Trump slams media as he celebrates 100 days in WH

WASHINGTON, APRIL 30 /--/ Celebrating the first 100 days of his administration, Donald Trump today attacked the media for misleading the people with "fake news" as he skipped the "very boring" annual White House Correspondents' Dinner to become the first president in over 30 years to skip the gala. "I could not possibly be more thrilled than to be more than 100 miles away from Washington's swamp, spending my evening with all of you with a much, much larger crowd and much, much better people. The media deserves a very big, fat, failing grade," Trump yesterday said sarcastically over the media's coverage of his achievements during his first 100 days in office.

He said a large group of Hollywood actors and Washington media are consoling each other in a hotel ballroom in the nation's capital right now, referring to the annual black-tie dinner at a luxurious hotel which was sold out to more than 2,600 guests, comprising who's who of nation's political players, and top journalists along with celebrities and diplomats. "They are gathered together for the White House Correspondents' Dinner without the President," 70-year-old Trump told his cheering supporters at a campaign-style rally at Harrisburg in Pennsylvania, a state which played a critical role in his electoral victory last November. He told supporters that he was keeping "one promise after another", dismissing criticism as "fake news" by "out of touch" journalists.

This is for the first time in decades that a serving US president decided against attending the annual event of journalists who cover him round-the-clock. None of the White House staff were present on the occasion in support of the President's decision. The last president to miss the White House Correspondents' Dinner was Ronald Reagan back in 1981, and that was because he was recovering from an assassination attempt. In his address, Trump said his rally to celebrate the completion of his first 100 days in office drew a much larger crowd and better people too. "They would love to be with us right here tonight. They're trapped at the dinner, which will be very, very boring," Trump said, but indicated that he would be present at the Correspondents' Dinner next year.

Next year's dinner might be "more exciting", he said. "But we have a good chance showing up here again next year." The last time Trump attended the dinner was in 2011, when he was a New York real estate mogul and reality-TV star who had just jumped into politics by getting involved in the "birther" movement, calling for President Barack Obama to release his birth certificate. Trump ended up being the butt of the jokes that night from comedian Seth Meyers and Obama himself. In his speech, Trump slammed newspapers like The New York Times and The Washington Post. Tension between the President and news organisations has been a hallmark of his early administration.

Several media organisations withdrew from the dinner in protest of Trump's treatment of the media before Trump decided he would not attend. Vanity Fair and Bloomberg, which usually co-host an exclusive, star-studded after-party, have cancelled that gala. More than 100 miles away from Harrisburg, journalists led by White House Correspondents' Association President Jeff Mason slammed the US President for attacking the media. "We cannot ignore the rhetoric that has been employed by the president about who we are and what we do," Mason said. "Freedom of the press is a building block of our democracy. Undermining that by seeking to delegitimize journalists is dangerous to a healthy republic," he said to a standing ovation. Mason's speech was quickly followed by Indian-American stand-up comedian Hasan Minhaj. "The leader of our country is not here, and that's because he lives in Moscow," Minhaj said amidst laughter from the audience. "It's a very long flight, it's a Saturday. As for the other guy, I think he's in Pennsylvania because he can't take a joke," said the Indian-American, whose parents are from Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh. (PTI)

Ukraine clings to nuke power despite Chernobyl trauma

KIEV, APRIL 30 /--/ Ukraine is still suffering from the trauma of the world's worst civil nuclear accident at Chernobyl but has nonetheless turned the hazardous fuel into the backbone of its energy portfolio. The crisis-torn country now uses atomic power for more than half of its electricity needs as it struggles through a coal shortage sparked by a three-year war against Russian-backed insurgents in the separatist east. And that figure shot up to nearly three-quarters of all power consumed during natural gas price disputes with its eastern arch foe and energy superpower Russia from 2014 to 2016. Ukraine Wednesday marked 31 years since the disaster in which thousands died with the country extending the lifespan of its communist-era nuclear reactors and turning atomic power into a workhorse that will be around for generations to come.

Hasidic Jewish pilgrims celebrate the end of Sabbath as they commemorate the anniversary of the day of death of Grand Rabbi Yeshaya Steiner, the founder of a famous Hasidic dynasty, in the village of Bodrogkeresztur, Hungary —REUTERS

Trump promises to make 'big decision' on one-sided Paris deal

WASHINGTON, APRIL 30 /--/ President Donald Trump has promised to make a "big decision" on the "one-sided" Paris climate deal soon as he alleged that the US is being unfairly targeted by asking to pay money while major polluting nations like Russia, China and India are contributing "nothing." In a campaign-style rally in Pennsylvania, a state that helped tip the election in his favor, Trump said the Paris Agreement on Climate Change is "one sided." "I will be making a big decision on the Paris accord over the next two weeks and we will see what happens," he said in his speech to mark the first 100 days of his presidency. "...like the one-sided Paris climate accord. Where the US pays billions of dollars (for the Paris Climate Accord) while China, Russia, and India have contributed (to pollution) and will contribute nothing," Trump alleged as the audience booed to the Paris Agreement. The Paris climate deal within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was signed in 2015 by 194 countries and ratified by 143. It aims to hold the increase in average global temperature to below 2 degrees above pre-industrial level by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Trump claimed that it is estimated that for compliance with the agreement could ultimately shrink America's GDP by USD 2.5 trillion over a 10-year period. "That means factories and plants closing all over our country," he said and alleged that the Washington s dishonest media would not report because it is is part of the problem. "Their priorities are not my priorities, and they are not your priorities, believe me," he said. "They are all part of a broken system that has profited from this global theft and plunder of American wealth at the expense of the American worker. We are not going to let other countries take advantage of us anymore because, from now on, it is going to be America first," Trump said.

Trump said his administration has made historic progress in the first 100 days. "We are keeping one promise after another and frankly the people are really happy about it. They see what's happening. To understand the historic progress we ve made, we must speak honestly about the situation that we, and I, inherited.

The previous administration gave us a mess," he added. The US President promised to build a wall along the Mexican border. "If the Democrats knew what the hell they were doing, they would approve it. (PTI)

China 'putting pressure' on N Korea: US Prez

WASHINGTON, APRIL 30 /--/ Donald Trump thinks Chinese President Xi Jinping is "putting pressure" on North Korea, the US president said in an interview to air today, as tensions mount over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes. If North Korea carries out a nuclear test "I would not be happy," Trump told the CBS television network's "Face the Nation" programme. "And I can tell you also, I don't believe that the president of China, who is a very respected man, will be happy either," Trump said in excerpts of the interview released yesterday.

Asked if "not happy" signified "military action," Trump answered: "I don't know. I mean, we'll see." North Korea test-fired a missile over the weekend in apparent defiance of a concerted US push for tougher international sanctions to curb Pyongyang's nuclear weapons ambitions. The latest launch, which South Korea said was a failure, came just hours after US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned the UN Security Council of "catastrophic consequences" if the international community -- most notably China -- failed to pressure the North into abandoning its weapons program. Trump assailed the failed launch as a show of disrespect toward its ally China. "North Korea disrespected the wishes of China & its highly respected President when it launched, though unsuccessfully, a missile today. Bad!" Trump wrote on Twitter. North Korea is seeking to develop a long-range missile capable of hitting the US mainland with a nuclear warhead. China, Pyongyang's number one trade partner, has repeatedly called for a return to talks on denuclearization but has been reluctant to use economic pressure that could destabilise North Korea. (AFP)

Trump invites Philippines' Duterte to Washington for talks

WASHINGTON, APRIL 30 /--/ US President Donald Trump invited his Philippine counterpart to Washington in a "friendly" call in which the leaders discussed Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs and their countries' alliance, the White House said. Duterte has faced international condemnation for his brutal crackdown on crime, which has claimed thousands of lives and led to warnings from rights groups about a possible crime against humanity. The White House said the two leaders, who were both elected to office last year, had "a very friendly conversation" that included discussion about the Philippine government's efforts to "rid its country of drugs" and the regional security threat posed by North Korea. "President Trump also invited President Duterte to the White House to discuss the importance of the United States- Philippines alliance, which is now heading in a very positive direction," the statement said. There has been concern about Duterte's efforts to loosen the Philippines' long-standing alliance with the US as he looks to court China, whose push to control most of the disputed South China Sea has alarmed neighbours. Duterte has regularly hit out at the Philippines' one- time colonial ruler for perceived hypocrisy over human rights and last year branded then US president Barack Obama a "son of a whore" for criticizing the drug war. The White House said Trump "enjoyed the conversation" with Duterte, and looked forward to attending the key US-ASEAN and East Asia summits in the Philippines in November. Vice President Mike Pence had announced earlier this month that Trump would attend the Asian meetings as a sign of "unwavering commitment" to the region.

Duterte's spokesman Ernesto Abella confirmed Trump's invitation, although he gave no indication of when the visit would take place. Philippine police have reported killing 2,724 people as part of Duterte's anti-drug campaign, although authorities insist the shootings have been in self defence. Many thousands of others have been killed by shadowy vigilantes, according to rights groups. A Philippine lawyer last week filed a complaint at the International Criminal Court accusing Duterte of mass murder, alleging his war on drugs had led to about 8,000 deaths. (AFP)

French will decide EU future in May 7 vote: Hollande

BRUSSELS, APRIL 30 /--/ French President Francois Hollande said today that voters in France must decide their future in Europe in the May 7 presidential vote pitting europhile candidate Emmanuel Macron against the anti-EU Marine Le Pen. Speaking at his last EU summit as leader of France, Hollande said the French people had every reason to stay in the European Union, tacitly backing Macron, his former economy minister. "The French have everything to gain by staying in the European Union," Hollande told reporters at an EU summit to discuss Britain's divorce from the bloc. France would face only hardship outside the bloc, Hollande warned, saying that without the EU, "there are no safeguards, no guarantees, no single market". Outside the bloc, "there is no single currency, which would be a setback and danger for France," the Socialist leader added.

France is in the midst of a bruising campaign in which Le Pen has attempted to wear down lingering resistance to her party's extremist reputation by portraying Macron as an elitist at the heel of an EU dominated by Germany. Hollande made his remarks shortly after Le Pen announced that if she won the May 7 run-off she would name eurosceptic Nicolas Dupont-Aignan as her prime minister. (AFP)

Iranian who ran TV network shot dead in Turkey: Report

DUBAI, APRIL 30 /--/ A Turkish newspaper is reporting that the Iranian founder of a Farsi-language satellite television network has been shot dead in Istanbul along with a Kuwaiti business partner. The shooting death late yesterday of Saeed Karimian of GEM TV comes after an Iranian court reportedly sentenced him to prison in March for making "propaganda" against the country. Turkey's Hurriyet newspaper reported Karimian was shot dead after an SUV blocked off his car and those inside opened fire. The newspaper says the SUV was later found abandoned and burned. Phone numbers for GEM rang unanswered today. The private Dogan news agency identified the dead Kuwaiti by the initials MM Kuwait's state-run KUNA news agency, quoting the consul general in Istanbul, confirmed a Kuwaiti citizen was gunned down, without elaborating. (Agencies)

Indian eatery in UK fined as neighbours complain of 'curry smell'

LONDON, APRIL 30 /--/ Owners of an Indian restaurant in the UK have been fined by a court after neighbours complained of strong 'curry smells' emanating from the eatery. Middlesbrough Council fined 'Khushi Indian Buffet Restaurant' owners Shabana and Mohammed Khushi after the establishment sent aromas of 'biryanis' and 'bhajis' filtering through the area. According to the local authority, the Linthorpe restaurant was lacking a 'sufficient filtration system'. A handful of locals had been complaining about the smells, which led to the council's decision, the Gazette Live reported. Khushi, which serves Punjabi dishes and was based in the Red Rose pub, was set in a built-up residential area alongside other businesses.

At Teesside Magistrates' Court last week, District Judge Kristina Harrison heard from a council prosecutor that some residents had complained that the smell of spicy food from the restaurant's kitchen got in through their windows and was overpowering. It was alleged the smells were so strong, it left them needing to wash their clothes. The pair were fined 258 pounds each, ordered to pay 500 pounds costs each, and a 30 pounds victim surcharge. Defence solicitor Neil Douglas, however, said that because the business had moved into a former pub building, no variation of planning permission was needed and therefore the Khushis were never made aware of the type of filters they needed. In letters written to a judge, some local businesses and councillors supported the restaurant, saying they have never had a problem with curry smells on the road. A company which specialises in fitting out Asian restaurants installed the kitchen in 2015, leading the couple to believe they had the right equipment.

The pair, joint directors in the business, have already upgraded their filtration system, but face another 3,500 pounds to 4,500 pounds bill to complete the work. Shabana, 42, speaking after the case, was quoted as saying, "We are relieved that it's all over, but we feel let down by the council."

"We've tried to be a good neighbour but we feel we've been targeted by a small minority of people. Others have said they can't smell anything until they're inside the restaurant," she said. Mohammed, 46, said, "It has been very stressful. We have had this hanging over us, and we will also have the fine hanging over us and when you start a business, you're trying everything you can to be a success." The Khushis, however, had admitted failing to comply with an abatement notice, which aimed to stop "cooking odours being emitted by the extraction system at said premises, in order to prevent nuisance being caused to neighbouring occupiers", between March and September last year. (PTI)

Italian FM backs prosecutor on NGO migrant row

ROME, APRIL 30 /--/ Italian Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano said today he "agreed 100 per cent" with a prosecutor's repeated suggestions that some charity boats rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean are colluding with traffickers in Libya. Sicily-based prosecutor Carmelo Zuccaro sparked a row last week after claims in La Stampa daily that some aid groups battling Europe's worst migrant crisis since World War II may be in league with people smugglers. "I am 100 per cent in agreement with prosecutor Zuccaro as he asked a real question....Those who become indignant at the drop of a hat are hypocrites," Alfano told reporters in the Sicilian town of Taormina. The city will host the G7 summit at the end of next month. Zuccaro doubled down on his La Stampa comments on Thursday when he said he regretted being unable to investigate his claim that some NGOs were "perhaps" financed by traffickers and were potentially seeking to "destabilise the Italian economy". Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni said today that "if magistrates have usable and credible information (regarding Zuccaro's claim), the government will certainly not stand in the way" of it being investigated. "That said, for us, the activities of charitable organisations is precious and welcome," Gentiloni said in Brussels, where he was attending an EU summit to discuss Britain's withdrawal from the European Union. Justice Minister Andrea Orlando has called on Zuccaro to present evidence if he has any while Interior Minister Marco Minniti cautioned against making "generalisations" on the thorny migrant issue. Around a dozen privately-financed charities including established groups such as Doctors without Borders and Save the Children have joined newer groups such as Malta-based MOAS to coordinate rescues with Italy's coastguard. The charities have firmly rejected Zuccaro's allegation as a baseless slur, insisting their mission is simply to save lives in the absence of EU governments acting effectively to do so. Zuccaro said in his La Stampa interview he had "proof" of his allegation some NGOs were in league with traffickers. (AFP)