

WORLD



No change in US stance on North Korea, says Haley

WASHINGTON (TNS) North Korea must stop conducting nuclear tests before the United States would enter into any talks with the isolated Pyongyang regime, US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said Sunday.

"They have to stop testing. They have to be willing to talk about banning their nuclear weapons. Those things have to happen," she said Sunday, one day after President Donald Trump indicated he would be open to speaking directly with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un.

"This is going to be phases. This isn't going to happen overnight, as we've seen, but it's a dangerous situation," Haley said on ABC's "This Week." Trump's latest remarks appeared to be a pivot away from his often-bellucous rhetoric on North Korea and Kim,

PM May to reassert her authority in a cabinet reshuffle

LONDON (TNS) Britain's government is set to be replaced after Monday as Prime Minister Theresa May looks to reassert her authority following a string of high-profile departures, according to MPs.

Deputy Prime Minister Damian Green is not to be replaced after stepping down last month over a pornography scandal, following on from the departures of ministers Michael Fallon and Priti Patel embroiled in separate controversies.

"Damian Green's departure before Christmas means that some changes do have to be made, and I will be making some changes," May told BBC's Andrew Marr

Show on Sunday.

A Labour MP who wished to remain anonymous told AFP that the reshuffle would take place on Monday, having received confirmation from Conservative colleagues.

May's Downing Street office also said that widespread reports that cabinet ministers would discover their fate on Monday were not inaccurate.

Green's resignation came as part of a broader scandal over sexual harassment at Westminster, which prompted defence minister, Fallon's departure in November.

His resignation was followed a week later by that of Patel, Britain's

overseas aid minister, who stepped down over unauthorised meetings in Israel. Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt is believed to be in line to take over Green's role, while the Sunday Telegraph reported that education minister Justine Greening was facing the sack.

Leading figures such as foreign minister Boris Johnson, finance minister Philip Hammond and Brexit Secretary David Davis are expected to stay in their roles.

Justice minister Dominic Raab, an ardent Brexit supporter, is reported to be in line for a top job, while May is also predicted to promote more women and racially diverse members.



Steve Bannon says 'treason' remark not directed at Trump Jr

WASHINGTON: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump's former chief strategist, has tried to reverse remarks in which he called the president's son Donald Jr "treasonous".

The accusation appears in Michael Wolff's new book *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*.

He was referring to a meeting in June 2016 between Mr Trump's son and a group of Russians. But on Sunday Mr Bannon said the barb was directed at former aide Paul Manafort, who was also present.

The Senate, House of Representatives and a special counsel are all investigating alleged Russian interference in the presidential election, allegations denied by both the Kremlin and Donald Trump.

In a statement first reported by news site Axios, Steve Bannon called Donald Jr "both a patriot and a good man".

"My comments were aimed at Paul Manafort, not Steve Bannon," he said. "He should have known they are duplications, cunning and not our friends. To reiterate, those comments were not aimed at Don Jr."

The original remark, published in Mr Wolff's book *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, and not disputed by Mr Bannon, appeared to take aim at all three Trump campaign officials at former Donald Jr's read: "The three senior guys in the campaign thought it was a good idea to meet with a foreign government inside Trump Tower in the conference room on the 25th floor - with no lawyers. They didn't have any lawyers. "Even if you thought that this was not treasonous, or unpatric, or bad ***, and I happen to think it's all of that, you should have called the FBI immediately." Agencies

Vietnam energy executives stand trial on corruption charges



Vietnam: Senior executives from Vietnam's state oil company are standing trial in Hanoi in a crackdown on corruption in the country's energy and banking sectors.

The 22 defendants include the ex-head of PetroVietnam Construction, Trinh Xuan Thanh, and a senior Communist Party official.

Germany says Mr Thanh was abducted from a park in Berlin last July, but Hanoi insists he returned home voluntarily. He is accused of corruption and could face jail.

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Baku to host NAM FM Conference in 2018

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Azerbaijan will chair the Non-Aligned Movement in 2019-2022 and will host a conference of foreign ministers of the Movement later this year in Baku, spokesman of Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Hikmat Hajiyev has said.

According to Azeri-Official News agency of Azerbaijan, the Non-Aligned Movement includes more than 120 states and its summit would be held in 2019.



23 killed in explosion in Syria's Idlib

BEIRUT (TNS): An explosion in Syria's Idlib killed at least 23 people and injured tens more, including civilians, a war monitor reported.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the explosion targeted the headquarters of a minor rebel faction in Idlib.

The nature of the attack was not immediately clear.

The monitor said there were conflicting accounts, attributing the explosion that shook the Thalathien district of the city to either a car bomb or a drone attack.

Ambulances were deployed to the explosion site and rescue teams were continuing efforts to recover bodies and the injured from the rubble of the targeted building and neighboring houses, the monitor added.

The majority of the deaths were fighters from the rebel group, in addition to seven civilians, with several people still unaccounted for, it said.

Idlib province is a stronghold of rebels in Syria and is situated on the border with Turkey, one of the main backers of



Rail strikes: Train workers at five firms walkout in safety row

LONDON: Commuters are facing up to three days of disruption, as staff at five train firms begin a fresh wave of strikes in separate disputes over "rail safety".

Rail, Maritime and Transport union members at Northern, Merseyrail, South Western Railway and Greater Anglia are striking today, Wednesday and Friday, RMT members at Southern are also staging a 24-hour walkout. A Department for Transport spokesman said the five franchises would "keep passengers moving" during the strikes.

The 24-hour walkouts were called over separate disputes, all concerning rail safety, the RMT said.

It said the disputes were over issues including the role of train guards and the extension of driver-only services. Strikes on each of the affected days will run from 00:01 until 23:59 GMT. The last of Wight's Island Line - run by SWR - will also operate hourly with buses replacing services on Wednesday.

Mexico gunfight kills eleven

ACAPULCO (TNS): The aftermath of a gunfight on the outskirts of the Mexican seaside resort of Acapulco that pit residents of a small town against members of a local self-appointed community police force has left 11 dead, state officials say.

The exchange of gunfire took place in the farming community of La Ceja, and state police later moved into the town, three members of the community police were shot dead after resisting them, Roberto Alvarez,

Second India restaurant fire in fortnight kills five

BANGALORE (DNA): Five workers were killed early Monday when a bar and restaurant in southern India caught fire, police said, less than two weeks after a blaze at another eatery killed 14. Police said an electrical short-circuit probably caused the fire at the Kailash Bar & Restaurant in the southern technology hub of Bangalore. All five victims were employees who were sleeping at the premises, Bangalore Deputy Commissioner of Police M. N. Anucheth told reporters.

In late December 14 people were killed in a fire at a rooftop restaurant in Mumbai, many of them

Mother arrested after her new born baby found dead in aircraft toilet

JAKARTA (TNS): Indonesian police detained the suspected mother of a new-born baby who was found dead in aircraft toilet at Jakarta's international airport. Hani, a 37-year-old migrant worker from Cianjur in West Java, was held soon after arriving from Bangkok at Soekarno-Hatta airport around 1am, said airport police chief Ahmad Yusel. "She didn't look healthy and wasn't fit. The woman is now at the airport's health centre," Yusel told.

Pakistan and India in the SCO: Regional Aspects of Nuclear Non-Proliferation



Vladimir Petrovsky

The regime of nuclear non-proliferation, unique in its universal and nature as well as its importance for international peace and security is the cornerstone of contemporary world order, a symbol of all (or nearly all) states to come to terms and cooperate for the sake of common survival.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) at the new stage of its development marked by the admission of new members (Pakistan and India) is facing new challenges in the sphere of nuclear non-proliferation. India and Pakistan that de facto possess nuclear weapons joined Russia and China, the "official

nuclear powers. The history of SCO has demonstrated that throughout its existence it has been committed to enhancing strategic stability, strengthening the international regime of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and upholding order in international law. Today, the erosion of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and the challenges the SCO is facing in this sphere demands a new strategy and new answers.

The SCO promoted the regional non-proliferation initiative, the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ) Treaty. This initiative is unique in many respects: it is the first non-proliferation zone in the Northern Hemisphere, in the landlocked region bordering on two nuclear powers - Russia and China; it is the first multilateral agreement in the security sphere that brought together five Central Asian countries; it is the first multilateral agreement in the nuclear sphere in the region where one of the states (Kazakhstan) had nuclear weapons in its territory. The CANWFZ is the first treaty that obligated its members to conclude with the IAEA an agreement for the application of safeguards in accordance with the NPT.

Compliance with the international regimes of non-proliferation of weapons

of mass destruction has become one of the main criteria of admittance of new members, together with their belonging to the SCO region, common borders with other SCO members, and their policy of non-participation in military blocs, an absence of military bases and military contingents of third countries on their territories, diplomatic relationships with all SCO member-states, and observance of human rights - these criteria were exhaustively formulated in the Statute on the Order of Admission of New Members adopted by the Tashkent Summit of June 11, 2010.

Taking into consideration that strict observance of the principles of nuclear non-proliferation is one of the basic rules for the SCO member states, the fact that India and Pakistan have not joined the NPT complicated the discussion of their membership in the SCO as a full-fledged members. The situation was further complicated by the fact that India and Pakistan hold identical positions on the current nuclear non-proliferation regime: the NPT is an "unequal" treaty that consolidated the nuclear monopoly of a small group of "chosen" powers. The two countries are prepared to join the treaty only as internationally recognized nuclear

The international community, however, cannot accept this, besides, Russia and China as the NPT depositaries have special responsibilities for the treaty's strict observance and consolidation. According to Russian experts, if India and Pakistan are recognized as nuclear powers the NPT basic provisions will be devalued, the treaty and the entire non-proliferation regime based on it will be dead. The SCO has already learned that the attempts to persuade India and Pakistan to join the non-proliferation regime as non-nuclear states are fruitless. Compromises, however, are possible, which means that the SCO might find "the golden mean" in the talks with the two countries in their SCO membership: in an effort to finally acquire the official nuclear status, India and Pakistan might agree to limit their nuclear missile arsenals and slow down realization of some of their strategic programs.

They refuse to join the CTCT yet observe the bilateral and virtual moratorium on nuclear tests. They do not participate in the talks on the FMCT (Fissile Materials Cut-Off Treaty) yet are developing national regimes of export control.

However, Delhi and Islamabad signed several agreements on confidence-building measures and that, therefore, further

negotiations look promising. This process can be developed through defining a set of urgent measures intended to stabilize their relations so that to avoid a nuclear conflict. The two states could have ensured partial transparency of the nuclear forces (their structure and location) up to and including a verifiable agreement on non-deployment of nuclear weapons in the border area). Mutual obligations not to deploy nuclear weapons in the debateable territories might have reduced the risk of a nuclear conflict.

The same goals can be achieved through mutual obligations to decrease the military operational readiness (that is, legalization of the current practices of storing warheads separate from missiles) and inform about changes of this status during military exercises.

In addition to the supported nuclear-weapon-free status initiative of Mongolia (one of the SCO observer states), there are other potentially useful initiatives, which Pakistan and India could also join. E.g., if the SCO Parliamentary Assembly is set up (the idea was put on the table in 2008 by the speaker of the parliament of Kyrgyzstan), it might start elaborating a Convention on Support of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Regime based on the

UN nuclear weapons model convention. To conclude, having decided to admit India and Pakistan to the SCO, the SCO member states reaffirmed that all NPT provisions should be strictly observed, its aims and principles comprehensively balanced to further consolidate the non-proliferation regime and the process of nuclear disarmament in the conditions of equal and undivided security for all.

This means that Pakistan and India, as members of the SCO, will have to cope, in the short- and medium-term perspective, with a very complicated and non-trivial task of strengthening the non-proliferation regime at the regional level, within its responsibility zone.

In case of a success (which is not guaranteed yet not ruled out) the SCO will not only make an exceptionally important contribution to the strengthening of the regime of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons at the global level, it will upgrade its status as an important power able to maintain and support the world order and ensure peace and international security.

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