



PROTESTS AGAINST US TRAVEL BAN



Trump faces reality check

CNN ONLINE

The rapid halting of President Donald Trump's immigration order has given him his first exposure to the limits on his presidential power, a sharp awakening for a real estate mogul accustomed to the wide unilateral prerogative of a chief executive.

With the order mired in legal challenge and travelers again weighed with uncertainty, Trump is facing his first run-in with a system of federal checks and balances.

The fresh uncertainty over the order illustrated again the chaotic fallout of the new president's intent in rapidly fulfilling his most controversial campaign promises.

And for the second Saturday in a row, airlines, travelers, and government lawyers are confronting a broad shift in the rules governing US immigration, sowing further global confusion about the president's travel ban meant to combat terror.

Trump was mingling among guests in the living room of his lavish Florida estate on Friday when a judge in Washington state halted enforcement of his executive order, which he signed last Friday at the Pentagon.

His core team of advisers, including chief of staff Reince Priebus, chief strategist Steve Bannon and his top policy aide Stephen Miller, had all made the journey with him to Palm Beach on Air Force One, where he's spending the weekend at his Italianate Mar-a-Lago club. The group triaged the judge's ruling from there.

Back in Washington, Trump's press secretary, Sean Spicer, issued a statement announcing the Justice Department intended to "file an emergency stay of this outrageous order and defend the executive order of the President." He updated his language moments later to remove the word "outrageous." But if the White House was hoping to temper its language around the legal challenge, the president himself dashed any hope of decorum when he woke up at his oceanfront retreat on Saturday.

"The opinion of this so-called judge, which essentially takes law-enforcement away from our country, is ridiculous and will be overturned!" Trump wrote on Twitter.

With the judge's ruling on Friday evening, even Trump's own appointees will be forced to follow the court's order. Less than three hours after the decision was handed down, Customs and Border Protection officials told representatives from major air carriers they could allow previously banned passengers to board flights bound for the US.

The Department of Homeland Security, headed by Trump pick John Kelly, said it is suspending implementation of the order, even as it insisted the ban was "lawful and appropriate."

And the State Department, run by Trump appointee Rex Tillerson, said it is revalidating visas it revoked only days ago. The latest legal controversy -- and Trump's highly unusual step for a President of personally attacking a judge who delivered a ruling critical of his administration -- could spark new controversy and ammunition for Democrats in the fight against his nomination of Judge Neil Gorsuch for the Supreme Court. Still, the likelihood that the tussle over the legality of Trump's executive order sooner or later ends up in the Supreme Court gives Democrats a fresh rationale to do everything possible to delay his confirmation, given that the Supreme Court, currently operating one justice short, may not be able to amass a majority in support of the president's move.



THE US PRESIDENT JUST LEARNT THE LIMIT OF HIS PRESIDENTIAL POWERS



Thousands took to the streets around the world to protest US President Donald Trump's travel ban amid a fierce legal battle over the order on Saturday and Sunday. The biggest demonstration by far on Saturday took place in the British capital, where an estimated 10,000 people turned out, chanting "Theresa May: Shame on You" to denounce the British prime minister's support for the new US leader. In these pictures (from top, clockwise) protesters are seen demonstrating in Washington, New York, Paris and Hong Kong.

PHOTO: AFP

'You think our country is so innocent?'

Trump defends Russian president again

CNN ONLINE

President Donald Trump appeared to equate US actions with the authoritarian regime of Russian President Vladimir Putin in an interview released Saturday, saying, "There are a lot of killers. You think our country's so innocent?"

Trump made the remark during an interview with Fox News' Bill O'Reilly, saying he respected his Russian counterpart.

"But he's a killer," O'Reilly said to Trump. "There are a lot of killers. You think our country's so innocent?" Trump replied.

A clip of the exchange was released Saturday and the full interview was scheduled to air yesterday.

It was an unusual assertion coming from the President of the United States. Trump himself, however, has made similar points before.

"He's running his country and at least he's a leader, unlike what we have in this country," Trump told MSNBC's "Morning Joe" in December 2015.

He continued, "I think our country does plenty of killing also, Joe, so you know. There's a lot of stupidity going on in the world right now, a lot of killing, a lot of stupidity," Trump said.

In the interview with O'Reilly, Trump noted that just because he respects someone "doesn't mean I'm going to get along with them."



US AID CUT TO UN ORGANISATIONS Peacekeeping to face axe

AFP, United Nations

Washington's new UN envoy Nikki Haley is putting in motion a far-reaching review of UN peacekeeping that is likely to lead to closures and downsizing of missions, according to diplomats.

Haley took up her post with a vow to overhaul the United Nations and "do away" with what she termed as "obsolete" activities amid fresh clamor in Washington over US funding for the world body.

During one-on-one meetings with Security Council ambassadors this week, the new US envoy raised peacekeeping as a priority for cuts, zeroing in on the UN's flagship enterprise, according to three diplomats with knowledge of the discussions.

"On UN reform, I think there is a particular interest in peacekeeping," said a Security Council diplomat.

Haley is setting up a mission-by-mission review of all 16 peace operations and is "relatively skeptical" of the value and efficiency of many of the blue-helmet deployments, said the diplomat, who spoke on background.

A senior Security Council diplomat told AFP that peacekeeping reform was "a priority" for the new US ambassador "who wants to work closely with key partners on the issue in the coming weeks."

NEWS IN brief

Russia backs renewal of UN-led peace talks

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia said yesterday that it supports the continuation of Syria peace talks under United Nations auspices, long-running negotiations which had been thrown into doubt by separate, Moscow-backed peace talks launched last month. The latest round of UN talks had been planned to begin in Geneva on Feb 8 but Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said last week that they had been postponed.

Merkel's poll lead shrinks in Germany

REUTERS, Berlin

The lead in voter support for German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative alliance over the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) shrank to a multi-year low of 4 percentage points, an opinion poll showed yesterday. The SPD scored 29 percent in the survey published in newspaper Bild am Sonntag - a six-point jump that Bild said was the biggest pollster Emnid had ever recorded for the party.

Le Pen launches polls campaign

AFP, Lyon

French far-right leader Marine Le Pen yesterday gave a major speech to formally launch her presidential bid with a programme featuring many of the themes that propelled Donald Trump to the White House. Le Pen on Saturday published a list of 144 "commitments" built around putting France first, reclaiming sovereignty from the EU, and clamping down on immigration.

HEAVY SNOWFALL IN AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN Dozens of people killed

REUTERS, Kabul

Dozens of people in Afghanistan and Pakistan were killed after heavy snow and avalanches hit over the weekend.

In eastern Afghanistan, at least 50 people died and dozens more were missing yesterday after an avalanche buried a village in Nuristan, provincial governor Hafiz Abdul Qayum said.

"Based on information from district officials, 50 dead bodies have been recovered and the number may increase," he said.

At least five other deaths from collapsed roofs were reported elsewhere in Nuristan.

In the northern province of Badakhshan, over the past two days as many as 19 people were killed and 17 injured by avalanches, collapsed roofs and road accidents, said Naweid Frotan, a spokesman for the provincial governor.

The government was working to reach at least 12 districts in Badakhshan that had been completely cut off, he said.

Heavy snow also blanketed the Afghan capital of Kabul, where the government closed its offices on yesterday.

In neighbouring Pakistan, at least nine people, including children, were killed by

an avalanche in the northern Chitral district, with as many as 14 residents believed to still be trapped in collapsed houses, district official Syed Maghferat Shah said.

"So far the rescue workers have recovered nine bodies and efforts are under way to retrieve more," he said.

The avalanche struck a village of 25 houses, but evacuation operations were delayed by the weather, Chitral Deputy Commissioner Shahab Hameed Yousafzai.

"There is no way to rush the injured persons to Chitral hospital because all roads in the valley have been blocked due to heavy snowfall," he said.

In a separate incident in the Chitral region, a government rescue worker was killed when an avalanche struck a check post near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the commanding officer told Reuters.

The snow wreaked havoc on major roads in Afghanistan, including the Kabul-Kandahar Highway, where police and soldiers had to rescue around 250 cars and buses trapped by the storm, said Jawid Salangi, a spokesman for Chazni province, where as much as two metres of new snow was reported.

Turkey detains hundreds in anti-IS raids

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish police yesterday detained hundreds of suspected members of the Islamic State extremist group in nationwide raids, just over a month after an Istanbul nightclub claimed by the jihadists.

Over 400 suspects were rounded up in Turkey's biggest police operation so far against IS since the New Year attack on the Reina nightclub just 75 minutes into 2017 that killed 39.

Those detained included foreigners and those suspected of planning attacks in Turkey, the Dogan and Anadolu news agencies reported. Anadolu said according to the latest figure, 423 suspects were detained so far.



A Libyan aid worker inspects an illegal immigrant child who was rescued with others at sea off the coast of Libya, at a reception centre in the capital Tripoli, in the early hours of yesterday. More than 120 migrants were rescued by Libyan coastguards off the coast of Tripoli, a day after authorities said they had intercepted more than 400 people attempting the sea crossing to Europe.

PHOTO: AFP

Rare opal makes public debut

CNN ONLINE

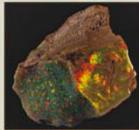
The world's finest uncut opal, a 998-gram gem called the Fire of Australia, has gone on permanent public display for the first time since its discovery more than 60 years ago.

Valued at more than \$675,000, the stone is the largest known high-grade opal in the world, according to the gem's new owners, the South Australian Museum in Adelaide, Australia.

"The Fire of Australia is around the size of a softball...and shows all the colors of the spectrum," museum director Brian Oldman told CNN, emphasizing the extreme rarity of the stone.

The gem was first discovered in 1946 by miner Walter Bartram at the Eight Mile opal field in Coober Pedy -- a small desert town in South Australia famous for its opals.

South Australia, which encompasses a vast arid area in the south and middle of Australia, produces more than 90% of the world's precious opal, according to Oldman.



Romania bows to pressure Repeals decree decriminalising graft offences

AFP, Bucharest

Romania yesterday scrapped a contentious corruption decree in a climbdown after the biggest mass demonstrations since 1989, but protesters kept up pressure by taking to the streets for a sixth straight day.

As thousands of people gathered in Bucharest and elsewhere, the government announced it had approved a repeal of the decree that would have decriminalised certain corruption offences.

This fulfilled the promise made late on Saturday by a pale and tired-looking Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu after a fifth day of demonstrations that were the largest since the ouster of communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989.

But the announcement didn't stop demonstrators gathering again yesterday to make it clear to Grindeanu and his left-wing

government, which has been in office only a month, that they were on thin ice and that corruption must be rooted out.

"I hope that this is a real repeal... We are going to keep an eye on them to make sure we are not being had," said protester Daniel, 35.

"Today we are going to break new records," electrician Florian, 40, told AFP in Bucharest, distributing free pretzels and tea at Victory Square, the epicentre of this week's protests.

By midafternoon, around a thousand people could be seen gathering in the square and the crowd was expected to swell later with buses arriving from outside the capital.

Again they brandished placards, chanted and blew whistles and plastic vuvuzela horns in the national colours of blue, yellow and red. Later in the evening they were all to sing the national anthem.



Trump pledges help to restore Ukraine peace

AFP, Kiev

US President Donald Trump told Ukraine's leader on Saturday that he would work with Kiev and Moscow to try to end the bloodshed in the European Union's backyard.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's first conversation with the new US leader came during a sharp escalation in violence in the Russian-backed separatist east that has claimed 35 lives in the past week.

It also took place as the former Soviet republic worries that Trump is seeking to build a friendship with Russia's Vladimir Putin. Some analysts linked the escalation of the violence to this potential thaw in relations while others attributed it to more local issues.