VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Jonathan Jones reporting.

The United States and United Nations are welcoming an agreement meant to ease tensions between North and South Korea. But some analysts are warning the North may be using the talks to buy more time to develop its nuclear weapons program.

During their first formal discussions in more than two years, the two nations on Tuesday agreed to hold further military talks and North Korea agreed to send a delegation to the Winter Olympics being held next month in South Korea.

Reuters correspondent Grace Lee reports.

A North Korea delegation making strides across the world's most heavily militarized border into the South, crossing it for the first time in more than two years.

Seoul and Pyongyang kicked off formal talks on Tuesday with an optimistic outlook on the upcoming Winter Olympics set to be held just kilometers away from the border next month.

North Korea has confirmed it will also send a delegation to the Games, including high-ranking officials and athletes, along with the country's famous cheering squad which has been a huge hit in the South in the past rare appearances.

Seoul has also suggested that athletes from the two Koreas march together during events, including the opening ceremony, something they've done in past sports events as a sign of unity.

Despite its narrow primarily sports related agenda on Tuesday, all eyes are on the globe are focused on the talks which could stretch on into the week, with world leaders eager for signs tensions over the North's nuclear program [is] are cooling off.

"Our talks begin after a long period of severed ties between the North and South. But I believe the first step is half the journey."

South Korea proposed talks between both militaries to start and a reunion of family members in time for February's Lunar New Year holiday.

Correspondent Grace Lee.

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Tuesday said a sanctions-busting court case in New York involving Turkish nationals is a "political coup attempt" against him and his government. While President Erdoğan also threatened military action against a key U.S. ally in Syria, relations between the NATO allies could deteriorate further.

Correspondent Dorian Jones reports from Istanbul.

President Erdoğan alleged the conviction of a Turkish state banker in the federal case is the latest attempt by the FBI and CIA to unseat him. Erdoğan made the comment while addressing members of his AK Party in parliament.

"Those who could not succeed in the military coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, are now searching for a different attempt in our country," Erdoğan said, adding the case in the U.S. is "the address of this political coup attempt."

Ankara also accuses Washington of collaborating with U.S.-based Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen in the 2016 failed coup that left an estimated 150 people dead. The U.S. denies the accusation. Turkey has asked the U.S. to extradite Gulen, who lives in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania and has denied all involvement in the coup attempt.

Dorian Jones, of VOA news, Istanbul.

South African President Jacob Zuma on Tuesday announced a corruption probe into the highest levels of the state after parliament indicated it would move to impeach him.

On December 13, a South African court ruled that a commission be set up within 30 days to carry out such an inquiry.

The U.S. government will suspend a protection extended to more than 260,000 citizens of El Salvador who have lived in the United States for nearly two decades.

Temporary Protected Status, which shielded hundreds of thousands of El Salvador nationals from deportation following devastating earthquakes in 2001, will end September 9, 2019.

And, President Trump told key lawmakers on Tuesday he would sign whatever legislation they agreed upon to protect hundreds of thousands of young immigrants from being deported and to improve security along the country's southern border with Mexico.

In an extraordinary televised meeting at the White House, Trump said that comprehensive immigration reforms could be dealt with later. He said that he still believes a wall needs to be built along at least part of the 3,200-kilometer U.S.-Mexican border, but he seemed to back off earlier demands that it be funded immediately.

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That's the latest world news from VOA.