

FIRST POST-PRESIDENCY SPEECH

# Ready to train new leaders: Obama

AFP, Chicago

Former US president Barack Obama returned to the public spotlight Monday, saying he hopes to spend the next phase of his life helping to "prepare the next generation of leadership."

After three months off, Obama -- looking rested and sporting a coat with no tie -- broke his silence in his adopted hometown of Chicago, speaking to a packed auditorium of more than 400 high school and college students at the University of Chicago.

He was greeted with a standing ovation, and was joined on stage by six students and recent college graduates for a discussion about the need for greater civic engagement among young people.

The 55-year-old Democrat, who ended his two terms at the White House in January -- handing power over to Donald Trump -- said he was "incredibly optimistic" about the future.

"I'm spending a lot of time thinking about: what is the most important thing I can do for my next job?" Obama said in his opening remarks at the university, where he once taught law.

"The single most important thing I can do is to help in any way I can to prepare the next generation of leadership to take up the baton and to take their own crack at changing the world," he said.

Obama took a few questions from the participants on stage, but mainly listened -- and did not offer any substantive commentary on how Trump is doing, in keeping with presidential protocol.



Displaced Iraqis push a wheelbarrow with children as they flee after a battle between Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service and Islamic State (IS) militants in western Mosul, Iraq, yesterday. Jihadist militants from the IS group posing as liberating security forces killed at least 15 civilians who welcomed them in central Mosul, officials said yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## The costs of reporting from North Korea

REUTERS, Pyongyang

North Korea rarely allows foreign correspondents into the country, but when it does, it makes them pay.

When Pyongyang invited 121 journalists to attend the birth anniversary celebrations of North Korea's founder-president, Kim Il Sung, just over a week ago, it was a great chance for the country to showcase its military might and present its socialist-realist propaganda to the world.

The visit also allowed North Korea to earn some foreign currency.

The cost of a seven-day reporting trip to one of the world's most impoverished and insulated countries came to about \$2,500 each, all paid to various government agencies. That represents about five years wages for an average North Korean.

Every charge was at the official exchange rate of 100 North Korean won to the dollar, despite a black market rate of about 8,400 to the dollar, according to people inside North Korea. All transactions had to be in cash, in hard currency.

Faced with increasingly tightening international sanctions that are threatening to throttle off some lucrative exports, such as coal, any hard currency is a welcome addition to Pyongyang's coffers.

Government minders escort journalists almost everywhere, so it's difficult to get won at the black market rate. In any case, foreigners are not allowed to use the local currency.

Most North Koreans I spoke to denied there was any black market for dollars. Except for one man who told me when no one else was listening that the unofficial rate fluctuated between 8,300 and 8,400 won to the dollar "depending on whether we've just had a nuclear test."

North Korea likely received more than \$300,000 from the money the visiting journalists spent on flights, hotels, visas and daily expenses.

# Hackers target Macron

Report says French candidate's campaign was target of cyber attacks by Russia last month; Moscow denies

AFP, Paris

French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron's political campaign was targeted by a group of Russian hackers last month, according to a report by a cybersecurity research group yesterday.

The Pawn Storm group, which has been linked to several high-profile attacks in the West, used "phishing" techniques to try to steal personal data from Macron and members of his En Marche! campaign, Japan-based Trend Micro said.

Pawn Storm, also known as APT28, is also believed to be behind the attacks last summer on the US Democratic National Committee, thought to be aimed at undermining Hillary Clinton's presidential bid.

It is widely suspected of having links to Russia's security services, and Moscow has been seen as a keen backer of Macron's rival in the presidential race Marine Le Pen, who met President Vladimir Putin in a surprise visit to Moscow ahead of the vote.

"There is always some technical uncer-

tainty when it comes to attribution," Loic Guezo, a strategist for Southern Europe at Trend Micro, told AFP.

"But we have analysed the operating tactics with data compiled over two years, which allowed us to determine the source."

Other suspected Pawn Storm targets in recent months include media groups such as The New York Times and Al-Jazeera.

Several political officials and government agencies also see the group behind sophisticated attacks, including ones targeting German Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU party, government ministries in Denmark and the Czech Republic, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

"To focus on such a range of targets over such a long time, you need plenty of human and financial resources," Guezo said.

But on Monday, Russia denied any involvement in the French election. "Which groups? Where do they come from? Why Russia?" Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.



## ROADSIDE BLAST

### 10 killed as Pak Taliban target Shia minority

REUTERS, Parachinar

Pakistani Taliban militants yesterday said they detonated a roadside bomb targeting members of the Shia minority that killed at least 10 people travelling in a minibus, and wounded several more, in a remote northwestern region.

Militants planted the explosive device in the Kurram Agency in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) bordering Afghanistan, said senior regional official Shahid Ali Khan.

"When the passengers were coming, they detonated the remote-controlled bomb," Khan, who is the assistant political agent for Kurram Agency, told Reuters.

# Turkish strikes kill 20 Kurdish fighters

AFP, Beirut

Turkish warplanes killed more than 20 Kurdish fighters yesterday in strikes in Syria and Iraq, where the Kurds are key players in the battle against the Islamic State group.

Turkey said it had carried out the strikes in northeastern Syria and northern Iraq against "terrorist havens" and vowed to continue action against groups it links to the outlawed Kurdistan's Workers' Party (PKK).

In northeastern Syria strikes targeting the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) -- who are leading the offensive against IS stronghold Raqa -- killed at least 18 people.

In northern Iraq they killed six peshmerga fighters from the autonomous Kurdish government, usually allied with Ankara, in an apparent accident. The peshmerga said the strike was "unacceptable" but blamed PKK-affiliated militia who were the apparent targets.



SYRIA-IRAQ WARS

The strikes underlined the complexities of the battlefields in Iraq and Syria, where twin US-backed offensives are seeking to dislodge IS jihadists from their last major urban strongholds.

They could also exacerbate tensions between Ankara and its Nato ally Washington, which sees the Kurds as one of the most effective fighting forces against IS.

Turkey's army said it launched the strikes "in order to destroy terrorist havens targeting our country".

"The operations will continue to be carried out from now with the same determination until the very last terrorist is neutralised," the army said.

Meanwhile, air strikes on a rebel-held village in northwestern Syria early yesterday killed 12 people and put a nearby field clinic out of service. The dead were killed in a first round of raids in Idlib province.

BREXIT TALKS

## EU toughens stance ahead of key summit

AFP, Brussels

The EU has hardened its position on Brexit talks ahead of a key summit, making new demands on financial services, immigration and Britain's exit bill, a document showed yesterday.

The leaders of the other 27 countries will stress that Britain will be liable for costs for at least a year after it leaves in 2019, according to the draft negotiating guidelines seen by AFP.

They insist that Britain's huge finance industry must also stick to EU rules if it wants easy access to European Union markets.

And Britain should give EU citizens permanent residency after living there for five years, they say, in a challenge for the British government which has vowed to limit immigration.

European diplomats agreed the changes on Monday at a meeting with the bloc's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier, ahead of Saturday's Brussels summit where EU leaders will approve "red lines" for two years of tough negotiations.

The leaders are also expected to have a "wider debate on Brexit and the upcoming talks" at the summit, a European source told AFP.

The EU's language has notably toughened from EU President Donald Tusk's first draft, issued two days after British Prime Minister Theresa May triggered the divorce process on March 29.

The new harder stance comes as May prepares to hold talks with European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker and Barnier in London today.



A demonstrator throws back a tear gas grenade at the riot police while rallying against Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro in Caracas, Venezuela, on Monday evening. Three people were killed in Venezuela in another day of nationwide protests, raising the death toll to 24 in weeks of anti-government demonstrations.

## Moth caterpillar joins fight against waste

AFP, Paris

A moth caterpillar commonly bred to provide fish bait feasts on a notoriously resistant plastic, scientists reported Monday, raising hopes the creature can help manage the global problem of plastic-bag pollution.

"This discovery could be an important tool for helping to get rid of the polyethylene plastic waste accumulated in landfill sites and oceans," said Cambridge University professor Paolo Bombelli, co-author of a study published in the journal Current Biology.

Polyethylene represents 40 percent of Europe's demand for plastic products, mostly in the form of packaging and shopping bags.

Taking many years to biodegrade, these objects constitute a serious hazard for the environment, especially for sea life, when they are not recycled.

In the European Union, 38 percent of plastic is thrown out in landfills.

The promising discovery centers on the wax worm -- the name for the caterpillar larva of Galleria mellonella, or greater wax moth. In its pre-caterpillar form, the species is commercially raised as maggots to provide fish bait and aquarium food.



## CATTLE PROTECTION

### India plans to tag millions of cows

AFP, New Delhi

India could issue millions of cows with unique identification numbers, the latest effort to protect the sacred animals amid a spike in violence by Hindu vigilantes against farmers accused of cattle smuggling.

The government has told the Supreme Court that millions of cows will be tagged with a tamper-proof plastic tag linked to a national database in a bid to curb smuggling within India and beyond its borders.

Cows are considered sacred in Hindu-majority India, and their slaughter is a punishable offence in many states.

"Each animal will have a unique number that will have details like age, breed and special marks," a senior official said.

# Ivanka forced to defend Trump at women's summit

AFP, Berlin

Ivanka Trump, making her overseas debut as the US "First Daughter" at a women's summit in Berlin yesterday, was forced to defend her father's attitude towards women.

Sitting on a G20 panel with female leaders including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Donald Trump's daughter drew chuckles from the audience when she praised "my father's advocacy" on the issue and his role as "a tremendous champion of supporting families and enabling them to thrive".

The panel moderator, a finance journalist, interjected, saying: "Some attitudes toward women your father has publicly displayed... might leave one questioning whether he is such an empowerer for women."

"I've certainly heard the criticism from the media and that's been perpetuated,"

replied the 35-year-old Ivanka.

"I think the thousands of women who have worked with and for my father for decades, when he was in the private sector, are testament to his belief and solid conviction in the potential of women and their ability to do the job as well as any man."

Ivanka, a glamorous former model who started her own fashion line, has worked for her billionaire-father's company and now has an office in the White House.

She said her father "encouraged me and enabled me to thrive".

"I grew up in a house where there were no barriers to what I could accomplish beyond my own perseverance and my own tenacity... There was no difference for me and my brothers."

Merkel is seen to be cultivating a good relationship with Ivanka as a key communication channel with the Trump presidency.



AFP, Vienna

## Iran nuclear deal under review

AFP, Vienna

Iran and major powers yesterday met in Vienna to review adherence to their 2015 nuclear deal as uncertainty grows about the landmark accord's future under US President Donald Trump.

The regular quarterly meeting was expected to hear, as Washington confirmed last week, that Iran is sticking to its side of the deal with the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany.

The accord saw Tehran drastically curb its nuclear activities in order to ease concerns that Iran wanted to build an atomic bomb. In return nuclear-related Western and UN sanctions were lifted.

However, Trump has ordered a 90-day review, saying last Thursday that Iran was "not living up to the spirit" of the "terrible" deal because of its actions in other areas.

This refers to Iran's support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, rebels in Yemen, and militias in Iraq and in Lebanon as well as Tehran's ballistic missile programme.

US State Department spokesman Mark Toner said Monday the review would examine the nuclear accord "in the larger context of Iran's role in the region and in the world, and then adjust accordingly."

Trump's Secretary of State Rex Tillerson last Wednesday expressed misgivings about the nuclear deal itself, in particular the time limits in key areas.

## NEWSIN brief

### UN asks Maldives to probe blogger killing

AFP, Malé

The UN yesterday demanded an immediate investigation into the murder of a liberal blogger in the Maldives, calling on the government to ensure the safety of dissidents. The High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein condemned Sunday's stabbing of Yameen Rasheed and urged a swift and thorough inquiry into the killing, meeting international standards.

### Thailand sets Oct date for king's cremation

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand will hold the cremation for its late king Bhumibol Adulyadej on October 26, the junta announced yesterday. Government spokesman Lieutenant General Sansern Kaewkumnerd said five days of funerary rites would begin on October 25, with the cremation held on the second evening. A public holiday will be declared that day.

### 20 people dead as boat capsizes in Senegal

AFP, Dakar

At least 20 people, almost all women, were killed when a wooden boat capsized off Senegal's central coast in a delta region popular with tourists, firefighters told AFP yesterday. The incident occurred on Monday night, with the traditional flat-bottomed boat overturning off Bettenty, an island area just north of The Gambia, with 72 on board.