

Trump: 'Big Results Will Come' From Putin Summit



President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin shake hands as they hold a joint news conference after their meeting in Helsinki, Finland July 16, 2018.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- U.S. President Donald Trump said Wednesday he got on well with Russian President Vladimir Putin at their summit in Finland and "big results will come".

"So many people at the higher ends of intelligence loved my press conference performance in Helsinki. Putin and I discussed many important subjects at our earlier meeting. We got along well which truly bothered many haters who wanted to see a boxing match. Big results will come!" he said on Twitter.

"While the NATO meeting in

Brussels was an acknowledged triumph, with billions of dollars more being put up by member countries at a faster pace, the meeting with Russia may prove to be, in the long run, an even greater success. Many positive things will come out of that meeting," he tweeted.

Trump sought on Tuesday to calm the storm over what critics said was his failure to hold Putin accountable for what U.S. intelligence agencies said was meddling in the 2016 U.S. election, saying he misspoke in the joint news conference in Helsinki.

Trump on Monday shied away

from criticizing the Russian leader for Moscow's actions to undermine the election and cast doubt on U.S. intelligence agencies, prompting calls by some U.S. lawmakers for tougher sanctions and other actions to punish Russia. Putin denies any Russian interference in the vote.

"I said the word 'would' instead of 'wouldn't,'" Trump told reporters at the White House, more than 24 hours after his appearance with Putin. "The sentence should have been, 'I don't see any reason why it wouldn't be Russia.'"

Trump, speaking to reporters in the Oval Office, said he had full faith and support for U.S. intelligence agencies and accepted their conclusion that Russia meddled in the election.

"I have felt very strongly that while Russia's actions had no impact at all on the outcome of the election, let me be totally clear in saying that -- and I've said this many times -- I accept our intelligence community's conclusion that Russia's meddling in the 2016 election took place," Trump said at the White House.

Trump hailed last week's NATO summit in Europe as victory for his tough stance of demanding the United States' European allies make big new defense spending pledges.

Tunisian Ministers to Declare Property Under New Law



Tunisians hold an anti-corruption protest in Tunis, May 13, 2017.

TUNIS (Middle East Eye) -- The Tunisian parliament approved a law to combat illicit enrichment, a step designed to strengthen the government's fight against widespread corruption in the country.

Since the 2011 uprising, Tunisia has been held up as a model of democracy for the region. Economic progress has lagged, however, and corruption remains a major problem in the North African state.

The law will force the president, ministers, senior officials in the public sector, independent bodies, banks, judges, security forces, journalists and unions to declare their property.

"The law is a revolution because it will allow the national group to scrutinize the unknown wealth that has been acquired illegally," Prime Minister Youssef Chahed said.

The parliamentary speaker, Mohamed Naceur, said the law "is another step in efforts to fight corruption, ensure transparency and preserve public money".

The penalties for illicit enrichment include fines and imprisonment for five years.

Last year, the government confiscated

property and froze bank accounts of about 20 prominent businessmen arrested on suspicion of corruption in an unprecedented government campaign against graft.

Chafik Jaraya, who maintains political contacts in Tunisia and Libya and helped finance the Nidaa Tounes ruling party during the last elections in 2014, was among those arrested last year. He is in jail awaiting trial. His lawyer has said the charges are politically motivated.

Tunisia's anti-corruption committee says graft is still widespread and threatens Tunisia with billions of dollars a year in losses.

It added that corruption had spread in all sectors including security, public tenders and health.

Tunisia was the first country to topple its president in the wave of the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions.

Former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who lives with his wife in exile in Saudi Arabia, has been convicted several times by Tunisian courts on corruption charges and for his role in the death of protesters during the uprising. Sentences against him have ranged from 10 years to life in prison.

California Wildfire Nears Yosemite National Park



The Ferguson Fire burns along a ridgeline in unincorporated Mariposa County, California on July 16, 2018.

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) -- A fierce California wildfire crept toward the boundary of Yosemite National Park on Tuesday as crews fought through steep, often inaccessible terrain and thick smoke to protect a string of small mountain communities in the path of the flames.

The so-called Ferguson Fire, which started on Friday night and killed a firefighter the following day, had charred nearly 19 square miles (49 square kilometers) by Tuesday afternoon and was burning just a few miles (km) outside the park.

"The fire continues to grow," fire spokeswoman Adrienne Freeman said. "There's a lot of vegetation and it's very, very dry, there's a significant amount of beetle kill (in

the trees)."

"The story is, this is steep terrain," Freeman said. "You would have a difficult time walking on some of these slopes or getting people into these canyons. There are a lot of places where we simply cannot put people because it's not safe."

Making the job more difficult was an inversion layer of thick black smoke pouring off the flames and visible for miles (km) that prevented water-dropping helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft from flying low into narrow canyons, she said.

State Route 140, a western entry point into Yosemite, remained closed by the flames. Investigators have not yet determined the cause of the conflagration.

As the blaze marched slowly east and south from its starting point

at Savage Trading Post, 20 miles (32 km) southwest of the park's boundary in the Sierra Nevada mountains, fire managers warned that the communities of Jerseydale, Mariposa Pines, Clearing House and Incline could be in danger.

A mandatory evacuation was ordered over the weekend for more than 100 homes deemed most threatened in Jerseydale, Freeman said.

Firefighter Braden Varney was killed on Saturday when a bulldozer he was using to cut a fire break overturned, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Varney is the 10th U.S. wildland firefighter to die in the line of duty this year, according to National Interagency Fire Center data.

California has had its worst start to the fire season in a decade, with more than 220,421 acres (89,201 hectares) blackened and six major wildfires burning statewide as of Tuesday, according to the agency.

Wildfires have already burned more than 3.3 million acres (1.3 million hectares) across the United States this year, more than the year-to-date average of about 3 million acres (1.2 million hectares) over the past 10 years.

The risk of large wildfires is set to ease in much of the Southwest and Rocky Mountains due to expected summer rains, but risk levels will remain high in California through at least October, according to the agency.

UN Urges World to Support 'Wretched' Rohingya



IOM Director General Ambassador William Lacy Swing (3rd L) meets new mothers from the Rohingya refugee and local communities in the world's biggest refugee settlement, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

UNITED NATIONS (UNIC) -- A failure to remain focused on the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh "would have tragic outcomes" for the nearly one million children, women and men living in Cox's Bazar, said Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) William Lacy Swing.

He said that the refugee families from the mainly-Muslim minority group who had fled their homes since last August across the Myanmar border were "in danger of becoming the wretched of the earth, homeless and without a future."

"The world must rally to support them," he said, wrapping up a week-long visit to the country and neighboring Bangladesh.

The Rohingya have suffered a pattern of persecution over decades -- lacking even the most basic human rights, starting with citizenship -- in their native Myanmar.

The IOM chief noted the major improvements made to the camp management in the Cox's Bazar area, and infrastructure -- including pathways, bridges, drainage, sanitation and shelters -- carried out by the United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national partners, since his last visit in October 2017.

However, as monsoon rains turn many hillsides to mud, many Rohingya now live in desperately cramped conditions on bare sandy slopes, with only bamboo and tarpaulin shelters to protect them from the elements, in

what has now become the world's largest refugee camp.

The humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar, which scaled up in August 2017, is now facing significant funding shortfalls.

Swing warned that with only one quarter of the joint funding appeal for the entire response met so far, much of the progress made in recent months was at serious risk of collapsing.

That, he said, would create yet another life-threatening disaster for the Rohingya and the Bangladeshi host community whose resources are already stretched to the limit.

In parallel, the UN Special Envoy on Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener, who also visited Bangladesh this week, expressed her sincere appreciation to all the people of the country, in particular host communities, for the help they have offered Rohingya refugees. She echoed the need for greater international assistance.

Calling for accountability for the human rights violations committed, the special envoy expressed her support for the implementation of the November 2017 agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar, and last month's agreement between Myanmar, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the UN Development Program (UNDP), paving the way towards a conducive environment allowing for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of the people to their place of origin or choice.



MOSCOW (Reuters) -- A summit between the leaders of Russia and North Korea is "on the agenda", Russia's ambassador to North Korea, Alexander Matsegora, was cited as saying by RIA news agency on Wednesday. The Kremlin said last month that Russia had invited North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to travel to the country, adding he could visit as part of an economic forum due to be held in the far eastern city of Vladivostok in September. Matsegora also said Russia supplies North Korea with between 200 and 400 tons of oil products per month, Russia's ambassador to North Korea. North Korea relies on imported fuel to keep its struggling economy functioning. Quotas set by the United Nations allow over 60,000 tons of oil products from Russia, China and other countries to be delivered to North Korea per year. Matsegora was quoted as saying in January.

BUDAPEST (Reuters) -- Hungary will quit a UN migration pact before its final approval, it said on Wednesday, calling the agreement a "threat to the world". The Global Compact For Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration was approved on Friday by all 193 UN member nations except the United States, which pulled out last year. But Hungary, led by right-wing nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban, has decided not to sign the final document at a ceremony in December. "This document is entirely against Hungary's security interests," Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto told a news conference, adding: "This pact poses a threat to the world from the aspect that it could inspire millions (of migrants)." Hungary, along with Poland and Czech Republic, has taken a tough stand against the admission of migrants, putting it at odds with the European Union, but striking a chord with voters by arguing that irregular immigration threatens European stability, and fencing off Hungary's southern borders.

ADDIS ABABA (AFP) -- The first commercial flight to Eritrea in two decades departed Wednesday from Addis Ababa, according to the Ethiopian Airlines website, after the two nations ended their bitter conflict in a whirlwind peace process. Ethiopian Airlines indicated that flight ET0312 to Asmara had left Bole International Airport, after a ceremony inaugurating the flight, which chief executive Tewolde GebreMariam described as a "unique event in the history of Ethiopia and Eritrea".

PARIS (AFP) -- Almost three in five people infected with HIV, or 21.7 million globally, took antiretroviral therapy (ART) in 2017 - a new record for anti-AIDS drug access, the UN's HIV/AIDS agency said Wednesday. There were 36.9 million people living with the immune system-attacking virus in 2017, of whom 15.2 million were not getting the drugs they need, UNAIDS reported. Announcing the lowest annual death toll in two decades for 2017, and a record number of people on life-saving treatment, UNAIDS cautioned that a creeping "complacency" threatened these achievements. "We are sounding the alarm," the agency's executive director Michel Sidibe said at the unveiling of a global status report in Paris ahead of next week's International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam.

MANAGUA (AFP) -- Forces loyal to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega launched an attack on the opposition stronghold of Masaya, as international calls mounted for an end to months of deadly violence in the impoverished Central American country. Around 40 vans full of heavily armed riot police and paramilitaries entered Masaya -- southeast of the capital Managua -- from four sides, according to images posted by residents on social media. Automatic arms fire and warning sirens rang out in the flashpoint city's Monimbo neighborhood -- the epicenter of recent protests calling for Ortega, who has dominated Nicaraguan politics for decades, to step down. More than 1,000 men firing machine guns entered the city of 100,000 people, residents said. The United States warned Ortega against pursuing the assault on Masaya and called for a halt to the deadly crackdown on anti-government protests, initially against a now-ditched pension reform, that have left some 280 people dead over the past three months.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- U.S. President Donald Trump has eased pressure on North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons quickly, conceding there is no deadline for a breakthrough. The U.S. president said there was "no rush for speed" because North Korea had not tested any ballistic missiles over the past nine months. "We have no time limit. We have no speed limit," Trump said at a meeting with members of Congress on Tuesday. "We're just going through the process, but the relationships are very good." Immediately after his summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Singapore last month, Trump insisted that the denuclearization process would "go pretty quickly". Earlier this month, White House national security adviser John Bolton claimed that the "overwhelming bulk of their programs" could be dismantled within a year. However, North Korea's foreign ministry recently accused the U.S. of spilling the atmosphere of goodwill by making a "unilateral and gangster-like demand for denuclearization".

South Africa Marks Centennial of Nelson Mandela

JOHANNESBURG (AP) -- South Africans along with former U.S. President Barack Obama were marking the centennial of Nelson Mandela's birth on Wednesday with acts of charity in a country still struggling with deep economic inequality 24 years after the end of white minority rule.

Obama was meeting with young people from around Africa to mark the anniversary, a day after he delivered a spirited speech in Johannesburg about Mandela's legacy of tolerance and criticized President Donald Trump and his

policies without mentioning him by name. Obama received a standing ovation for his address, the highest-profile one since he left office.

"Most people think of Mandela as an older man with hair like mine," the 56-year-old Obama said to laughter from his young audience on Wednesday. But "he started as a very young man, at your age, trying to liberate this country."

He urged young African leaders to pursue change at home and emphasized the impact they can have as the continent's population is the fastest-growing in the world. "How big are your ambitions?" he

asked.

Obama also spoke out against the corruption and conflict that slow down change, mentioning as one example the current deadly tensions in Cameroon, which faces an Anglophone separatist movement.

South Africans and others around the world were marking the July 18, 1918 birth of the anti-apartheid leader with clinic openings, blanket handouts and other charitable acts.

After 27 years in prison in South Africa, Mandela was released in 1990 and became the country's first black president four years later. He died in 2013 at the age of 95.