

## International

# Despite Trump tirade, Fed reiterates independence

## Washington pushing to maintain measures against the North

SEOUL: North Korea said yesterday its commitment to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula was bound up with a “complete removal of US nuclear threats”. Following a rapid diplomatic rapprochement this year, the North’s leader Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump signed a vaguely-worded statement in Singapore in June, agreeing to work towards the “denuclearization of the Korean peninsula”. But the two countries have since disagreed on what it means, causing follow-up negotiations to stall.

Now Pyongyang is demanding sanctions relief and has condemned US insistence on its nuclear disarmament as “gangster-like”, while Washington is pushing to maintain the measures against the North until its “final, fully verified denuclearization”. Yesterday’s commentary released by the North’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) asserted that the commitment was a mutual rather than unilateral undertaking. “It must be clearly understood that the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula means the removal of all nuclear threats — not only those from the North and the South but those aiming at the Korean peninsula from surrounding areas as well”, it said.

It urged the US to give up the “delusion” of

forcing the North to give up its nuclear arsenal “unilaterally” through “pressure and coercion”. It also called for the lifting of sanctions, describing it as a “touchstone” in determining whether the US was committed to implementing the Singapore agreement. A second summit between Trump and Kim — who exchanged personal insults and threats of war throughout 2017 — is expected to take place next year.

The US leader faces criticism over the planned talks since North Korea has taken few concrete steps to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Pyongyang has long said it needs the weapons to deter a possible US invasion. It has spent decades developing them, at a heavy cost in both resources and the imposition of multiple sets of UN, US, EU and other sanctions.

Washington last week added three senior North Korean officials to those subject to sanctions over human rights abuses, including Choe Ryong Hae, who has been considered a right-hand man to Kim. Pyongyang condemned the move, warning Washington’s approach could “block the path to denuclearization on the Korean peninsula forever”. Trump played down hopes last week for any imminent deal to persuade Pyongyang to give up its nuclear arsenal



SINUJU: This picture taken on November 30, 2018 shows a person walking along railway tracks in front of North Korean buildings and the skyline of the Chinese city of Dandong (rear), on the outskirts of the border city of Sinuiju. —AFP

but he also expressed optimism, saying North Korea’s economy has “wonderful potential” and

that Kim “sees it better than anyone and will fully take advantage of it for his people”. —AFP

## Fugitive spy jailed again in Vietnam

HANOI: A fugitive spy was jailed for a second time in Vietnam yesterday after a court convicted him for “abuse of power” for pilfering more than \$8 million from a bank in a share-buying scheme. Phan Van Anh Vu was convicted as Vietnam’s communist government widens a corruption crackdown that has already seen dozens of former high-flying officials, executives and businessmen put behind bars. The former property developer turned runaway spy is already serving eight years after he was convicted in July for “divulging state secrets”.

That conviction came after he was arrested in Singapore and swiftly sent back to Vietnam to face trial earlier this year. Yesterday, a court in Ho Chi Minh City found him guilty of abuse of power in a separate trial linked to the partially state-owned Dong A Bank, Vu’s lawyer told AFP. He was jailed for 17 years while the bank’s former general director Tran Phuong Binh got life. “Vu insists that he was not guilty and he will appeal,” his attorney Nguyen Huu The Trach said.

Binh allegedly instructed Vu to sign a falsified document that said Vu purchased \$8.7 million worth of stocks in Dong A Bank, when in fact he pocketed it. Vu paid the money back this year, his lawyer said. Vu grabbed headlines when he was arrested in Singapore carrying two passports — one of which was fake — while passing through the city state en route to Europe. Vu’s conviction shocked many in conservative Vietnam because of his links to the powerful Ministry of Public Security (MPS), long believed to be untouchable. But several other MPS-linked officials have been targeted as a hardline administration makes good on a promise to clean up the graft-prone country. The anti-corruption campaign initially zeroed in on the state-run oil industry, but has since expanded to security, banking and land sectors.

Earlier this week, the former CEO head of the state-run PetroVietnam Exploration Production Corp was arrested for allegedly “abusing power to appropriate property”, according to MPS. Observers say the anti-graft crackdown — which echoes Beijing’s anti-corruption drive — is aimed at cleaning up the notoriously crooked country, but may also be aimed at eliminating political foes. Transparency International ranks Vietnam 107 out of 180 countries on its corruption index, behind Thailand, Indonesia and China. —AFP

## Academic stalked in HK hits out at China

SYDNEY: An Australian academic who was followed for a week by a state-owned newspaper in Hong Kong has suggested Beijing could be behind the intimidation and has vowed not to be bullied. Kevin Carrico — a lecturer in Chinese Studies at Sydney’s Macquarie University — was tailed by the Wen Wei Po tabloid during a visit earlier this month and was the subject of a front-page “expose”. The paper accused him of stirring “pro-independence” sentiment in Hong Kong, holding “secret meetings”, and secretly photographed him throughout his week-long trip, as well as on previous visits.

The incident has raised concerns about ebbing freedoms in Hong Kong, including the ability of academics to carry out research. Carrico — who has written extensively on Chinese nationalism — on Wednesday accused the paper of trying to intimidate him or people he speaks to, telling AFP its motivations were not “particularly pure or admirable”.

If the authorities were trying to scare him away from returning to Hong Kong, that was “not going to happen”, Carrico insisted. But he fears it was “Beijing signaling to Hong Kong to refuse me entry next time” or “intimidating people away from speaking with me”. That, he admitted, “could happen, considering how tense things are in Hong Kong now”. In Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua

Chunying dismissed Carrico’s allegations as “preposterous and absurd”.

### ‘Patriotic hoodlums’

Beijing has sought to tighten its grip on the semi-autonomous city following mass pro-democracy protests in 2014. Since then, key protest leaders have been charged while a string of pro-democracy lawmakers were stopped from sitting in the Hong Kong legislature. Earlier this year, a small pro-independence party was banned on national security grounds, and a British journalist who hosted a press club talk with that party’s leader had to leave the city after his visa renewal was suddenly denied.

Hong Kong was handed back to China by Britain in 1997 and still enjoys freedom of speech and other rights unseen on the mainland. But critics have been stopped from coming to the city. Last year, British human rights activist Benedict Rogers was denied entry on arrival at the airport, prompting London to seek an explanation. Carrico said he fears the paper has now made him a possible target for “patriotic hoodlums” from gangs with links to the Chinese Communist Party when he does return. “The Wen Wei Po is essentially an intelligence service masquerading as a paper and should be shut down,” he said.

In a statement issued yesterday, Wen Wei Po defended its article, saying it was built around “clear facts” that “complied with usual news reporting rules and skills”. The paper accused Carrico of making “false accusations” and attacking press freedom, adding it reserved the right to pursue legal action against the academic. In July this year, Ta Kung Pao — a sister paper to Wen Wei Po — followed pro-independence activist Andy Chan during a holiday to Taiwan. —AFP