

International

Kim urges more 'military muscle' after hypersonic missile test

Pyongyang claims it accurately hit target some 1,000 km away

SEOUL: Kim Jong Un personally oversaw the successful test of a hypersonic missile, state media said yesterday, and urged North Korea to press ahead with building more "strategic military muscle" despite international sanctions over its nuclear weapons program. Pictures in state media showed Kim using binoculars to observe the second missile launch by the nuclear-armed nation in less than a week.

Hypersonic missiles are listed among the "top priority" tasks for strategic weapons development in North Korea's five-year plan. After the launch, Kim said North Korea must "further accelerate the efforts to steadily build up the country's strategic military muscle both in quality and quantity and further modernize the army", according to KCNA.

The Tuesday test, which came as the UN Security Council met in New York to discuss Pyongyang's weapons program, sparked swift condemnation, with the US State Department branding it a "threat... to the international community". It was the third reported North Korean test of a hypersonic gliding missile. The first, which took place four months ago, was followed by one last week.

North Korea's state news agency KCNA said the most recent test demonstrated "the superior maneuverability of the hypersonic glide vehicle". It also claimed it accurately hit a target some 1,000 km away. South Korea's military, which had cast doubt on Pyongyang's initial claims, said the missile

launched on Tuesday had reached hypersonic speeds and showed clear signs of "progress" from last week's test.

The missile flew 700 km at an altitude of about 60 km at Mach 10 speed, Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. Hypersonic missiles travel at speeds of at least Mach 5 - five times the speed of sound - and can maneuver mid-flight, making them harder to track and intercept. "Everything about this test is a reminder that North Korea is all-in on a new military modernization campaign," Ankit Panda of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said on Twitter yesterday.

"Kim's working his way down his 8th Party Congress wish list and is once again personally guiding tests," Panda said, referring to a recent meeting of high-level North Korean officials. Russia, the United States and China have all reported successfully testing hypersonic glide missiles. Russia is generally seen as the world leader in the technology. Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said the weapon was not ready for deployment. "Nonetheless, Pyongyang's ability to threaten its neighbors continues to grow," he said.

The fact that Kim attended the missile test indicates that North Korea is satisfied with the level of progress, said Lim Eul-chul, a professor of North Korean studies at Kyungnam University in Seoul. "Since ... the test was the final verification, addition-

demanded a policy document signed by the chiefs of the three armed forces of the country.

The military holds vast sway over many aspects of commercial, cultural and political life. Last year a United Nations report said it owned "the largest conglomerate of business entities in Pakistan", as well as being the country's biggest urban real estate developer and manager, with wide-ranging involvement in public construction projects.

Tuesday's court ruling ordered the golf course to be sealed and handed over to the Capital Development Authority and Islamabad Wildlife Management Board. It said it should be demolished within four weeks unless it can be used for "an environmentally friendly activity". A popular restaurant in the Margalla hills - on land the army claimed it owned and leased out commercially - was given a similar fate.

Mazher Allahyar, general manager of the Monal Restaurant, said they were considering challenging the court ruling, which he said would lead to job losses for around 600 people. Pakistan has around 50 golf courses - many built on military land - but the sport is largely exclusive and played mostly by the wealthy or top brass of the armed forces.

hibiting any foreign political organizations from conducting activities in Hong Kong or local political organizations establishing ties with similar overseas bodies.

No opposition

China imposed its own security law after huge and sometimes violent democracy protests swept Hong Kong in 2019, saying it was needed to restore order and would only affect a "tiny minority". It has begun transforming Hong Kong into a mirror of the authoritarian mainland, criminalizing much dissent, setting new legal precedents and sparking sanctions by Western governments who argue it has trashed the city's freedoms and autonomy.

It also empowered China's mainland security apparatus to operate openly in the city, and allows the government to freeze the assets of any company or individual deemed to be a national security threat. Most of Hong Kong's best-known democracy activists are in jail, have quit politics or have fled overseas. The vast majority of national security charges revolve around people holding or vocalizing political views now deemed illegal.

In 2003, an attempt by Hong Kong's government to pass its own national security law sparked large protests and was eventually aborted - which is why Beijing imposed a law directly on the city in 2020. It is unlikely the city government will face much opposition in passing the new law. Under new "patriots only" political rules also imposed by Beijing, the city's legislature has been cleared of any opposition. All lawmakers are now vetted for political

reported in the central Chinese city of Zhengzhou since last week, as China battles to contain multiple local outbreaks of the Delta and Omicron variants. Parts of the city were abruptly placed under lockdown last Wednesday when a woman named Wang was having dinner at her blind date's house. "Just after I arrived in Zhengzhou, there was an outbreak and his community was put under lockdown and I could not leave," Wang told Shanghai-based outlet The Paper on Tuesday, adding that she went there for a week-long trip to meet potential suitors.

"I'm getting old now, my family introduced me to ten matches... The fifth date wanted to show off his cooking



This picture taken on Tuesday and released yesterday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un speaking with military officials during an observation of a hypersonic missile test at an undisclosed location in North Korea. —AFP

al tests of hypersonic missiles, at least, are not expected for a while," Lim said.

The tests come as North Korea has refused to respond to US appeals for talks. At a key meeting last month of North Korea's ruling party, Kim vowed to continue building up the country's defense capabilities, without mentioning the

United States. Dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang remains stalled, and the country is under multiple sets of international sanctions over its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The impoverished nation has also been under a rigid self-imposed coronavirus blockade that has hampered its economy. —AFP

Pakistan court shuts military golf course

ISLAMABAD: A golf club belonging to Pakistan's military was closed yesterday after a court ruled it encroached on national park land in the capital and breached environment regulations. In a rare ruling against the country's powerful armed forces, judge Athar Minallah said yesterday that the navy had "illegally" established Margalla Greens Golf Club, an 18-hole course adjacent to the country's top military university.

The course, which opened in 2010, also abuts the Margalla Hills National Park in a range of Himalayan foothills that partly ring Islamabad. Pakistan has been ruled by the military for roughly half its 74-year history, and court decisions against the powerful institution are almost unheard of. But only last year the Supreme Court questioned the use of military land for commercial projects and

HK to create more national security crimes

HONG KONG: Hong Kong will create a host of new national security crimes, the city's leader said yesterday, as she presided over the first session of a new "patriots only" legislature scrubbed of political opposition. The legislation will add to a sweeping national security law imposed directly on Hong Kong by Beijing that has transformed the international finance hub and empowered authorities to carry out a widespread crackdown on dissent.

The current national security law defines four crimes - secession, subversion, terrorism and colluding with foreign forces - and offenders can face up to life in prison. But yesterday, Chief Executive Carrie Lam confirmed that her government would create new "local legislation" that meets Article 23 of Hong Kong's mini-constitution, which calls for the city to pass its own national security laws.

"Article 23 legislative work is part of Hong Kong's constitutional duty and cannot be further delayed," Lam told lawmakers, adding that the government aimed to publish a draft by June. Lam did not outline what the new crimes would be. But the specific offences Article 23 lists are treason, secession, sedition, subversion and theft of state secrets. It also includes pro-

Woman stuck in blind date's house after lockdown

BEIJING: Imagine being on a first date you couldn't end? That's what happened to a woman in China whose video blogs about going into a citywide lockdown during a blind date have gone viral. Over 100 virus cases have been



ISLAMABAD: Employees gather outside the sealed hill-top Monal Restaurant following a court order at the Margalla Hills National Park yesterday. —AFP

Tuesday's ruling was greeted with glee by some activists on social media. The judge was hitting the military where it "matters most to them", wrote one, followed by emojis of a money bag and a pile of dollars. The Margalla Hills National Park is home to hundreds of different bird species as well as dozens of types of mammals and reptiles. —AFP



HONG KONG: This overhead view shows Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam speaking to Legislative Council (LegCo) members during the first session of a new "patriots only" legislature yesterday. —AFP

loyalty before standing, and only 20 seats are directly elected. Just one of the 90 vetted legislators who were selected in polls last month describes himself as "non-establishment".

Prevent and punish

A small committee of Beijing loyalists will choose Hong Kong's next leader in March, and Lam has not yet said whether she will stand for a second term. Her first term ends in June. Yesterday, Lam said it would be difficult for the new national security bill to be completed by the end of

her first term, meaning the legislation will probably fall to her successor.

Addressing a chamber whose walls now bear China's red-and-gold national emblem - placed above the city's official seal - Lam praised Beijing's security law. "Its function now is to act as an anchor to guarantee stability, to let people know there are consequences," she told lawmakers, adding the new legislation would be similarly "well written". "The law requires us to prevent, curb and punish crimes. If prevention is done well, we can punish less." —AFP

News in brief

16 burnt to death in S Africa crash

JOHANNESBURG: Sixteen people were burnt to death on Tuesday when a minibus taxi and an SUV collided on a highway in South Africa's northeastern Limpopo province, a local official said. The SUV driver lost control after a tyre burst and collided head-on with a 22-seater Mercedes-Benz bus, provincial transport ministry spokesman Mike Maringa told AFP yesterday. "The bus burst into flames and 16 occupants trapped inside were burnt alive," he said. The SUV driver was killed on impact, he said. Eight other people survived with injuries. —AFP

Heavy rains kill 10 in Brazil

RAPOSOS, Brazil: Torrential rain in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais killed 10 people in two days, according to an official report Tuesday, which warned of more intense downpours in the region. The victims, among them an 11-year-old girl, died on Sunday and Monday due to rains, flooding, and landslides, according to the State Coordinator of Civil Defense. Since the rains began at the beginning of October, 19 people have died in the southeastern Brazilian state. Ten more were killed Saturday when a large rock fragment broke free of a ravine and plunged onto four tourist boats in Furnas Lake. —AFP

Indonesia launches booster drive

JAKARTA: Indonesia opened its coronavirus booster campaign to the public yesterday as the country records rising infections driven by the Omicron variant. The free shots will be given to the elderly and at-risk residents as a priority, but will be available to everyone who received their second dose six months prior, President Joko Widodo said on Tuesday after announcing the decision. The boosters will be administered as half doses - which a local study confirmed was sufficient protection against the virus - due to supply shortages, said health minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin. —AFP

Third COVID infection for Bolivian VP

LA PAZ: Bolivia's vice president David Choquehuanca, who touts indigenous treatments for COVID-19, has contracted the virus for a third time, the government said Tuesday, with six government ministers also testing positive. All are self-isolating and working from home, with no major symptoms, the president's office said in a statement. All had been vaccinated against the coronavirus, although Choquehuanca - a member of the Aymara indigenous group - has had only one jab. Last month, he revealed he had contracted COVID-19 twice, and recovered after taking what he called traditional medicine. —AFP

which I think is great." Wang did not disclose her age or the identity of the man in the videos.

Related hashtags have racked up over six million views on the Twitter-like social media site Weibo by yesterday. However, Wang said the recent surge in online attention prompted her to remove the videos. "Friends have been calling him and I think this has definitely affected his life, so I have taken them down for now," she said in a video posted Tuesday that was widely republished in Chinese local media. "Thanks everyone for your attention... I hope the outbreak ends soon and that my single sisters also find a relationship soon." —AFP