

PARADISE PAPERS

EU pushes for tax blacklist after leak

EU finance ministers yesterday sought to break resistance against creating Europe's first ever blacklist of tax havens after new revelations from the "Paradise Papers" showed how major firms escape tax.

The 28 members of the European Union have struggled for over a year to finalise a list of non-EU tax havens, with smaller countries such as Ireland, Malta and Luxembourg loath to scare off major firms headquartered in their low tax capitals.

Soon-to-quit Britain has also drawn up resistance, hoping to protect the near zero-tax rates offered in several of its dependencies, such as Jersey or the British Virgin Islands, that have been identified in the series of leaks that also include Panama Papers and the Luxleaks scandal.

The EU move follows similar efforts, notably by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development, which maintains a list of "uncooperative tax havens".

Nike used Dutch loophole to cut taxes

US sportswear giant Nike used a loophole in Dutch fiscal law to reduce its tax rate in Europe to just two percent, according to reporting Monday on the leaked Paradise Papers.

Two companies based in the Netherlands concentrated all Nike's European revenues, allowing the company to avoid paying tax on "profits in the countries where it actually sells its shoes," French daily Le Monde said.

The findings have emerged as part of the Paradise Papers released late Sunday by the US-based International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), which was behind similar leak last year of the Panama Papers.

According to the report on Nike, the sportswear manufacturer managed to bring its tax on profits down to two percent from the 25 percent average for European companies.

"To carry out this 'tour de force', Nike used the Dutch fiscal system "and its immense possibilities for optimisation," said Le Monde.

Under this system, set up in 2014, Nike paid itself for the right to use its brand and artificially reduced its profits thus reducing also its taxes, according to the report. SOURCE: AFP

Come to table, make a deal

Trump urges N Korea in conciliatory note during Seoul visit, says three US carriers, submarine in place to act on Pyongyang

REUTERS, Seoul

President Donald Trump on Tuesday warned North Korea he was prepared to use the full range of US military power to stop any attack, but in a more conciliatory appeal than ever before he urged Pyongyang to "make a deal" to end the nuclear standoff.

Speaking on North Korea's doorstep during a visit to Seoul, Trump said that while "we hope to God" not to have to resort to the use of full U.S. military might, he was ready to do whatever was necessary to prevent the "North Korean dictator" from threatening millions of lives.

"We cannot allow North Korea to threaten all that we have built," Trump said after talks with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who has supported diplomatic outreach to Pyongyang.

But at times taking a more measured, less confrontational tone, Trump also urged North Korea to "do the right thing" and added that: "I do see some movement," though he declined to elaborate.

"It really makes sense for North Korea to come to the table and make a deal," Trump told reporters at a joint news conference with Moon.

Despite Trump's renewed threats against North Korea, it was a far cry from the more strident approach he has pursued in recent months, including his previous dismissal of any diplomatic efforts with Pyongyang as a waste of time.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has made clear, however, that he has little interest in negotiations, at least until he has developed a nuclear-tipped missile capable of hitting the US mainland.

Landing earlier at Osan Air Base outside Seoul, the president and First Lady Melania Trump stepped down from Air Force One onto a red carpet as he began a 24-hour visit that could aggravate tension with North Korea. He then flew by helicopter to Camp Humphreys, the largest US military base in the country, and met US and South Korean troops, along with Moon.

The White House billed Trump's trip as intended to demonstrate US resolve over a hardline approach to North Korean nuclear and missile threats.

But many in the region had expressed fear that any further bellicose rhetoric by Trump toward Pyongyang could increase the potential for a devastating military conflict.

At the news conference, Trump said Pyongyang must understand the "unparalleled strength" that Washington had at its disposal. He cited three US aircraft carrier strike groups that are converging on the Western Pacific for exercises as well as a nuclear submarine he said was also in position.

Trump has rattled some US allies with his vow to "totally destroy" North Korea if it threatens the United States and by deriding Kim as a "Rocket Man on a suicide mission."



Hadi 'under house arrest'

Officials say Saudi Arabia allegedly has barred Yemeni president from returning home for months

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Saudi Arabia has barred Yemen's president, along with his sons, ministers and military officials, from returning home for months, Yemeni officials told The Associated Press.

The officials said the ban was prompted by enmity between President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and the United Arab Emirates, which is part of the Saudi-led coalition against Houthi rebels and has come to dominate southern Yemen, the portion of the country not under rebel control.

Hadi and much of his government have been in the Saudi capital Riyadh for most of the war.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the two main pillars of the coalition, which is ostensibly defending Hadi's government and is battling the Shia rebels, known as Houthis.

The coalition has waged an air campaign against the rebels since 2015, and the UAE has a strong military presence in southern Yemen - but the Houthis still control the north.

Saudi Arabia intensified its blockade on Yemen on Sunday, closing land crossings and all traffic to Yemen's air and sea ports. A

UN agency warned ships to depart Houthi-controlled ports, and flights to the only functioning airports in southern Yemen were cancelled.

As night fell, prices of fuel hiked in Sanaa, with some petrol stations closed, and drivers queued to fill their tanks, fearing worsening fuel shortage.

The coalition move came after the Houthis fired a missile towards Riyadh, their deepest strike into the Kingdom.

Hadi's inability to get back to southern Yemen underscores the president's loss of authority - even in the south that is nominally under his administration.

Since Hadi left Yemen in February, he has repeatedly sent written requests to Saudi King Salman asking to return. None were processed, said a Yemeni security commander.

In August, Hadi even went to Riyadh airport, planning to return to his temporary capital, Aden, in southern Yemen - but he was turned back from the airport, the commander said.

Two other Yemeni officials confirmed that Hadi, his sons and several ministers with him in Riyadh have been prevented from going to Yemen.



South Korean protestors holding a banner reading "No Trump Zone" dance during an anti-US rally near the US embassy in Seoul yesterday ahead of US President Donald Trump's visit to South Korea. PHOTO: AFP

Iran's actions may be 'act of war'

Says Saudi crown prince

CNN ONLINE

Supplying rebels in Yemen with missiles was a "direct military aggression by the Iranian regime," declared Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz yesterday.

In his first direct statements regarding a thwarted missile strike on the Riyadh airport that occurred over the weekend, bin Salman laid the blame for the attempt at the feet of Iran's government, claiming it was "supplying its Houthi militias [in Yemen] with missiles."

In comments reported by the Saudi Arabian official news agency SPA, the Crown Prince told British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson that Iran's actions "may be considered an act of war against the Kingdom."

A spokesman for Iran's foreign ministry dismissed Saudi Arabia's allegations over the missile strike as "false, irresponsible, destructive and provocative," the Iranian news agency Tasnim reported Monday.

Bin Salman's remarks were the latest by the Saudi government accusing Iran of not only being behind the actions taken in Yemen, but also for its purported behavior in Lebanon.

Iran sponsors Lebanese Hezbollah, the Shia militant and political group that holds tremendous sway in the Cabinet and as part of a pro-Syrian alliance in Lebanese parliament.

Iran and Hezbollah were blamed by Saad Hariiri for meddling in "the internal affairs of Arab countries" when he announced that he was resigning as prime minister of Lebanon on Saturday. Hariiri, a Sunni politician with Saudi backing, made the announcement from Riyadh.

Syria war does not end in Deir al-Zor

Says President Bashar al-Assad

REUTERS, Beirut

Syria's army and its allies will keep fighting in Syria after the battle ends in Deir al-Zor province, where Islamic State has its last significant stronghold, President Bashar al-Assad said yesterday.

He also indicated that he might take the war to the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which controls more than a quarter of Syria, by saying the war targeted those who seek to "divide and weaken states".

His comments came after a meeting with Ali Akbar Velayati, the foreign policy adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"The victories against terrorist organizations, starting in Aleppo and not ending in Deir al-Zor, formed a critical strike that foiled partition projects and terrorist goals," Assad's office quoted him as saying.

Assad regards all the groups fighting against the Syrian state as terrorist groups.

The Syrian army, with Russian air power and Iran-backed militias, is waging an offensive against Islamic State in the eastern Deir al-Zor province, mostly on the west banks of the Euphrates River.

The SDF, an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias, is also battling IS militants in Deir al-Zor. Backed by US-led air strikes and special forces, the SDF has focused on territory east of the river, which bisects the oil-rich province.

Delhi residents panic as deadly smog returns

Doctors warn of health emergency; schools shut

AFP, New Delhi

A public health emergency was declared as choking smog blanketed New Delhi yesterday, with authorities ordering the temporary closure of all primary schools in the world's most polluted capital city.

The US embassy website said levels of the fine pollutants known as PM2.5 that are most harmful to health reached 703 -- well over double the threshold of 300 that authorities class as hazardous. Local authorities are warning of worsening conditions in the coming days.

The Indian Medical Association declared a public health emergency as it urged city administrators "to make every possible effort to curb this menace".

As public outrage mounted over the air pollution crisis, Delhi's deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia ordered the closure of all

primary schools today. "We have decided to shut schools up to primary level for a day, and will evaluate the situation on an hourly basis to see if such a closure needs to be extended," he told reporters.

Almost 2 million students are enrolled in primary schools in Delhi, according to government data from 2015.

All outdoor activities have also been banned across the capital's 6,000 schools while pollution levels remain at severe levels, Sisodia said.

The World Health Organization in 2014 classed New Delhi as the world's most polluted capital, with air quality levels worse than Beijing.

Since then authorities have closed power plants temporarily and experimented with taking some cars off the road.



Trump not invited to Paris climate talks

Says a French presidential aide

AFP, Paris

US President Donald Trump is not among the around 100 heads of state and government invited to next month's climate summit in Paris, a French presidential aide said yesterday.

"For now, President Donald Trump is not invited," he said, while noting that representatives of the US government would attend.

Trump announced his decision to withdraw the United States from the historic 2015 Paris Agreement on limiting carbon emissions in June.

The pact calls for capping global warming at "well under" two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels, and 1.5 C if possible.

Around 800 organisations and public stakeholders will be on hand for the December 12 event to be held on Ile Seguin, an island in the Seine River southwest of Paris.

The meeting will follow the 23rd UN climate conference (COP23) that opened in Bonn, Germany, on Monday.

The Bonn meeting is dealing with mainly technical issues such as ensuring transparency and compliance, the reporting of emissions, and procedures for allocating climate funds.

The aide to French President Emmanuel Macron said the upcoming summit would aim to "build coalitions" involving cities, investment funds and development banks to further the goals of the accord.

NEWSIN brief

Turkey PM hails US visa move as 'positive step'

AFP, Ankara

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim yesterday hailed the resumption of limited visa services by the US as a "positive step" as he prepared to head to Washington. The US and Turkish embassies in Ankara and Washington announced on Monday they would start processing visa applications for each other's citizens after an almost month-long suspension.

Ex-Trump adviser met Russian officials

AFP, Washington

A second foreign policy advisor to Donald Trump's presidential campaign has admitted to contacts with Russian officials during last year's election and to having proposed that Trump travel to Russia during the campaign. Former investment banker and Russia expert Carter Page told the House Intelligence Committee last week that he had "brief" contact with a Russian deputy prime minister.

French cops launch anti-terror raids

AFP, Paris

Ten people were arrested in an anti-terror operation in France and Switzerland yesterday including a Swiss man linked to a foiled knife attack by a French teenager, sources close to the probe said. A 27-year-old Swiss man arrested in France was in contact with a 14-year-old French boy who was "about to carry out the attack," one of the sources said. The teenager was arrested in the Paris region on June 20 and charged by an anti-terror judge, the sources said.



Afghan security forces rescued Shamshad TV station staff after an attack in Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. Gunmen disguised as policemen stormed the television station, killing at least two people and wounding several others. The assault, claimed by the IS, lasted about three hours. PHOTO: REUTERS

Ex-Catalan leader urges unity against Spain

Deadline for secessionist pact nears

REUTERS, Madrid

Catalonia's deposed leader Carles Puigdemont yesterday urged the region's political forces to unite against Spain, as hours remained for him to agree terms for an electoral pact with other pro-independence parties.

Puigdemont went into self-imposed exile in Belgium last month after Spain's central government fired his secessionist administration, dissolved the Catalan parliament and called an election in the region for Dec 21.

Madrid also issued an arrest warrant against him on charges including rebellion, but a Brussels court ruled on Monday he could remain at liberty in Belgium until it had decided whether he should be extradited.

The independence push has deeply divided the country, dragging it into its worst political crisis since its return to democracy four decades ago and fuelling

anti-Spanish feelings in Catalonia and nationalist tendencies elsewhere.

Pro-independence parties want the December vote to become a de facto independence referendum, and Puigdemont's PDeCAT and the ERC party led by Oriol Junqueras said at the weekend they might contest it on a combined ticket.

But they must register any alliance by the end of yesterday, and prospects of them bridging their differences in time looked slim.

ERC's spokesman Sergi Sabria said on Monday his party did not rule out a coalition with PDeCAT, but would agree only if other parties joined them, including the anti-capitalist CIUP which has yet to decide whether it will contest the December ballot.

Polls suggest secessionist parties would win enough votes combined to hold a slim majority in the Catalan parliament. Running together would increase their chance of success.

