



S African deluge easing but flood emergency lingers

Young conservatives target 'wokeism' on US campuses

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This undated picture released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on April 17, 2022 shows the test-fire of a new-type tactical guided weapon in North Korea. —AFP

North Korea tests new weapons system

Latest in unprecedented blitz of sanctions-busting weapons-tests

SEOUL: Kim Jong Un supervised the test-firing of a new guided weapons system to improve North Korea's "tactical nukes", state media said Sunday, capping days of celebrations surrounding the birthday of the country's founding leader. The launch was the latest in an unprecedented blitz of sanctions-busting weapons-tests this year, which included firing an intercontinental ballistic missile at full range for the first time since 2017. It also came just ahead of US-South Korea military training exercises-which have always infuriated Pyongyang-that were due to begin on Monday.

The "new-type tactical guided weapon... is of great significance in drastically improving the firepower of the frontline long-range artillery units and enhancing the efficiency in the operation of tactical nukes," the North's official KCNA news agency reported. It said the test was successful, but did not specify when or where it took place. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it detected two projectiles fired late on Saturday, which flew 110 kilometers (68 miles) at an altitude of 25 kilometers, travelling at speeds of around Mach 4.

The United States was "aware of the North Korean statement that they conducted a test of a long range artillery system", a Pentagon spokesperson said, adding it was monitoring. Analysts had

widely expected Pyongyang could conduct a nuclear test as part of events to celebrate Friday's anniversary of the 110th birthday of North Korea's founding leader-and Kim's grandfather-Kim Il Sung.

Expectations were heightened because of indications that Pyongyang had restarted work at one of its known nuclear testing sites. Analysts said the weapon tested over the weekend appeared to be a new short-range ballistic missile-but no less significant. "This is North Korea's first tactical nuclear weapon delivery system, it would seem," said Ankit Panda, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "You don't have to be particularly imaginative to put this two and two together."

Short-range but significant

Photos carried by the Rodong Sinmun newspaper showed a grinning Kim-surrounded by uniformed officials-applauding as he watched what it said was the test-firing of the weapon. Kim gave a

military research team "important instructions on the defense capabilities and nuclear combat forces," according to the KCNA report. Kim had also overseen in Pyongyang a series of events to celebrate Friday's anniversary, including a huge civilian parade, mass dance parties, and fireworks-but no military parade to show off the regime's new weapons.

At a key party congress in January 2021, Kim outlined a five-year defense development plan, calling for the development of higher nuclear technology and to make smaller and lighter nuclear weapons for "more tactical uses." The remarks signaled a return to nuclear testing and Kim's rare attendance at a launch of a short-range missile-the first in more than two years-suggested "particular significance", according to Panda.

North Korea had paused long-range and nuclear tests while Kim met then-US president Donald Trump for a bout of doomed diplomacy, which collapsed in 2019. North Korea has tested nuclear

weapons six times since 2006 and touted the success of its last and most powerful one in 2017 - a hydrogen bomb with an estimated yield of 250 kilotons. Officials and analysts had widely predicted that North Korea may carry out its seventh nuclear test in the coming weeks.

Satellite imagery has shown signs of new activity at a tunnel at the Punggye-ri nuclear testing site, which North Korea said was demolished in 2018 ahead of the first Trump-Kim summit. "This test of a tactical nuclear delivery system comes as indicators grow of significant reconstitutive work at North Korea's Punggye-ri nuclear test site," said Panda. With a new nuclear test, experts say Pyongyang will seek to miniaturize nuclear warheads to mount on its ICBMs.

South Korean officials have said Pyongyang could still stage a military parade or carry out a weapons test on or around April 25, the anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Army. South Korea and the United States regularly stage military exercises, but Pyongyang has long protested the drills as a rehearsal for war. "This training is a defensive command post training using computer simulation, and there is no real military maneuver training," Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said Sunday. — AFP



Pyongyang try to improve 'tactical nukes'

Yemen's new leaders focus on peace path

RIYADH: Yemen's new leaders are "ready for war" should the latest push for peace with Houthi rebels fail, but a senior official told AFP they genuinely want the years-long conflict to end soon. "Our first option is peace, but we are ready for war," Abdullah Al-Alimi said late Saturday in his first interview since being named to an eight-member leadership council tasked with running the country after President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi stepped down earlier this month.

"We believe the council is in a position, with the coalition support, to score a decisive military victory," Alimi told AFP in the Saudi capital. Hadi's internationally recognized government had been locked in conflict for seven years against the Iran-backed Houthis, who control the capital Sanaa and most of the north despite a Saudi-led coalition's military intervention launched in 2015.

The war has killed hundreds of thousands directly or indirectly, and triggered what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with millions on the brink of famine. Hadi's April 7 announcement handing power to the council came at the end of talks in the Saudi capital Riyadh that brought together anti-Houthi factions but were boycotted by the Houthis themselves.

The developments followed the start of a renewable two-month truce that has brought a rare respite from violence and spurred cautious hopes the war could finally end. Hadi said the council would be tasked with "negotiating with the Houthis for a permanent ceasefire". "We hope the dire situation in Yemen will make people have a desire to leave personal and partisan interests behind in pursuit of peace," said Alimi, formerly Hadi's chief of staff.

He said council leaders are due to meet in the coming days with UN special envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg, who last week visited Sanaa for the first



SANAA: Yemenis break their fast at a group iftar, offered by a charity, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in the Yemeni capital Sanaa. — AFP

time during his mandate and held talks with Houthi leaders. After meeting Grundberg, the council will travel to Yemen to be sworn in, though Alimi refused to specify exactly where. The new council has not yet decided how long it will give the Houthis to join talks, Alimi said.

Rebel resistance

The Houthis refused to participate in the negotiations in Riyadh, which they consider enemy territory, but Alimi said future talks could take place in a more neutral location such as Oman. So far, however, the Houthis have been dismissive, denouncing the new council as "a desperate attempt to rearrange the ranks of the mercenaries' fighting in Yemen."

Analysts note the Houthis have said peace will

only come once foreign forces leave and some believe they are only really interested in talks with the Saudis. "The Houthis don't see themselves in a conflict with Yemenis. The Houthis see themselves in a conflict with Saudi Arabia," said Fatima Abo Alasarar of the Middle East Institute in Washington.

If the push for peace goes nowhere, the newly-aligned anti-Houthi forces are positioned to pursue "a concerted multifront campaign" against the rebels, provided the council's diverse membership can hold together, said Peter Salisbury, senior Yemen analyst for the International Crisis Group. "They (the leadership council) have the potential to more aggressively pursue peace and more aggressively pursue war, and the most likely outcome is they do a little bit of one and a little bit of the other," he said. — AFP

Nigeria airstrikes kill 70 'terrorists'

ABUJA: Nigeria's airforce said that it had killed more than 70 Islamic State affiliated fighters in the north of the country, at the border with Niger. The statement said aircraft from both Nigeria and Niger had taken part in the operation. The Lake Chad area where Nigeria said it launched the airstrikes is known for hosting fighters of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a jihadist group active since 2016. With older rivals Boko Haram, the two factions have killed more than 40,000 people in the past decade and over two million people are still displaced from their homes due to ongoing violence.

"Missions over the suspected locations... conducted on 13 April 2022 specifically sighted large number of terrorists, a likely logistics camp," Nigeria's airforce spokesman Edward Gabkwet said. As a result, they carried out airstrikes on April 14 at Tumbun Rego and a nearby training camp, using aircraft from both Nigeria and Niger, he added in a statement. "Over 70 ISWAP terrorists were either eliminated or severely injured," he said. Nigeria often scales up its offensive at this time of the year, before the rainy season starts.

Soldiers have been battling the jihadist insurgency for more 12 years. Since last year, ISWAP has mostly taken over from its rival Boko Haram, after its leader Abubakar Shekau died during inter-factional clashes. Shekau had gained international notoriety after kidnapping nearly 300 schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014. Government troops are also battling heavily armed gangs in the northwest and separatist tensions in the southeast.—AFP