

RESOLUTION TO END US SUPPORT FOR SAUDI-LED YEMEN WAR

Trump vetoes bill

Afp, Washington

President Donald Trump has vetoed a resolution from Congress directing him to end US support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen, the second such move of his presidency.

The resolution was a harsh bipartisan rebuke to Trump that took the historic step of curtailing a president's war-making powers -- a step he condemned in a statement announcing his veto.

"This resolution is an unnecessary, dangerous attempt to weaken my constitutional authorities, endangering the lives of American citizens and brave service members, both today and in the future," Trump said.

The veto was the second of his presidency, after he overrode a congressional resolution that aimed to reverse the border emergency he declared in order to secure more funding for his wall between the US and Mexico in March.

Vetoing the measure is an "effective green light for the war strategy that has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis to continue," said International Rescue Committee president and CEO David Miliband.

"Yemen is at a breaking point with 10 million people on the brink of famine. There are as many as 100 civilian casualties per week, and Yemenis are more likely to be killed at home than in any other structure."

Trump argued that US support for the bloody war between the Saudi-backed Yemeni government and Iran-aligned Huthi rebels was necessary for a variety of reasons, "first and foremost" to "protect the safety of the more than 80,000 Americans who reside in certain coalition countries."

The president also said the resolution would "harm the foreign policy of the United States" and "harm our bilateral relationships."

And it would "negatively affect our ongoing efforts to prevent civilian casualties and prevent the spread of terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and ISIS, and embolden Iran's malign activities in Yemen," Trump said, referring to two Sunni Muslim militant groups and his Shia bete noire.

The resolution, which passed the US House of Representatives earlier this month and the Senate in March, was a historic milestone, as it was the first time in history that a measure invoking the 1973 War Powers Resolution reached the president's desk.



Indian poll station workers transport Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) and Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines with a horse on the trek to the remote high altitude Darjeeling constituency polling station in Srikhola near the India-Nepal border, yesterday. The polling booth in Srikhola at an altitude of 2,800 metres (9,200 feet) above sea level is the highest elevation for a voting station in Bengal and will be used by voters when the Darjeeling constituency votes today during the second phase of the mammoth Indian elections.

PHOTO: AFP



Bashir moved to prison

Sudan's military rulers have transferred ousted president Omar al-Bashir to prison, a family source said yesterday, as doctors marched through the capital to join a sit-in protest at the army complex. Following the dramatic end to Bashir's rule of three decades last week, he was moved late Tuesday "to Kober prison in Khartoum," the source said without revealing his name for security reasons. The detention of Bashir has failed to pacify protesters, who launched anti-government demonstrations in December and have for days been camped out in front of Khartoum's army headquarters. Journalists held a separate rally, calling for press freedom and holding signs demanding state media be run by "independent, professional journalists."

NZ lowers terror threat level; police disarmed

New Zealand police yesterday ended the routine arming of frontline officers as the terrorism threat level was lowered a month after the Christchurch mosques massacre. Police and security agencies reduced the threat level from high to medium, meaning authorities judge that another attack, violent criminal behaviour, or violent protest remains "feasible" rather than "very likely." Frontline New Zealand police have historically not carried firearms and many people were shocked to see them heavily armed after 50 Muslims were gunned down while at Friday prayers.



6 killed in Libya capital

Rocket fire on the Libyan capital Tripoli, which the UN-recognised government blamed on military strongman Khalifa Haftar, killed six people ahead of a Security Council meeting yesterday over a cease-fire. Diplomats have long complained that Libyan peace efforts have been stymied by major powers backing the rival sides, with Haftar ally Russia quibbling over the proposed wording of the cease-fire demand even as the bombardment of Tripoli intensifies. Three of the six killed in the rocket fire on the south Tripoli neighbourhoods of Abu Salim and Al-Antisar late on Tuesday were women. 35 other people were wounded.

SOURCE: AFP

'LEGENDARY' NOTRE-DAME ROOF

Carpenters 'Mona Lisa' gone

Afp, Paris

The charred roof of the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris was once a legend that "astounded the Middle Ages" and still fascinates master carpenters. Thomas Buechi of the Charpente Concept group told AFP.

It is possibly one of the greatest masterpieces for French master carpenters. For a painter it would have been a bit as if the Mona Lisa went up in smoke.

The framework (known as "the forest") was mythical, it was a legend for several reasons. It was so complex that it astounded the Middle Ages.

First of all, it took 50 years to prepare the timber. They began cutting around 1,500 trees, sometime around the year 1200.

These were laid for a year with the top turned to the North to align them with the energy of the earth. The bark was then removed and they were immersed in a swamp for 25 years to preserve the wood from fungus and insects. Around 1225, the wood was removed from the water and the trunks were sawed into beams and allowed to dry for another 25 years.

Given average lifespans at the time, it meant that most of those who cut down the trees never saw the roof structure.

The French revolution left the cathedral in ruins. In the middle of the 19th century the decision to redo the spire was made.

Rebuilding this masterpiece would involve all professionals in the wood sector. It will be a massive mobilisation.

But thanks to a small yet enduring corps of artisans specialised in traditional stone and woodwork techniques, France's ambitious goal of restoring the fire-ravaged Notre-Dame cathedral within five years may be within reach, experts say.

But officials in the sector add they will probably need to hire hundreds of new apprentices to carry on the intricate and often arduous work, much of which can't be replicated by modern technology.

"It's a niche market. There aren't that many projects but there aren't that many of us either," said Benoit Dulion, who heads a firm in the central Yonne department that restores timber roof frames.

For decades the French state has spent heavily on the exacting upkeep of its cultural treasures, ensuring the preservation of artistic and architectural know-how dating back to the Middle Ages.

Maintaining the country's 40,000 registered monuments is effectively a full-time job, with schools passing on time-honed techniques to successive generations.

In France there are plenty of oaks, the wood will not be a problem. They could use old trees and leave more space for young ones to grow. In the Trocais forest (in central France) there are oak trees that are several hundred years old.

Experts say today's technology would allow work to proceed faster. For seasoning of wood and replacing the roof, they say, it won't take more than five years.



This general view shows debris inside the Notre-Dame Cathedral, on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

EU threatens reprisals if US sanctions interests in Cuba

Afp, Brussels

The European Union is threatening the United States with reprisals if President Donald Trump decides to sanction EU investments in Cuba, a copy of a letter showed yesterday.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini and trade commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom sent the warning in a letter dated April 10 to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, according to the letter obtained by AFP.

US National Security Advisor John Bolton was expected to formally unveil a shift in policy yesterday opening the way for lawsuits in US courts over property confiscated by Cuba.

Bolton "will announce the enforcement of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act," a US official said.

By ending once-routine US presidential waivers of provisions in the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, Cuban exiles will be allowed to sue both private firms and the Havana government for profiting from

properties nationalised after Fidel Castro's 1959 communist revolution.

While US courts cannot directly enforce decisions inside Cuba, the Helms-Burton Act is meant to send a chilling message to foreign investors -- including Americans -- who may increasingly decide to exit or steer clear of the island.

In their letter, Mogherini and Malmstrom urged Pompeo to stick to what they said was an agreement on managing policy differences over Cuba under which the US waived Title III and the EU suspended a threatened case at the World Trade Organization against Washington.

They said they were calling on Washington "to maintain a full waiver of Title III for EU companies and citizens," the letter said.

"Failing this, the EU will be obliged to use all means at its disposal, including in cooperation with other international partners, to protect its interests," they said.

"The EU is considering a possible launch of the WTO case," the letter added.

Thunderstorms kill 35 in India

Afp, New Delhi

Thunderstorms swept across western India killing at least 35 people and leaving widespread damage, officials said yesterday.

Strong winds barreled through Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh states felling walls, trees and electricity lines. The storms have also been blamed for at least 25 deaths in Pakistan this week.

At least 10 people were killed in the desert state of Rajasthan, where a wall of dust swept over several cities. Another 10 were killed in neighbouring Gujarat and 15 in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, state emergency services told AFP.

Officials said victims were hit by lightning, falling trees or electrocuted by power lines.

Strong winds and sudden rains also hit the capital, New Delhi, bringing searing summer temperatures down by 10 degrees.

The storms forced the cancellation of several political rallies as India's national election gathers pace. The wind blew away a tent that was to have been used for a rally by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Himmatnagar in Gujarat.

More than 125 people were killed in a wave of storms that battered northern Indian states in May last year. Lightning kills thousands in India every year, mostly farmers working in fields.

NEWSIN brief

Parliament endorses Sisi power extension

Afp, Cairo

Egypt's parliament on Tuesday approved constitutional amendments allowing President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to stay in power until 2030, state media reported. Deputies also backed other sweeping changes to the constitution including to give the military greater influence in political life as well as granting Sisi more control over the judiciary. The amendments are to be put to a public referendum whose date was to be announced yesterday.

Red Cross aid arrives in Venezuela

Afp, Caracas

The first shipment of Red Cross humanitarian aid arrived in crisis-hit Venezuela on Tuesday following approval from President Nicolas Maduro's government, the organization confirmed. The shipment included 24 tons of medical supplies and 14 power units to be distributed amongst eight hospitals and 30 outpatient clinics. Some 3,100 volunteers will take part in the distribution of the supplies that arrived from Panama.

Canada conservatives win Alberta polls

Afp, Ottawa

Canada's opposition conservatives won a clear victory in provincial elections in oil-rich Alberta Tuesday, in a setback for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his environmental policies just six months ahead of national polls. The United Conservative Party won a large majority in the legislature, with its Jason Kenney set to become Alberta premier, according to Canadian television projections.

BID TO EVADE ARREST

Peru's ex-president kills himself

Afp, Lima

Former Peru president Alan Garcia died in hospital yesterday after shooting himself in the head at his home as police were about to arrest him in a graft investigation, a party official said.

"Alan Garcia has died, long live Apra," said Omar Quesada, the general secretary of Garcia's American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (Apra) party. The attempted arrest took place at 6:30 am (1130 GMT) at Garcia's home in the posh Miraflores neighborhood of Lima.

Garcia, who was president from 1985-90 and again from 2006-11, is suspected of having taken bribes from Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht in return for large-scale public works contracts.

In November he sought refuge in the Uruguayan Embassy and applied for asylum but he left the next month after it was denied.

He is one of four Peruvian ex-presidents embroiled in various corruption scandals alongside Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, Ollanta Humala and Alejandro Toledo.

Odebrecht has admitted to paying \$29 million in bribes to Peruvian officials over three administrations.



Anything for a good turnout

Indonesia lures voters with ghouls, superheros and tons of fun

Afp, Surabaya

Dressed like Count Dracula, Yasim Adnan doesn't look much like an election official, but neither do his staff who are decked out as mummies and spooky nuns with blood pouring from their eyes.

The 37-year-old Indonesian presided over one of the creepiest ballot stations in the Muslim majority country yesterday as it held a giant election that featured some 190 million voters and 245,000 candidates vying for public office, including a new president.

To bolster turnout at some 800,000 polling booths nationwide, election officials pulled out all the stops, from dressing like ghouls and superheroes to enlisting the help of elephants in Sumatra.

In Tangerang, outside the capital Jakarta, voters cast their ballots at Adnan's horror-themed polling station which was outfitted with cardboard coffins and blood-stained rags that hung from the ceiling.

Staff were allowed any costume they chose, as long as it didn't appear to favour either president Joko Widodo or his re-election rival Prabowo Subianto.

"We're trying to attract people so there will



be less golput," Adnan told AFP, using the Indonesian term for citizens who don't vote.

It seemed to work for some locals.

"This is amazing -- the theme is so different from other stations," said 42-year-old Komariah Usia.

There was also a photo booth on hand for successful ballot casters -- whose fingers were dipped in indelible ink to prevent double voting -- keen to snap a picture of themselves as proof of their civic duty.

Some restaurants and other retailers were offering free food and drink to those held up their ink-stained finger as proof they voted.

In Surabaya, Indonesia's second-biggest city, an Avengers-themed polling station also proved a hit.



Election officials there dressed as the cartoon superheroes as well as the Amazing Spiderman, helping disabled voters cast a ballot and pressing fingers into the Muslim-approved halal ink jars.

"We made it look this way to motivate millennials, especially first-time voters," said polling station chief Andilio, who goes by one name.

But he also hoped that staff would take the Avengers costumes to heart by serving "voters just like how these characters would".

"Safeguard democracy and the election so it will be smooth, safe, and peaceful," he added.

Not to be outdone, officials in Sumatra enlisted the help of three critically endangered Sumatran elephants to boost voter numbers and raise awareness about their dwindling numbers in the wild.