

Trump calls for US nuke supremacy

FBI refused White House request to knock down Russia links

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he wants to ensure the US nuclear arsenal is at the "top of the pack," saying the United States has fallen behind in its weapons capacity.

In a Reuters interview, Trump also said China could solve the national security challenge posed by North Korea "very easily if they want to," ratcheting up pressure on Beijing to exert more influence to rein in Pyongyang's increasingly bellicose actions.

Trump also expressed support for the European Union as a governing body, saying "I'm totally in favor of it," and for the first time as president expressed a preference for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but said he would be satisfied with whatever makes the two sides happy.

Trump said in the interview he would like to see a world with no nuclear weapons but expressed concern that the United States has "fallen behind on nuclear weapon capacity."

Meanwhile, The FBI rejected a recent White House request to publicly knock down media reports about communications between Trump's associates and Russians known to US intelligence during the 2016 presidential campaign, multiple US officials briefed on the matter tell CNN.

Trump took the unusual step yesterday of publicly criticizing the FBI, saying it was failing to stop national security leaks to the media, even from within the agency.

"The FBI is totally unable to stop the national security 'leakers' that have permeated our government for a long time," Trump said. "They can't even find the leakers within the FBI itself. Classified information is being given to media that could have a devastating effect on U.S. FIND NOW."



An Iraqi Special Forces soldier stands on top of a vehicle in a desert south of Mosul, Iraq yesterday. Inset, a man carries lambs as he escapes fight between Iraqi forces and Islamic State fighters in the area. Iraqi forces entered a west Mosul neighbourhood for the first time since the October launch of a massive offensive to retake the city from the jihadist group.

PHOTO: REUTERS

UN 'disturbed' by sentence for Israeli soldier

AFP, Geneva

An 18-month prison sentence for an Israeli soldier who shot dead a wounded Palestinian assailant is an "unacceptable" punishment for "an apparent extra-judicial killing", the UN said yesterday.

United Nations human rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani further charged the Jewish state with having "a chronic culture of impunity" regarding cases involving Israeli troops and Palestinians.

In March 2016, Israeli Private Elor Azaria was caught on video shooting Palestinian Fatah al-Sharif in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron.

The video showed Sharif, 21, lying wounded on the ground, shot along with another Palestinian after stabbing and wounding a soldier, according to the army.

Azaria then shoots Sharif in the head without any apparent provocation.

After a months-long trial, Azaria was on Tuesday sentenced to 18 months in prison, with a further 18 months suspended.

"We are deeply disturbed at the lenient sentence," Shamdasani said.

"While the prosecution and conviction are very welcome steps towards accountability, the punishment... is difficult to reconcile with the intentional killing of an unarmed and prone individual," she added.

According to the rights office, more than 200 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank since September 2015 and Azaria has been the only one to face trial.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday backed pardoning Azaria.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Palestinian protesters clashed with Israeli soldiers yesterday in the powderkeg West Bank city of Hebron on the anniversary of a 1994 massacre carried out by a far-right Jewish settler.

Soldiers fired tear gas and sound grenades to disperse the crowd as cannons doused them with stinking water, an AFP correspondent said. There was no immediate report of injuries.

No mass deportations

US officials promise Mexico no use of military force to expel immigrants as Trump vows to crack down on 'bad dudes'

AFP, Mexico City

US officials promised Mexico no "mass deportations" or use of military force to expel immigrants, moving to calm tensions over President Donald Trump's vow to crack down on "bad dudes" illegally residing in his country.

US Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met with Mexican ministers who expressed "concern and irritation" over Trump's combative stance on trade and migration ties with Mexico.

Trump has outraged the United States' southern neighbor by vowing to build a wall along the border to keep out immigrants, and branding those from Mexico as rapists and criminals during his presidential campaign.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on Tuesday issued new orders to step up the arrest and deportation of illegal immigrants, many of them Mexicans.

But Kelly promised at a news conference in Mexico City on Thursday that "there will be no, repeat, no mass deportations. Everything we do in the DHS will be done legally."

"There will be no use of military force for immigration operations," he added.

Earlier at the White House, Trump had described the

stepped-up deportation drive as "a military operation."

But his spokesman Sean Spicer later told a news conference that Trump was using the term "military" simply "as an adjective" to mean "efficient."

Or as Trump himself put it: "We're getting really bad dudes out of this country, and at a rate that nobody's ever seen before."

Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray, who met with Tillerson, repeated his vow not to let the United States impose migration reforms on it "unilaterally."

"There is concern and irritation among Mexicans about what are seen as policies that could be detrimental for Mexicans in Mexico and abroad," he said.

"There are well-known differences and the best way to resolve them is through frank, clear dialogue."

Tillerson said the two sides "reiterated our joint commitment to maintaining law and order along our shared border by stopping potential terrorists

and dismantling the transnational criminal networks moving drugs and people into the United States."

But he agreed that cooperation on border security had to work both ways.

"We underscored the importance of stopping the illegal firearms and bulk cash that is originating in the United States and flowing into Mexico," he said.



South African police disperse protesters

REUTERS, Pretoria

South African police fired tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets to disperse rival marches by hundreds of protesters in Pretoria yesterday, after mobs looted stores this week believed to belong to immigrants.

Anti-immigrant violence has flared sporadically in South Africa against a background of near-record unemployment, with foreigners being accused of taking jobs from citizens and involvement in crime.

Armed police had formed a barrier between rival crowds of citizens and non-nationals marching in Pretoria, but both sides began shouting at one another and brandishing rocks and sticks, prompting police to disperse the angry mobs.

Shops were shuttered in Marabastad, an area of western Pretoria where many foreign nationals have their stores, and roads were blocked as the marchers gathered. Some of the foreigners carried rocks and sticks, saying they were ready to protect their stores.

The marches follow the looting this week of at least 20 small businesses believed to belong to Nigerian and Pakistani immigrants. Residents said they had attacked the shops because they were dens of prostitution and

drug dealing. Some said they had lost jobs to the foreigners.

A 34-year old South African, who declined to be named, said a Zimbabwean took his job at a manufacturing plant because he was willing to work for less.

"The police must leave us alone so we can sort them out," he said, pointing at a group of foreign shop owners.

ANTI-IMMIGRANT MARCHES

Anti-foreigner violence hit Pretoria this week

High unemployment fuels xenophobia

President Zuma calls for calm

"Over 24-hour period, 156 have been arrested," Phahlane told a news conference, and "those inciting violence will face prosecution." It was unclear how many of those in custody were South Africans and how many foreigners.

President Jacob Zuma condemned acts of violence between citizens and non-nationals, his office said in a statement yesterday. Zuma appealed to citizens not to blame all crime on non-nationals.



Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (C) claps his hands at a concert for Premium Friday, which encourages firms to let workers out a few hours early on the last Friday of every month so that they spend money on shopping and leisure to help boost the economy, in Tokyo, Japan yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

German secret service spied on global media

AFP, Berlin

Germany's foreign intelligence service BND long spied on journalists of the BBC, The New York Times, Reuters and other media, news weekly Der Spiegel reported yesterday.

Media rights group Reporters Without Borders labelled the alleged surveillance "a monstrous attack on press freedom", voiced fears the eavesdropping was ongoing and said it was planning legal action, according to Der Spiegel.

The magazine, which has extensively worked with US fugitive intelligence contractor Edward Snowden and reported on US and German espionage scandals, only cited documents it had seen.

Turkish diplomats apply for asylum

Says German interior ministry

AFP, Berlin

More than 130 Turkish diplomats, soldiers and their family members have sought refuge in Germany since last July's failed coup, according to German government data in documents seen by AFP yesterday.

"The government is aware of 136 asylum applications filed by diplomatic passport holders from Turkey. They also include family members," said the interior ministry in a written reply to a query from a lawmaker.

The ministry said however that it did not have data on how many among the applicants are diplomats and how many are soldiers stationed at Nato bases.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government has accused US-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen of having orchestrated the putsch, and launched a sweeping crackdown against his followers.

Some 43,000 people in Turkey have been arrested over their suspected links to Gulen's movement, and 100,000 fired or suspended. Many of them are teachers, police, magistrates and journalists.

The scale of the crackdown has raised international concern, with Germany among the most vocal in raising questions over the mass arrests.

Philippine drug war critic arrested, but defiant

AFP, Manila

The highest-profile critic of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's brutal drug war was yesterday arrested on charges she said were meant to silence her, but she vowed to keep fighting the "sociopathic serial killer".

Speaking to journalists minutes before armed police in flak jackets detained her, Senator Leila de Lima insisted she was innocent of the drug trafficking charges that could see her jailed for life.

"It is my honour to be imprisoned for the things I am fighting for. Please pray for me," De Lima, 57, said outside her Senate office where she had sought temporary refuge overnight after an arrest warrant was issued on Thursday.

"They will not be able to silence me and stop me from fighting for the truth and justice and against the daily killings and repression by the Duterte regime."

Duterte's drug war, which has seen more than 6,500 people killed since he took office eight months ago.

"There is no doubt that our president is a murderer and a sociopathic serial killer," she said in the 10-minute video that was posted on her Facebook page.

De Lima, a former human rights commissioner, said her arrest was an act of revenge for her decade-long efforts to expose Duterte as the leader of death squads during his time as mayor of southern Davao city.

Duterte first raised allegations in August that De Lima had been running a drug trafficking ring with criminals inside the nation's biggest prison when she was the justice secretary in the previous government.

"I will have to destroy her in public," Duterte said then as he began a campaign to tarnish her reputation, including by making unsubstantiated allegations about her sex life.

"De Lima is not only screwing her driver, she is also screwing the nation."



World's cheapest smartphone boss held

AFP, New Delhi

The former managing director of a little-known Indian company that claimed to be selling the world's cheapest smartphone has been arrested for fraud, police said yesterday.

Mohit Goel, boss of the domestic handset maker Ringing Bells, was taken into custody in Ghaziabad late Thursday after a distributor complained it had not received phones worth 1.6 million rupees (around \$24,000).

Ayam Enterprises said it had paid 3 million rupees (\$45,000) after Goel persuaded it to distribute the Freedom 251 smartphone in November 2015 but only received 1.4 million rupees' worth. Deputy superintendent of police Manish Kumar Mishra said Goel had been arrested in Ghaziabad.

Bees have been taught by scientists to play football

MAIL ONLINE

They are unlikely to trouble the Premier League any time soon, but bees have been taught by scientists to play football.

For the first time, insects have demonstrated they can learn a complex skill and improve upon it.

Bees learned football not for a Premier League salary but for sugar, released from a yellow ball every time they successfully pushed it to the middle of a 'pitch'.

But they showed for the first time they can learn by watching and, rather than copy what they have seen, change it to make it better.

That skill has only previously been seen in humans, primates and marine mammals like dolphins.

A study by Queen Mary University of London found the insects, given a selection of balls, cleverly went for the closest even after watching demonstrator bees which always chose the furthest away.

Project supervisor and co-author

Professor Lars Chittk, also from Queen Mary University of London, said: "Our study puts the final nail in the coffin of the idea that small brains constrain insects to have limited behavioural flexibility and only simple learning abilities."

The study, published in the journal



Science, placed bumblebees on a platform and trained them to move a yellow ball from the edge to the centre.

When they were successful, a trapdoor in the ball would open, releasing a delicious sugar solution as their reward.

To learn the technique, the bees were trained under one of three conditions.

NEWSIN brief

No more visas for HRW staff: Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel will stop issuing work visas to Human Rights Watch staff, the NGO said yesterday, with the Jewish state accusing the group of being "fundamentally biased" against it. The New York-based watchdog, which has written critical reports about the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, applied months ago for a visa for its Israel and Palestine director, American citizen Omar Shakir.

Suicide bomber kills 8 soldiers in Yemen

AFP, Aden

A suicide bomber killed eight people and wounded 11 yesterday when he blew up his vehicle at the gate of a Yemeni army base, security sources said. The bomber struck Najda Camp in the Abyan provincial capital of Zinjibar just 55 kilometres along the coast from second city Aden where the government has its headquarters. He failed to get through the gate and heavy exchanges of fire ensued as other assailants tried to penetrate the base.

Lanka detains migrants bound for New Zealand

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday arrested 18 people suspected of trying to leave the country illegally for New Zealand, a navy spokesman said. A joint team of navy and police officers took the men into custody during a pre-dawn operation outside Colombo as they tried to board a fishing trawler. Sri Lankans have sought asylum in New Zealand in the past, most of them members of the island's Tamil minority.