

US to solve N Korea problem alone

Says Trump, hopes to use trade as lever to secure Chinese co-op against Pyongyang

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump held out the possibility on Sunday of using trade as a lever to secure Chinese cooperation against North Korea and suggested Washington might deal with Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs on its own if need be.

The comments, in an interview published on Sunday by the Financial Times, appeared designed to pressure Chinese President Xi Jinping ahead of his visit to Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida this week.

"China has great influence over North Korea. And China will either decide to help us with North Korea, or they won't. And if they do that will be very good for China, and if they don't it won't be good for anyone," Trump was quoted as saying, according to an edited transcript published by the newspaper.

Asked what incentive the United States had to offer China, Trump replied: "Trade is the incentive. It is all about trade."

Asked if he would consider a "grand bargain" in which China pressured Pyongyang in return for a guarantee the United States would later remove troops from the Korean peninsula, the newspaper quoted Trump as saying: "Well if China is not going to solve North Korea, we will. That is all I am telling you."

It is not clear whether Trump's comments will move China, which has taken steps to increase economic pressure on Pyongyang but has long been unwilling to do anything that may destabilize the North and send millions of refugees across their border.



Displaced Iraqis who had fled their homes reach to get water before entering at Hammam al-Ail camp south of Mosul, Iraq, yesterday. Top aide to US President Donald Trump Jared Kushner, inset, is in Iraq on an official visit to get a first-hand assessment of the battle against Islamic State. PHOTO: REUTERS

South Korean liberal wins party primary

Poised to become next president

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korean human rights lawyer Moon Jae-in won the liberal Democratic Party primary vote yesterday, setting him on course to become the next president and perhaps take a softer line on North Korea.

Moon has been leading in opinion polls ahead of the May 9 election to succeed impeached Park Geun-hye, who was dismissed last month over a corruption scandal involving family-run conglomerates, or chaebol.

If elected, Moon, 64, is expected to soften South Korea's policy towards North Korea, possibly delay deployment of a U.S. anti-missile defence system that has enraged China and get tough on corporate criminals, including chaebol bosses.

"I will do everything I



Moon Jae-in

have to do to look after the failing standard of people's living, revive the economy and resurrect national security that's been riddled with holes," Moon told an enthusiastic party crowd in his acceptance speech.

In a major policy statement in March, Moon said there was no choice but to recognise Kim Jong Un as the leader of reclusive North Korea and deal with him.

North and South Korea are technically still at war because their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce, not a peace treaty. The North, heavily sanctioned for missile and nuclear tests in breach of UN Security Council resolutions, regularly threatens to destroy the South and its main ally, the United States.

"We can't deny that the ruler of the North Korean people is Kim Jong Un. We have no choice but to recognise Kim Jong Un as a counterpart, whether we put pressure and impose sanctions on North Korea or hold dialogue," Moon said.

NEWS IN brief

Five charged for 'hate crime' in London

AFP, London

British police said yesterday they had charged five people over a suspected hate crime attack on a 17-year-old Kurdish Iranian asylum-seeker in south London. The teenager was badly beaten by a group of around 20 people while he was at a bus stop with two friends outside a pub in Croydon on Friday night. Police said the teenager's condition was "serious but stable and is not believed to be life-threatening."

Somali pirates seize Indian ship, 11 crews

AFP, Mogadishu

Somali pirates have seized an Indian vessel carrying 11 crew members, the ship's owner said yesterday, the third such hijacking in less than a month as piracy resurges in the country. The "Al Kausar" cargo ship was carrying items such as wheat and sugar from Dubai via Yemen to Somalia's Bossaso port when it came under attack, owner Isaak Them told AFP.

UK minister voices support for Gibraltar

AFP, London

Brexit minister David Davis voiced Britain's "steadfast" support for Gibraltar in talks with Spain's foreign minister in Madrid yesterday amid a bitter sovereignty row over the tiny outcrop. Davis's visit to Spain had been planned for weeks, Prime Minister Theresa May's spokesman told reporters in London, although it had not been made public.

Serbia elects PM Vucic as president

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday congratulated Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic on his "convincing" win in Sunday's presidential election as the countries strive to boost their already close ties. A hardline nationalist who became a pro-European, Vucic wants to negotiate Serbia's accession to the EU but keep close ties with the country's traditional ally, Moscow.

Philippine soldiers kill 'more than 10' militants

REUTERS, Manila

Philippine soldiers killed "more than 10" Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf militants in an attempt to free Vietnamese captives held on a remote southern island as troops fired howitzer shells on rebel positions, an army general said yesterday. The small but violent militant group is holding more than two dozen captives on Jolo island.

No future for Assad: EU

Regime forces intensify bombardment of opposition-held areas around Damascus, central city of Hama

AGENCIES

President Bashar al-Assad has no future in post-conflict Syria but his fate is ultimately up to the Syrian people, EU foreign ministers said yesterday in response to an apparent shift in US policy.

The United States and the European Union have consistently demanded Assad stand down in any peace deal.

But last week Washington signalled it would no longer focus on Assad's ouster as it concentrates on the wider fight against terror groups such as Islamic State.

Asked what this meant for EU policy, bloc foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini said she believed it "would be impossible" to return to the status quo in Syria.

After nearly seven years of war, "it seems completely unrealistic to believe that the future of Syria will be exactly the same as it used to be in the past," Mogherini said as she arrived for an EU foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg.

"But this is for the Syrians to decide, that is clear ... any solution that can be acceptable by all Syrians, we will support it."

The foreign ministers later endorsed a statement which

noted: "The EU recalls that there can be no lasting peace in Syria under the current regime."

It said some 13.5 million Syrians were now in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria while another five million had sought refuge in neighbours, such as Turkey and other regional countries.

Meanwhile, Syrian activists said government forces have intensified their bombardment of opposition-held areas around Damascus and the central city of Hama.



Syrians carry an injured man following a government air strike on Hamouria, Damascus, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says the Damascus suburbs of Eastern Ghouta, as well as areas on the eastern edges of the capital, were hit by at least 50 airstrikes yesterday morning.

The activist group says scores of airstrikes also targeted the countryside north of Hama, reported AP. Syrian state media said government forces have reclaimed the village of Maardes after losing it to rebels two weeks ago.

Syrian rebels and al-Qaeda-linked fighters launched twin attacks on the contested areas two weeks ago. They reached within 10 kilometers, or 6 miles, of Hama, Syria's fourth largest city, before government forces and allied militias stopped the advance.

Ecuador socialist wins presidency

Conservative rival alleges fraud

AFP, Quito

Socialist Lenin Moreno was set to extend a decade of leftist rule in Ecuador yesterday after official results showed him winning the presidential election, as his conservative rival cried foul.

Both candidates claimed victory on the basis of conflicting exit polls from Sunday's runoff, but with 96.94 percent of districts reporting the National Electoral Council said that Moreno -- the designated heir to President Rafael Correa's "21st-century socialism" -- won 51.12 percent of the vote against 48.88 percent for ex-banker Guillermo Lasso.

The election was closely watched as a barometer of the political climate in Latin America, where more than a decade of leftist dominance has been waning.

It may also decide the fate of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has been holed up in Ecuador's London embassy since 2012.

Lasso however alleged fraud, claiming that his campaign had evidence of an attempt to rig the results.

"We are going to defend the will of the Ecuadorian people in the face of an attempted fraud that aims to install what would be an illegitimate government," Lasso said, setting up what could be a long and ugly fight.

Some Lasso supporters protested outside election offices in Quito and other cities demanding transparency in the vote count.



Lenin Moreno



Supporters of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan show their hands which read "Yes" during a rally for the upcoming referendum in the Black Sea city of Rize, Turkey, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Pakistan resumes Afghan refugees repatriation

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday resumed its mass repatriation of Afghan refugees despite past accusations of coercion in the supposedly voluntary UN programme to return hundreds of thousands to a war-torn nation.

The operation, which saw 380,000 registered refugees sent back from Pakistan in 2016, was halted in December for a routine winter break.

"The UNHCR voluntary repatriation programme for registered Afghan refugees resumed today," Duniya Aslam Khan, a spokeswoman for the refugee aid body, told AFP.

The UN had cut its cash grant for returnees from \$400 to \$200, she confirmed, citing "financial constraints facing humanitarian operations worldwide".

The grant was doubled in 2016 and became a factor in the surge of returnees across the border to Afghanistan after July last year, the UN has said.

But fears of a crackdown by Pakistan on

refugees, many of whom left Afghanistan decades ago, also contributed.

Human Rights Watch in a scathing report in February accused Pakistan of coercion, threats and abuse in the mass repatriation, and the UN of complicity.



An official carries out IRIS test on an Afghan refugee. PHOTO: REUTERS

The report said a combination of insecure legal status, the threat of deportation during winter and police abuses -- including extortion, arbitrary detention and night raids -- had left the Afghan refugees with no choice but to leave.

Mexico newspaper closes print edition

AFP, Mexico City

The Mexican newspaper where a reporter who investigated drug gangs worked until she was murdered has announced it is closing its print edition due to a lack of security.

The director of the Ciudad Juarez-based newspaper, Oscar Cantu, wrote Sunday in an article titled "Adios!" that Miroslava Breach's slaying last month led him to reflect on the dangers of practicing journalism in the region, where "high risk is the main ingredient."

Breach, 54, who wrote for the newspapers Norte and La Jornada, was found dead in her vehicle with multiple gunshot wounds to the head on March 23 in the city of Chihuahua, capital of the state of the same name.

Ciudad Juarez, located in Chihuahua state on the US border with Texas, was for years one of the bloodiest battlegrounds in Mexico as drug cartels fought over lucrative

RACIST ATTACKS African diplomats slam Indian govt

AFP, New Delhi

Representatives of 44 African countries accused the Indian government yesterday of failing to do enough to stop racist attacks on their nationals following a series of brutal assaults targeting Nigerians.

Around a dozen people were injured, some seriously, when a mob angered by the death of a local teenager went on the rampage in a satellite city of New Delhi last Monday.

The violence erupted after a group of Nigerian students who were detained in connection with the teen's death were released without charge, with police saying there was no evidence against them.

The vicious assault was captured on camera and shared widely on social media, triggering concern over a rise in racist violence against Africans in India.

In a statement, the African Heads of Mission said that "no known, sufficient and visible deterring measures were taken" by New Delhi after previous such attacks.

smuggling routes into the United States.

Breach reported on organized crime, drug-trafficking and corruption during a 20-year career as a journalist in northern Mexico.

She had recently published a report about a conflict between



leaders of the La Linea group, part of the powerful Juarez cartel.

"Deadly attacks as well as impunity in crimes against journalists have become evident, preventing us to freely continue to do our job," Cantu wrote.

Dalai Lama meets border guard from 1959 escape

AFP, Guwahati

The Dalai Lama has had an emotional reunion with the Indian border guard who escorted him as he fled his native Tibet following a failed uprising nearly 60 years ago.

The 81-year-old Tibetan spiritual leader, who has lived in exile ever since, was visibly emotional as he embraced the retired paramilitary guard on Sunday evening at the start of a visit to northeast India that has angered China.

The two men had not met since 1959 when the Buddhist monk fled his Himalayan homeland in fear of his life after China poured troops into the region to crush an uprising.

"Looking at your face, I now realise I must be very old too," he told 79-

year-old Naren Chandra Das at a ceremony in the northeastern city of Guwahati, according to the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency.

Das recalled how he was given orders not to speak to the young monk when he arrived in India after a 13-day trek through the Himalayas, disguised as a soldier to evade detection by Chinese troops.

"Our duty was only to guard and escort him during a part of his journey," he said.

The Dalai Lama en route to the remote Tawang monastery in the northeast Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, where he first crossed into the country. China has condemned the planned visit. Beijing has said it could seriously damage the relationship with New Delhi.

