

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

US tariffs take effect, China announces retaliation

BEIJING — The United States hiked tariffs on Chinese imports today and Beijing announced it was retaliating against American goods in a technology dispute between the world's two biggest economies that President Donald Trump says he is prepared to escalate.

Washington imposed 25 percent tariffs on \$34 billion worth of Chinese imports, a first step in what could become an accelerating series of tariffs.

Retaliatory measures "took effect immediately," said a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Lu Kang. Hu gave no details, but the Communist Party newspaper People's Daily said the customs agency was carrying out a plan announced last month to impose 25 percent tariffs on a \$34 billion list of American goods including soybeans, pork and electric cars.

Companies worry the spiraling dispute could chill global economic growth, but Asian financial markets took today's developments in stride.

Japan's main stock index, the Nikkei 225, gained 1.1 percent while the Shanghai Composite Index added 0.5 percent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 0.8 percent.

Japan cult leader behind gas attack, followers are executed

TOKYO — Doomsday cult leader Shoko Asahara and six of his followers were executed today for their roles in a deadly 1995 gas attack on the Tokyo subways and other crimes, closing a chapter on one of Japan's most shocking crimes in recent memory.

During the morning rush hour of March 20, 1995, members of the Asahara's Aum Shinrikyo cult punctured plastic bags to release sarin nerve gas inside subway cars, killing 13 people and sickening more than 6,000.

Japan's Justice Ministry announced the executions of Asahara, 63, and his followers. Two major Japanese newspapers issued extra editions about the executions and handed them out at train stations.

"This gave me a piece of mind," Kiyoe Iwata, who lost her daughter in the subway attack, told Japanese broadcaster NHK. "I have always been wondering why it had to be my daughter and why she had to be killed. Now, I can pay a visit to her grave and tell her of this."

Asahara and five of the six executed were implicated in the subway attack. The cult also carried out other crimes that together with the subway attack killed 27 people in total. Six other followers remain on death row.

US Army quietly discharging immigrant recruits

SAN ANTONIO — Some immigrant Army reservists and recruits who enlisted in the military with a promised path to citizenship are being abruptly discharged, the Associated Press has learned.

The AP was unable to quantify how many men and women who enlisted through the special recruitment program have been booted from the Army, but immigration attorneys say they know of more than 40 who have been discharged or whose status has become questionable, jeopardizing their futures.

"It was my dream to serve in the military," said reservist Lucas Calixto, a Brazilian immigrant who filed a lawsuit against the Army last week. "Since this country has been so good to me, I thought it was the least I could do to give back to my adopted country and serve in the United States military."

Some of the service members say they were not told why they were being discharged. Others who pressed for answers said the Army informed them they'd been labeled as security risks because they have relatives abroad or because the Defense Department had not completed background checks on them.

Spokespeople for the Pentagon and the Army said that, due to the pending litigation, they were unable to explain the discharges or respond to questions about whether there have been policy changes in any of the military branches.

Pompeo in North Korea vows to get details of nuke commitment

PYONGYANG, North Korea — Secretary of State Mike Pompeo began his first trip to Pyongyang since President Donald Trump's summit with leader Kim Jong Un last month with a vow to nail down the specifics of Kim's commitments on denuclearization.

Pompeo, who arrived in the North Korean capital today, has the crucial task of dispelling growing skepticism over how seriously Kim is about giving up his nuclear arsenal and translating the upbeat rhetoric following the summit into concrete action.

He was met at the Pyongyang airport by Kim Yong Chol, a senior ruling party official and former intelligence chief, and Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho.

Soon afterward, he and Kim Yong Chol, who has been something of a point-man on Washington negotiations for Kim Jong Un, sat down for their first talks.

"The more you come, more trust we can build between one another," Kim told Pompeo, according to a pool from reporters traveling with the secretary.

Thais fight water and oxygen levels in cave as diver dies

MAE SAI, Thailand — Thai authorities overseeing the rescue operation for 12 boys and their soccer coach trapped in a flooded cave in the country's north said they have a "limited amount of time" to get them out, as they raced today against worsening weather and lowered oxygen levels in the underground complex.

The massive operation inside and around Tham Luang Nang Non cave in Chiang Rai province suffered its first fatality when a former Thai navy SEAL passed out underwater on an overnight mission and was unable to be revived.

"We can no longer wait for all conditions (to be ready) because circumstances are pressuring us," Thai SEAL commander Arpakorn Yookongkaew told a news conference. "We originally thought the boys can stay safe inside the cave for quite some time but circumstances have changed. We have limited amount of time."

Scandal-plagued Pruitt resigns from top EPA post

Latest Trump official to go

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, ZEKE MILLER and ELLEN KNICKMEYER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt resigned Thursday amid ethics investigations of outsized security spending, first-class flights and a sweetheart condo lease.

With Pruitt's departure, President Donald Trump loses an administrator many conservatives regarded as one of the more effective members of his Cabinet. But Pruitt had also been dogged for months by scandals that spawned more than a dozen federal and congressional investigations.

Talking to reporters on Air Force One, Trump continued to praise his scandal-plagued EPA chief, saying there was "no final straw" and he had not asked for Pruitt's resignation.

"Scott is a terrific guy," Trump said. "He came to me and said I have such great confidence in the administration I don't want to be a distraction. ... He'll go and do great things and have a wonderful life, I hope."

In his resignation letter to Trump, obtained by The Associated Press, Pruitt expressed no regrets.

"It is extremely difficult for me to cease serving you in this role first because I count it a blessing to be serving you in any capacity, but also, because of the transformative work that is occurring," Pruitt wrote. "However, the unrelenting attacks on me personally, my family, are unprecedented and have taken a sizable toll on all of us."

Pruitt, a Republican, had appeared Wednesday at a White House picnic for Independence Day, wearing a red-checked shirt and loafers with gold trim. Trump gave him and other officials a brief shout-out, offering no sign of any immediate change in his job.

EPA Deputy Administrator Andrew Wheeler, a former coal industry lobbyist, will take the helm as acting administrator starting Monday.

"I have no doubt that Andy will continue on with our great and lasting EPA agenda," Trump tweeted Thursday.

Pruitt's resignation came days after two of his closest advisers spoke to House oversight committee investigators and revealed new, embarrassing details in ethics scandals involving Pruitt.

Samantha Dravis, who recently resigned as Pruitt's policy chief, told investigators last week that Pruitt had made clear to her before and after he became EPA admin-



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt resigned on Thursday.

istrator that he would like the attorney general's job, held then and now by Jeff Sessions.

Pruitt "had hinted at that (sic) some sort of conversation had taken place between he and the president," Dravis told congressional investigators, according to a transcript obtained Thursday by the AP. "That was the position he was originally interested in."

Industry ties

A former Oklahoma attorney general close to the oil and gas industry, Pruitt had filed more than a dozen lawsuits against the agency he was picked to lead. Arriving in Washington, D.C., he worked relentlessly to dismantle Obama-era environmental regulations that aimed to reduce toxic pollution and planet-warming carbon emissions.

rate interests.

But despite boasts of slashing red tape and promoting job creation, Pruitt had a mixed record of producing real-world results. Many of the EPA regulations Pruitt scraped or delayed had not yet taken effect, and the tens of thousands of lost coal mining jobs the president pledged to bring back never materialized.

Pruitt was forced out following a series of revelations involving pricey trips with first-class airline seats and unusual security spending, including a \$43,000 soundproof booth for making private phone calls. He also demanded 24-hour-a-day protection from armed officers, resulting in a swollen 20-member security detail that blew through overtime budgets and racked up expenses of more than \$3 million.

at EPA headquarters last summer after his firm, Williams & Jensen, revealed he had lobbied the agency on a required federal disclosure form.

Pruitt also publicly denied any knowledge of massive raises awarded to two close aides he had brought with him to EPA from Oklahoma. Documents later showed Pruitt's chief of staff had signed off on the pay hikes, indicating he had the administrator's consent.

Investigations

The slew of damaging revelations, many of which came to light through media reports and public records lawsuits filed by environmental groups, triggered more than a dozen investigations related to Pruitt's conduct by EPA's Office of Inspector General, the House Oversight Committee and other federal watchdogs.

It was not immediately clear how Pruitt's resignation might affect those ongoing probes. No longer a federal employee, Pruitt can't be compelled to speak or otherwise cooperate with the inspector general's investigation. As a private citizen, he could still be subpoenaed to testify before Congress, but Republican-led committees have thus far shown little appetite in forcing him to do so.

Jennifer Kaplan, a spokeswoman for EPA Inspector General Arthur Elkins, said Thursday that the office was "assessing and evaluating" its ongoing audits and investigations in the wake of Pruitt's departure.

U.S. Sen. John Barrasso, the Republican chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works and until Thursday a strong defender of Pruitt, said Trump made the right decision to accept the resignation.

"It has become increasingly challenging for the EPA to carry out its mission with the administrator under investigation," said Barrasso, who is from Wyoming.

'The unrelenting attacks on me personally, my family, are unprecedented and have taken a sizable toll on all of us.'

Scott Pruitt

former Environmental Protection Agency administrator

During his one-year tenure, Pruitt crisscrossed the country at taxpayer expense to speak with industry groups and hobnob with GOP donors, but he showed little interest in listening to advocates he derided as "the environmental left." Those groups quickly applauded his departure.

"Despite his brief tenure, Pruitt was the worst EPA chief in history," said Kieran Suckling, executive director of the Center for Biological Diversity. "His corruption was his downfall, but his pro-polluter policies will have our kids breathing dirtier air long after his many scandals are forgotten."

Like Trump, Pruitt voiced skepticism about mainstream climate science and was a fierce critic of the Paris climate agreement. The president cheered his EPA chief's moves to boost fossil fuel production and roll back regulations opposed by corpo-

Pruitt routinely ordered his EPA staff to do personal chores for him, including picking up his dry cleaning and trying to obtain a used Trump hotel mattress for his apartment. He had also enlisted his staff to contact conservative groups and companies to find a lucrative job for his unemployed wife, including emails seeking a Chick-fil-A franchise from a senior executive at the fast-food chain.

Pruitt's job had been in jeopardy since the end of March, when ABC News first reported that he leased a Capitol Hill condo last year for just \$50 a night. It was co-owned by the wife of a veteran fossil fuels lobbyist whose firm had sought regulatory rollbacks from EPA.

Both Pruitt and the lobbyist, Steven Hart, denied he had conducted any recent business with EPA. But Hart was later forced to admit he had met with Pruitt



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