VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Jonathan Jones reporting.

The White House shake-up continues as President Trump announced late Thursday he is replacing his National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster with former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton.

Bolton is currently an analyst with Fox News. He has a reputation as a tough-talking conservative who has backed military action against Iran and North Korea and has taken a hard line against Russia.

President Trump today imposed tariffs on a nearly 1,300 Chinese imported products worth about $60 billion.

"... the people we're negotiating with - smilingly, they really agree with us. I really believe they cannot believe that they've gotten away with this for so long."

Mr. Trump blamed what he called "unfair Chinese trade practices" for America's trade deficit with China, which has now reached a record $375 billion.

"The word that I want to use is 'reciprocal.' When they charge 25 percent for a car to go in, and we charge 2 percent for their car to come into the United States, that's not good."

The president said, "We have a tremendous intellectual property theft going on."

The president also on Thursday said he is willing to testify before the special counsel that is investigating Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and other matters. His response came after one of his personal attorneys, John Dowd, confirmed he is stepping down.

Dowd is known to have counseled Trump against sitting for an interview with those working for the special counsel, Robert Mueller, a former director of the FBI.

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At least 14 people were killed Thursday when a car packed with explosives blew up in Mogadishu, the Somali capital.

Somali officials say the car exploded outside a hotel that's frequented by politicians and businessmen. It's located on Mogadishu's busiest street.

More than 1,500 Syrian rebel fighters and their families are evacuating a town in the besieged Damascus suburb of eastern Ghouta as the army moves closer to recapturing the town.

Dozens of white buses pulled out of the town of Harasta on their way to Idlib, which is still in rebel hands.

Rebel officials say they expect the evacuation to last several days and will leave just two other enclaves in eastern Ghouta in opposition control.

A Kenyan appeals court has struck down the use of forced anal testing in homosexuality cases. Rights activists are hailing the verdict as a key victory that could have a ripple effect in the region.

For VOA, correspondent Rael Ombuor reports from Nairobi.

The court of appeals in the coastal city of Mombasa ruled Thursday that the forced anal testing of suspected gay men is unlawful. The judges deemed the practice a violation of human rights.

Homosexuality is illegal in Kenya, punishable by up to 14 years in prison. Authorities have routinely subjected men arrested under the law to anal examinations.

Thursday's verdict stems from a 2015 case. In 2015, Mombasa police obtained a court order to force two men to undergo anal exams and HIV testing at a local hospital. The two men had been arrested and charged with unnatural sex.

The National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission challenged the court's decision on the grounds that anal exams are cruel, inhumane and degrading. The commission also argued that the exams are a breach of medical ethics, both in Kenya and internationally.

Rael Ombuor, for VOA news, Nairobi.

U.S. prosecutors have quietly dropped charges against 11 of the 15 members of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's security detail. They were criminally indicted last year for assaulting protesters during a visit by Erdoğan to Washington.

And the State Department has approved nearly $1 billion in new arms sales for Saudi Arabia as the kingdom's crown prince continued his American tour.

Congress was notified Thursday of the deal, which includes a $670 million sale for more than 6,600 anti-tank missiles and a $300 million sale for spare vehicle parts for the Royal Saudi Land Forces Ordnance Corps.

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That's the latest world news from VOA.