

## International

# N Korean, US officials at nuclear talks after latest missile test

## Pyongyang tested what it called a 'super-large' rocket

**STOCKHOLM:** North Korean and US officials yesterday gathered for new nuclear talks in Stockholm after months of deadlock and Pyongyang's defiant test of a sea-launched ballistic missile this week. North Korea's Kim Myong Gil and Stephen Biegun, the special envoy of US President Donald Trump, are part of the teams at the talks. The two were to meet at a heavily guarded venue on an island off Stockholm, several hundred meters from the North Korean embassy, an AFP correspondent said.

The first cars with tinted windows started arriving just after 9:00 am (0700 GMT). "I am encouraged that US and (North Korean) working level delegations are currently in Sweden to hold talks," Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Lindh tweeted. "Dialogue needed to reach denuclearization and peaceful solution." Similar-level talks on North Korea's nuclear disarmament were held in Stockholm in March 2018 and then in January this year.

North Korea frequently couples diplomatic overtures with military moves as a way of maintaining pressure on negotiating partners, analysts say, and many believe this weapons system gives it added leverage. Pyongyang tested what it called a "super-large" rocket on Wednesday just hours after it said it was willing to resume working-level talks with Washington. Kim Myong Gil said he was "optimistic" about the talks, speaking in Beijing on his way to the Swedish capital.

Washington has been eagerly awaiting a resumption of the dialogue, which has virtually stalled after a Hanoi meeting in late February between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. North Korea claimed to have entered a new phase in its defence capability with Wednesday's test of a submarine-launched ballistic missile

— the most provocative since Pyongyang began a dialogue with Washington in 2018. The Pentagon said Thursday the missile seems to have been launched from a "sea-based platform" and not a submarine. Trump said he sees no problem with a string of short-range rocket tests conducted previously by North Korea, while insisting his personal ties with the North's leader remain good.

### 'New phase'

Photos carried by Pyongyang's official Rodong Sinmun newspaper showed a black and white missile emerging from the water and appearing to shoot into the sky. The images also showed a small towing vessel next to the missile, which analysts said indicates the test was conducted from a submersible barge rather than an actual submarine, and that the system was in its early stages.

"The new-type ballistic missile was fired in vertical mode" in the waters off Wonsan Bay, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported, identifying the weapon as a Pukguksong-3 and saying it "ushered in a new phase in containing the outside forces' threat." The United Nations Security Council meanwhile is expected to hold closed-door talks early next week on the latest test, diplomats said. Those talks were requested by Britain, France and Germany, as the European powers push for the world body to keep up pressure on Pyongyang which is under heavy US and UN sanctions over its weapons program.

North Korea is banned from ballistic missile launches by Security Council resolutions. It is also under three sets of UN sanctions adopted in 2017 in an effort to force it to give up its nuclear and ballistic weapons programs. They limit North Korea's oil imports and impose bans linked to its exports of



**LIDINGO:** Cars carrying members of the North Korean delegation arrive to Villa Elfvik Strand conference center where US-North Korea talks are expected to take place. — AFP

coal, fish and textiles. Since the US-North Korea talks began, Russia and China have been calling for the UN to start lifting

sanctions so as to create momentum towards the North's denuclearisation. But the United States has refused. — AFP

## Cameroon president drops prosecution on 'some' political rivals

**YAOUNDE:** Cameroon's President Paul Biya on Friday announced he had ordered prosecutions to be dropped against "some" opposition leaders, including a number from the main Movement for the Rebirth of Cameroon (MRC) led by his jailed rival Maurice Kamto. The move is the latest in a series of concessions from the 86-year-old leader, who is under intense international pressure over a sweeping crackdown on the opposition.

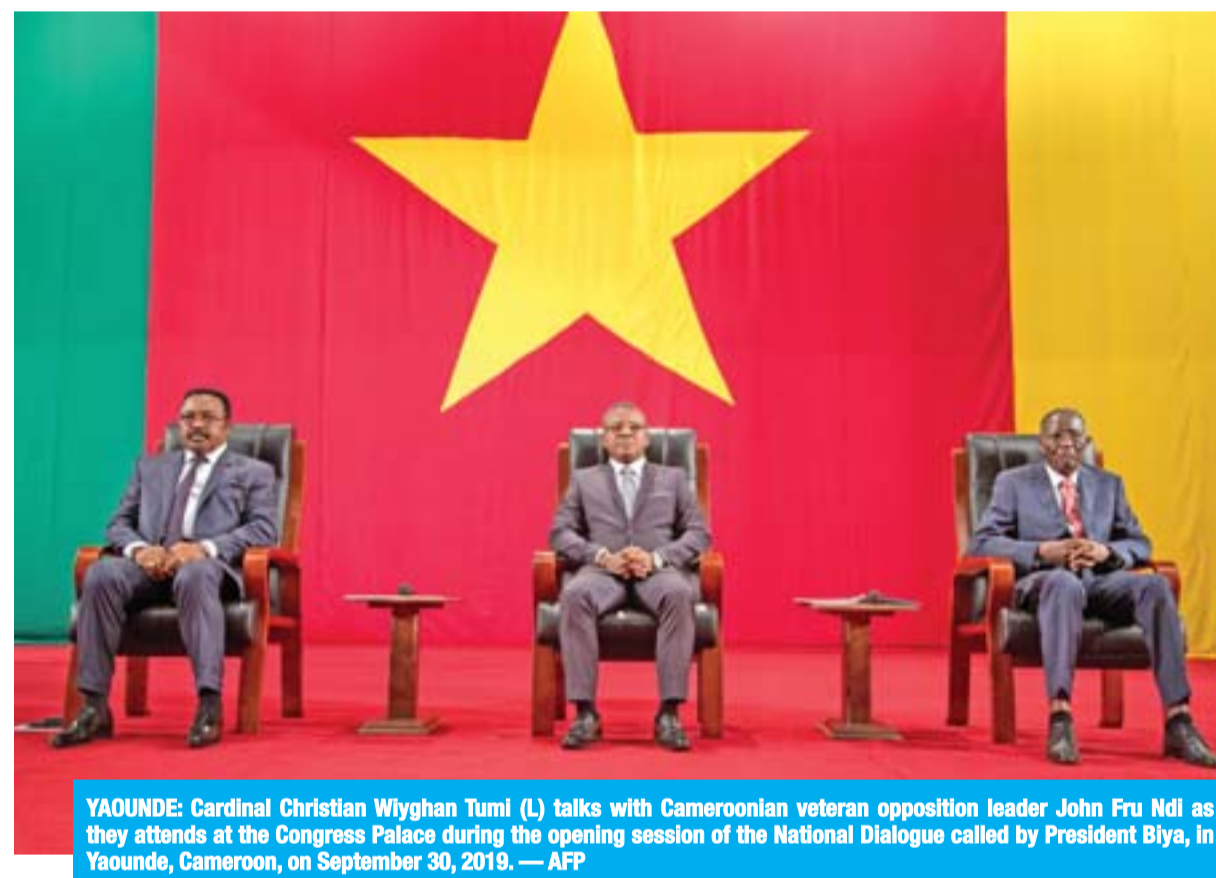
He is also attempting to ease surging tensions in separatist anglophone regions, with talks on the turmoil wrapping up Friday. "I have ordered the discontinuance of proceedings pending before Military Tribunals against some officials and militants of political parties in particular the (MRC)," he said on his official Twitter account in English. In French, he added that it affected those "arrested and detained for acts committed in contesting the results of the recent presidential elections".

He did not specify whether the decision would affect Kamto, Cameroon's main opposition leader who unsuccessfully claimed victory in elections last year. Kamto went on trial with 88 others in a military court in September on charges of insurrection, hostility to the motherland and rebellion — crimes which could carry the death penalty. Their next hearing was scheduled for October 8. His party also was not able to confirm details.

"I do not know if Maurice Kamto is involved or not," said senior MRC official Emmanuel Simh. Kamto was arrested in late January after months of peaceful opposition protests over the results of the October 2018 election won by Biya, who has been in power for 37 years. The crackdown on Kamto and the opposition has caused outrage among rights groups and many western governments.

### Multiple crises

Biya's shock announcement came on the closing day of crunch talks aimed at easing a bloody crisis in



**YAOUNDE:** Cardinal Christian Wiyghan Tumi (L) talks with Cameroonian veteran opposition leader John Fru Ndi as they attend at the Congress Palace during the opening session of the National Dialogue called by President Biya, in Yaounde, Cameroon, on September 30, 2019. — AFP

Cameroon's anglophone regions, which were shunned by the main separatist leaders. Two areas in western Cameroon — the Northwest Region and Southwest Region — are home to most of the country's anglophones, who account for about a fifth of a population that is overwhelmingly French-speaking.

Two years ago, decades of resentment at perceived discrimination boiled over into an armed campaign for independence that has met with a brutal crackdown. The president on Thursday announced the release of more

than 330 people detained in connection with the anglophone crisis. In a statement on Friday, the president's office said Biya "reaffirms his determination to tirelessly continue his efforts in the search for the ways and means for a peaceful resolution of the different crises that may confront our country".

Delegates at the talks on the anglophone crisis on Thursday adopted a resolution recommending "special status" for the English-speaking areas "aimed at strengthening the autonomy of administrative areas". — AFP

## Thai judge shoots self in court after railing at justice system

**BANGKOK:** A Thai judge shot himself in the chest in front of a packed court after acquitting several murder suspects and decrying the kingdom's judicial system in an impassioned speech broadcast on Facebook Live. Critics say Thailand's courts often work in favor of the rich and powerful, while delivering swift and harsh sentences on ordinary people for minor offences. But it is virtually unheard of for judges to criticize the system.

Kanakorn Pianchana, a judge at Yala court in the heart of the insurgency-battered Thai south, was delivering the verdict for five Muslim suspects in a gun murder case on Friday afternoon. He acquitted the group, delivered a courtroom plea for a cleaner justice system, before pulling out a handgun and shooting himself in the chest.

"You need clear and credible evidence to punish someone. So if you're not sure, don't punish them," the judge said addressing the court and broadcasting his words on his phone on Facebook live. "I'm not saying that the five defendants didn't commit the crimes, they might have done so... But the judicial process needs to be transparent and credible... punishing wrong people makes them scapegoats."

The Facebook feed then cut, but witnesses said Kanakorn recited a legal oath in front of the former Thai king's portrait, before shooting himself in the chest. "He is being treated by the doctors and is out of danger," Suriyan Hongvilai, the spokesman of the Office of the Judiciary, told AFP yesterday. "He shot himself because of 'personal stress'. But the cause behind the stress is not clear and will be investigated," he said. No Thai judge has ever breached protocol by making similar statements on the wider justice system, he added. A lawyer working with the suspects said Judge Kanakorn had ruled the prosecutor's evidence was insufficient to convict. "Right now the five are still being detained and are waiting to see if the state prosecutor appeals their acquittal," Abdulloh Hayee-abu, of the Muslim Attorney Centre in Yala told AFP. Over 7,000 people have died in 15 years of conflict in the Malay-Muslim majority southern region. Thousands of suspects have been jailed for acts linked to the insurgency, many under emergency laws imposed on the restive region. Advocacy groups in the Thai south have long accused security forces of trumping up charges against Muslim suspects and using emergency laws to drive cases through the courts. — AFP

## Seven Philippine ex-rebels killed by IS-linked gunmen

**MANILA:** Seven former Muslim rebels have been killed in the southern Philippines, military and police authorities said yesterday, in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group. They said the dead were all members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), formerly the country's largest guerrilla group but which began decommissioning weapons last month under the terms of a 2014 peace treaty.

A pro-IS armed group called Dawlah Islamiyah attacked a MILF camp near the town of Shariff Saydona on Friday, sparking fighting lasting several hours, said Lieutenant-Colonel Ernesto Gener, commander of a local army battalion. IS claimed responsibility in a communique seen by SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors jihadist activity. The jihadists said eight MILF members were killed, but local police commander Lieutenant-Colonel Arnold Santiago told reporters the authorities were only aware of seven deaths.

Locals said they saw seven bodies being loaded onto a boat at a riverbank in Shariff Saydona, about 900 kilometers south of Manila. MILF spokesman Von al Haq declined to comment. The MILF peace pact ended decades of Muslim rebellion that had claimed 150,000 lives by government estimates in the Mindanao region, home to the Catholic nation's large Islamic minority. The MILF was put in charge of a Muslim autonomous region as part of the peace accord, but Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said IS is attempting to set up a Southeast Asian stronghold there.

Hundreds of pro-IS gunmen seized the Mindanao city of Marawi in May 2017, sparking a five-month battle that left more than 1,000 people dead. The MILF, sometimes with Philippine military help, has in recent years waged an armed campaign to flush out a number of pro-IS groups operating in the swampy farming region around Shariff Saydona. — AFP



**HERAT:** In this photo taken on October 1, 2019, an internally displaced Afghan girl looks on as she walks towards her temporary home at a refugee camp on the outskirts of Herat. — AFP

## Violence against Afghan children up sharply: UN

**UNITED NATIONS:** Violence against children in Afghanistan has risen sharply over the past four years, a UN report says. From 2015 to 2018 a United Nations team studying the plight of children in war-torn Afghanistan documented 14,202 grave violations against them throughout the country, says the report published this week by the office of Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

"Of serious concern, the killing and maiming of 12,599 children was verified, representing almost a third of all civilian casualties and an increase of 82 per cent in child casualties compared with the previous four years," the report says. The extent of these violations is probably even

greater, adds the report. Civilians have long paid a disproportionate price in the 18 years since a US-led force invaded Afghanistan against the Taliban, and insurgency-linked violence claimed a record number of lives generally last year with more than 3,800, according to UN figures released previously.

The report documents 274 cases of children being recruited to fight, 17 of sexual violence committed against them, 231 child abductions, 832 attacks on schools and 249 cases of humanitarian aid being denied. Armed groups are mainly responsible for grave violations, except in the case of sexual violence, which is often blamed on security forces, says the report. "I am deeply disturbed by the scale, severity and recurrence of grave violations endured by the children in Afghanistan and by the fact that they continue to bear the brunt of the armed conflict," Guterres said. "I urge all parties to immediately cease all violations." "I am extremely concerned about the significant increase in the number of child casualties, including those resulting from aerial operations conducted by government and pro-government forces," he added. — AFP

## African migrant child dies trying to reach Spain

**MADRID:** A young African child has died off the coast of Spain after being rescued from a packed boat carrying 66 migrants, the maritime rescue services said Friday. Aged about six, the child died on Thursday while being transported by helicopter to the southern coastal city of Almeria, said a spokeswoman, who was unable to say whether it was a girl or a boy, nor specify the nationality.

Rescuers located the boat in the Alboran Sea between Morocco and Spain in waters just off Motril, a town 100 kilometers east of Malaga, after being tipped off by the NGO Caminando Fronteras ("Walking Borders"). Among those on board were 20 children and 14 women, one of whom was pregnant, the spokeswoman said. They were rescued by a patrol vessel from the European Union's border agency Frontex, which called in urgent assistance for the child who "had a weak pulse and whose temperature was below 36 degrees Celsius (96.8 degrees Fahrenheit)."

The helicopter picked the child up with its mother and flew them to Almeria where they were met by an ambulance, by which point the child had died, she said. The other rescued migrants disembarked at Malaga on Friday morning. At least 1,041 men, women and children have died while trying to make the perilous journey across the Mediterranean this year, with 315 of them dying as they sought to reach Spain, according to figures from the International Organization of Migrants (IOM). — AFP