

N. Korea Nuke Paper Turned Over

North Korea handed over more than 18,000 pages of nuclear weapons documents to a US diplomat visiting Pyongyang on Thursday that will help verify its plutonium holdings, Reuters quoted senior US officials as saying.

The officials said the documents were another step toward the goal of getting a full declaration of North Korea's nuclear activities, which has been delayed since the end of last year. The documents, between 18,000 and 19,000 pages, were handed over by the North Koreans to the State Department's Korea expert, Sung Kim, who is visiting Pyongyang, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said.

"He will bring back with him a significant number of documents relating to North Korea's plutonium program and we will have an opportunity over the coming days and weeks to assess the significance of these documents," McCormack said. Another senior US official, who asked not to be named, said they provided detailed logs of how much plutonium was produced by North Korea.



Sean McCormack

Clinton Defies Electoral Math

Hillary Rodham Clinton, defying electoral math stacked against her, is urging supporters to ignore predictions that her White House bid was over, according to AP.

Barack Obama, meanwhile, was reaching out to top Democrats who could help seal a nomination well within his grasp.

Clinton spent some of Thursday in West Virginia—the next battleground and where she is favored to win—telling supporters that she had faced similar pressure to withdraw before she went on to win New Hampshire, Ohio, Texas and Pennsylvania's primaries.

"I'm running to be president of all 50 states," said Clinton, who would be the nation's first woman president. "I think we ought to keep this going so the people of West Virginia's voices are heard."

But, smarting from a crushing loss in North Carolina and a narrower-than-expected win in Indiana on Tuesday, the former first lady also sought to stave off further defections among longtime supporters who saw the pace of the race turn decisively in Obama's favor.

Morales Agrees To Recall Vote

President Evo Morales agreed Thursday to stand for election in a nationwide recall vote, gambling that Bolivians will re-elect him after just two years in office and shore up support for his pending reforms.

According to AP, Morales first proposed a nationwide recall referendum last December amid a fierce political battle over his draft constitution, which would give Bolivia's long-oppressed indigenous population greater power.

The idea seemed to have been forgotten until Thursday, when an opposition-controlled Senate passed a bill ordering a referendum to be held within 90 days. Morales pledged to sign the measure.

"If we politicians can't agree, it's best that the population decide our destiny," Morales said in a nationally televised address. The measure would require Morales and Bolivia's nine state governors to win both more votes and a greater percentage of support than they did on a 2005 ballot. If they fall short, they will have to run again in a new general election.



Ecuador Claims US Backed Colombian Raid

Ecuador's defense minister says there are reasons to believe the US aided Colombia's air force in a cross-border raid on a rebel camp in Ecuador's jungle last March, AP reported.

Javier Ponce says "Colombia's president needs to clarify what happened during the raid," claiming that "the US government violated our territorial sovereignty."

Ecuador severed diplomatic ties with Colombia following its attack on a guerrilla camp in Ecuador that killed 25 people, including a rebel leader, Ecuadorean and four Mexicans.

President Rafael Correa accused the CIA of infiltrating Ecuador's intelligence services in April. A spokesman at the US embassy in Quito could not be reached Thursday for comment.

This is while US intelligence officials claim seized computer files showing strong ties between Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez and Colombian rebels are authentic, The Wall Street Journal reported.

The files show Venezuela made concrete offers to help arm the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the paper said.

Putin Takes Over As Premier



Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (r) shakes hands with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin at State Duma in Moscow on May 8.

Former Russian President Vladimir Putin was appointed Russia's prime minister Thursday, securing a new place in power a day after leaving the Kremlin.

Forced out of the presidency by constitutional term limits, Putin on Wednesday handed off his title to a longtime protégé, Dmitry Medvedev, who in turn nominated his old boss as prime minister.

When Boris Yeltsin left the Kremlin eight years ago he gave Vladimir Putin the pen he had used to sign important documents and decrees, a gesture symbolizing the transfer of power to Russia's new president, AP reported.

When Putin left the Kremlin he took the pen with him. It's one of the many signs that Putin, now prime minister, intends to remain Russia's dominant leader—at least in the short term and possibly much longer. He is keeping the trappings of his presidency and many of its powers as well.

Kremlin insiders say it was not always meant to be this way. According to them, Putin originally intended to hand full authority to his chosen successor and step aside. But as the time drew near he changed his mind. Some say he was forced to stay after fighting between rival Kremlin factions spilled into the open, threatening to undermine political stability.

Veterans of the secret services have come to dominate the government under Putin, a former KGB officer. These influential figures have been given leading roles in major busi-

nesses—including oil companies and aircraft and automobile manufacturers—that Putin has brought back under state control.

They see Putin as the key to preserving their positions and continued access to financial flows. Some of them opposed Putin's choice of Medvedev, a 42-year-old lawyer, who was inaugurated Wednesday.

Putin may have decided to stay around to keep the peace and protect his protégé until he consolidates his position.

In a fervent 45-minute speech Thursday before parliament, Putin laid out huge ambitions for the economy and boasted that under his leadership Russia becomes a different country.

> Warning Against Warmongering

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev warned on Friday against "irresponsible ambitions" that can spark conflict across continents, at his first World War II military parade since taking office, AFP reported.

"The history of world wars warns us that armed conflicts don't appear by themselves, they are sparked by those whose irresponsible ambitions are put above the interests of countries and whole continents, above the interests of millions of people," Medvedev said at the vast Red Square parade.

"We need to view very seriously any attempt to sow racist or religious hatred or to inflame ideological terror and extremism, as well as intentions to intrude in the affairs of other states

and especially redraw borders.

"We can't permit violations of the norms of international law, a law for which the whole international community suffered, a law without which a secure life and a just world order is impossible," Medvedev said.

> Annual Parade

The annual Red Square parade has long been used by Moscow to send a defiant message to the West, with which Russia is at odds on issues ranging from NATO enlargement to missile defense.

The annual May parade, which remembers the almost 27 million Soviets who perished in World War Two, is also intended to show Russia's revival and a military that the Kremlin says is still a force to be reckoned with, reported Reuters.

Vladimir Putin, before stepping down as president, ordered generals to revive the Soviet-era tradition of driving tanks, howitzers and missile launchers over Red Square as Russia's top brass watch from a platform in front of Lenin's mausoleum.

By his side on Friday stood his predecessor Vladimir Putin, who was confirmed in the prime minister's post on Thursday and retains major influence.

In recent days tensions between Russia and its US-backed neighbor Georgia have reached new heights amid differences over the Moscow-backed separatist territory of Abkhazia.

In Focus



Pressure Mounting on Zimbabwe

Pressure mounted on Zimbabwe Thursday to admit foreign observers to oversee a presidential election runoff amid fresh claims that pro-government militias were deliberately instilling terror, said AFP.

The opposition said 30 supporters had now been killed and a union chief said 40,000 farm workers and their dependents had been made homeless, although authorities played down the levels of violence.

Six days since results from an inconclusive March 29 poll were announced, there was still no word on when a second round would take place nor whether the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) would participate.

Its leader Morgan Tsvangirai has argued that President Robert Mugabe, who lost the first round but not by a sufficient margin for the MDC to avoid a runoff, is trying to spread fear to cling on to power.

In its latest death toll, the MDC said it now had information 30 supporters had been killed by Mugabe supporters in attacks in rural areas.

International disquiet, however, is growing, with UN Chief Ban Ki-moon calling for international observers to oversee the runoff and the White House pressuring Mugabe and his supporters to put an end to the violence.



Myanmar:

No Need for Foreign Aid Workers

Myanmar will accept foreign aid but not foreign aid workers, the Foreign Ministry said on Friday, after a disaster rescue team from Qatar that arrived in Yangon on an aid flight was turned back.

"Myanmar is not in a position to receive rescue and information teams from foreign countries at the moment," said a foreign ministry statement carried in the official Myanmar Ah-lin newspaper.

"But at present Myanmar is giving priority to receiving relief aid and distributing them to the storm-hit regions with its own resources," the statement said.

According to Reuters, the Qatar plane was one of 12 international relief flights that landed in the former capital on Thursday, it said.

Frustration is mounting over Myanmar's generally feeble response to one of its worst disasters in memory and particularly the delays in giving visas to aid workers and landing rights for relief flights.

Survivors have been mostly fending for themselves in the swampy delta after Cyclone Nargis packing winds of up to 190 kph (120 mph) whipped up a massive wall of sea-water that hurtled through the low-lying Irrawaddy delta.

The official death toll still stands at nearly 23,000, with 42,119 people remained missing although experts fear it could be as high as 100,000. With saltwater ruining wells, grain stores and rice fields, the relief task ahead will be enormous.

The United Nations estimates at least 1.5 million people out of a population of 53 million are "severely affected" -- needing food and shelter.

Myanmar's junta urged citizens on Friday to do their patriotic duty and vote for an army-drafted constitution in a televised message that made no mention of the millions living in cyclone-affected areas where the balloting has been postponed.

The junta's opponents have suggested the reason for the delays in allowing in aid workers could be that the generals do not want an influx of foreigners before Saturday's referendum.