

North Korea threatens to cancel U.S. June summit

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea on Wednesday canceled a high-level meeting with South Korea and threatened to scrap a historic summit next month between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un over military exercises between Seoul and Washington that Pyongyang has long claimed are invasion rehearsals.

The surprise declaration, which came in a pre-dawn dispatch in North Korea's state media, appears to cool what had been an unusual flurry of outreach from a country that last year conducted a provocative series of weapons tests that had many fearing the region was on the edge of war. It's still unclear, however, whether the North intends to scuttle all diplomacy or merely wants to gain leverage ahead of the planned June 12 talks between Kim and Trump.

The statement by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency was released hours before the two Koreas were to meet at a border village to discuss how to implement their leaders' recent agreements to reduce military tensions along their heavily fortified border and improve their overall ties.

It called the two-week Max Thunder drills, which began Monday and reportedly include about 100 aircraft, an "intended military provocation" and an "apparent challenge" to an April summit between Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, when the leaders met on their border in their countries' third-ever summit talks since their formal division in 1948. KCNA said the U.S. aircraft mobilized for the drills include nuclear-capable B-52 bombers and stealth F-22 fighter jets, two of the U.S. mili-



In this April 27 file photo, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, left, and South Korean President Moon Jae-in shake hands after signing on a joint statement at the border village of Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone, South Korea. The two Koreas will hold a high-level meeting on Wednesday to discuss setting up military and Red Cross talks aimed at reducing border tension and restarting reunions between families separated by the Korean War.

tary assets it has previously said are aimed at launching nuclear strikes on the North.

"The United States must carefully contemplate the fate of the planned North Korea-U.S. summit amid the provocative military ruckus that it's causing with South Korean authorities," the North said Wednesday. "We'll keenly monitor how the United States and South Korean authorities will react."

Annual military drills between Washington and Seoul have long been a major source of contention between the Koreas, and analysts have wondered whether their continuation would hurt the detente that, since an outreach by Kim in January, has replaced the insults and threats of war. Earlier — and much larger — springtime drills, which Washington and Seoul toned down, went off without the North's typically fiery con-

demnation or accompanying weapons tests.

In Washington, the U.S. State Department emphasized that Kim had previously indicated he understood the need and purpose of the U.S. continuing its long-planned exercises with South Korea. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said the U.S. had not heard anything directly from Pyongyang or Seoul that would change that.

The North's statement Wednesday comes amid a slew of surprising moves in recent weeks.

On Tuesday, South Korea's military said North Korea was moving ahead with plans to close its nuclear test site next week, an assessment backed by U.S. researchers who say satellite images show the North has begun dismantling facilities at the site.

The site's closure was set to come before the Kim-

Trump summit, which had been shaping up as a crucial moment in the decades-long push to resolve the nuclear standoff with the North, which is closing in on the ability to viably target the mainland United States with its long-range nuclear-armed missiles.

Despite the North's moves, some experts were skeptical about whether Kim would completely give up a nuclear program that he had pushed so hard to build. Kim has expressed his intention to negotiate over his weapons, but he still uses a long-contentious term, "the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." The North previously has used this phrase when demanding that the United States pull its 28,500 troops out of South Korea and withdraw its so-called "nuclear umbrella" security guarantee to South Korea and Japan as a condition for its nuclear disarmament.



People fill seats before a Seattle City Council meeting where the council was expected to vote on a "head tax" Monday in Seattle.

Seattle OKs taxing companies to aid the homeless

By PHUONG LE
Associated Press

social impact.

SEATTLE — Seattle's largest businesses such as Amazon and Starbucks will have to pay a new tax to help fund homeless services and affordable housing under a measure approved by city leaders.

The city council unanimously passed a compromise plan Monday that taxes businesses making at least \$20 million in gross revenues about \$275 per full-time worker each year — lower than the \$500 per worker initially proposed. The so-called "head tax" would raise roughly \$48 million a year to build new affordable housing units and provide emergency homeless services.

The debate over who should pay to solve a city housing crisis exacerbated by Seattle's rapid economic growth comes after weeks of tense exchanges, raucous meetings and a threat by Amazon, the city's largest employer, to stop construction planning on a 17-story building near its hometown headquarters.

Amazon, Starbucks and business groups sharply criticized the council's decision after Monday's vote. They called it a tax on jobs and questioned whether city officials were spending current resources effectively. One state Republican lawmaker said he would seek legislation next year to make clear that a city tax on employees, wages or hours is illegal.

Seattle-based Starbucks had harsh words for its hometown leaders. It accused the city of spending without accountability while ignoring that hundreds of children who sleep outside.

"If they cannot provide a warm meal and safe bed to a 5-year-old child, no one believes they will be able to make housing affordable or address opiate addiction," said John Kelly, Starbucks' senior vice president of global public affairs and

Worker and church groups and others praised the tax as a step toward building badly needed affordable housing in an affluent city where the income gap continues to widen and lower-income workers are being priced out.

"People are dying on the doorsteps of prosperity. This is the richest city in the state and in a state that has the most regressive tax system in the country," said councilmember Teresa Mosqueda, who wanted a heftier tax. She called the compromise plan "a down payment" to build housing the city needs.

For Seattle's liberal city council, the discussion centered not so much on whether there should be a head tax but how big it should be. Four bill sponsors initially pitched a tax of \$500 per full-time employee a year but a compromise proposal emerged over the weekend after they could not muster six votes needed to override a potential veto by Mayor Jenny Durkan.

Councilmember Lisa Herbold, a bill sponsor, said the revenue will not be enough to fully address the problem given the city's needs but said it was "the strongest proposal" possible given the veto threat.

Tax proponents have said too many people are suffering on the streets and that the problem is deepening even though city-funded programs found homes for 3,400 people last year. The Seattle region had the third-highest number of homeless people in the U.S. and saw 169 homeless deaths last year. The city spent \$68 million on homelessness last year and plans to spend even more this year. The tax will provide additional revenue.

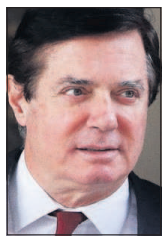
"This legislation will help us address our homelessness crisis without jeopardizing critical jobs," Durkan said in a statement.

Other cities have put in place similar taxes, but critics have said Seattle's tax

BRIEFLY

Special counsel OK to prosecute Manafort

WASHINGTON (AP) — Special counsel Robert Mueller was working within his authority when he brought charges against President Donald Trump's former campaign chairman Paul Manafort, a federal judge in Washington ruled Tuesday.



Manafort

The decision was a setback for Manafort in his defense against charges of money-laundering conspiracy, false statements and acting as an unregistered foreign agent related to his Ukrainian political work. Manafort had argued that Mueller had exceeded his authority because the case was unrelated to Russian election interference.

But U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson disagreed.

Citing Manafort's years of work in Ukraine, his prominent role on the Trump campaign and his publicized connections to Russian figures, Jackson said it was "logical and appropriate" for Mueller's team to scrutinize him as part of their investigation into Russian election meddling and possible coordination with Trump associates.

"Given what was being said publicly, the Special Counsel would have been remiss to ignore such an obvious potential link between the Trump campaign and the Russian government," Jackson wrote.

Peter Carr, a spokesman for the special counsel's office, declined to comment on the ruling. Manafort

spokesman Jason Maloni said, "Paul Manafort maintains his innocence and looks forward to prevailing in this matter."

In her 37-page ruling, Jackson went through a point-by-point rejection of Manafort's arguments, including his contention that Mueller had been given a "blank check" to investigate anything "he may stumble across."

Jackson said Justice Department regulations allow for a "broad grant of authority" for special counsels. And regardless, she wrote, it was clear that Mueller had been specifically authorized to investigate not only Manafort's possible links to Russia but also his Ukrainian business.

She cited an August 2017 memo by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein that prosecutors had filed in the case. The memo shows Rosenstein specifically authorized Mueller to investigate payments Manafort received from the Ukrainian government "before and during the tenure" of then-President Viktor Yanukovich, who was one of Manafort's clients.

Jackson had previously thrown out a civil case Manafort brought challenging Mueller's authority. Her decision Tuesday allows one of two criminal cases against Manafort to proceed.

Gaza hospitals struggle to cope with casualty toll

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Patients with gunshot wounds filled wards and hallways in Gaza's under-equipped and overwhelmed main hospital Tuesday, with dozens still waiting in line for surgery a day after Israeli soldiers shot and killed 59 Palestinians and wounded hundreds in mass protests on

the Gaza border.

The high casualty toll triggered a diplomatic backlash against Israel and new charges of excessive use of force against unarmed protesters. The U.N. Security Council began its session Tuesday with a moment of silence for the dead, and the U.N.'s special Mideast envoy said there was "no justification for the killing."

Turkey expelled Israel's ambassador, and several European countries called for an international investigation.

Israel said it has the right to protect its border and nearby communities, accusing Gaza's ruling militant group Hamas of carry-

ing out several attacks under the guise of the protests. The U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Nikki Haley, came to Israel's defense, saying no member "would act with more restraint than Israel has."

Monday's border confrontation was the culmination of a weeks-long protest campaign to break a border blockade that Israel and Egypt imposed after a Hamas took over Gaza by force in 2007. The protests were led by Hamas, but fueled by the growing despair among Gaza's 2 million people who face worsening poverty, unemployment, 22-hour-a-day power cuts and sweeping bans on travel and trade.

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