

Beijing hits back hard at US tariffs

REUTERS, Beijing

China hit back quickly yesterday against the Trump administration's plans to impose tariffs on \$50 billion in Chinese goods, retaliating with a list of similar duties on key US imports including soybeans, planes, cars, beef and chemicals.

The speed with which the trade struggle between Washington and Beijing is ratcheting up – China took less than 11 hours to respond with its own measures – led to a sharp selloff in global stock markets and commodities.

US President Donald Trump, who has long charged that his predecessors served the United States badly in trade matters, rejected the notion that the tit-for-tat moves amounted to a trade war between the world's two economic superpowers.

"We are not in a trade war with China, that war was lost many years ago by the foolish, or incompetent, people who represented the US," Trump wrote in a post on Twitter early yesterday.

Because the actions will not be carried out immediately, there may be room for maneuver. Publication of Washington's list starts a period of public comment and consultation expected to last around two months. The effective date of China's moves depends on when the US action takes effect.

US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said in an interview with CNBC that it would not be surprising if the US and China trade actions led to negotiations, although he would not speculate on when this might happen.

US-made goods that appear to face added tariffs in China based, on an analysis of Beijing's list, include Tesla Inc electric cars, Ford Motor Co's Lincoln auto models, Gulfstream jets made by General Dynamics Corp and Brown-Forman Corp's Jack Daniel's whiskey.

Unlike Washington's list, which was filled with many obscure industrial items, China's list strikes at signature US

Trump tweets 'we are not in a trade war with China'

China calls on WTO to join against US protectionism

Speed of retaliatory steps stun financial markets



exports, including soybeans, frozen beef, cotton and other key agricultural commodities produced in states from Iowa to Texas that voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election.

While Washington targeted products that benefit from Chinese industrial policy, including its "Made in China 2025" initiative to replace advanced technology imports with domestic products in strategic industries such as advanced IT and robotics, Beijing's appears aimed at inflicting political damage.

Beijing's announcement triggered heavy selling in global financial markets, with US stock futures sliding 1.5 percent and US soybean futures plunging nearly 5 percent and on track for their biggest fall since July 2016. The dollar briefly extended early losses, while China's yuan skidded in offshore trade.

China also launched a dispute settlement procedure at the World Trade Organization yesterday, the commerce ministry said in a separate statement, adding that Washington had committed a "flagrant violation of WTO rules".

Foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said China had shown sincerity in wanting to resolve the dispute through negotiations.

"But the best opportunities for resolving the issues through dialogue and negotiations have been repeatedly missed by the US side," he told a regular briefing yesterday.



A border patrol agent apprehends immigrants who illegally crossed the border from Mexico into the US in the Rio Grande Valley sector, near McAllen, Texas, US, Tuesday. President Donald Trump on Tuesday vowed to deploy the military to secure America's southern border, as a caravan of Central American migrants headed north through Mexico toward the United States.

Israeli forces kill one near Gaza border

AFP, Gaza City

A Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli forces on the Gaza border Tuesday, the health ministry in the strip said, as tensions remained high days after 17 people were killed when a mass demonstration led to clashes.

The ministry identified the dead man as 25-year-old Ahmed Arafat, saying he was shot in the chest during clashes east of Bureij in central Gaza.

It was the first death since at least 17 Palestinians were killed by Israeli troops on Friday when a protest by tens of thousands of people resulted in clashes. That was the deadliest day since the 2014 war.

Israel's use of live fire has come under criticism from rights groups, while the European Union and UN chief Antonio Guterres have called for an independent investigation.

SHOOTING AT YOUTUBE HEADQUARTERS

Female suspect dead, 3 hurt

REUTERS, San Bruno

The woman identified by police as the attacker who wounded three people at YouTube's headquarters in California was a vegan blogger who accused the video-sharing service of discriminating against her, according to her online profile.

Police said 39-year-old Nasim Najafi Aghdam from San Diego was behind Tuesday's shooting at YouTube's offices in Silicon Valley, south of San Francisco, where the company owned by Alphabet Inc's Google employs nearly 2,000 people.

A man was in critical condition and two women were seriously wounded in the attack, which ended when Aghdam shot and killed herself.

Californian media reported that Aghdam's family had warned the authorities that she may target YouTube prior to the shooting. Her father Ismail Aghdam told The Mercury News that he had told police that she might be going to YouTube's headquarters because she "hated" the company.

Police said they were still investigating possible motives but Aghdam's online activities show that she believed YouTube was deliberately obstructing her videos from being viewed.

"YouTube filtered my channels to keep them from getting views," she wrote on YouTube according to a screenshot of her account. Her channel was deleted on Tuesday.

Writing in Persian on her Instagram account, Aghdam said she was born in Iranian city of Urmiah but that she was not planning to return to Iran. "I think I am doing a great job. I have never fallen in love and have never got married. I have no physical and psychological diseases," she wrote.

"But I live on a planet that is full of injustice and diseases."

Her family in Southern California recently reported her missing because she had not been answering her phone for two days, police said.

At one point early Tuesday, Mountain View, California, police found her sleeping in her car and called her family to say everything was under control, hours before she walked onto the company grounds with a handgun and opened fire.

The United States is in the grips of a fierce national debate around tighter curbs on gun ownership after the killing of 17 people in a mass shooting at a Florida high school in February. Authorities there failed to act on two warnings about the attacker prior to the shooting, prompting a public outcry.

Shooter believed YouTube restricted views of her videos

Father warned police about his daughter: media

Police still probing motive



Nasim Aghdam

SYRIA WAR

Trump agrees to keep US troops a 'little longer'

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump agreed in a National Security Council meeting this week to keep US troops in Syria a little longer but wants them out relatively soon, a senior administration official said yesterday.

Trump did not approve a specific withdrawal timetable at Tuesday's meeting, the official said. He wants to ensure Islamic State militants are defeated but wants other countries in the region and the United Nations to step up and help provide stability in Syria, the official said.

"We're not going to immediately withdraw but neither is the president willing to back a long-term commitment," the official said.

Trump had signaled his desire to get US forces out of Syria in a speech last Thursday in Ohio, and officials said he had privately been pressing for an early withdrawal in talks with his national security aides.

His advisers have been pressing him to maintain at least a small force in Syria to ensure the militants are defeated and prevent Iran from gaining an important foothold.

In the National Security Council meeting, Trump made clear that he did not want to stay in Syria for a lengthy period. The senior official said the impression Trump left was that he would like to withdraw in a year or less.

"He's not going to tolerate several years to a half decade," the official said.

Brett McGurk, the US special envoy for the global coalition against Islamic State, speaking alongside Votel at an event in Washington on Tuesday, said the US fight against Islamic State, also known as IS, was not over.



Presidents Hassan Rouhani of Iran, Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and Vladimir Putin of Russia pose before their meeting in Ankara, yesterday. After the meeting, in a joint statement, Turkey, Russia and Iran said they were committed to achieving a "lasting ceasefire" in Syria.

CASTE VIOLENCE IN INDIA

Mob burns Dalit leaders' homes

AFP, New Delhi

Indian security forces enforced a curfew on a tense district yesterday after a mob set fire to the homes of two political figures from the country's low-caste Dalit community.

Amid heightened communal tensions over caste rights, some 5,000 people angered by earlier Dalit protests torched the houses Tuesday of a state legislator and former lawmaker in the Karauli district of the popular tourist state of Rajasthan.

Neither was at home at the time, the district's top administrative official told AFP.

The incident followed violent nationwide protests by tens of thousands of Dalits on Monday which left at least nine dead.

Once dismissed as "untouchables", Dalits make up 200 million of India's 1.25 billion population and are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy.

They have been enraged at a Supreme Court ruling that they say weakens a law intended to protect lower caste communities. The court last month banned the automatic arrest of people accused of attacking or harassing Dalits and other marginalised groups.

While the court says its intention was to prevent fake cases, Dalit leaders say the community is now more vulnerable to attack.

MILITIA ATTACK

22 fighters, UN peacekeeper killed in CAR

AFP, United Nations

A peacekeeper was killed and 11 others wounded when a UN base was attacked early Tuesday in the Central African Republic, triggering heavy fighting that also left 22 fighters dead.

The anti-balaka mostly Christian militia launched the dawn attack on the temporary UN base in Tagbara, near the southern city of Bambari, sparking several hours of gunfire.

"Peacekeepers fired back and after several hours of exchange of fire, one peacekeeper was killed and 11 others were injured," said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric. The soldier was from Mauritania.

UK, US behind 'grotesque' poisoning of former spy

Accuses Russia as UK lab fails to prove origin of nerve agent

AFP, The Hague

Russia and Britain yesterday faced off trading accusations at a tense meeting of the world's chemical weapons watchdog, as Moscow accused British and US secret services of being behind the poisoning of a Russian former double agent.

London slammed as "perverse" a Russian proposal for a joint probe into the poisoning of ex-spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia with a nerve agent, dismissing it as a "diversionary tactic".

But Russian officials hit back that accusations of Moscow engineering the attack were a "grotesque provocation ... crudely concocted by the British and American security services".

The OPCW's experts have taken samples from the site in Salisbury and sent them to certified laboratories for analysis, but are still awaiting the results.

British authorities say the Skripals were poisoned with the Soviet-designed nerve agent Novichok in the town of Salisbury on March 4, and said it was "highly likely" Moscow was behind it.

But the British defence laboratory analysing the nerve agent revealed Tuesday that it could not say whether the substance came from Russia. Moscow hailed that as a vindication of its repeated denials of involvement.

The crisis has sent the long-difficult relations between Russia and the West plummeting to new lows. Both sides have already expelled scores of diplomats.

Britain has also suspended high-level diplomatic contact with Moscow.

The Kremlin has also demanded an apology from British Prime Minister Theresa May and her government for implicating Russian President Vladimir Putin in the attack, saying this "idiocy has gone too far".

Kremlin demands apology from British PM

NEWSINbrief

Timbuktu Malian jihadist to face ICC

AFP, The Hague

A Malian jihadist was to appear for the first time yesterday before international war crimes judges, accused of demolishing Timbuktu's fabled shrines, as well as rape, torture and sex slavery. Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz, a member of the Ansar Dine jihadist group, was the "de facto chief of the Islamic police" in Timbuktu, the ICC said.

12 European hostages freed in Cameroon

AFP, Douala

Twelve European tourists have been freed after being taken hostage in western Cameroon, where anglophone militants are campaigning for an independent state, the government said yesterday. The group of seven Swiss and five Italians were rescued by troops on Monday in a "special operation," the communications ministry said in a statement.

Bahrain discovers 80b barrels of oil

AFP, Manama

Bahrain yesterday announced its newly discovered shale oil reserve was estimated to contain more than 80 billion barrels, making the once-marginal oil producer potentially a major player in the market. The small Gulf state currently produces some 50,000 barrels per day of crude oil from the Bahrain Field, discovered in 1932.

Journos faced arrest, assault in US: report

AFP, Washington

Journalists in the United States were assaulted 45 times last year, and 34 were arrested while covering news, a report from a media rights watchdog said Tuesday. The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press cited a total of 122 incidents including physical assaults, arrests, equipment seizures and border checks.



Duterte calls UN rights chief 'empty-headed'

AFP, Manila

President Rodrigo Duterte has launched a foul-mouthed attack on the UN human rights chief, calling him "empty-headed" in a row over international criticism of the Philippine leader's deadly drug war.

Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, had last month said Duterte needed "psychiatric evaluation" and that his verbal attacks on a United Nations rapporteur who condemned his anti-drug crackdown could not go unanswered.

"Hey son of a *****, you commissioner, I need to go to a psychiatrist?" asked Duterte in a speech late Tuesday.

"The psychiatrist told me: 'You are okay, mayor. You are just fond of cursing,'" Duterte said, referring to his former title.

The Philippine leader added he had been advised to refrain from commenting on the remarks of Zeid, a Jordanian prince, but he wanted to "seek revenge".

"Look, you have a big head but it's empty. There is no grey matter between your ears. It's hollow. It's empty. It cannot even sustain a nutrient for your hair to grow because his hair here is gone," Duterte said as he touched his head.

Duterte, 73, has launched curse-laden tirades on world leaders, including former US President Barack Obama and Pope Francis, as well as critics of his anti-crime crackdown.