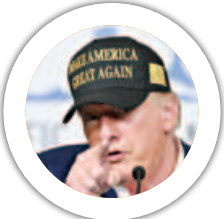


“I think it’s better if we have direct talks. I think it goes faster, and you understand the other side a lot better than if you go through intermediaries.”

DONALD TRUMP on talks with Iran on nuke deal



“Trump is not going to fall into the trap of endless negotiations.... We will know soon enough, in a matter of weeks, not months, whether Russia is serious about peace or not.”

MARCO RUBIO US secretary of state on Ukraine war



“Future investments, investments announced in the last weeks, should be suspended for a time for as long as the situation with the US is not clarified.”

EMMANUEL MACRON French president reacting to US tariff



A young boy looks on as Palestinians stand amid the devastation in the yard of a school yesterday, a day after it was hit by an Israeli strike, in the al-Tuffah neighbourhood of Gaza City.

PHOTO: AFP

South Korea court ousts impeached president Yoon

AFP, Seoul

South Korea’s Constitutional Court yesterday unanimously ruled to remove impeached president Yoon Suk Yeol from office over his disastrous martial law declaration, triggering fresh elections after months of political turmoil.

Yoon, 64, was suspended by lawmakers over his December 3 attempt to subvert civilian rule, which saw armed soldiers deployed to parliament. He was also arrested on insurrection charges as part of a separate criminal case.

Millions of Koreans watched the Constitutional Court hand down its verdict live on television, with the country’s main messaging app KakaoTalk telling AFP that some users were experiencing delays due to a sudden surge in traffic.

“Given the serious negative impact and far-reaching consequences of the respondent’s constitutional violations... (We) dismiss respondent President Yoon Suk Yeol,” acting court President Moon Hyung-bae said while delivering the ruling.

Yoon’s removal, which is effective immediately, triggers fresh presidential elections, which must be held within 60 days. Authorities will announce a date in the coming days.

Outside the court, AFP reporters heard Yoon supporters shouting threats that they wanted to kill the judges, who decided unanimously to uphold Yoon’s impeachment and have been given additional security protection by police.

Yoon’s actions “violate the core principles of the rule of law and democratic governance”, the

judges said in their ruling.

Yoon sending armed soldiers to parliament in a bid to prevent lawmakers from voting down his decree “violated the political neutrality of the armed forces”.

He deployed troops for “political purposes”, the judges added.

“In the end, the respondent’s

Ji Yeon Hong, a political science professor at University of Michigan, told AFP.

“He failed to grasp the magnitude of the power entrusted to him and showed a deeply biased understanding of democracy and political leadership.”

Yoon is the second South Korean



unconstitutional and illegal acts are a betrayal of the people’s trust and constitute a serious violation of the law that cannot be tolerated,” they ruled.

Opposition party lawmakers clapped their hands as the verdict was announced, calling it “historic”, while lawmakers from Yoon’s party filed out of the courtroom.

Yoon apologised for failing to meet the people’s “expectations” in a brief statement released after the verdict.

The dismissed president “will likely be remembered as a leader who was fundamentally unprepared -- and perhaps unqualified -- for the presidency,”

leader to be impeached by the court after Park Geun-hye in 2017.

After weeks of tense hearings, judges spent more than a month deliberating the case while public unrest swelled.

Police raised the security alert to the highest possible level yesterday. Officers encircled the courthouse with a ring of vehicles and stationed special operations teams in the vicinity.

Anti-Yoon protesters gathered outdoors to watch a live broadcast of the verdict, cheering and holding hands. When Yoon’s removal was announced, they erupted into wild cheers, with some bursting into tears.

Russian drone attack kills five in Kharkiv

AFP, Kyiv

Russian drone strikes killed at least five people and wounded more than 30 in the northeastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, authorities said yesterday, the latest barrage amid mounting US pressure for a ceasefire.

Russia and Ukraine have stepped up aerial attacks even as US President Donald Trump pushes them to come to the negotiating table and strike a deal to end more than three years of costly fighting.

The attack on Kharkiv came hours before French and British military chiefs arrived in Kyiv for talks on how a European peacekeeping force could be deployed to Ukraine to help enforce any future ceasefire.

“An 88-year-old man died in hospital ... As of this moment, five people are dead and 32 are wounded,” Kharkiv Governor Oleg Synegubov said on social media, updating the previous toll.

An AFP reporter in the city saw rescue workers climbing through the smouldering rubble of a destroyed residential building, as grey smoke engulfed the air where apartments used to stand.

Ukraine has repeatedly accused Russia of targeting residential areas and civilians throughout its three-year invasion.

Buy \$5m Trump card for US visa!

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump unveiled the first “gold card”, a residency permit sold for \$5 million each, aboard Air Force One on Thursday.

Holding a prototype that bore his face and an inscription “The Trump Card”, the Republican president told reporters that the special visa would probably be available “in less than two weeks”.

“I’m the first buyer,” he said. “Pretty exciting, huh?”

Trump previously said that sales of the new visa, a high price version of the traditional green card, would bring in job creators and could be used to reduce the US national deficit.

The billionaire former real estate tycoon, who has made the deportation of millions of undocumented migrants a priority for his second term, said the new card would be a route to highly prized US citizenship.

He said in February that his administration hoped to sell “maybe a million” of the cards and did not rule out that Russian oligarchs may be eligible.



Israeli military kills teenager in West Bank

AFP, Ramallah



The Israeli army yesterday said that its soldiers shot dead a Palestinian who threw stones at troops near the occupied West Bank village of Husan, whose mayor told AFP the boy was 17.

The army said that on Thursday evening “several terrorists hurled

rocks toward Road 375 adjacent to Husan... Soldiers who were operating in the area responded with fire toward the terrorists, eliminated one terrorist and hit an additional terrorist”.

Husan mayor Jamal Sabateen said the army had opened fired on youngsters throwing stones in the village west of Bethlehem.

“The Israeli army opened fire on them -- killed one and injured another. The army took them, and up until now, they haven’t been returned,” Sabateen told AFP.

The West Bank-based Palestinian health ministry reported the killing of the young man “by Israeli gunfire” and identified him as Yussef Zaoul.

Husan sits seven kilometres (four miles) west of Bethlehem, in a region usually quieter than the northern cities of Jenin and Tulkarem, bastions of Palestinian groups where the Israeli military has been operating for months.

The health ministry also reported the death of 42-year-old Hussein Hardan on Friday.

It said Hardan was killed “by Israeli gunfire” in Jenin at dawn.

Since the start of the Gaza war in October 2023, violence has soared in the West Bank.

Israeli troops or settlers have killed at least 917 Palestinians, including militants, in the territory since then, according to health ministry figures.

Trump’s tariff war reshapes how US treats allies

AFP, Washington

Japan and Taiwan promised billions in investment. Britain offered an invitation from the king.

In the end, even US allies failed to dissuade President Donald Trump from hitting them with tariffs, which threaten to remake not just the global economy but the foundations of US foreign policy.

Trump, in what he called “Liberation Day,” on Wednesday unleashed across-the-board global tariffs on US friends and foes alike with some of the most punishing rates hitting longstanding US allies.

“This is a huge change in how we deal with the world,” said Danielle Pletka of the conservative American Enterprise Institute.

Trump, seeing himself as a master dealmaker, believes he can gain leverage when effectively “you take exports hostage, and then you start negotiating the price of their release.”

“That’s not usually how America does business. Sometimes it will do business this way with our adversaries,” she said. “It is very rarely how we do business with our allies.”

Heather Hurlburt, who was chief of staff to the US trade representative during former president Joe Biden’s administration, said the US has traditionally put security ties first.

“What you now have is the people around Trump saying we want to fix our economic relationships, and the security relationships

can follow where we approve of the economic relationships.

“That’s a complete inversion in how US policy has worked,” said Hurlburt, now an associate fellow at think tank Chatham House.

In his first term, Trump confounded US allies, but many found combinations of flattery and incentives to prevent drastic actions.

In his first term, leaders like late Japan PM Shinzo Abe and French President Emmanuel Macron could gain a little by building rapport with Trump.

In the White House Rose Garden on Wednesday, Trump instead basked in praise from a blue-collar worker who declared Trump the greatest president ever as he was invited to the podium.

People around Trump saying we want to fix our economic ties, and the security ties can follow where we approve of the economic ties. That’s a complete inversion in how US policy has worked.



Ahead of the tariffs, some US partners tried to woo Trump with big announcements. Chipmaking giant TSMC of Taiwan, which counts on the US for security against China, said last month that it would invest \$100 billion in the US.

Trump acknowledged the investment in his remarks but said that Taiwan “took all of our computer chips and semiconductors” and announced 32 percent tariffs on its exports.

A Washington-based diplomat of one country hit by heavy tariffs said his government decided on a quiet approach, reaching out to Trump officials to plead for cooperation.

“It didn’t work at all. The tariffs are much higher than anything we were expecting,” he said on condition of anonymity.

Trump, in sharp contrast to Biden, has piled pressure on allies. He has demanded Europe spend more on its own defense and

take the lead in arming Ukraine.

Vice President JD Vance, in an interview with Breitbart News, said the US would no longer be the “piggy bank of the world” and drew a link between economic and security policies.

“In a word, it’s nationalism,” he told the right-wing outlet. “In our economic policy, we’re going to fight back against ridiculous trade practices. In our foreign policy, we’re going to stop starting stupid wars.”

Trump has vowed to generate “trillions of dollars” from tariffs to reduce taxes and stimulate domestic manufacturing.

Most mainstream economists dismiss Trump’s logic, noting that tariff costs will be passed on to consumers. Wall Street on Thursday suffered its worst fall in five years.

Hurlburt, the Chatham House expert, said that policymakers around Trump consider tariffs an “opening move” to reshape the economic order, with tariffs eventually stabilizing at a “reciprocal level” and a weaker dollar boosting US exports.

To achieve such a long-term transformation, she said, “you need at least some level of cooperation with other countries” -- which will need to be certain that they can make deals that the United States will honour.

“It’s a little unclear that other countries will indeed conclude that negotiating with us is a good investment,” she said.