

North Korea Rebuilding Rocket Launch Site after Failed Summit, Reports Say

PYONGYANG - North Korea is restoring a rocket launch site it had dismantled as part of its disarmament pledge last year -- just a week after a nuclear summit between Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump ended without an agreement, reports said Wednesday.

New satellite images show that efforts to rebuild some structures at the Tongchang-ri launch site started between Feb. 16 and March 2, the Associated Press reported, citing 38 North, a website specializing in North Korea studies.

The structures being restored include a rail-mounted transfer building, for which new walls have been erected and a new roof added, 38 North reported. The engine support structure at the engine test stand is also being



resembled, the report said. New roofs have been installed on the fuel and oxidizer buildings.

South Korea's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper reported Wednesday that the country's spy service gave an assessment on the North's

launch site to lawmakers in a private briefing Tuesday. The unnamed lawmakers' offices couldn't immediately confirm the paper's report. National Intelligence Service director Suh Hoon told lawmakers at the briefing that the structures being restored at the launch

site include roofs and doors of buildings, JoongAng Ilbo reported, citing unidentified lawmakers who attended the briefing.

Suh reportedly said that the restoration is seen as the North's preparation to restart long-range missile test-launches in the event that nuclear diplomacy cannot be reached. Suh reportedly also suggested that the rebuilding was being done so the launch site could be blown up more dramatically in a show of denuclearization commitment when U.S. inspectors visit if negotiations with Washington go well.

The launch site has been used for satellite launches and engine testing, never for ballistic missile launches, according to the BBC. (Fox News)

Neighbor News

Pakistan Will Send Envoy Back to India amid 'De-Escalating' Tensions - FM

ISLAMABAD - Islamabad will return its ambassador to New Delhi as tensions "appear to be de-escalating," Pakistan's Foreign Ministry announced. The step comes after both countries appeared to be on the brink of all-out war. "Pakistan has further increased diplomatic efforts and we have decided to send back the Pakistani high commissioner to New Delhi," Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi told media on Wednesday. "This is a positive development," he said. In a bid to improve bilateral ties, the Pakistani delegation is set to visit

New Delhi to hold talks over the Kartarpur Corridor, which will allow Sikh pilgrims from India to visit the Gurdwara in Kartarpur, Pakistan without a visa. The Pakistani foreign minister also thanked his counterparts in China, Russia, Turkey, UAE, Jordan, and the US for their role in calming recent tensions between India and Pakistan.

The nuclear-armed neighbors found themselves on the brink of war last month when Indian forces conducted an air raid against "a terrorist camp" in Pakistani territory. (RT)

Iran Says No Chance of Negotiations, Compromise with US

TEHRAN, Iran - Iran's president said on Wednesday that there was no chance of negotiations or compromise with the United States, allegedly because Washington is seeking to topple the government in Tehran. In a televised speech, Hassan Rouhani said "the United States says Iran should change" back to the way the country was before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, when it was ruled by a U.S.-supported monarchy. "We say we won't go back," Rouhani said at a gathering in the north-

ern city of Lahijan. He said the differences between Iran and the U.S. are so wide, they are "neither negotiable nor can there be a compromise." The Trump administration has taken a hard line on Iran but insists the U.S. is not trying to overthrow the government. However, tensions between the two countries have been heightened after Washington withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal last year and re-imposed sanctions on Iran, which have particularly hurt Iran's vital oil industry. (AP)

World Economic Growth Forecasts Cut amid Trade Concerns

PARIS - A top economic watchdog has cut its forecasts for global economic growth due to the impact of trade disputes, Brexit and weakening demand in Europe and China. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said Wednesday it expects global growth of 3.3 percent this year, down from its forecast of 3.5 percent in November. That would be a slowdown from last year's 3.6 percent. The OECD, which ad-

vises developed countries on economic policy, slashed its forecasts particularly deeply for Germany and Italy, which are relatively exposed to changes in global trade. Italy's economy is expected to contract this year. The U.S. forecast was trimmed 0.1 percentage points to a still-robust 2.6 percent. Laurence Boone, the OECD's chief economist said "the global economy is facing increasingly serious headwinds." (AP)

Israeli Newspaper Asks If Marie Kondo Can 'Fix the Israeli-Palestinian Mess'

JERUSALEM - An Israeli newspaper is wondering if Netflix star Marie Kondo can tidy up more than just a home. Haaretz, a news outlet headquartered in Tel Aviv, published an article on Tuesday asking if Kondo could "fix the Israeli-Palestinian mess" - a conflict that's plagued Israelis and Palestinians for decades. In the Netflix show "Tidying Up with Marie Kondo," the 34-year-old from Japan helps homeowners "transform" their space by teaching

them the "KonMarie Method," which involves six rules that encourage tidying up by category, not location - and, most popularly, questioning whether or not their items "spark joy." Referred to as a "Japanese Mary Poppins," the author pondered what Kondo's method could bring to the West Bank. "I can already imagine her talking to them about compartmentalizing Jerusalem by keeping-owners 'transform' their space by teaching



separate areas; uncluttering the West Bank by removing some settlements; and then finally getting around to sorting out that neglected storage space down in Gaza," author Adrian Hennigan wrote. (Fox News)

Russia Detains 2 LDS Volunteers, Church Says



MOSCOW - Russian officials have detained two volunteers for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, church offi-

cial said Tuesday. The missionaries were serving in Novorossiysk, Russia, which is about 930 miles south of Moscow.

It was unclear why the missionaries were being detained. "While we are grateful these young men are reportedly in good condition and are being treated well, we are troubled by the circumstances surrounding their detention," church spokesman Eric Hawkins said, as Salt Lake City's Fox 13 reported. They reportedly were detained Friday at a local meetinghouse. Russia enacted anti-terrorism laws in July 2016 that included a provision banning missionary work, the

Deseret News noted. The church complied with Russian law and redesignated the missionaries as volunteers, warning them to comply with local laws and customs. According to the Salt Lake Tribune, which cited a 2017 report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, the Russian law forbids "preaching, praying, disseminating religious materials, and even answering questions about religion outside of officially designated sites." (Fox News)

Turkey Cannot Become an EU Member, Says EPP's Weber

PASSAU, Germany - Turkey cannot become a member of the European Union, said Manfred Weber, the European Peoples Party's (EPP) lead candidate for the upcoming European elections, adding that he would end accession talks if he becomes European Commission president. Turkey says EU membership remains one of its top strategic goals even though accession talks, formally launched in 2004, have been stalled for years.

Weber, the center-right EPP candidate to be EU Commission President after European Parliament elections in May, told German conservatives in Bavaria "everyone wants good relations with Turkey, everyone wants to work closely together." "But if I become Commission president, then I will instruct the offices in Brussels to end the talks with Turkey on accession to the European Union," he said to rapturous applause. (Reuters)

Turkmenistan Preparing for Additional Parliamentary Elections

ASHGABAT - Registration of candidates as part of additional elections to the vacant parliament seats has ended in Turkmenistan, Trend reports referring to the Turkmen Central Election Commission (CEC) Feb. 18. The elections are scheduled for March 31, 2019. In total, seven candidates have been nominated for MPs. All of them are given equal opportunities to meet with the electorate, and during these meetings, voters will become familiar with the key aspects of their election programs, the report said. The election process involves national observers. So far, 284 observers have been registered from the Democratic Party, the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, the Agrarian Party, as well

as public organizations and groups of citizens of Turkmenistan. In line with the Constitution, the parliament adopts laws, makes changes and additions to the basic law, approves the state budget; resolves issues of holding national referendums; appoints elections of the president, members of the Parliament, members of representative bodies; considers issues of appointment and dismissal of the Chairman of the Supreme Court, the Prosecutor General, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Justice based on the proposal of the head of state; ratifies and denounces international treaties; and solves the issues of changing the state border and administrative-territorial division of the country. (Trend)

Germany Extends Saudi Arabia Arms Sales Ban

BERLIN - Germany's foreign minister says the country is extending its ban on arms sales to Saudi Arabia, and will continue to evaluate the situation. Germany rescinded existing arms export permits to Saudi Arabia last year in response to the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. The ban was due to expire soon but Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Wednesday it was being extended until the end of March to give the government time to evaluate Saudi Arabia's military involvement in Yemen. Maas says "we believe that the Yemen war needs to be ended as quickly as possible." Britain and France have criticized Germany's stance, saying the ban prevents them from selling jointly-developed equipment with German components to the Gulf nation. (AP)

India, Pakistan to Hold Meeting Over Sikh Pilgrim Access

NEW DELHI - Indian and Pakistani officials will hold a meeting to discuss and finalize the modalities for setting up the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor on March 14, in a bid to facilitate direct access for Indian pilgrims to a holy shrine located in Pakistan, said an official statement on Wednesday. The holy shrine Gurudwara Kartarpur Sahib is located in Pakistan's Punjab province and thousands of Indian pilgrims, particularly belonging to the Sikh community, visit it every year taking a long route. (Xinhua)

US Flies B-52 Bombers over Disputed Waters Near China

BEIJING - The US has sent a pair of B-52 strategic bombers on two separate missions in close proximity to China, in an action that is likely to draw criticism from Beijing, which is currently locked in a trade dispute with Washington. Two US Air Force B-52H Stratofortress long-range bombers, based in Guam, participated in "routine training missions" on Monday by flying through the disputed airspaces over the South and East China Seas. As one bomber "conducted training in the vicinity of the South China Sea," the other practiced off the coast of Japan in "co-



ordination with the US Navy and alongside our Japanese air force," US Pacific Air Forces said in a statement. The Pacific Command's so-called 'Continuous Bomber Presence Missions' are designed to ensure the air force's rapid global strike capability and act as a means of deterrence. China views

such overflights as clear provocations and as a show of force aimed at challenging Beijing's sovereignty in the region. The B-52 maneuvers could further inflame tensions with China at the height of a bitter trade dispute where the ongoing negotiations have yet to bear any concrete results. (RT)

White Farmers Jailed for Murder of Black Teen in S.Africa

MAFIKENG (South Africa) - A South African court on Wednesday handed jail terms of 23 and 18 years to two white farmers who murdered a black teenager suspected of stealing sunflowers in a remote farming community. Pieter Doorewaard, 28, and Philip Schutte, 35, were found to have killed 15-year-old Mathomola Mosweu on April 20 2017, after claiming they caught him taking a plant from a farm in the area.

Doorewaard was jailed for at least 18 years and Schutte was jailed for at least 23. The boy died after being thrown out of a moving vehicle driven by the pair and suffering a broken neck, in a case that sparked rioting and looting of white-owned businesses in the town of Coligny. The men had claimed that the teen jumped off the truck as they drove him to the police but it was Schutte who was found to have thrown the boy to his death. (AFP)

Looking Is Free: High-End Rides Abundant at Geneva Auto Show

GENEVA - If you like gawking at breathtaking sports cars with enormous engines, flowing aerodynamics and expensive carbon-fiber bodies, then you are in the right place at the Geneva International Motor Show. If you want to do more than look, however, that will take money. Lots and lots of money. The Geneva show is a traditional showplace for high-end sports cars that offer speeds similar to those of Formula One racers, for prices that start at hundreds of thousands and soar up from there into the millions. It opens to the public at the Palexpo exhibition center on Thursday and runs through March 17. Here are five of the eye-catching beasts crouching on the show floor. Simply getting in or out of this two-seat convertible will turn heads thanks to the dihedral doors that swing out and up like giant wings. Even with the top up in the rain, the driver can lower the small rear window in order to savor the roar of the turbocharged 720-horsepower engine that can take the car to 212 mph. The 720S Spider starts at \$282,500 in the United States, but that's only the beginning for well-heeled customers who wish to pay more for options such as expensive carbon fiber body parts. The version on display in Geneva came in a glowing azure color option dubbed "Belize Blue" by the company, calling to mind a luxury vacation. (AP)

IMF Forecasts Uzbekistan's GDP to Increase to 5.5pct

TASHKENT - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts GDP growth at 5.5 percent in Uzbekistan in 2019 due to the investment boom in the country, however, external demand for the main commodity exports may weaken, Trend reports with reference to the head of IMF mission Albert Eger. In November 2018, the IMF predicted GDP growth at 5 percent in Uzbekistan in 2019. "We expect growth rate of GDP to be 5.5 percent in 2019. The main reason is investment," Eger said at the press conference in Tashkent. He states that the growth of Uzbek economy in 2020 will be 6 percent, which is also associated with investment demand.

The mission underlines that imports of investment goods of Uzbekistan rose from \$4.5 billion in 2017 to \$7.5 billion by the end of 2018. "We see large investment projects, Tashkent city itself has turned into one big construction project," said Eger. The IMF representative placed the weakening of external demand for the main export goods - gold, natural gas, non-ferrous metals among the short-term risks for Uzbek economy. "Their prices will be lower than today," said Eger. The mission assessed that the inflation in Uzbekistan in 2019 will remain at last year's level at 15 percent, after falling from 20 percent in 2017. (Trend)