

## International

## US imposes more North Korea sanctions, warns of 'phase two'

Trump: Phase two may be ... very, very unfortunate

WASHINGTON/SEOUL: The United States said on Friday it was imposing its largest package of sanctions to pressure North Korea to give up its nuclear and missile programs, and President Donald Trump warned of a "phase two" that could be "very, very unfortunate for the world" if the steps did not work. In addressing the Trump administration's biggest national security challenge, the US Treasury sanctioned one person, 27 companies and 28 ships, according to a statement on the US Treasury Department's website.

The United States also proposed a list of entities to be blacklisted under separate UN sanctions, a move "aimed at shutting down North Korea's illicit maritime smuggling activities to obtain oil and sell coal." North Korea has been developing nuclear-tipped missiles capable of reaching the US mainland and Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un have exchanged taunts that have raised fears of war.

In August, Trump threatened to go beyond sanctions by bringing "fire and fury like the world has never seen," although his administration has repeatedly said it prefers a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Speaking at a news conference with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Trump made apparent reference to military options his administration has repeatedly said remain on the table. "If the sanctions don't work, we'll have to go phase two," Trump said. "Phase two may be a very rough thing, may be very, very unfortunate for the world. But hopefully the sanctions will work."

The sanctions' targets include a Taiwan passport holder, as well as shipping and energy firms in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. The actions block assets held by the firms and individuals in the United States and prohibit US citizens from

dealing with them.

The US Treasury said the sanctions were designed to disrupt North Korean shipping and trading companies and vessels and further isolate Pyongyang. They are also aimed at ships located, registered or flagged in North Korea, China, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Marshall Islands, Tanzania, Panama and the Comoros. Last month, three Western

said showed December 2017 images that revealed ship-to-ship transfers of fuel and other products destined for North Korea in an attempt to evade sanctions.

He said he could not rule out the prospect of the United States boarding and inspecting North Korean ships. Mnuchin said virtually all shipping currently being used by North Korea was now under sanction and the US government had "issued an advisory alerting the public to those continuing to enable shipments of goods to and from North Korea." Mnuchin said the number of sanctions steps taken by the United States against Pyongyang since 2005 was now 450 with approximately half imposed in the last year.

Christopher Ford, assistant secretary of state for international security and non-proliferation, told reporters sanctions already had affected North Korea's weapons programs and this was shown by the lengths North Korea was going to try to evade sanctions.

Jonathan Schanzer of the Washington think tank Foundation for the Defense of Democracies said Friday's move was "the largest tranche of DPRK (North Korea) sanctions" released by the Treasury Department. "The only thing missing here today is action against Chinese banks," he said. "We know they continue to undermine our efforts to isolate North Korea." Tougher sanctions may jeopardize the latest detente between the two Koreas, illustrated by the North's participation in the Winter Olympics in the South, amid preparations for talks about a possible summit between North Korea's Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in.

Nevertheless, South Korea welcomed the US sanctions saying they would "alert those who are illegally trading with North Korea and therefore bolster the international com-



## Japan also backs sanctions

European intelligence sources told Reuters that North Korea shipped coal to Russia last year and that it was then delivered to South Korea and Japan in a likely violation of UN sanctions.

## Frustrated Trump

Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said the new sanctions would help prevent North Korea from skirting restrictions on trade in coal and other fuel through "evasive maritime activities."

"The president is clearly frustrated and rightly so over the efforts that have failed in the past and also over the uptick in testing and the advances we've seen in the North Korean program," a senior administration official told reporters. At another briefing, Mnuchin stood next to enlarged photos he

banking accounts, and one count of lying over his work as a foreign agent for Ukraine. Each count could bring a maximum of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. But sentencing depends on the extent of his cooperation with Mueller's broader investigation, which has focused on a number of others in Trump's orbit, including current White House aides and members of Trump's family. That was similar to deals offered to two other ex-advisors to Trump, who have also pleaded guilty to reduced charges. Former Trump national security advisor Michael Flynn and former campaign foreign policy aide George Papadopoulos have each pleaded guilty to one count of lying.

Gates and Manafort still face a separate indictment filed Thursday by Mueller in a Virginia court, on charges of bank and tax fraud in relation to how they deployed their Ukraine earnings back into the United States.

## Manafort defiant

The Mueller probe, which began in May, has built up steam in recent weeks. Last week, Mueller indicted 13 Russians who were allegedly behind a Kremlin-backed operation to spread disinformation and disrupt the 2016 election via social media. And on Tuesday, a London-based lawyer with links to Russia and to Gates pleaded guilty to lying to FBI agents.

Manafort was defiant, refusing to cut a deal. "Notwithstanding that Rick Gates pled today, I continue to maintain my innocence," he said in a statement.

"I had hoped and expected my business colleague would have had the strength to continue the battle to prove our innocence... This does not alter my commitment to defend myself against the untrue piled up charges contained in the indictments against me." In a letter to family and friends made public by some US news outlets, Gates said he had planned to defend himself but had a "change of heart," and was ready to accept "public humiliation" to avoid distressing his children.

"The reality of how long this legal process will likely take, the cost and the circus-like atmosphere of an anticipated trial are too much. I will better serve my family moving forward by exiting this process," he wrote. — AFP

"I am glad that the UK government seems to be moving towards a more detailed position," Tusk told journalists after 27 EU leaders - all apart from May - met in Brussels on Friday.

"However... I am afraid that the UK position today is based on pure illusion. It seems like the 'cake' philosophy is still alive. From the very start it has been a key clear principle of the EU 27 that there can be no cherry-picking and no single market 'a la carte'."

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has famously said he wants Britain to get the best of both worlds - to "have its cake and eat it".

EU leaders have long been asking May for details of London's vision for future relations, but she has been hampered by divisions within her ruling Conservative Party, with some backing close trading ties and others seeking a "clean break". — Reuters

## Ex-Trump aide Gates pleads guilty to conspiracy, lying

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's former campaign deputy Rick Gates pleaded guilty Friday to fraud and lying, pledging to cooperate with Special Counsel Robert Mueller on his vast probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election. Gates was the third former Trump aide to agree to cooperate in exchange for reduced charges by Mueller, who is also examining Moscow's alleged collusion with the Trump campaign and whether the president illegally sought to obstruct his probe.

The plea deal in a Washington federal court, on charges much reduced from the original ones filed against Gates, immediately put him at odds with his former business partner and ex-Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort, who refuses to bow to pressure from Mueller to strike a deal.

Manafort has countersued Mueller, accusing the former FBI director of going far beyond his Justice Department mandate in the probe. A new indictment against Manafort accuses him of having secretly paid a group of former senior European politicians more than two million euros (\$2.5 million) to lobby for the government of Ukraine's former pro-Russia president Viktor Yanukovich.

## Charges tied to Ukraine work

Gates and Manafort were originally charged on October 30 with multiple counts of laundering \$75 million and tax evasion related to their work from 2006 to 2014 for Yanukovich. They were also accused of illegally representing a foreign government, Ukraine, as lobbyists without first registering with the US government as foreign agents. But the charges Gates ultimately pleaded guilty to on Friday were one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States in relation to not reporting offshore

## British ideas on post-Brexit ties are 'pure illusion', says EU's Tusk

BRUSSELS: European Council President Donald Tusk on Friday dismissed as "pure illusion" the ideas floated by Britain so far on what sort of relationship it wants with the European Union after it leaves the bloc. Tusk said he hoped to get more clarity when he meets Theresa May next Thursday, a day before the British prime minister is due to deliver a speech to outline London's vision of its future ties with the EU.

## After shooting, Florida to station police officer at every school

WASHINGTON: A police officer will be stationed at every public school in Florida, the state's governor announced Friday as part of a plan to improve security following last week's deadly high school shooting. President Donald Trump repeated his call, meanwhile, for arming some of America's teachers and claimed the controversial proposal was increasingly drawing support. The push to make schools safer came as the local sheriff's office released details of nearly two dozen visits to the residences of Nikolas Cruz, the 19-year-old behind the assault at Marjory Douglas Stoneman High School in Parkland, Florida.

Speaking at a news conference in the state capital Tallahassee, Republican Governor Rick Scott unveiled a \$450 million security plan in response to the Valentine's Day rampage.

"There is nothing more important than the safety of our children," Scott said. "We must take care of our kids." "I am proposing at least one law enforcement officer for every 1,000 students," Scott said of putting police in public schools. Asked about Trump's proposal that teachers carry concealed weapons, Scott replied: "My focus is on providing more law enforcement officers, not on arming the teachers." Scott proposed a ban on "bump stocks" - an accessory which turns a semi-automatic weapon into an automatic one - and making it easier for courts to prohibit a violent or mentally ill person from purchasing or possessing a firearm." Scott also said the age for gun buyers in the state would be raised from 18 to 21 — a move opposed by the powerful National Rifle Association (NRA) gun lobby.

The governor stopped short, however, of endorsing a ban on assault weapons - a demand

## Pastor has faith he can unseat Maduro in Venezuela poll

CARACAS: Despite unpopularity and a deepening economic crisis, Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro seems such a certainty for reelection in April that only an evangelical pastor has found the faith to run against him. "I am the light in the darkness," said little-known pastor Javier Bertucci, without a hint of irony, so far the only opponent willing to try to unseat the leftist leader in a presidential election which Maduro's opponents accuse him of rigging.

Mainstream opposition parties say they are boycotting the April 22 poll because they have no guarantees they would be free and fair.

A ballot wasn't due until December but the Constituent Assembly, an all-powerful legislature stacked with Maduro loyalists, announced in January that the date was being brought for-



OXON HILL: US President Donald Trump speaks during the 2018 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) at National Harbor in Oxon Hill, Maryland, on Friday. — AFP

munity to carry out resolutions from the UN Security Council".

Japan also supported the new sanctions, Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera said, according to the Kyodo news agency. Taiwan said it was in touch with the United States and would investigate its citizens and entities suspected of helping North Korea. It also called on Taiwan firms and citizens not to break UN sanctions. Reuters was unable to locate contact details for the Chinese companies listed in the new US sanctions. In a commentary carried by Korean Central News Agency on Saturday, North Korea said it never intended to aim its nuclear weapons at South Korea, adding the weapons will only be aimed at the United States.

## 'Warm climate'

North Korea last year conducted dozens of missile launches and its sixth and largest nuclear test in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions. It defends the weapons programs as essential to deter US aggression. It has been more than two months since North Korea's last missile test. Kim said he wants to boost the "warm climate of reconciliation and dialogue" with South Korea, which hosts 28,500 US troops, after a high-level delegation, including his sister, returned from the Olympics.

In an extension of that rapprochement, the North agreed on Friday to hold working-level talks on Tuesday for the Pyeongyang Winter Paralympics on the North's side of the border village of Panmunjom. — Reuters



NEWTOWN, CT: Mourners attend a community vigil at Newtown High School for the victims of last week's mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, on Friday. — AFP

of many of the teenagers who survived the shooting at Stoneman Douglas that left 14 of their classmates and three staff dead.

"I know there are some who are advocating a mass takeover of Second Amendment rights for all Americans," Scott said - referring to America's constitutional right to bear arms. "That is not the answer." "Keeping guns away from dangerous people and people with mental issues is what we need to do," he said. Trump also does not support a ban on semi-automatic weapons and in a speech to a conservative gathering near Washington, he returned again to his idea of arming teachers.

## 'Shot the hell out of him'

Speaking to a receptive crowd of thousands of fellow Republicans at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), Trump said "well-trained" teachers could help stop school shootings. "Maybe 10 percent or 20 percent of the population of teachers," he said. "Not all of

them, but you would have a lot. "And the beauty is it's concealed," Trump said. Referring to Cruz, the Stoneman Douglas assailant, Trump said "a teacher would have shot the hell out of him before he knew what happened."

Trump claimed his proposal to arm teachers, which has been strongly criticized by the nation's largest teachers' unions, was drawing support. "Since I started this two days ago, a lot of people that were totally opposed to it are now agreeing," he said. "They don't want their students to be killed or to be hurt."

Trump proposed measures preventing the mentally ill from obtaining weapons and to "really strengthen up background checks" for gun buyers. "And I really believe that Congress is going to get it through this time," he said.

Lawmakers in Washington have been deadlocked on the gun debate, accomplishing nothing despite a spate of mass shootings and polls showing Americans support stricter gun laws by a two-to-one margin. — AFP

ward. Venezuela's Supreme Court issued a ruling that excludes the opposition coalition Democratic Unity Roundtable from running and banned several prominent opposition figures from participating. The United States and European Union have imposed sanctions on Maduro and his officials, with Washington calling him a "dictator."

Bertucci scoffs at assertions from the opposition that he is merely a political stooge to legitimize Maduro's election. Other would-be candidates have only a few more days to register. Analysts believe Henri Falcon, a polarizing figure in the opposition, will eventually emerge as Maduro's main challenger. Bertucci, 48, says Maduro is "beatable" in the ballot and criticized the opposition for effectively giving him a clear run to a second six-year term.

"It's a mistake to leave the way clear (for Maduro) and continue with talk that everyone is cheating," he said after preaching to a packed congregation at his church. The government "continue to take all the space. They have always had the advantage, but more than 50 percent of the electorate wants to vote. Why deny them that right?"

There seems little doubt that the few thousand fervent followers who packed a hall to hear him preach this week would vote for him. People



CARACAS: In this file photo, Venezuelan opposition presidential pre-candidate and evangelical pastor Javier Bertucci rolls up his sleeve after a press conference in Caracas. — AFP

in the congregation, young and old, held their arms up in supplication, tears streaming down their faces, as a suited Bertucci murmured into a microphone on a stage over a soundtrack of motivational music. But it's a stretch to believe Bertucci can make more than a tiny dent in the national vote. Most will say he hasn't a prayer. Still, he says his fusion of politics and religious faith is what the country needs to overcome its deep economic crisis, which has made food and medicine shortages the norm. — AFP