



A picture taken yesterday shows the destroyed Al-Nuri Mosque in the Old City of Mosul. After eight months of grinding urban warfare, Iraqi government troops yesterday captured the ruined mosque, and the prime minister declared the group's self-styled caliphate at an end. PHOTO: REUTERS

Struggling UK PM May faces confidence vote

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May's government moved to fend off a threatened parliamentary rebellion over abortion yesterday ahead of a vote of confidence, laying bare its weakness following a disastrous election.

The House of Commons will vote later on May's legislative programme -- the Queen's Speech -- in a crucial test of whether her Conservative government can survive after losing its parliamentary majority on June 8.

The legislative agenda should pass after May formed a deal with Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), whose 10 MPs will vote with the 317 Conservatives on key issues in the 650-seat chamber.

But the government's jitters were made clear when it announced it would change abortion rights for Northern Irish women ahead of a threatened revolt by MPs.

May's personal authority is deeply damaged after calling the election three years early, expecting to win a landslide only to find herself hanging on by a thread.

She cut short a trip to Berlin yesterday with European allies ahead of next week's

G20 summit, to ensure she was present for Thursday's vote.

The majority of the bills in the Queen's Speech concern Britain's departure from the European Union, on which the first formal negotiations took place last week.

May's Brexit plan is under scrutiny as many saw the election as a rebuke to her move to pull Britain out of Europe's single market -- its largest trading market -- to prioritise cutting EU immigration.

Labour, which won 262 seats in the election, officially accepts that Britain will be leaving the single market but wants "full tariff-free access" to protect jobs.

However, some Labour MP has tabled an amendment to the Queen's Speech on Thursday calling for the government to consider staying in the single market.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has ordered lawmakers to abstain, raising the prospect of his own rebellion.

May announced a deal with the DUP on Monday where they agreed to back her minority government in confidence and budget votes, in return for an extra £1.0 billion (1.1 billion euros, \$1.3 billion) in state aid for Northern Ireland.



Gulf crisis 'opportunity to hit on' all sides

Nikki Haley sees US interest in rift between Qatar and other states

AGENCIES

US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley has said that the crisis between Qatar and other Gulf states is "an opportunity" to influence both Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Haley was testifying before the House Foreign Affairs committee on Wednesday when she was asked about her take on the crisis in the Gulf amid conflicting statements made by members of the Trump administration.

She said the US "should take it [the crisis] as the opportunity that it is".

She said it was a good time to tell Qatar to "quit funding Hamas ... but at the same time, go back to Saudi Arabia and say look you can talk to them [the Qataris] ... you got to cut this out, you've got to stop doing this."

Haley added that it was "an opportunity to sort of hit on both of them".

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt cut diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed sanctions on the country on June 5, accusing it of supporting

"terrorism".

The four countries have not provided any evidence for their claim, while Qatar has repeatedly rejected the allegation.

Last Thursday, the Saudi-led bloc issued a 13-point demand list in



exchange for the end of the anti-Qatar measures and gave a 10-day deadline.

The demands included, among others, that Qatar shut down the Al Jazeera media network, close a Turkish military base and scale down ties with Iran.

Over the three two weeks, US President Donald Trump has taken a

tougher stance against Qatar, while the state department and the pentagon had previously sought to remain neutral in the Gulf crisis.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said some demands on Qatar by a group of Arab countries that have imposed a blockade against it "will be very difficult to meet".

Nevertheless, in a statement issued on Sunday, Tillerson said the list submitted by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt includes "significant areas which provide a basis for ongoing dialogue leading to a resolution".

Meanwhile, a top Qatari human rights group said Wednesday it will employ Swiss lawyers to seek compensation for those impacted by the decision of Gulf countries to cut ties with the emirate.

Ali bin Smaikh Al-Marri, chairman of Qatar's National Human Rights Commission, said his group would take action against Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, which cut ties with Qatar this month.

Trump's travel ban to take partial effect in US

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump's order to block arrivals from six mainly Muslim countries takes partial effect yesterday after he won a Supreme Court victory over rights groups.

But implementation of the order after five months of legal challenges could be chaotic, in part due to the meaning of a key term used in the court's ruling Monday: "bona fide."

The court said that Trump could only ban travelers from the targeted countries "who lack any bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States."

With a 72-hour preparation period set before implementing the ban, the ruling has sent lawyers diving into legal texts to define that.

They need to set standards for US immigration officials and diplomats in Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, and also at US arrival points, who will decide who from those countries can still enter the United States.

Lawyers and advocates both for and against the travel ban say the result could be

a flood of legal challenges by travelers, immigrants and their supporters -- further slowing arrivals from the six countries.

Immigrant advocates were preparing for the onset of the ban, saying they would be at airports to aid any arriving travelers that immigration officers seeks to send back.

The ruling Monday capped five months of heavily politicized legal scrapping. The highest US court partially reversed lower courts' freezes of Trump's 90 day ban on travelers from the six countries, which he said was necessary to screen out potential terrorists.

It also allowed Trump to implement a 120 day ban on all refugees.

The court said it will review the overall case in October, meaning both bans will largely have run their course by then, though they could be extended if immigrant vetting processes are still judged to be too weak.

Even with the ban being blocked for five months, arrivals from the six countries have plunged due to more rigorous vetting. Arrivals were down by about half in March and April, just 6,372, compared to 12,100 for the two months in 2016.



CHILD SEX ABUSE

Vatican finance chief denies charges

AFP, Vatican City

Cardinal George Pell yesterday said that he would take leave from the Vatican to return to Australia to fight sexual assault charges after being given strong backing from Pope Francis, who has not asked him to resign from his senior Church post.

Hours after becoming the highest-profile Catholic cleric to face such charges, the Vatican finance chief said he had been a victim of "relentless character assassination" and vowed to clear his name and return to work.

"I am looking forward finally to having my day in court. I am innocent of these charges," the 76-year-old said at a press conference. "They are false. The whole idea of sexual abuse is abhorrent to me."

Pell, unofficially considered the number three in the Vatican hierarchy, said he had been in close contact with Francis.

In a strongly supportive statement, the Vatican said Pell's staff would continue his work in his absence and noted Francis's respect for the Australian's "honesty" and "energetic dedication" to his work on Church financial reform.

Police in the Australian state of Victoria announced earlier that Pell had been charged with "historical sexual assault offences" and ordered him to appear in a Melbourne court on July 18.

Deputy Commissioner Shane Patton said there were "multiple complainants" but provided no details as to the precise nature of the charges, or the age of the alleged victims.



Poetry diplomacy

AFP, Dubai

The ruler of Dubai has taken to verse to urge Qatar to concede to the demands of Saudi Arabia and its allies for an end to a crippling embargo.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, who is also vice president and prime minister of the United Arab Emirates, is the latest in a long line of world leaders to turn to poetry to convey their message.

In the poem, posted on Instagram late on Wednesday, Sheikh Mohammed urged Qatar to abandon its independent foreign policy and return to the Gulf fold.

"Of one origin, people, existence/one flesh and blood, one land and faith," he wrote.

"Yet Qatar turns to the nearby stranger, to the weak," he added, alluding to Doha's refusal to join the Riyadh-led boycott of Tehran.

"Now is the time to unite, one heart/to protect one another beyond hate."

The poem garnered more than 80,000 likes overnight.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and its allies Egypt and Bahrain severed all ties with Qatar on June 5, accusing it of support for extremist groups -- a claim Doha denies.

Sheikh Mohammed is by no means the first world leader to turn to poetry.

Former US president Jimmy Carter is a published poet. Barack Obama dabbled in poetry in the 1980s and his successor Donald Trump is now the unintentional author of a compilation of tweets and quotes entitled "Bard of the Deal: The poetry of Donald Trump".

US to toughen airline security

No laptop ban expansion

AFP, Washington

The United States announced Wednesday it would implement tough new security rules for all airlines flying into the country, but held off from a threatened expansion of its carry-on laptop ban.

Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly said evolving terror threats made it imperative to raise overall security standards, rather than take a piecemeal approach on personal electronics.

The move put off for the moment an extension of the ban on laptops and other carry-on personal electronics to flights from Europe, something that had been under discussion for months.

The laptop ban was instituted in March for eight North African and Middle East countries based on intelligence that the Islamic State group was working to build a bomb into a tablet or laptop computer.

For the same reason, Britain also banned similar-sized electronics from being carried into cabins on direct flights from six countries.

In a speech at a conference of the Center for a New American Security, Kelly said the terror threat to airlines has not diminished.



Indian children help to push an auto rickshaw along a flooded street after heavy rain in Jalandhar yesterday, as the monsoon season begins.

PHOTO: AFP

Protectionism 'terribly wrong'

Merkel vows to confront Trump over climate, open markets at G20

AFP, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel appeared headed for a collision course with US President Donald Trump yesterday after vowing to make a stand next week for climate protection and open markets at what is expected to be the most fractious G20 summit in years.

Merkel said that discussions at the July 7-8 gathering of world leaders in Hamburg would be difficult given Trump's climate scepticism and "America First" stance, but that she was determined to seek a clear commitment for the Paris accord against global warming and a pledge against protectionism.

When Trump announced in early June he would withdraw from the Paris deal, "we knew that we could not expect discussions to be easy" at the G20 summit, Merkel told the German parliament.

"The differences are obvious and it would be dishonest to try to cover that up. That I won't do," she said, adding that the US exit from the 2015 Paris pact had made Europe "more deter-

mined than ever" to make the accord a success.

Without naming names, she also warned that "those who think that the problems of this world can be solved with isolationism or protectionism are terribly wrong" and pledged to seek a "clear signal for open markets and against sealing off" at the summit.



Trump's divergent stance has left Western allies struggling to find a common front for the G20 gathering -- unlike previous summits, when differences were drawn along global north-south and east-west lines.

With Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan

and Saudi Arabia's King Salman in the volatile mix for the power meet, the list of potential minefield issues also includes the Syrian war, the Ukraine conflict and the diplomatic shut-out of Qatar.

Trump's anti-immigration stance has also emboldened many of the EU's ex-communist members in the east, which have staunchly opposed Merkel's pleas to accept larger shares of the refugees who have flocked to Europe.

With the fault lines multiplying, Merkel was to meet with her western European allies later Thursday to draw up a common battle strategy.

"Merkel has called a summit between Europeans because there is a problem with the relationship with Trump," said a diplomatic source, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"It's necessary to ensure European cohesion because within the G20, it's complicated."

Ahead of the meeting, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said it was important for Europe to face up to the US confidently.

3 years left to save humanity from climate change: experts

AFP, Paris

Humanity must put carbon dioxide emissions on a downward slope by 2020 to have a realistic shot at capping global warming at well under two degrees Celsius, the bedrock goal of the Paris climate accord, experts said Wednesday.

A world that heats up beyond that threshold will face a crescendo of devastating impacts ranging from deadly heatwaves to mass migration caused by rising seas, the experts warned in a commentary published in the science journal Nature.

With 1.0 degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming so far, ice sheets that could lift oceans by a dozen metres are melting more quickly, coral reefs are dying from heat stress, and ever more damaging storm surges are hammering coastal communities.

A number of benchmarks should be met

by 2020, according to the commentary.

Renewable energy -- mainly wind and solar -- must make up at least 30 percent of the world's electricity supply, it said. Moreover, no additional coal-fired power plants should be approved after that date.

In the transport sector, electric vehicles -- which currently represent one percent

of new car sales -- should account for 15 percent of the market by that date.

Governments should also require a 20 percent improvement in fuel efficiency for heavy-duty vehicles, and a 20 percent drop in carbon dioxide pollution per kilometre travelled in the aviation sector.

Still climbing sharply, CO2 from the aviation industry account for about two percent of all human-generated emissions.

Greenhouse gases from deforestation and agriculture, currently about 12 percent of the global total, must be cut to zero within a decade, the experts wrote.

