



PHOTO: AFP

Syrians evacuate a toddler from a destroyed building following a reported air strike on the rebel-held neighbourhood of al-Kalasa in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, yesterday. The Syrian army was preparing an offensive to retake Aleppo yesterday, as escalating fighting in the divided second city killed dozens of civilians in a new blow to a tattered truce.

UN slams Europe's refugee policies

AFP, Vienna

UN chief Ban Ki-moon yesterday hit out at what he called "increasingly restrictive" refugee policies in Europe as the continent faces its worst migrant crisis in decades.

Ban also said he was "alarmed by the growing xenophobia here" and elsewhere in Europe, in a speech to the Austrian parliament.

"I am concerned that European countries are now adopting increasingly restrictive immigration and refugee policies," Ban told lawmakers.

"Such policies negatively affect the obligation of member states under international humanitarian law and European law. Divisiveness and marginalisation hurt individuals and undermine security."

His comments came a day after the Austrian parliament adopted one of Europe's toughest asylum laws, as the country's centrist government struggles to halt the surging far-right whose candidate won the first round of presidential polls on April 24.

The hotly-disputed legislation allows the government to declare a "state of emergency" if migrant numbers suddenly rise and reject most asylum seekers at the border, including those from war-torn countries like Syria.

If the mechanism is triggered, border authorities will only grant access to refugees facing safety threats in a neighbouring transit country or whose relatives are already in Austria.

Some groups including minors and pregnant women will be exempt from the rule.

Meanwhile, Italy and Austria were set for showdown talks yesterday as Italian politicians and media reacted furiously to Vienna's new anti-migrant measures that could close the border between the two countries.

Prime Minister Matteo Renzi has warned that closing the famous Brenner Pass in the Alps would be a "flagrant breach of European rules".



China won't allow chaos, war

Xi tells Asian foreign ministers; N Korea's new missile test fails again: Seoul

REUTERS, Beijing

China will not allow chaos and war to break out on the Korean peninsula, which would be to no one's advantage, Chinese President Xi Jinping told a group of Asian foreign ministers yesterday.

North Korea's drive to develop a nuclear weapons capability, in defiance of UN resolutions, has angered China and raised tension in the region.

"As a close neighbour of the peninsula, we will absolutely not permit war or chaos on the peninsula. This situation would not benefit anyone," Xi said in a speech to a Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia.

South Korea's defence ministry yesterday said North Korea had fired what appeared to have been an intermediate range ballistic missile that crashed within seconds of the test launch.

It was the second such failure in the run-up to next week's ruling party congress in Pyongyang, and follows the isolated state's fourth nuclear test in January.

North Korea is expected to conduct another nuclear test before the rare congress, set to begin on May 6, at which

young leader Kim Jong Un is expected to try to cement his leadership. China has long called for the Korean peninsula to be free of nuclear weapons.

Xi also told the meeting China would safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea, while at the same time maintain-

TENSION IN KOREAN PENINSULA



ing its sovereignty and rights there. China claims almost the entire South China Sea, believed to rich in oil and gas deposits. Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also claim parts of the waters, through which about \$5 trillion in trade is shipped every year.

China has rattled nerves with its military and construction activities on tiny islands in the disputed waters, including building runways, though it says most of it is for civilian purposes.

Chinese officials say the United States is pushing militarization and endangering stability with "freedom of navigation" operations by its military in the South and East China seas.

The US operations were "extremely dangerous" political and military provocations that could lead to maritime mishaps, said Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian.

"Freedom of navigation has become an excuse for the United States to meddle in South China Sea disputes," Wu told a regular news briefing.

The United States calls its patrols an effort to demonstrate that the international community does not accept restrictions set up by some countries in international waters.

The 26-member conference on confidence building measures in Asia includes Russia and many central Asian and Middle Eastern nations. The United States and Japan are among eight observers.

India gets its own sat nav system

AFP, Sriharikota

India yesterday took the final step towards completing its own satellite navigation system, a development heralded by the prime minister as making the nation self-reliant in the field of space-based positioning.

The seventh satellite to make up the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) was launched into space via a rocket from Sriharikota spaceport in southwestern India at 12:50 pm IST (0720 GMT).

However, unlike the widely used United States' Global Positioning System (GPS) or Russia's GLONASS, the Indian system will provide positioning information only in India and 1,500 square kilometres (580 square miles) around its periphery.

"Until now we were dependent on their systems, now we are self-reliant," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a televised congratulatory message to scientists at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

"With this successful launch, we will determine our own paths powered by our technology. This is a

great gift to our people from the scientists," he said.

"Our efforts will help not only India but we can help fellow SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) nations as well."

The system, which will be fully operational in a month's time, offers applications for marine and air navigation and can be integrated into mobile phones for use by hikers or fishermen, for example.

Over the next six months, all the IRNSS satellites will be stabilised in their final orbital positions, ISRO spokesman Deviprasad Karnik said.

A ground control centre in the southern city of Bangalore and tracking stations across the country will monitor the system round the clock.

ISRO scientists have been riding high since an Indian spacecraft successfully reached Mars in 2014

on a shoe-string budget, winning Asia's race to the Red Planet and sparking an outpouring of national pride.

The eight countries that make up SAARC are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

China and the European Union are both developing global satellite navigation systems.



Trump vows 'America first' foreign policy

REUTERS, Washington

Rolling out an "America first" foreign policy, Republican front-runner Donald Trump vowed on Wednesday that if he were elected president, US allies in Europe and Asia would have to fend for themselves if they did not pay more for the US defense umbrella.

Trump's speech, delivered with a teleprompter in a staid Washington hotel ballroom, was an attempt to show he can be more presidential and move past the rancorous rhetoric that he routinely uses on the campaign trail.

"My foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people, and American security, above all else. That will be the foundation of every decision that I will make," Trump said. "America first" will be the major and overriding theme of my administration."

The New York billionaire spoke the day after victories in five Northeastern states that moved him closer to capturing



the Republican Party nomination for the Nov 8 election.

But the message Trump delivered appeared contradictory at times and was largely devoid of details.

While issuing that stern message on paying for defense, Trump said the United States under his leadership would be "a reliable friend and ally again."

Trump was sharply critical of immediate past presidents, both Republican and Democratic, for getting Americans involved in military conflicts abroad, but said the United States may well need to use force to defeat Islamic State militants.

In perhaps his most specific policy prescription, Trump said he would organize two summits, for Nato allies and Asian allies, to discuss "rebalancing" the alliances to ease the financial burden to the United States.

Clinton adviser Madeleine Albright, herself a former secretary of state, said Trump's address was centered on "simplistic slogans and contradictions."

Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington, said Trump's speech did not contain enough details to call it a strategy. "Ultimately, he's selling a dream and he's still not offering a plan. He's representing the sales office, but he's given no clue of who will be the architect and who will do the construction," he said.

Trump attacks Clinton on gender issue

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump trained his fire on Hillary Clinton Wednesday, accusing his Democratic rival of playing "the woman card" in her White House bid, after both took a giant step towards clinching their parties' nominations.

Clinton and Trump crushed their rivals in Tuesday's latest round of primaries, leaving them almost assured of nominations.

"Frankly, if Hillary Clinton were a man, I don't think she'd get five percent of the vote," he told supporters at a victory press conference. "The only thing she's got going is the woman's card."

The billionaire real estate developer doubled down Wednesday on CNN, goading: "She's playing the woman card left and right... she will be called on it. Absolutely."

It wasn't the first time Trump had goaded Clinton with the accusation, and she took up the gauntlet in a victory speech late Tuesday in Philadelphia.

"Well, if fighting for women's health care and paid family leave and equal pay is playing the woman's card, then deal me in," she said.

Trump is still short of the 1,237 delegates needed. He now stands at 988 delegates, according to CNN. Clinton needs 2,383 delegates to win the nomination, and now has 2,168 delegates, against Sanders's 1,401.



Anti-government demonstrators gather to sign the form to activate the referendum on cutting President Nicolas Maduro's term short, in Caracas on Wednesday. Venezuelans lined up Wednesday to seek a recall referendum against President Nicolas Maduro, exasperated with a grinding crisis that has paralyzed government offices and triggered rolling blackouts.

PHOTO: AFP

'Global citizenship' rising: poll

BBC ONLINE

People are increasingly identifying themselves as global rather than national citizens, according to a BBC World Service poll.

The trend is particularly marked in emerging economies, where people see themselves as outward looking and internationally minded.

However, in Germany fewer people say they feel like global citizens now, compared with 2001.

Pollsters GlobeScan questioned more than 20,000 people in 18 countries.

More than half of those asked (56%) in emerging economies saw themselves first and foremost as global citizens rather than national citizens.

In Nigeria (73%), China (71%), Peru (70%) and India (67%) the data is particularly marked.

By contrast, the trend in the industrialised nations seems to be heading in the opposite direction.

In these richer nations, the concept of global citizenship appears to have taken a serious hit after the financial crash of 2008. In Germany, for example, only 30% of respondents see themselves as global citizens.

Russia appears to have the strongest overall opposition to immigration. Only 11% of the Russians polled would approve of accepting refugees from Syria, for example.

On the other hand, Spain would be the most welcoming of all the countries polled when it comes to receiving

refugees from the Syrian conflict. There, an eye-catching majority - 84% - believe they should take in more of those fleeing the five-year civil war.

Indonesia has the weakest sense of national citizenship (4%). Instead, it seems Indonesians have a much stronger sense of localism, with over half of respondents seeing their immediate communities as the most important way of defining themselves.

In general, religion plays a much smaller part how people define themselves compared to nationality.

The big exception to that rule is Pakistan, with 43% of Pakistanis appearing to identify themselves first and foremost by their religion - considerably higher than any other country.

PARIS TERROR ATTACKS Terror charges filed against Abdeslam

AFP, Paris

A French court on Wednesday charged Paris attacks suspect Salah Abdeslam over his role in the November 2015 carnage that left 130 dead, just hours after his extradition from Belgium.

Abdeslam, a French national of Moroccan origin who grew up in Belgium, is believed to be the last surviving member of a terror squad that hit cafes, a concert hall and the national stadium in Paris on November 13.

More than a month after his capture in Belgium, Abdeslam was brought to France by helicopter early on Wednesday where he was formally placed under arrest before being swept off to the main Paris court, where he spent several hours.

His lawyer Frank Berton said that investigating judges charged him with murder, association with a terrorist group, possession of weapons and explosives as well as sequestration over the hostage-taking at the Bataclan concert hall where 90 people were killed.

Another hearing has been set for May 20, the lawyer said, adding that his client was being held in a cell with video surveillance at the sprawling Fleury-Merogis prison complex outside Paris.

Justice Minister Jean-Jacques Urvoas said the suspect would be placed in isolation and monitored by "hardened guards" skilled in handling dangerous detainees.