesale Bank

license of "Investcorp Bank B.S.C"

With reference to the Resolution of the Governor of the Central Bank of Bahrain No. (52) of 2019 pertaining to the cancellation of the Wholesale Bank license of "Investcorp Bank B.S.C" issued on 9th Muharram 1441H, corresponding to 8th September 2019, the Central Bank of Bahrain hereby provides notice that the Wholesale Bank license of "Investcorp Bank B.S.C" issued on 28th June 1982, registered under commercial registration no. 12411-1 has been cancelled, with effect from the date of issuing and publication of the above resolution in the Official Gazette.