

TRUMP TRAVEL BAN

US SC exempts grandparents, grandkids

AFP, Washington

The Supreme Court dealt President Donald Trump's government a fresh setback Wednesday, saying its controversial travel ban cannot be applied to grandparents and other close relatives of people living in the United States -- for now.

The court accepted a Hawaii federal judge's ruling last week that the Trump administration had too narrowly defined what constitutes "close family relationships" to determine exceptions to the ban on travelers from six mainly Muslim countries -- Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

That left in place Judge Derrick Watson's wider definition, which includes grandparents, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins of people living in the United States.

But in its brief order, the court backed the Trump administration by staying the part of Watson's ruling that would have expanded exemptions to its 120-day ban on all refugees.

The order said the Supreme Court's ruling is temporary, pending a federal appeals court's review of the issues.

The Supreme Court itself was partially the source of the dispute, having ruled in late June that the 90-day travel ban, aimed at better screening out potential security risks, can be broadly enforced for travelers from the six countries "who lack any bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States."

Days later, the government interpreted that to mean that only "close family" was exempted -- which it defined as the parents, spouses, children, sons- and daughters-in-law, siblings and step- and half-siblings of people in the United States.

Hawaii, one of several states fighting the travel ban since Trump first announced it in January, filed a court motion arguing that grandparents and grandchildren were by all measures also "close family."



An air tanker drops fire retardant on flames as firefighters continue to battle against the Detwiler fire in Mariposa, California on Wednesday. Inset, A house burns. The Detwiler fire is currently at 7 percent containment and has burned more than 45,000 acres and destroyed eight structures.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

'Extremely unfair to president'

Trump regrets hiring Sessions after Russia probe recusal

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump said he regretted his choice for attorney general Wednesday as he sought to protect himself from the growing firestorm over Russia's alleged election meddling which is engulfing his presidency.

On the eve of the six-month mark of Trump's inauguration, it also emerged that senators will next week grill three of the pivotal players in the Trump campaign -- including his eldest son and son-in-law -- over swirling allegations of the presidential campaign's collusion with Russia.

Trump Jr sent shockwaves through Washington last week by releasing a series of emails that detailed how he had attended the meeting after being promised "very high level and sensitive information" that was "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

The announcements came as the Trump administration and the Kremlin tried to quell an uproar about a previously undisclosed meeting between Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin during this month's G20 summit.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions was one of the first senior Republican politicians to endorse Trump before last

November's election and was rewarded by being appointed America's top law enforcement officer.

But he stood aside in March from overseeing an FBI-led probe into whether members of the Trump team colluded with Moscow during the election campaign after it emerged that Sessions had not disclosed during his Senate confirmation hearing that he met twice with the Russian ambassador to Washington.

In an interview with the New York Times, Trump said Sessions had acted unfairly in taking the job in the first place if he had felt in any way compromised.

"How do you take a job and then recuse yourself? If he would have recused himself before the job, I would have said, 'Thanks, Jeff, but I'm not going to take you,'" Trump said.

"It's extremely unfair -- and that's a mild word -- to the president."

Trump also criticized Sessions' performance at the Senate confirmation hearing in January, in which he denied meeting with any Russians when he had in fact met with the Russian ambassador.

The Senate Intelligence Committee is now due to grill the president's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who is one of the most powerful figures in the Trump White House, in a closed-door session next Monday, his lawyer told CNN.

SON, SON-IN-LAW TO APPEAR BEFORE US SENATE OVER MOSCOW-LINKED MEETING



AIDS claimed 1m lives in 2016: UN

AFP, Paris

AIDS claimed a million lives in 2016, almost half the 2005 toll that marked the peak of the deadly epidemic, said a UN report yesterday proclaiming "the scales have tipped".

Not only are new HIV infections and deaths declining, but more people than ever are on life-saving treatment, according to data published ahead of an AIDS science conference opening in Paris on Sunday.

"In 2016, 19.5 million of the 36.7 million people living with HIV had access to treatment," said the UNAIDS global roundup.

This marked the first time that more than half of infected people were receiving anti-retroviral treatment, which subdues the AIDS virus but does not kill it.

The year 2016 saw 1.8 million new infections, almost half the record number of some 3.5 million in 1997, said the report.

In total, 76.1 million people have been infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, since the epidemic started in the 1980s. Some 35 million have died.

As yet, there is no HIV vaccine or cure, and infected people rely on lifelong anti-retroviral therapy to stop the virus replicating.

Saudi prince arrested over 'abuse video'

AFP, Riyadh

A Saudi prince was arrested yesterday on King Salman's order, a state-run broadcaster reported, as outrage grew on social media over videos appearing to show him abusing members of the public.

Salman issued a warrant for "the immediate arrest ... and imprisonment" of Prince Saud, a descendent of Saudi Arabia's founder, along with a group of men who appeared in the videos uploaded to YouTube, Al-Ikhbariya television reported.

A video circulating on social media showed police escorting the young prince -- one of the thousands of members of the royal family -- out of a house in handcuffs.

The arrest came after the prince, whose face can clearly be seen in some of the videos shared via Twitter Wednesday, unleashed a wave of verbal and physical abuse on Saudis and foreigners.

"You park by my house, you ... eunuch, I'll screw your mother in her grave," he says to a dazed driver bleeding from the mouth, his clothes splattered with blood.

"Do you understand?" he asks the man, who nods and turns away.

In another video, a man moaning and clutching his head is led out of a house with an automatic rifle pointed at his back.

The prince also pummels a man cowering in a chair who waits for him to pause and insists, "Honest to God, I didn't do anything, I swear to God."

The videos have sparked anger on social media, with users identifying as Saudi citizens calling for the prince to be put on trial.

"No matter who you are -- prince, minister, citizen -- no one is above the law," read one tweet.

The victims in the videos will be called to testify in court, according to a royal decree carried by Al-Ikhbariya.

Saudi Arabia has one of the world's highest rates of execution and widely imposes harsh sentences for criminal offences.



Andreas Goebes of the bakers guild Heidelberg (R) watches as Princess Kate, the Duchess of Cambridge, and Britain's Prince William (L), the Duke of Cambridge, form pastry to pretzels during their visit of the market in the historic center of southern German town of Heidelberg, yesterday. The British royal couple is on a three-day visit in Germany.

BREXIT TALKS

EU calls for UK 'clarity'

AFP, Brussels

left to talk about."

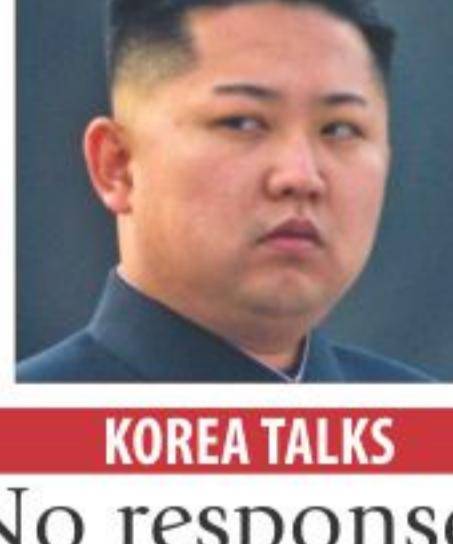
"A solution will require flexibility from both sides," he added.

The Brexit talks are the second round since negotiations formally began in June, a year after Britain's historic referendum vote to leave the 28-member European Union, but the first to really go into detail.

The negotiations are dealing with issues around Britain's divorce -- Britain's exit bill, the rights of EU citizens living in Britain, and the Northern Ireland border -- with talks on a future trade deal only set to start if leaders decide in October there has been "sufficient progress".

Barnier warned there was a "fundamental divergence" with Britain on whether the EU's top court would keep jurisdiction over the rights of three million European citizens living in Britain after the UK leaves the bloc.

The EU wants an outline deal agreed by October 2018, so that the European and British parliaments can approve it in time for Brexit day, which is scheduled for the end of March 2019.



KOREA TALKS

No response from North yet: South

AFP, Seoul

Hours before proposed military talks between South and North Korea, Pyongyang yesterday still refused to confirm its participation, officials said.

Seoul's defence ministry had offered rare talks with the North at the Panmunjom truce village on the heavily militarised inter-Korean border to discuss tension reduction today.

"There has been no response as of late Thursday", a defence ministry spokesman told AFP.

The Red Cross in Seoul had also proposed a meeting August 1 at the same venue to discuss reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War.

The twin proposals are the first concrete steps towards rapprochement with the North since South Korea in May elected the President Moon Jae-In, who favours greater engagement with Pyongyang.

The military meeting would mark the first official inter-Korea talks since December 2015. Moon's conservative predecessor Park Geun-Hye had refused to engage in substantive dialogue with Pyongyang unless it made a firm commitment to denuclearisation.

The development came as United States and Russia are waging rival campaigns at the United Nations Security Council over the type of ballistic missile fired by North Korea earlier this month as the US pushes to impose stronger sanctions on Pyongyang over the test.

SUPPORTING 'TERROR' CELL

Kuwait expels Iran diplomats

AFP, Kuwait City

Kuwait yesterday expelled Iranian diplomats and closed some embassy missions after the emirate's top court convicted a "terror" cell of links to the Islamic republic, the foreign ministry said.

The action was taken after a supreme court ruling last month said "Iranian sides helped and supported the cell members," the ministry said in a statement.

A senior government official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP around 15 diplomats were ordered to leave. Kuwait also ordered the closure of the Iranian "military, cultural and trade" missions, the official said. It was not immediately known if the Iranian ambassador is among the diplomats ordered to leave.

Last month Kuwait's supreme court sentenced the mastermind of the cell to life in jail and condemned 20 others to various prison terms for alleged links with Iran and Lebanese Shia militia Hezbollah, and plotting terror attacks in Kuwait.

The row comes at a time when Kuwait is trying to mediate an end to the Gulf's worst diplomatic crisis in years, after Saudi Arabia and its allies cut ties with Qatar over accusations it is too close to Iran and funds extremists. Unlike fellow Sunni-ruled Gulf partners Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, Kuwait maintained good relations with its Shia neighbour Iran.

Are you my surreal dad?

Salvador Dali to be exhumed in paternity case

AFP, Figueras

Salvador Dali's remains were to be exhumed yesterday from his Spanish hometown in an effort to test a fortune teller's claims the renowned surrealist is her father.

The artist's body is buried in the elaborate museum of his work Dali designed himself in the northeastern Spanish town of Figueras, where he was born over 110 years ago.

Pilar Abel, a 61-year-old who long worked as a psychic in Catalonia, says her mother had a relationship with the artist when she worked in Cadaques, a picturesque port where the painter lived for years. Abel is confirmed as Dali's only child, she could be entitled to a slice of at least 25 percent of the huge fortune and heritage of one of the most celebrated and prolific painters of the 20th century, said the woman's lawyer Enrique Blanquez.

The Salvador Dali Foundation had tried to fight off the exhumation with an appeal, but there was not enough time for all parties to

present their case, a court spokesman told AFP. Barring some "administrative or logistical surprise", the exhumation will go ahead, he said.

Authorities will begin removing the over one-tonne slab covering the tomb of the eccentric artist, who died in 1989 with no known child heirs, after visitors have cleared out for the day from the Dali Theatre-Museum.

Forensic scientists will take DNA samples in the form of bone or tooth fragments directly from the grave where Dali was buried and they will then be sent to Madrid to undergo the necessary tests.

Abel has already provided a saliva sample for comparison, with results

expected within a matter of weeks.

"I just want to know the truth. I am very positive, very happy," Abel told reporters at a Madrid hotel on the eve of Dali's exhumation.

A question has always hung over his sexuality, with some claiming he was a closet homosexual who preferred to watch others having sex rather than taking part.

ARRESTS OF RIGHTS ACTIVISTS IN TURKEY

Germany vows full overhaul of ties

AFP, Berlin

Germany yesterday vowed stinging measures impacting tourism and investment in Turkey and a full "overhaul" of their troubled relations, signalling its patience had snapped after Ankara's arrests of human rights activists.

The foreign ministry stepped up its travel advisory for the Nato ally, warning it could no longer guarantee its citizens' safety amid "arbitrary" mass arrests, a step set to hit a sector crucial to Turkey's ailing economy.

Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, a day after his ministry summoned Turkey's ambassador, interrupted his holidays and returned to Berlin to deliver his unusually strong comments towards President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Gabriel said Germany would review state guarantees for foreign investment in Turkey and urge businesses against putting their money there, and also review its support for billions in EU financial flows earmarked for the long-time aspirant to membership of the bloc.

He accused Erdogan of trying to muzzle "every critical voice" with mass arrests in sweeping crackdowns over the last year.

Relations between Turkey and Germany, home to three million ethnic Turks, have been badly strained, particularly since the failed coup attempt a year ago against Erdogan.