

Ethiopia names envoy to Eritrea as ties thaw

Nairobi | Kenya

Ethiopia has appointed an ambassador to Eritrea for the first time in 20 years, state-affiliated media reported Thursday, the latest in a series of dizzying peace moves between the neighbours.

The announcement follows a flurry of diplomacy between the former enemies that included visits between their leaders and the first commercial flights between their capitals in two decades.

Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki reopened his country's embassy in Ethiopia on Monday during a three-day official visit to Addis Ababa.

China seizes 156 mammoth tusks

Beijing | China

Chinese customs authorities said they seized 156 prehistoric mammoth tusks from a truck entering from Russia in one of the country's largest such hauls.

The contraband was seized in late April at a border crossing in northeastern China's Heilongjiang province bordering on Siberia, but the find was only announced this week by Chinese customs, state media said.

The haul, which also included two elephant tusks and a range of other animal parts, was hidden under a shipment of soybeans.

Eight suspects, including Russians and Chinese, have been arrested, the People's Daily said.

China banned the sale and processing of elephant ivory last year after having banned its import in 2015.

US troop remains to be repatriated from N Korea

Washington | United States

The repatriation of remains of US troops killed during the Korean War should begin shortly, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Wednesday, starting a process agreed by President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

"I think in the next couple weeks we will have the first remains returned," Pompeo said during a meeting at the White House.

Repatriating remains of US soldiers who perished during the 1950-53 conflict was part of a written agreement signed by Kim and Trump during their landmark summit in Singapore last month.

Pompeo did not confirm media reports that the first repatriations would be on July 27, and that about 50-55 sets of remains would be returned. North Korean and US military officials met Sunday at the truce village of Panmunjom on the inter-Korean border to discuss the repatriation.

Russia meddled, whatever Putin, Trump say: FBI Dir

Trump appeared to accept Putin's denial in a press conference after their meeting in Helsinki

Washington | United States

FBI director Christopher Wray said Wednesday that the US intelligence community stands by its view that Russia interfered in the 2016 US election, despite Vladimir Putin's denial this week to President Donald Trump.

"He's got his view, he has expressed his view," Wray said when asked about Putin's denial to Trump at their summit in Helsinki on Monday.

"The intelligence community's assessment has not changed. My view has not changed, which is that Russia attempted to interfere with the last election and that it continues to engage in malign influence operations to this day." Those acts "aimed at sowing discord and divisiveness in this country," he added.

On Monday, Trump appeared to accept Putin's denial in a press conference after their meeting in Helsinki, sparking outrage in Washington and a rare statement of disagreement by the head of the US intelligence community, Director of National In-



US President Donald Trump (L) and Russian President Vladimir Putin arrive for a meeting in Helsinki.

telligence, Dan Coats.

On Tuesday Trump walked back his comments, saying he accepted the view of US spies that Moscow had in fact meddled. "I accept our intelligence community's conclusion that Russia's meddling in the 2016 election took place," Trump said, reading a statement from the White House. Yet Trump contin-

ued to suggest doubts, adding: It "could be other people also; there's a lot of people out there."

Wray, who was speaking at the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado, also took issue with Trump's suggestion on Wednesday that Russia has not continued to interfere this year as the United States prepares for congressional elections in No-



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ember.

Wray said that the FBI has not yet seen any specific actions targeting US election infrastructure -- compared to 2016, when Russian hackers targeted voter registration and voting management computers across the country, according to US intelligence. "But certainly other efforts, what I would call malign influence operations, are very active. And we could be just a moment away from going to the next level," he said.

"For me, it's a threat that we need to take extremely seriously and respond to with fierce determination and focus."

Wray also took issue with Trump's repeated condemnations of the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into possible collusion with Russia's election meddling as groundless and politically motivated.

"It's not a witch hunt," he said, using Trump's words.

Asked if, amid intense criticism of the FBI by Trump, he had threatened to resign in recent months, Wray declined to answer directly.

US arrests Russian 'agent' for infiltrating govt

Washington | United States

A Russian gun rights enthusiast who built a network of powerful Republican contacts under the direction of a Kremlin power-broker was ordered held without bond Wednesday after FBI counterintelligence agents accused her of conspiring to infiltrate the US government.

US prosecutors said Maria Butina, 29, exploited her close links with the powerful NRA gun lobby while posing as a visiting graduate student to endear herself with senior Republicans, guided by one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's major political supporters, Alexander Torshin.

Butina was charged in the Washington federal court with acting illegally as an unregistered agent for the Russian government while she lived in Washington over the past three years with her boyfriend, a veter-

Moscow condemns

On Wednesday Moscow said the arrest was a political move seeking to undermine the gains of the Helsinki summit.

"This happened with the obvious task of minimizing the positive effect," of the Trump-Putin meeting, said foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

"There is an impression the FBI is simply carrying out a clearly political order," she said.

eran Republican operative.

They called Butina a "covert Russian agent" who maintained contacts with Russian spies and pursued a mission "to penetrate

the US national decision-making apparatus to advance the agenda of the Russian Federation."

That included offering sex to get a job in a US lobbying group, according to documents filed in court by the DoJ.

Butina pleaded not guilty to two criminal charges of conspiring to act as a foreign agent without registering, and acting as a foreign agent. The first charge brings a maximum five years in prison, while the second carries a maximum 10 years.

"This is not a spy case," her lawyer Robert Driscoll said after Butina appeared in court in an orange jumpsuit.

"The government is speculating that someone is a Russian spy, but thousands of Russians met intelligence operatives" in the United States, he said.

'Direct line to Putin'

Butina began visiting the United States and was regularly hosted



Maria Butina poses with a gun. (Picture Facebook)

by the NRA and other groups, and became a "life member" of the American gun rights lobby.

In July 2015, Butina was selected to ask Trump a question about his plans for ties with Russia at a rally in Las Vegas.

Her activities ramped up af-

ter she moved to the US capital on a student visa in 2016, attending American University graduate school while she lived with Erickson. Hardly masking her networking efforts, she told colleagues at the school that she had a nearly direct line to Putin.

Japan start-up plans meteor shower by 2020

● **First satellite to be launched by March 2019**

● **Each satellite will be able to carry 400 tiny balls**

Tokyo, Japan

A Japanese start-up developing "shooting stars on demand" says it will be ready to deliver the world's first artificial meteor shower in a spectacular show over Hiroshima in early 2020.

ALE, based in Tokyo, is in the



Representative picture (Courtesy of NDTV)

final stages of developing two micro-satellites that will release tiny balls that glow brightly as they enter the atmosphere, simulating a meteor shower.

The first satellite will hitch a

ride into space on a rocket being launched by Japan's space agency by March 2019. The second will be launched in mid-2019 on a private-sector rocket.

Each satellite will be able



The 400 balls will be enough for 20-30 events, according to the company, and the satellites will be able to stay in space for around two years

o carry 400 tiny balls whose chemical formula is a closely-guarded secret.

Ejected from the satellite, the balls will glow as they plunge through the atmosphere.

The 400 balls will be enough for 20-30 events, according to the company, and the satellites will be able to stay in space for around two years.

ALE's two satellites will start orbiting the Earth by February 2020.

It has not disclosed the price but it may not come so cheap, with the company spending about \$20 million for the development, production, launch and operation of the two satellites.