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4TH TEST OF THE YEAR

NORTH KOREA TESTS TACTICAL GUIDED MISSILES

Rockets hit an island target in East Sea of Korea, says state news agency

SEOUL

NORTH Korea said yesterday it had launched two tactical guided missiles, its fourth sanctions-busting test of the year as it seeks to bolster its conventional weaponry while rebuffing offers of talks from the United States.

Since leader Kim Jong-un avowed his commitment to military modernisation at a key party speech last month, the nuclear-armed country has conducted a string of weapons tests, including

of hypersonic missiles.

Washington hit Pyongyang with fresh sanctions last week and North Korea responded by doubling down on testing, asserting its "legitimate right" to self-defence.

The most recent weapons test involved two "tactical guided missiles" that "precisely hit an island target in the East Sea of Korea", state news agency KCNA said yesterday.

The launches "confirmed the accuracy, security and efficiency of the operation of the weapon sys-



A test-fire of a tactical guided missile at an undisclosed location in North Korea on Monday. AFP PIC

tem under production", it said.

South Korea's military earlier said two suspected "short-range ballistic missiles" were fired east from near Pyongyang on Monday, flying 380km at an altitude of 42km.

Japan also detected the test, with Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi warning the string of recent launches indicated North Korea "is trying to improve its technology and operational capability".

Pyongyang was using the new US sanctions as an excuse to proceed with pre-planned conventional weapons tests, an analyst said, as the North seeks to narrow the gap with South Korea's well-equipped military.

"It lags far behind on that point in its rivalry with Seoul," said Cheong Seong-chang of the Centre for North Korea Studies at the

Sejong Institute.

"Though it is nuclear-armed, it is not in a position to use them unless it's attacked first and it can only use conventional weapons for possible military conflict along the border areas."

For now, talks with the US were "off the table" as Pyongyang would not respond until Seoul and Washington freeze joint drills, something Washington had said was not up for negotiation, he said.

The US called on North Korea on Monday to "cease its unlawful and destabilising activities".

The US special representative on North Korea Sung Kim "expressed concern" about the missile launches and urged Pyongyang to return to dialogue "without pre-conditions", the State Department said. **AFP**

DISEDIKAKAN OLEH

1-NOR SURIANI BINTI MOHD ZIN (S44), BPM
2-CARLOS LINTON (S19), BPM
UNIT PERPUSTAKAAN, BPM