

South Korea

Moon talks to Xi, Abe

S. Korea urges dialogue and N. Korea sanctions

SEOUL, May 11, (RTRS): South Korea's new president launched international efforts to defuse tension over North Korea's weapons development on Thursday, urging both dialogue and sanctions while also aiming to ease Chinese anger about a US anti-missile system.

Moon Jae-in, a liberal former human rights lawyer, was sworn in on Wednesday and said in his first speech as president he would immediately address security tensions that have raised fears of war on the Korean peninsula.

Moon first spoke to Chinese President Xi Jinping and later to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, with how to respond to North Korea's rapidly developing nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, in violation of UN Security Council resolutions, dominating talks.

"The resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue must be comprehensive and sequential, with pressure and sanctions used in parallel with negotiations," Moon's spokesman, Yoon Young-chan, quoted Moon as telling Xi.

"Sanctions against North Korea are also a means to bring the North to the negotiating table aimed at eliminating its nuclear weapons," Yoon told a briefing, adding that Xi indicated his agreement.

Moon has taken a more conciliatory line with North Korea than his conservative predecessors and advocates engagement. He has said he would be prepared to go to Pyongyang "if the conditions are right".

Regional experts have believed for months that North Korea is preparing for its sixth nuclear test and was working to develop a nuclear-tipped missile capable of reaching the United States, presenting US President Donald Trump with perhaps his most pressing security issue.

Trump told Reuters in an interview last month major conflict with North Korea was possible though he would prefer a diplomatic outcome.

North Korea says it needs its weapons to defend itself against the United States which it says has pushed the region to the brink of nuclear war.

Threats

"Threats from North Korea's nuclear and missile development have entered a new stage," Japan's Abe told Moon in their telephone call, according to Japanese Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Koichi Hagiuda.

"How to respond to North Korea ... is an urgent issue. I would like to closely cooperate with the president to achieve the denuclearisation of North Korea," Abe told Moon.

But Abe also said "dialogue for dialogue's sake would be meaningless" and he called on North Korea to demonstrate "sincere and concrete action", Hagiuda said, adding that Moon shared Abe's views.

Japan has been concerned that Moon will take a tough line on feuds stemming from the bitter legacy of its 1910-1945 colonisation of the Korean peninsula and could fray ties at a time when cooperation on North Korea is vital.

Moon told Abe to "look straight at history" and not make the past "a barrier", though he raised South Korea's dissatisfaction with a 2015 agreement meant to put to rest a dispute over Japanese compensation for South Korean women forced to work in Japanese brothels before and during World War Two, Korea's presidential office said.

While South Korea, China and Japan all share worry about North Korea, ties between South Korea and China have been strained by South Korea's decision to install a US anti-missile system in defence against the North.

China says the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) undermines its security as its powerful radar can probe deep into its territory.

China says the system does little to curb the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes, which it has been pressing ahead with in defiance of US pressure and UN sanctions.

Agreed

The deployment of THAAD was agreed last year by South Korea's previous administration after North Korea conducted a long-range rocket launch that put an object into space.

Moon came to power with a promise to review the system and he told Xi that North Korea must cease making provocations before tension over the deployment could be resolved, officials said.

In the first direct contact between the South Korean and Chinese leaders, Xi explained China's position, Yoon, the South Korean presidential spokesman said, without elaborating.

"President Moon said he understands China's interest in the THAAD deployment and its concerns, and said he hopes the two countries can swiftly get on with communication to further improve each other's understanding," Yoon told a briefing.

South Korea and the United States began deploying the THAAD system in March and it has since become operational.

Xi told Moon South Korea and China should respect each other's concerns, set aside differences, seek common ground and handle disputes appropriately, China's foreign ministry said in a statement.

As well as clouding efforts to rein in North Korea's nuclear ambitions, the THAAD deployment has also led to recriminations from Beijing against South Korean companies.

Moon explained the difficulties faced by South Korean companies that were doing business in China and asked for Xi's "special attention" to ease those concerns, Yoon said.

China has also denied it is doing anything to retaliate against South Korean businesses.



Moon



South Korea's acting President and Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn (center), leaves the Central Government Complex after his farewell ceremony in Seoul, South Korea on May 11. Newly elected South Korean President Moon Jae-in Wednesday took the oath of office in a ceremony at the National Assembly. (AP)



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, Chinese soldiers help people clear rubble from a damaged house following an earthquake in Kuzigun Village in Taxkorgan County, northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on May 11. A moderate earthquake that struck close to the earth's surface killed at least several people. (AP)

Earthquake kills eight in western China: report

An earthquake rocked China's western Xinjiang region on Thursday, killing eight people and injuring another 23 as more than 1,500 homes crumbled, state media reported.

The shallow 5.4-magnitude quake struck at 5:58 am (2158 GMT Wednesday) 213 kms (133 miles) south-southwest of the ancient Silk Road city of Kashgar, the US Geological Survey said.

Some people were buried after their adobe homes collapsed, said

Wang Fuyou, Communist Party chief of Taxkorgan county, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

Rescuers were searching for people trapped in the rubble in Quzgun, the worst-hit village, which has a population of 449, Wang said.

More than 1,500 homes collapsed in Quzgun, Xinhua said.

More than 9,000 people were relocated in the region while 1,000 soldiers and 1,500 civilians were participating in rescue efforts, the agency

said. Xinhua said the injured were taken to hospital.

The People's Daily posted a photo on Twitter of a building in complete ruins. Other photos, all from the official earthquake monitoring centre, show ceiling panels on the ground in one building and products on the floor in a store.

The remote and sparsely populated area is close to the border with Tajikistan. (AFP)

Thailand

Smugglers resume overland trails

People smuggling rises

MAE SOT, Thailand, May 11, (RTRS): People smuggling across the border from Myanmar to Thailand is on the rise despite a crackdown by authorities in both countries that has made it more expensive and dangerous, Thai immigration police say.

Thailand said earlier this year that it hoped its efforts against smuggling would be recognised by the United States in its annual Trafficking in Persons report expected next month.

But while fewer migrants appear to be braving hazardous journeys by sea, figures from immigration police on the land border show an increase in people smuggled from Myanmar since 2014, when Thailand's military government seized power and vowed to crack down on human smuggling and trafficking rings.

"We've applied a lot of pressure so they have to find a new way to come," Sompong Saimonka, deputy superintendent of Border Immigration Police in Thailand's western Tak province, the main land gateway from Myanmar, told Reuters. "We can't keep tabs on it all."

While Myanmar's economy has been booming — the World Bank forecasts annual growth will average 7.1 percent over the next three years — wages remain among the lowest in the region.

Migrants from Myanmar often do work in Thailand in sectors such as construction, agriculture and fishing, forming the backbone of Southeast Asia's second largest economy.

positions, the Zhangjiakou Intermediate People's Court heard.

Wang admitted his guilt and expressed regret, the court said in a statement, adding it would sentence him at a later date.



Xi



Baoan

The two countries signed an agreement last year to allow migrants from Myanmar to legally work in Thailand. But many are unwilling to wait up to six months for identity documents and take their chance with the smugglers instead.

Thailand's crackdown on human smuggling and trafficking syndicates reverberated around the region in 2015 and drew global attention to the abuses suffered by some of those seeking a better life.

Boatloads of migrants, many of them Rohingya Muslims escaping persecution in Myanmar's Rakhine state, were turned away by regional governments from Bangladesh to Malaysia after being abandoned at sea by smugglers.

Dozens of bodies of suspected migrants were discovered in jungle camps along the Thai-Malaysian border.

Thai police say the focus on sea routes to Thailand and Malaysia has prompted smugglers to resume overland trails where it is easier to avoid checkpoints.

Data from immigration police at Mae Sot, the main entry point into western Thailand, shows the number of people smuggled from Myanmar rose from 20,323 in 2014 to 24,962 in 2016.

Those were just the recorded cases, so the increase could partly be due to greater enforcement efforts. Few of those recently smuggled were Rohingya, police in Mae Sot said.

The bribes, totalling 154.28 million yuan (\$22.35 million), were accepted directly or through relatives in exchange for favours for third parties, including securing project approvals or job appointments.

Wang was deputy finance minister from 2012 until April 2015, when he took up the post of statistics bureau chief. (RTRS)

3 suspects let off:

Three people on China's list of 100 most wanted graft suspects overseas were not prosecuted when they finally returned to China, the government has said in an update on the cases of 40 people on the list it has had returned.

China has pursued an overseas search, dubbed Operation Fox Hunt, for corrupt

officials and business executives who have fled abroad with their assets, part of President Xi Jinping's war on deep-seated corruption.

In 2015, authorities published a list of 100 of the most wanted corruption suspects who had been targeted with an Interpol red notice, many living in the United States, Canada and Australia. (RTRS)

Duterte rails vs corrupt police:

Philippine President **Rodrigo Duterte** on Wednesday launched another tirade against corrupt police who are the frontline troops in his deadly drug war, after four more officers were accused of kidnapping and extortion.

The arrest of the four from Manila's financial district of Makati was the latest in a series of scandals involving police that have raised concerns about their suitability to prosecute the drug war.

"I was reading, coming here, another spot report of four policemen again (linked to) kidnapping. These policemen, sons of whores!" Duterte said at Manila airport before flying to Cambodia.

The 160,000-member police force is the main enforcer of Duterte's 10-month-old drugs crackdown that has claimed thousands of lives and led to warnings he may be orchestrating a crime against humanity.

Duterte admitted early this year that the force was "corrupt to the core", after several anti-drugs policemen were arrested on charges of kidnapping and murdering a South Korean businessman as part of an extortion scam.

Duterte pulled all police off the drug war at that time and vowed to "cleanse" the force. But after a brief lull he allowed the police to resume the anti-drug crackdown without major reforms. (AFP)

Troops, supplies to island: The Philippines has started transporting troops and supplies to a disputed island in the South China Sea in preparation for construction work that includes reinforcing and lengthening an airstrip and building a dock, an official said Thursday.

China has protested the visit last month by the Philippine defense and military chiefs to Pag-asa Island, home to Filipino soldiers and fishermen for decades, but which is also claimed by Beijing.

Lt Gen Raul del Rosario, head of the Philippine military's Western Command, said troops and initial supplies arrived on Pag-asa island last week. About 1.6 billion pesos (\$32 million) has been earmarked for the construction that will also include a fish port, solar power, water desalination plant, refurbishment of housing for soldiers and facilities for marine research and tourists. (AP)

24K flee homes: More than 24,000 people fled their homes as the Philippine military used airstrikes and artillery against Muslim extremists who have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, authorities said Thursday.

Almost a week of attacks on members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in the strife-torn southern island of Mindanao has displaced residents of six towns, said Jofelle Delicana, spokeswoman for the civil defence office.

About 24,300 villagers were forced to take refuge in schools, makeshift tents or with relatives after the military launched their assault on May 5, she told AFP.

Local Army spokesman Captain Arvin Encinas said that reports from civilians and intelligence sources indicate that as many as 31 BIFF guerrillas have been killed including the group's leader, Commander Ismael Abubakar, also known as "Bungos", as well as two of his aides.

"We believe they are among the dead considering our information that they were there in the location hit by airstrikes," he told AFP. (AFP)

Sen threatens protesters: Cambodia's strongman premier Hun Sen warned Wednesday that he would not hesitate to quash protests with military might if they turn violent, raising tensions as the country braces for elections.

Hun Sen is preparing for local polls in June and a 2018 national election after clamping down on opposition figures trying to break his 32-year grip on power.

The warning was a reference to opposition protests that broke out during the last election in 2013, when a crowd destroyed at least two police cars over allegations of voter fraud.

The opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) also accused Hun Sen of rigging the poll in his favour and led a month-long protest over the election results.

Dressed in a military uniform, Hun Sen told a gathering of former soldiers such protests would not be tolerated this time around. (AFP)

Allow access — Red Cross: The International Committee of the Red Cross has asked Myanmar to let aid workers get access to people caught up in conflicts that have displaced tens of thousands despite a transition that brought Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi to power.

Authorities have blocked the ICRC from areas under the control of ethnic minority forces and from visiting some prisoners, the organisation's president, Peter Maurer, told reporters late on Wednesday in the commercial capital, Yangon.

"We would like to have access to all the people in need in order to do proper assessments, to help ease according to needs," he said.

Maurer visited the northwestern state of Rakhine, where he toured camps set up almost five years ago to house those displaced by communal clashes between Rohingya Muslims and ethnic Rakhine Buddhists.

He did not visit the north of the state, where a security operation in response to insurgent attacks in October sent an estimated 74,000 people fleeing to Bangladesh.

Troops and police have been accused of killing and raping Rohingyas, who are denied citizenship in Myanmar and widely viewed as interlopers from Bangladesh. (RTRS)



Duterte