

EU defends Iran deal amid Trump criticism

Urges US not to reimpose sanctions

REUTERS, Luxembourg
The European Union yesterday reaffirmed its support for a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers despite sharp criticism of the accord by President Donald Trump, and urged US lawmakers not to reimpose sanctions on Tehran.

Trump defied both US allies and adversaries on Friday by refusing to formally certify that Tehran is complying with the accord, even though international inspectors say it is, and said he might ultimately terminate the agreement.

EU foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg said a failure to uphold an international agreement backed by the UN Security Council could have serious consequences for regional peace, and also undermine efforts to check North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

"As Europeans together, we are very worried that the decision of the US president could lead us back into military confrontation with Iran," German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel told reporters.

After a closed-door meeting chaired by EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini on how best to proceed on the Iran issue, the ministers issued a joint statement saying the 2015 deal was key to preventing the global spread of nuclear weapons.

"The EU is committed to the continued full and effective implementation of all parts of the JCPOA," it said, referring to the 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action', the formal name of the accord with Iran agreed in July 2015 in Vienna.

"Non-proliferation is a major element of world security and rupturing that would be extremely damaging," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told reporters. "We hope that Congress does not put this accord in jeopardy."



People gather on the road as they welcome Iraqi security forces members, who continue to advance in military vehicles in Kirkuk yesterday. Iraqi forces seized a key military base and other territory in a major operation against Kurds sparked by a controversial independence referendum.

IS Southeast Asia chief killed in battle

Says Philippines

AFP, Manila
The head of the Islamic State group in Southeast Asia, who figures on the US "most wanted terrorist" list, was killed yesterday in the battle to reclaim a militant-held Philippine city, officials said.

Isnilon Hapilon's reported death came during a final push to end the nearly five-month siege of Marawi, a battle that has claimed more than 1,000 lives and raised fears that IS was seeking to set up a regional base in the southern Philippines.

President Rodrigo Duterte and security analyst says Hapilon has been a key figure in the jihadist outfit's drive to establish a Southeast Asian caliphate as they suffer battlefield defeats in Iraq and Syria.

The military said the long-haired leader was killed in a dawn offensive against rebel forces in Marawi. Maute, one of two brothers who allied with Hapilon to plot the takeover of the city.

"It's a big deal for us that they were killed," Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana told reporters, adding that Hapilon's death was a symbolic blow to regional militancy because he had been declared the leader emeritus of the Islamic State group.

Philippine military chief of staff General Eduardo Año showed reporters a photo of Hapilon, who was Hapilon's bloodied face.

The US government had offered a \$5 million bounty for information leading to Hapilon's arrest, describing the 31-year-old as the "top leader of the southern Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf group, which the US considers a 'foreign terrorist organization'."

Año said Philippine ground forces launched an assault before dawn, sparking a four-hour gun battle that led to the two leaders' deaths.

DNA tests will be carried out on the two bodies because of the reward offer. It also led to the deaths of Philippine governments, Lorenzana said.

Catalan leader stalls on independence drive

Gets time till Thursday morning to clarify stance

AFP, Barcelona

Madrid yesterday gave Catalonia's separatist leader three more days to say "return to legality" after he refused to say whether he would follow through on a threat to declare independence from Spain.

Responding to an initial deadline set by the central government, Carles Puigdemont sent a letter early yesterday calling for talks with Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy "as soon as possible" amid Spain's worst political crisis in decades.

But he stopped short of giving a definitive "yes or no" as demanded by Madrid after his ambiguous independence speech last week, and Spain gave him until Thursday morning to clarify.

Anything less than a full climb-down by Thursday's 10:00 am (0800 GMT) deadline is likely to prompt moves by Madrid to impose direct control over the semi-autonomous region.

"The government regrets that the president of the Catalan government has not responded to the request made by the



Carles Puigdemont, leader of the Catalan independence movement.

Stealth warship joins India's Navy fleet

PTI, Visakhapatnam

India's Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman yesterday commissioned the indigenously built anti-submarine warfare stealth corvette INS Kilan at the Eastern Naval Command here.

Kilan is the latest indigenous warship after Shivalk class, Kolkata class and sister ships INS Kamorta and INS Kadmat to have joined the Indian Navy's arsenal wherein a plethora of weapons and sensors have been integrated to provide a Common Operational Picture (COP), an official release said.

It is India's first major warship to have a super-structure of carbon fibre composite material resulting in improved stealth features, lower top weight and maintenance costs, it said.

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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Austria shifts to right

Conservative party led by Kurz seals clear win

REUTERS, Vienna

Austria's shift to the right in a parliamentary election has paved the way for young conservative star Sebastian Kurz to become the country's next leader and opened a path for the resurgent far right to return to power.

The People's Party, which named 31-year-old Foreign Minister Kurz its leader only in May, secured a clear victory on Sunday with a hard line on immigration that left little space between it and the anti-Islam Freedom Party (FPÖ).

That party was founded by former Nazis and is a sister to France's National Front and Germany's AfD, both of which were also buoyed by voter concerns about Europe's migration crisis in 2015.

Kurz will seek a majority and will probably need a coalition partner to govern. Having pledged to move away from often deadlocked coalitions with the centre-left like the one currently in power, an alliance with the FPÖ is likely.

Austria was a gateway into Germany for more than a million people fleeing war



Sebastian Kurz, new leader of Austria.

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Tillerson plays down tensions with Trump

REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Sunday minimized tensions with his boss, President Donald Trump, and brushed aside comments from an influential lawmaker, who compared Tillerson's undermining of his top diplomat to a public castration.

"I am fully committed to his objectives. I agree with what he is trying to do," Tillerson said in a written statement.

Tillerson said of Trump on CNN's 'State of the Union' program.

Tillerson's tenure as secretary of state has been dogged by rumors about rifts with Trump over policy.

Earlier this month, Trump undercut Tillerson in a written message, saying the secretary of state was wasting his time trying to negotiate with North Korea.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker said Trump's comments were the equivalent of undermining the secretary in public.

"I checked. I'm fully intact," Tillerson said when asked about Corker's comments.

Tillerson reportedly declined to answer a question about a report by NBC News that said the secretary of state has called Trump a "moron" during a private meeting in July with US officials.

The secretary of state accused CNN moderator Katie Couric of "making a game" out of pressing him on the "moron" comment.



Demonstrators in Kenya simulate throwing a stone toward police station in Kisumu yesterday to demand the removal of officials from national election oversight body, Interim Elections & Boundaries Commission (IEBC) allegedly implicated in manipulation of the votes tally during the August 8, presidential elections. PHOTO: AFP

N Korea EMP attack could 'kill 90pc of Americans'

US experts warn Congress at a subcommittee hearing

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Newly developed warheads from North Korea which could shut down the US power grid and kill the vast majority of Americans within a year.

Two members of the disbanded congressional Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) commission said at a recent House Homeland Security subcommittee hearing that a nuclear EMP attack from Kim Jong Un was the "biggest threat" to the US yet it remains "unacknowledged" by the government.

More attention has been focused on the regime's continued testing of intercontinental ballistic missiles this year, but the dictatorship also recently claimed to have tested a hydrogen bomb underground in September.

The regime said in a public statement that such a bomb could be detonated at high altitudes for "super-powerful EMP attack according to strategic goals."

William Graham, chairman of the former EMP commission and its former chief of staff, Peter



Peter Vincent Pry, former EMP commission member.

Vincent Pry, warned the hearing that such an attack could "shut down the US electric power grid for an indefinite period, leading to the death within a year of up to 90 per cent of all Americans."

They urged the House to protect the grid, and warned that US ballistic missile defence systems are currently designed to intercept missiles from North Korea that approach the US over the North Polar region, but not over the South Polar region.

Former Republican representative Curt Weldon, one of the founders of the former commission, wrote in The Hill last month:

"A nuclear EMP attack would destroy electric power everywhere, cause planes to crash, stop cars and rail traffic, blackout electric grids and other critical infrastructure that make modern civilization, and life itself, possible. Eventually, millions would die from starvation, disease, and societal collapse."

The two former commission members added that North Korea is thought to have 60 nuclear weapons, and its intercontinental ballistic missiles could reach Denver and Chicago, and "perhaps the entire US."

Israel okays Hebron settlement plans

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli authorities yesterday approved permits for 31 settler homes in Hebron in the occupied West Bank, the first such approvals for the flashpoint city since 2002, the Peace Now NGO said.

An Israeli committee approved construction permits for the 31 units, Anat Ben Nun of Peace Now told AFP. Several hundred Israeli settlers live in the heart of Hebron under heavy military guard among some 200,000 Palestinians.

The approvals are among some 4,000 settler home plans to be advanced as part of a push to greatly boost settlement growth, an Israeli official has said.

Peace Now, which closely monitors settlement construction, said a planning council meeting today and tomorrow is expected to have more than 2,000 units on the agenda.

Settlement building in the occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem is considered illegal under international law.

It is also seen as a major obstacle to peace as the settlements are built on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition government leans heavily on settlers and their supporters to maintain its thin parliamentary majority.

Adityanath said the famed monument built by US president Barack Obama's administration, but that has not been the case with his successor Donald Trump.

Taj built by traitors

Says BJP legislator from India's Uttar Pradesh

NDTV ONLINE

The world-renowned Taj Mahal has been dragged into an ugly political row after its exclusion from a Uttar Pradesh tourism booklet earlier this month. First Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the famed monument does not reflect Indian culture.

Now Sanget Som, a controversial lawmaker of the ruling BJP, has said the monument was built by "traitors" and is a "blot on Indian culture."

"Many people were worried that the Taj Mahal was removed from the list of historical places in the UP tourism booklet. What history are we talking about? The man who built Taj Mahal imprisoned his father. He wanted to massacre Hindus. If this is history, then it is very unfortunate and we will change this history. I guarantee you" Som said at a rally in Meerut on Sunday.

His party senior Nalin Kohli disowned the comments and said:



The Taj Mahal in Agra, India.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Death toll from Somalia bomb attacks tops 300

REUTERS, Mogadishu

More than 300 people died after twin bomb explosions in Mogadishu, an official said Tuesday as local police searched for hostages in search of friends and relatives caught up in Somalia's deadliest attack in a decade. The blasts - for which no organisation has claimed responsibility - struck at two bus junctions in the city.

May heads for Brussels amid Brexit deadlock

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister Theresa May travelled to Brussels yesterday for talks over dinner with EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker after deadlock in Brexit appeared to dash her hopes a summit this week could launch negotiations on future trade

Wildfires kill 34 in Portugal, Spain

AFP, Valencia

At least 31 people have died in fires ravaging forests in northern and central Portugal over the past 24 hours, rescuers said yesterday afternoon, after three people were killed in Spain in blazes sparked by arsonists and fanned by Hurricane Ophelia.

Two killed as freak storm hits Ireland

AFP, Dublin

Ireland was hit by an "unprecedented storm" yesterday that left two people dead, 120,000 homes and businesses without power and closed every school in the country, a police spokesman said one woman was killed outside the village of Aglish, near the south coast, apparently by a tree falling on her car.