US TRAVEL BAN 130 experts denounce Trump order

AFp, Washington

Over 130 US foreign policy experts have denounced President Donald Trump's revised travel ban, saying it undermines America's national security and interests as much as the original order barring travelers from some Muslim-majority countries and refugees.

"To Muslims -- including those victimized by or fighting against ISIS (Islamic State) -- it will send a message that reinforces the propaganda... that falsely claim the United States is at war with Islam," read the letter by former government officials and experts.

"Welcoming Muslim refugees and travelers, by contrast, exposes the lies of terrorists and counters their warped vision," added the document dated Friday.

Among the 134 signatories were some who served in either or both Republican and Democratic administrations were former senior diplomat Nicholas Burns, ex-National Security Council counter-terrorism director Richard Clarke and ex-undersecretary of

Most served under Democratic presidents, including former secretary of state Madeleine Albright,

defense Michele Flournoy.

former Homeland Security secretary Janet Napolitano, ex-national security advisor Susan Rice and ex-National Counterterrorism director Matthew Olsen. Their comments echo

those being made in court by US states claiming the modified measures discriminate against Muslims and are detrimental to US interests.

"Bans like those included in this order are harmful to US national security and beneath the dignity of our great nation," the letter read.



Riot police clash with demonstrators in the streets near the Turkish consulate in Rotterdam, Netherlands, yesterday.

PhOTO: ReUTERS

Third of west Mosul retaken

AFp, Mosul

Iraqi security forces have seized control of more than a third of west Mosul, a commander said yesterday, after a week of steady gains in their battle to retake the city from the Islamic State group.

Fierce fighting has shaken Mosul in recent days as thousands of US-backed Iraqi soldiers and police battle to reclaim the country's second city.

A renewed push against the jihadists launched last Sunday has seen IS forced from several neighbourhoods and key sites, including the main local government headquarters and the famed Mosul museum. Speaking to AFP on Sunday, Staff Major General

Maan al-Saadi of the elite Counter-Terrorism Service said "more than a third" of west Mosul was now under the control of security forces. CTS forces were battling IS inside the Mosul al-Jadida and Al-Aghawat areas yesterday, Saadi

be completed in the coming hours. Iraq's Joint Operations Command (JOC) said

said, adding that he expected the fighting there to

that forces from the Rapid Response Division, another special forces unit, and the federal police were also attacking the Bab al-Toub area on the edge of Mosul's Old City.

WAR ON ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ

irregular enemy who hides among the citizens

and uses tactics of booby-trapping, explosions

and suicide bombers, and the operation is taking

place with precision to preserve the lives of the

citizens," Brigadier General Yahya Rasool, the

"The battle is not easy... we are fighting an

spokesman for the JOC, told AFP. Still, he said, IS resistance "has begun to

weaken in a big way". IS seized Mosul in mid-2014 when the jihadist

group swept across areas north and west of Baghdad, taking control of swathes of territory and declaring a cross-border "caliphate" in Iraq and neighbouring Syria.

Backed by a US-led air strikes and other support, Iraqi forces have since retaken much of the territory they lost.

The operation to recapture Mosul -- then the last Iraqi city under IS control -- was launched in October.

After recapturing the east of the city, Iraqi forces last month set their sites on the west, where hundreds of thousands of civilians remain trapped.

In Syria the coalition is backing an Arab-Kurdish alliance known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) that is pushing towards the jihadists' de facto capital Raqa.

Turkish-backed rebels are also advancing against IS in northern Syria, as are government | 10 seats.

A new India has emerged: Modi

Indian PM says in victory speech after key victories in state polls **AGencies**

In a victory speech yesterday evening, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the BJP's near-historic victory in state elections is a mandate by the poor for the opportunities the BJP has afforded them and will continue to offer them.

"Growth is a difficult political issue. Development is always a central issue during every election. But, earlier parties were scared to fight elections on development. We fought on development," Modi said in the speech at the BJP's headquarters in New Delhi.

The PM was reiterating rhetoric from his poll campaign when he stressed that the BJP is committed to working for

the poor and is focussed on development and performance. "The poor are saying- I want to progress and I seek the opportunity from you. This is the foundation of a new

India, this is new India's credo," he said. And keeping an eye firmly on Lok Sabha 2019, he gave a shout out to India's middle class, too.

"The burden on the middle class should reduce. This will enable our middle classes to shine. If we bring together the poor's strength and the middle class's aspirations, no one

can stop us," Modi said. The PM also took forward his tweets of earlier today to coin a new catch phrase - "a new India." The mandate, he



said, in tweets and elaborated upon in his speech, is one for "a new India". He today also unveiled #IAmNewIndia, a nation-building exercise on the NaMo App, which is "a pledge to build a new India".

BJP won a surprise absolute majority in Uttar Pradesh in the north, which is home to 220 million people and seen as a key indicator of national politics. It won 311 of the total 403 seats there. It also won in Uttarakhand state.

The BJP also made big gains in the northeastern state of Manipur. The party won 21 of the 60 seats in the state, where it previously held none, behind Congress on 28.

Congress won in the northern state of Punjab, where it fended off a challenge from the fledgeling Aam Aadmi Party.

In Goa, the Congress led with 17 of the state's 40 seats, but fell short of a majority. Yesterday BJP said it will form government there with the help of other parties which has

Netherlands will 'pay price'

Warns Erdogan after Turkey ministers barred from campaign rallies there

AFp, Istanbul

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday warned the Netherlands it would pay a price for preventing top ministers from holding rallies ahead of a referendum on expanding his powers, as a crisis escalated with Turkey's key EU partners.

Erdogan renewed hugely controversial

accusations that the Netherlands -occupied by the Germans in World War II -- was behaving like the Nazis in its treatment of Turkish ministers.

Analysts are predicting a tight outcome to the April 16 referendum and key Turkish ministers have planned major rallies in key EU cities to win votes from millions of Turks resident abroad.

But Turkey's Family Minister Fatma Betul Sayan Kaya was expelled after being prevented from addressing a rally in the Dutch port city of Rotterdam.

Also this weekend, The Hague refused to allow Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu's plane to land ahead of a planned rally.

"Hey Holland! If you are sacrificing Turkish-Dutch relations for the sake of the

elections on Wednesday, you will pay a price," an angry Erdogan told a ceremony in Istanbul, referring to the March 15 election in Turkey's Nato ally.

"They will learn what diplomacy is," he growled, adding that what happened "cannot remain unanswered." Faced with an upsurge in support for the

ultra-right, European governments have come under pressure to take a hard line on Erdogan who is accused by

> critics of authoritarianism. Erdogan reaffirmed his accusations from Saturday that the Dutch behaviour over the Turkish visits

was "Nazism, fascism". Police clashed with pro-Erdogan demonstrators in the Netherlands overnight while in Istanbul a man

climbed onto the roof of the Dutch consulate yesterday and replaced the Dutch flag with a Turkish flag.

The flag was later taken down and Turkish officials insisted the consulate had not been entered from the outside and "consular officials" had hoisted the flag on their own initiative. The consulate declined to comment.



A vehicle carrying South Korea's ousted leader Park Geun-hye drives past her supporters as she arrives at her private home in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday. PhOTO: ReUTERS

US forces in Syria 'invaders': Assad

CNn ONline

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad scoffed and questioned US actions in Syria, calling American troops deploying to the country "invaders" because he hadn't given permission for them to enter the country and saying there's been no "concrete action" from the Trump administration toward IS.

"Any foreign troops coming to Syria without our invitation or consultation or permission, they are invaders, whether they are American, Turkish, or any other one," Assad said.

"And we don't think this is going to help. What are they going to do? To fight ISIS? The Americans lost nearly every war. They lost in Iraq, they had to withdraw at the end. Even in Somalia, let alone Vietnam in the past and Afghanistan, your neighboring country. They didn't succeed anywhere they sent troops, they only create a mess; they are very good in creating problems and destroying, but they are very bad in finding solutions."

The Syrian leader made the comments in an interview with Chinese media outlet Phoenix TV. It was published on Syria's state-news agency SANA on Saturday.

US Marines have arrived in northern Syria with artillery to support US-backed local forces fighting there, US officials said. The US-backed fighters are preparing to move in the coming weeks to assault the city of Raqqa, IS' self-declared capital, according to the officials.

The US has also deployed approximately 100 Army Rangers in and around Manbij, Syria.

Landslide at Ethiopia waste dump kills 30

AFp, Addis Ababa

At least 30 people were killed and dozens more hurt in a giant landslide of garbage at Ethiopia's largest rubbish dump on the outskirts of the capital Addis Ababa, a city official said yesterday.

An AFP journalist at the scene said the largest pile of rubbish at the Koshe landfill appeared to have collapsed, triggering Saturday's tragedy that levelled dozens of homes of squatters living there.

"The death toll is now 30," said an official.

He said many of the victims were squatters who scavenged for a living in the dump. The Koshe site has for more than 40 years been one of the main garbage dumps for Addis Ababa, a rapidly growing city of some four million people in the east African

country.

Top US prosecutor fired after refusing to quit on order

Afp, New York

High-profile New York prosecutor Preet Bharara -- who was among the federal attorneys asked to resign by the White House -- said Saturday that has been fired. US President Donald Trump's adminis-

tration on Friday demanded the resignations of 46 US prosecutors -- including Bharara -- appointed during the two terms of his predecessor Barack Obama. The federal attorney's firing capped a

standoff with the Trump administration that started when Bharara refused the White House order to resign. "I did not resign. Moments ago I was

fired," Bharara tweeted Saturday using his recently created personal account. "Being the US Attorney in SDNY will

forever be the greatest honor of my professional life." The Southern District of New York, the

prominent post to which Obama appointed Bharara in 2009, includes the Manhattan and Bronx boroughs as well as neighboring areas just north of the city.

Bharara began working there in the thick of the mortgage crisis, and rose to prominence after overseeing a number of insider

trading and public corruption cases.

SOUTH KOREA CRISIS

Impeached Park leaves presidential palace

AFp, Seoul

South Korea's impeached ex-president Park Geun-Hye left the Blue House yesterday, issuing an apology for not completing her full term as she arrived back at her private residence. Park vacated the presidential complex, accompanied by tight security,

two days after the Constitutional Court verdict removing her from office over a massive corruption scandal. The court upheld a parliamentary vote to impeach Park, effectively

removing her from office over a corruption scandal involving her close friend. But she had remained at the presidential Blue House since the verdict,

citing the need to repair her private home in southern Seoul before moving in. The ousted leader, seen greeting supporters outside her property yester-

day evening, later issued an apology through a former spokesman. "I would like to express an apology for failing to fulfill my term," Park said, according the Yonhap news agency. "Although it may take time, I believe the truth will eventually be

revealed." The court ruling removed Park's presidential immunity to criminal

indictment. She was found to have broken the law by allowing her friend Choi Soon-Sil to meddle in state affairs, and breached rules on public servants' activi-

ties. She has already been named a criminal suspect, accused of bribery for offering policy favours to firms that benefited Choi. A presidential election is to be held within 60 days of the ruling, with

local media suggesting May 9 as the most likely date. The likely winner -- by a distance -- is the liberal former Democratic Party leader Moon Jae-In who enjoys 36 percent popular support.

NEWSIN

Damascus blasts death toll jumps to 74

Afp, Beirut

The toll from twin bombings targeting Shia pilgrims in the centre of Damascus has risen to 74 dead, a monitor said yesterday. Among the victims of Saturday's blasts were 43 Iraqi pilgrims who had come to the Syrian capital to visit Shiite shrines in Damascus's famed Old City, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. No group has so far

claimed responsibility for **Suicide bombing attacks** foiled in Nigeria

Afp, Lagos

Civilian vigilantes foiled a suicide attack on the outskirts of Nigeria's flashpoint city of Maiduguri, killing two teenaged female bombers, police said yesterday. Boko Haram has regularly used suicide bombers in their eight-year insurgency, which seeks to establish a hardline Islamist state. The Boko Haram violence has claimed at least 20,000 and forced some 2.6 million others to flee their home, triggering a dire humanitarian crisis in the region.

Jordan releases Israeli schoolgirls killer

Afp, Amman A Jordanian soldier who shot

dead seven Israeli schoolgirls in 1997 was released from prison yesterday after serving out his life sentence, sparking outrage from the families of those killed. In March 1997, Ahmad Dakamseh fired an automatic weapon at schoolgirls on a trip to the Jordan-Israel border, killing seven of them and wounding five others and a teacher. His motives were never entirely clear, but he told the national security court during his trial that he fired his weapon at them after they mocked him while he was praying.