

Images Suggest NKorea Ready For Nuke Test

WASHINGTON (AP) — Recent satellite photos show North Korea could be almost ready to carry out its threat to conduct a nuclear test, a U.S. research institute said Friday.

The images of the Punggye-ri site, where nuclear tests were conducted in 2006 and 2009, reveal that over the past month, roads have been kept clear of snow and that North Koreans may have been sealing the tunnel into a mountainside where a nuclear device would be detonated.

But it remains difficult to discern North Korea's true intentions, as a test would be conducted underground.

The analysis was provided to The Associated Press by 38 North, the website of the U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. The latest image was taken Wednesday.

North Korea's powerful National Defense Commission declared its plans Thursday after the U.N. Security Council tightened sanctions in response to a December long-range rocket launch. It described the plans as part of a "new phase" of combat with the United States, which retains 28,000 troops in South Korea and which it blames for leading the U.N. bid to punish Pyongyang.

Egyptians Deliver Backlash Against Morsi

CAIRO (AP) — Violence erupted across Egypt on Friday as tens of thousands took to the streets to deliver an angry backlash against President Mohammed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood, demanding regime change on the second anniversary of the revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak. At least seven people were killed.

Two years to the day after protesters first rose up against the autocratic ex-president, the new phase of Egypt's upheaval was on display: the struggle between ruling Islamists and their opponents, played out against the backdrop of a worsening economy.

Rallies turned to clashes in multiple cities around Egypt, with police firing tear gas and protesters throwing stones. At least six people, including a 14-year-old boy, were killed in Suez, where protesters set ablaze a building that once housed the city's local government. Another person died in clashes in Ismailia, another Suez Canal city east of Cairo.

At least 480 people were injured nationwide, the Health Ministry said, including five with gunshot wounds in Suez, raising the possibility of a higher death toll.

Friday's rallies brought out at least 500,000 Morsi opponents, a small proportion of Egypt's 85 million people, but large enough to show that antipathy toward the president and his Islamist allies is strong in a country fatigued by two years of political turmoil, surging crime and an economy in free fall. Protests — and clashes — took place in at least 12 of Egypt's 27 provinces, including several Islamist strongholds.

Abortion Opponents March In Washington

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thousands of anti-abortion demonstrators marched through Washington to the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court on Friday to protest the landmark decision that legalized abortion.

The annual event took on added significance for many in the crowd since it coincided with the 40th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court decision that created a constitutional right to abortion in some circumstances. The demonstrators, carrying signs with messages such as "Defend Life" and "Defund Planned Parenthood," shouted chants including "Hey, Hey, Ho, Ho, Roe v. Wade has got to go." They packed the National Mall and surrounding streets for the March of Life.

"I just felt this 40th year marked a huge anniversary for the law," said one demonstrator, Pam Tino, 52, of Easton, Mass, who also participated several years ago. "Forty is a very important year in the Bible as well, in terms of years in the desert. And I just felt like maybe this year that was going to be something miraculous that might happen. We might see something going forward with the cause."

With the re-election of President Barack Obama, she added, "we just have our walking papers. Now we just feel like we have to keep the battle up."

The large turnout reflected the ongoing relevance of the abortion debate four decades after the decision.

Syrian Forces Escalate Offensive

BEIRUT (AP) — Syria's army unleashed a barrage of rocket and artillery fire on rebel-held areas in a central province Friday as part of a widening offensive against fighters seeking to oust President Bashar Assad. At least 140 people were killed in fighting nationwide, according to activist groups.

The United Nations said a record number of Syrians streamed into Jordan this month, doubling the population of the kingdom's already-cramped refugee camp to 65,000. Over 30,000 people arrived in Zaatari in January — 6,000 in the past two days alone, the U.N. said.

The newcomers are mostly families, women, children and elderly who fled from southern Syria, said Melissa Fleming, spokeswoman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. She said the UNHCR was working with the Jordanian government to open a second major camp nearby by the end of this month.

Many of the new arrivals at Zaatari are from the southern town of Daraa, where the uprising against Assad first erupted nearly two years ago, the Britain-based Save the Children said Friday.

Five buses, crammed with "frightened and exhausted people who fled with what little they could carry," pull up every hour at the camp, said Saba al-Mobasat, an aid worker with Save the Children.

Court Says Obama Violated Constitution

BY SAM HANANEL
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama violated the Constitution when he bypassed the Senate last year to appoint three members of the National Labor Relations Board, a federal appeals court ruled Friday in a far-reaching decision that could severely limit a chief executive's powers to make recess appointments.

The decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit marked a victory for Republicans and business groups critical of the labor board. If it stands, it could invalidate hundreds of board decisions over the past year, including some that make it easier for unions to organize.

When Obama filled the vacancies on Jan. 4, 2012, Congress was on an extended holiday break. But GOP lawmakers gavelled in for a few minutes every three days just to prevent Obama from making recess appointments. The White House argued that the pro forma sessions — some lasting less than a minute — were a sham.

The court rejected that argument, but went even further, finding that under the Constitution, a recess occurs only during the breaks between formal year-long sessions of Congress, not just any informal break when lawmakers leave town. It also held that presidents can bypass the Senate only when administration vacancies occur during a recess.

White House press secretary Jay Carney said the administration strongly disagrees with the decision and that the labor board would continue to conduct business as usual, despite calls by some Republicans for the board members to resign.

"The decision is novel and unprecedented," Carney said. "It contradicts 150 years of practice by Democratic and Republican administrations."

Under the court's decision, 285 recess appointments made by presidents between 1867 and 2004 would be invalid.



YURI GRIPAS/ABACA PRESS/MCT
President Barack Obama announces Denis McDonough, left, as his new White House Chief of Staff replacing Jack Lew, center, on Friday, January 25, 2013, in Washington, DC.

The Justice Department hinted that the administration would ask the Supreme Court to overturn the decision, which was rendered by three conservative judges appointed by Republican presidents. "We disagree with the court's ruling and believe that the president's recess appointments are constitutionally sound," the statement said.

The court acknowledged that the ruling conflicts with what some other federal appeals courts have held about when recess appointments are valid, which only added to the likelihood of an appeal to the high court.

"I think this is a very important decision about the separation of powers," said Carl Tobias, a constitutional law professor at Virginia's University of Richmond. "The court's reading has limited the president's ability to counter the obstruction of appointments by a minority in the Senate that has been pretty egregious in the Obama administration."

The ruling also threw into question the legitimacy of Obama's recess appointment of Richard Cordray to head the Consumer Financial Protection Bu-

reau. Cordray's appointment, made on the same date, has been challenged in a separate case.

Carney insisted the court's ruling affects only a single case before the labor board and would have no bearing on Cordray's appointment. Obama on Thursday renominated Cordray for the job.

The case challenging the recess appointments was brought by Noel Canning, a Washington state bottling company that claimed an NLRB decision against it was not valid because the board members were not properly appointed. The D.C. Circuit panel agreed.

Obama made the recess appointments after Senate Republicans blocked his choices for an agency they contended was biased in favor of unions. Obama claims he acted properly because the Senate was away for the holidays on a 20-day recess. The Constitution allows for such appointments without Senate approval when Congress is in recess.

But during that time, GOP lawmakers argued, the Senate technically had stayed in session because it was gavelled in and out every few days for so-called pro

forma sessions.

GOP lawmakers used the tactic — as Democrats had done in the past — specifically to prevent the president from using his recess power to install members to the labor board and the consumer board. They had also vigorously opposed the nomination of Cordray.

The three-judge panel flatly rejected arguments from the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, which claimed that the president has discretion to decide that the Senate is unavailable to perform its advice and consent function.

"Allowing the president to define the scope of his own appointment power would eviscerate the Constitution's separation of powers," Chief Judge David Sentelle wrote in the 46-page ruling. He was appointed by President Ronald Reagan.

The court ruled that during one of those pro forma sessions on Jan. 3, 2012, the Senate officially convened its second session of the 112th Congress, as required by the Constitution.

Sentelle's opinion was joined by Judge Thomas Griffith, appointed to the court by President George W. Bush, and Karen LeCraft Henderson, who was appointed by President George H.W. Bush.

"With this ruling, the D.C. Circuit has soundly rejected the Obama administration's flimsy interpretation of the law, and (it) will go a long way toward restoring the constitutional separation of powers," said Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah.

GOP House Speaker John Boehner welcomed the ruling as "a victory for accountability in government."

If the ruling stands, it would invalidate more than 600 board decisions issued over the past year. It also would leave the five-member labor board with just one validly appointed member, effectively shutting it down. The board is allowed to issue decisions only when it has at least three sitting members.

S&P 500 Index Closes Above 1,500

NEW YORK (AP) — Passing another milestone on the nation's long journey back from the Great Recession, the Standard and Poor's 500 index closed above 1,500 for the first time in more than five years Friday after a wave of good earnings reports.

It took scores of incremental gains, several stalled rallies and a few sickening falls, but the widely watched S&P, one of the broadest measures of the American stock

market, finished at 1,502.96, up 8.14 points. The index had not closed above 1,500 since December 2007, the start of the worst economic downturn since the 1930s.

The news came on top of other hopeful signs that the economy is slowly recovering. Housing is rebounding. Companies are hiring again, albeit slowly, and their earnings, a big driver of stock prices, are at record levels.



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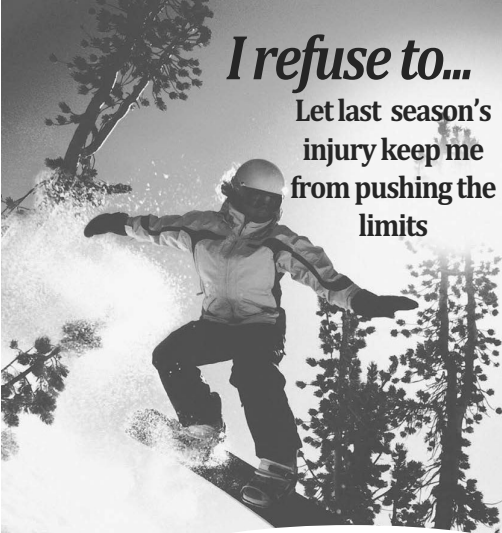
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