



(From left, clockwise) Demonstrators arrive at Union Station for the Women's March on Washington in Washington, DC; Women protest against Trump in Rome and Germany. Women in pink "pussyhats" flooded into Washington by the train-load yesterday for a massive rights march set to draw hundreds of thousands in defiance of America's hardline new president, Donald Trump.



PHOTO: AFP

Asian media decry isolationist Trump

Fear economic, diplomatic turmoil

AFP, Tokyo

A day after Donald Trump became U.S. President and vowed to put "America First", Asian media decry his isolationist policies, fearing they will chill the global economy and sow widespread international discord.

In a defiant inaugural address, Trump said US workers have been devastated by an outflow of jobs overseas, one of the main themes of a divisive campaign that emphasized making America strong again.

In Japan, one of Washington's oldest and staunchest Asian allies, newspapers across the political spectrum criticised the new administration, with more than one saying the world was now in "unpredictable territory."

"Has there ever been a new U.S. administration that began by spreading unease, not expectations, throughout the world?" said the conservative Yomiuri Shimbun, adding that Trump appeared ready to take both alliances and global norms lightly if they didn't benefit the United States.

State media in China, accused of stealing US jobs during Trump's campaign, said they hoped his government understood the importance of relations with China but that Beijing should also brace for the worst.

"What's crucial is to control and manage disputes and find a way to resolve them," said the overseas edition of the ruling Communist Party's official People's Daily.

Worry about friction between the two superpowers loomed over many in the region.

"As an exporting nation reliant on both China and the US, we would suffer from greater US protectionism and any trade war," said the Sydney Morning Herald.

NEWS IN brief

23 missing in Italy avalanche hotel

AFP, Penne

Italian rescuers yesterday pulled four survivors from an avalanche-hit hotel and said they remained hopeful of finding alive at least some of the 23 people still trapped under the ruins three days after the disaster. The latest rescues lifted the total number of survivors to 11. The avalanche followed four earthquakes of more than five magnitude in the space of four hours earlier.

Austria 'foils potential terror attack'

AFP, Vienna

Austria's interior minister said Friday that authorities had averted a potential "terror attack" in Vienna with the arrest by armed police of an 18-year-old suspected Islamist extremist. He told public television later that the Austrian citizen is from the country's ethnic Albanian minority and there were "some indications" that he was in contact with Islamic extremists. Vienna's metro system was among possible targets, he said.

'El Chapo' pleads not guilty in US

AFP, New York

Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, one of the world's most notorious criminals, pleaded not guilty Friday to multiple drug trafficking, firearms and conspiracy charges in a US court. The 59-year-old drug baron, who has twice escaped from jail in Mexico, appeared in the packed federal court room in Brooklyn dressed in blue prison scrubs and looking tired, just hours after his extradition to New York from Mexico.

Trump leads standing ovation for Clinton

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump on Friday led a standing ovation for his defeated Democratic rival Hillary Clinton, saying he was "honored" she and her husband had attended his inauguration.

"I was honored when I heard that former president Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton were coming today and I would like you to stand up," he said while addressing lawmakers, his cabinet nominees and other dignitaries at a Congressional luncheon.

"There's nothing more I can say because I have a lot of respect for those two people," Trump added as attendees rose and clapped.

The Republican billionaire clashed brutally with both Clintons during the hard-fought campaign -- labeling his Democratic rival corrupt, and digging up past allegations of sexual misconduct by her husband.

Clinton has largely retreated from public view since Trump's upset win in November shattered her hopes of becoming the first female commander-in-chief of the world's most powerful democracy.

Trump's inauguration -- for which she dressed in a streamlined ivory coat and pants -- marked her first high-profile public outing in months.

Clinton and her husband were seen hand in hand and smiling as they headed from the inauguration to the Congressional luncheon.

"I'm here today to honor our democracy & its enduring values. I will never stop believing in our country & its future," Clinton tweeted.

Trump vows to 'eradicate radical Islamic terrorism'

Aims for 'unquestioned' US military dominance in first policy statement

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

President Donald Trump echoed his hardline stance against "radical Islamic terrorism" in his first address as the 45th president of the United States.

"We will ... unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism which we will eradicate completely from the face of the earth," he said during the Inaugural Address.

The 15 minute speech echoed much of the tone of his campaign, during which he criticised his opponent, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and former President Barack Obama for their approach to fighting IS.

Trump has claimed to have a plan to fight the extremist group, but has divulged no details about it.

"Their days are numbered," he said in an April foreign policy speech. "I won't tell them where and I won't tell them how. ... We must as a nation be more unpredictable. We are totally predictable. We tell everything. ... We have to be unpredictable, and we have to be unpredictable starting now. But they're going to be gone. Isis will be gone if I'm elected president."

In a debate with Clinton, Trump accused his opponent of giving away her tactics against IS.

"You're telling the enemy everything you want to do," he said. "No wonder you've been fighting Isis your entire adult life."

IS' origins can be traced back to 1999 -- well after Clinton entered political life.

Meanwhile, according to the first policy statements published on the White House website Friday, Trump will "rebuild" America's vast military, boost its anti-missile capabilities and prioritise defeating the Islamic State group.

Published moments after Trump was inaugurated president, the statements say he will end limits on Pentagon spending agreed by Congress and the Obama administration, and will soon release a new budget proposal outlining his vision for the military.

"We will provide our military leaders with the means to plan for our future defense needs," the White House said.

"We cannot allow other nations to surpass our military capability."

The statement said the US will develop a "state-of-the-art missile defense system" to defend against attacks from Iran, North Korea and others.



"We may have to negotiate our way through a new world order not just regarding trade and China but also climate, Russia and regional security given Trump's lack of interest in the US playing the role of sheriff."

A less-engaged Washington could also lead to shifting alliances and more reliance on regional networks.

"India must not only prepare for a more protectionist America, but also prepare of a United States that does not plan to mess around with other people's affairs or squander blood and treasure in the name of promoting democratic values," wrote policy analyst C Raja Mohan, head of Carnegie India, in the Indian Express.

A few said they expected US political institutions to prevail and that Trump should be given the benefit of the doubt as the duly-elected US leader. "It is wisest to hope he succeeds," added The Australian in an editorial titled "President Trump Seals the Deal."

But uncertainty prevailed for the most part.

"Under Trump, the United States is apt to be as edgy and unpredictable as his former television reality show," said Thailand's The Nation on Friday.

"The reality show has become reality. We are about to discover whether America can become great again - and whether the word 'great' takes on unexpected meanings."

Gambians await Jammeh's exit after pledge to go

AFP, Banjul

Gambians yesterday anxiously awaited the departure of strongman Yahya Jammeh after he agreed to stand down following 11-hour talks with west African leaders to head off a regional military intervention.

Announced in the early hours of Saturday morning, Jammeh's decision to leave appears to end a protracted political crisis in this former British colony, allowing newly-elected president Adama Barrow to take over.

The announcement came after a flurry of last-minute diplomacy by the presidents of Guinea and Mauritania who jetted into the capital Banjul on Friday to persuade the recalcitrant leader to stand down.

Several sources said he was likely to leave yesterday, but so far there has been no clear agreement on where he would go.

And his actions will be carefully monitored as he has previously agreed to step down after recognising Barrow as winner of the December 1 elections -- then completely reversed his position.

"I have decided today in good conscience to relinquish the mantle of leadership of this great nation with infinite gratitude to all Gambians," Jammeh said on state television in the early hours of yesterday.

At Friday's talks, backed by the 15-nation Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), an agreement was reached in principle for Jammeh to leave, but by Saturday morning, it had still not been signed.

After a calm night in Banjul, many only heard the news on waking, and greeted his declaration with a cautious optimism, aware of the strongman's mercenary nature.

Speaking to AFP on Saturday morning, a Mauritanian diplomatic source close to the talks said Jammeh would likely leave during the day.

"He will most likely go to Equatorial Guinea," she said, saying Barrow was expected to return to the country during the evening.



US President Donald Trump and his wife, first lady Melania Trump, dance at the "Salute to Our Armed Forces" inaugural ball during inauguration festivities in Washington, US, on Friday.

Turkey parliament nods in expanding Erdogan powers

AFP, Ankara

Turkey is headed for a referendum this year on whether to dramatically expand the powers of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan after parliament backed the changes early yesterday.

The government insists the proposals to create an executive presidency will ensure simpler and more effective leadership, but critics fear they will edge Turkey toward one-man rule.

Parliament approved a new 18-article constitution, which includes the presidency changes, in a final vote with 339 approving, and 142 MPs voting against the bill.

Each article was put to a vote in the 550-seat parliament, where the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) enjoys a comfortable majority. At least 330 votes -- a three-fifths majority -- were needed to adopt the constitutional change.

Immediately after the bill was approved, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said the "last word" would be had by the people in a referendum, expected to be held in April.

Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek said on Twitter the reforms would ensure stability, adding: "No more coalition governments that led to crises in 1970s and 1990s."

The bill would create an executive presidency for the first time in modern Turkey and give the president the power to appoint and fire ministers.

In addition, the post of prime minister will be abolished for the first time in the country's history and replaced by a vice president, or perhaps several.

The debates have been fractious and the assembly has witnessed some of the worst fighting in years including clashes on Thursday after an independent lawmaker, Aylin Nazliaka, handcuffed herself to the microphone on the platform.

The bill would allow parliamentary elections and presidential ballots to be held at the same time, with the draft giving November 3, 2019 as the poll date.



School coach crashes in Italy; 16 killed

AFP, Verona

Sixteen people died when a coach bringing Hungarian teenagers home from a skiing trip crashed and burst into flames on a northern Italian motorway overnight, authorities said yesterday.

It appeared the death toll from the tragedy near Verona at around 11:00 pm (2200 GMT) could have been much worse had it not been for the bravery and quick thinking of a teacher.

Emergency workers said that the bus carrying 56 people returning from France, most of them teenagers aged 14-16 as well as several teachers and two drivers, ploughed into a bridge pillar.

Nasheed plans return to save sinking Maldives

AFP, Park City

He faces jail in the Maldives but former president Mohamed Nasheed says he wants to contest elections and guide the island nation away from environmental catastrophe.

Nasheed became the first democratically elected president of the Maldives in 2008, but lives in exile in London after he was jailed on terrorism charges that he says were politically motivated.

"I don't think I can return home without risks. I don't think there will ever be a time for that," the 49-year-old told AFP during a visit to the Sundance Film Festival in Utah.

"I guess I'll have to take the risks and do it, if I were to do it."

In the past he has accused Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who ruled the Maldives for 30 years and is still regarded as the power behind the throne, of being behind his downfall.

But in September he indicated he wanted to bury the hatchet with Gayoom, amid reports of a rift between the former strongman leader and his half-brother, current President Abdulla Yameen.

Once a honeymoon paradise before its tourism industry was shaken by political unrest, the Indian Ocean island chain could be underwater by 2100, according to the United Nations.

"It's already happening in the Maldives, it isn't something that is going to happen. We are already going through it," said Nasheed, adding that 16 of the 196 inhabitable islands already needed to be evacuated.

Nasheed is pushing for the Maldives to use its own resources, rather than international aid, to bolster its defences against rising seas and coastal erosion.

"To do that, we must have investor confidence, for us to bring the money into the country. It is my view that we have enough resources," he told AFP.

Investment has stopped because of corruption, he says, citing what he describes as the unlawful termination of construction contracts by Yameen's government.



Militants blow themselves up in Saudi

AFP, Riyadh

Two suspects blew themselves up yesterday during a firefight with security forces in the Red Sea city of Jeddah in western Saudi Arabia, officials said.

The two men "committed suicide by detonating their explosive belts" during a security operation against a suspected "terrorist" hideout in a southern district of Jeddah, the region's authorities said on Twitter.

They did not give immediate details about the operation or identify the bombers, but said the raid had been successfully carried out after a shootout with the suspects.

Earlier this month, Saudi security forces shot and killed two suspected jihadists including an explosive belt maker during a police operation in the north of Riyadh.