



London voters to punish PM, party

Thrifty at 50: Pakistan keeps ageing Mirages flying



PANMUNJOM: North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un (right) talks with South Korea's President Moon Jae-in at a bench on a bridge next to the military demarcation line at the truce village of Panmunjom. —AFP

N Korea offers to shut nuke test site

Trump presses for full denuclearization

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un plans to invite experts and journalists from the United States and South Korea when the country closes its nuclear test site in May, Seoul officials said yesterday, as US President Trump pressed for total denuclearization ahead of his own unprecedented meeting with Kim. On Friday, Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in vowed "complete denuclearization" of the Korean peninsula in the first inter-Korean summit in more than a decade, but the declaration did not include concrete steps to reach that goal.

North Korea's state media had said before the summit that Pyongyang would immediately suspend nuclear and missile tests, scrap its nuclear test site and instead pursue economic growth and peace. Kim told Moon that he would soon invite the experts and journalists to "open to the international community" the dismantling of the facilities, the Blue House said.

"The United States, though inherently hostile to North Korea, will get to know once our talk begins that I am not the kind of person who will use nuclear weapons against the South or the United States across the Pacific," Moon's press secretary Yoon Young-chan quoted Kim as saying. "There is no reason for us to possess nuclear weapons while suffering difficulties if mutual trust with the United States is built through frequent meetings from now on, and an end to the war and non-aggression are promised." Kim said there were two additional, larger tunnels that remain "in a very good condition" at the Punggye-ri test site beyond the existing one, which experts have said had collapsed after repeated explosions, rendering much of the site useless.

Kim's promise shows his willingness to "preemptively and actively" respond to inspection efforts to be made as part of the denuclearization process, Yoon said. To facilitate future cross-border cooperation, Kim pledged to scrap the unique time zone Pyongyang created in 2015. He said the North would move its clocks forward 30 minutes to be in sync with the South, nine hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. Kim also reaffirmed that he would not use military force against the South and raised the need for an institutional mechanism to prevent unintended escalations, Yoon said.

Next steps

Late Saturday, US President Donald Trump told Moon in a phone call that he was pleased the leaders of the two Koreas reaffirmed the goal of complete denuclearization during their summit, Seoul officials said yesterday. Moon and Trump agreed on the need for an early summit between Trump and Kim, and explored two to three potential locations, one of which Moon suggested, the Blue House said.

The candidates for the venue did not include North Korea,

the United States or the demilitarized zone dividing the two Koreas, a Blue House official told reporters, declining to elaborate. A senior US official has said Singapore is being considered as a possible venue for the Trump-Kim summit. "Trump said it was good news for not only the two Koreas but the whole world that they affirmed the goal of realizing a nuclear-free Korean peninsula through a complete denuclearization," Blue House spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom told a separate briefing.

Kim to invite US, S Korea experts for shutdown

"Moon told Trump that Kim said he and Trump would get along with each other, ... and Trump said he was looking forward to talks with Kim and there would be a very good result," Trump, who called the 75-minute chat "a long and very good talk" on Twitter, said his summit with Kim would take place sometime in the next three to four weeks. "It's going to be a very important meeting, the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula," he said at a campaign rally in Washington, Michigan, on Saturday.

The White House said Trump and Moon during the call "emphasized that a peaceful and prosperous future for North

Korea is contingent upon its complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization." Most of the specific commitments outlined in the official declaration signed by Kim and Moon focused on inter-Korean relations and did not clear up the question of whether Pyongyang is willing to give up its arsenal of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Abe's office said yesterday that Trump and Abe highlighted the significance of Pyongyang's taking concrete steps towards denuclearization in their phone call.

Trump had informed Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that he would urge North Korea to promptly resolve its abductions of Japanese citizens, the White House said. Moon also had a phone call with Abe yesterday and said he had discussed the abduction issue with Kim during the summit "in substantial detail," the Blue House spokesman said. Pyongyang admitted in 2002 to kidnapping 13 Japanese in the 1970s and 1980s to train spies. Five of them returned to Japan, but Tokyo suspects that hundreds more may have been taken.

"Moon relayed Abe's wish for a normalization of bilateral ties to Kim based on the clearing of historical legacy issues, and that Kim expressed his willingness to talk to Japan at any time," the official said. Later on, Moon informed Russian President Vladimir Putin of the summit's outcome in a separate call, and proposed a joint study on trilateral cooperation over rail, gas and power infrastructure involving North Korea, the Blue House said. Putin stressed the need for the summit to lead to trilateral projects, and invited Moon to Russia for a summit and the World Cup in June, Moon's office said. —Reuters



Tunisian Islamist party endorses a Jewish candidate

MONASTIR: Decked out in a striking blue suit and white shirt, matching his political allegiance, Simon Slama rubs shoulders with fellow candidates ahead of Tunisia's municipal elections. Nothing unusual about that—except he is the only Jewish candidate, standing for the Islamist Ennahdha party. A public relations stunt for some; a sign of genuine liberalization for others. But even if Slama fares dismally come the May 6 poll, his candidacy has become a major story in the nation. This will be the first municipal vote since former dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fell from power in 2011. And while Slama looks at ease, joyously clapping hands on the campaign trail in the coastal town of Monastir, the 54-year old sewing machine repairman's decision to run drew fierce initial opposition from loved ones.

"All my family were against my choice. My brother was angry and my wife went days without speaking to me," the candidate tells AFP, with a timid smile and a nervous fidget of the hands. "But I managed to convince them." Slama and his relatives are among the small number of Jews still living in Tunisia. The community in the North African nation has shrunk from several hundred thousand before independence in 1956, to just 1,200 today. While Jews in the country, which is overwhelmingly Muslim, once served as lawmakers and even ministers, they have long since slipped to the margins of politics. Slama believes his candidacy is helping to change all that and has already "removed fears for Jewish Tunisian citizens".

'Ancient family'

Comrades in the Ennahdha party insist Slama is the right man to stand for office in Monastir—a symbolic town for Tunisians as it is the birthplace of Habib Bourguiba, the father of the country's independence. "He comes from an ancient family. He has his roots in Monastir... and he knows the town's problems," says Chokri ben Janet, who heads the party's candidate list in the town. Slama says that



MONASTIR, Tunisia: Simon Slama, the only Jewish candidate on the Islamist Ennahdha party's list for the municipal elections distributes flyers on a visit to a local souk (market) while campaigning yesterday. —AFP

despite its history as an Islamist party he opted for Ennahdha out of political conviction, describing it as "the most active and the most serious on the political scene". "Ennahdha has changed its strategy—it is no longer a religious party, it is a civil party," he says.

The party is a junior partner in a coalition led by President Beji Caid Essebsi and his Nidaa Tounes party. Taking stock from its experience in power after the 2011 revolution, it has worked hard to modernize its image. It opposed a project to criminalize any attempt to normalize relations with Israel: a vote on the proposal was dropped this winter. Now some of its leading candidates are women who don't wear the Islamic veil. All of these changes—including Slama's candidacy—have drawn derision from some political opponents who accuse the group of simple opportunism to bolster its vote. Top Nidaa Tounes official Borhane Bassais called it a "political striptease".

Torah and Quran

Others say that interest in Slama's candidacy highlights that while Jews can practice their religion freely they remain an anomaly in Tunisia—and shows the country still has a long way to go on minority rights. The media frenzy is testament to "this obsession we have of judging (people) on the basis of something so personal as their religious conviction," says Yamina Thabet, an official for Tunisia's Association for the Support of Minorities. —AFP

Migrants at US border ask Trump to have heart

TIJUANA: Olga Caballero and her four children set out from southern Mexico a month ago as part of a US-bound caravan that infuriated President Donald Trump. Now, having reached the border with the wealthy United States on Tuesday, this Honduran woman is asking the anti-immigrant Trump to show compassion and remember that he, too, is a father. Caballero and her children—whose ages range from two to 16—spent the first night in Tijuana, across the border from San Diego, as part of a caravan of 120 migrants including 50 minors who arrived on two buses.

Since the so-called Via Crucis Migrante set out on March 25, or Palm Sunday, these poor and hearty Central Americans have crossed Mexico on foot, on trains and in buses. "My biggest fear was that I would fall asleep and one of my kids would fall from the train. Everybody was crowded up against a railing, and I sat up all night watching them," said Caballero, who is 35. The caravan is a tradition that dates back to 2010 and is designed to draw attention to the plight of destitute Central Americans crossing through Mexico to try to reach the US and the promise of a better life. This time, it set out with 1,000 people, but they have since dispersed, with some now traveling on their own.

Irineo Mujica of the migrant rights group Pueblo Sin Fronteras (People Without Borders) that organized the procession said that some 600 of the original thousand remain grouped together. About half have begun filing papers to stay in Mexico and the other 300 plan to request asylum in the United States. Media coverage of the US-bound caravan triggered a flurry of furious tweets from Trump, who ordered thousands of National Guard troops to the US-Mexican border and called on Mexico to stop the migrants. He also linked the issue of migration to the signing of a revamped North American Free Trade Agreement.

Late Wednesday, the Department of Homeland Security warned the migrants against trying to enter the country illegally or filing false immigration claims, saying they will be arrested if they do. Mexico rejected pressure from Trump. It gave the migrants a one-month transit pass to decide if they want to seek refuge in Mexico, go back home or keep trudging toward the United States. Lisandro Guerrero, a Honduran traveling with his wife, decided to stay in Mexico even though he made it all the way to Tijuana on the border with the US. He will stay in Tijuana seeking work and at some point bring over his nine children. "If they do not want us there," he said of the United States, "why go? It is better to stay in Mexico which is welcoming us with open arms, thanks to God."

Compassion

Caballero had a message for Trump: "I would like him to put his hand on his heart, and I would ask if he has ever been a father. Because only a parent knows what it means to be ready to do absolutely anything for your children." She says she will ask the Americans for asylum because violence from street gangs in Honduras makes life impossible there. "That is why we are here. It is not that we covet another country," she said, her voice breaking with emotion. Among this group there are only about 20 men, including the Honduran Gualdin Omar, 20, who will also ask for asylum to escape the gangs, known in Spanish as "maras."

"Because of the maras you cannot even go out on the street. No one leaves home," said this young farmer, who used to grow corn and beans. Omar says he is sure he will achieve the American dream, and challenged Trump: "I tell Donald Trump to get ready for when we get there." Upon their arrival at the border, the migrants were fed roast chicken, beans, rice and tortillas. Along the way, they found solidarity as people provided them with food and clothing. "The good thing is there have been lots of good people who supported us a lot," said Honduran Reina Garcia. Tristan Call, a member of People Without Borders who accompanied these travelers, said Mexicans responded to what he called Trump's "hatred" and bent over backwards to help the Central Americans. —AFP