



Supporters hold poster of the newly sworn-in President Emmerson Mnangagwa during the Inauguration ceremony at the National Sport Stadium in Harare, yesterday. Inset, Mnangagwa taking oath as president of Zimbabwe.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

SEEKING PEACE WITH INDIA

Hafiz Saeed brands Pak ex-PM a traitor

AGENCIES

Newly freed JuD chief and mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai terror attack Hafiz Saeed yesterday called ousted former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif a "traitor" for seeking peace with neighbour and arch-rival India.

Hafiz Saeed, who has a \$10 million US bounty on his head over the Mumbai attack, spoke at Friday prayers after being freed earlier today from 11 months of house arrest by a court that said there was no evidence to hold him.

Saeed was placed under house arrest in January while Sharif was still prime minister, a move that drew praise from India, who had for long been furious at Saeed's freedom in Pakistan.

A Supreme Court ruling disqualified Sharif from office in July over a corruption investigation, though his party still runs the government.

Saeed, however, said Sharif deserved to be removed for his peace overtures with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Nawaz Sharif asks why he was ousted? I tell him he was ousted because he committed treason against Pakistan by developing friendship with Modi," Saeed said.

The JuD chief also wasted no time in launching his anti-India rhetoric by saying he would mobilise people for the "cause of Kashmir".

The fire-brand cleric's release after midnight came ahead of the 9th anniversary of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks in which as many as 166 people were killed.

India had expressed outrage over the decision+ of the judicial board to release Saeed, calling it an attempt by Pakistan to mainstream proscribed terrorists and a reflection of its continuing support to non-state actors.



Britain's May pushes EU on Brexit deal

AFP, Brussels

Prime Minister Theresa May urged the EU to "step forward together" with Britain yesterday as the bloc's leaders hoped she would finally offer a compromise to reach a Brexit divorce deal in December.

The embattled British premier was set to meet EU President Donald Tusk on the sidelines of a summit with ex-Soviet states in Brussels in a bid to unlock negotiations on a future trade deal.

EU officials were increasingly hopeful she would bring a new proposal on the thorny issue of Britain's exit bill, after senior British ministers agreed earlier this week to improve the offer to a reported 40 billion euros.

Arriving in Brussels, May refused to deny she was ready to bump up the amount Britain would pay when she meets Tusk at 1530 GMT, but insisted any such move must be tied to a final deal on future relations next year.

May will also meet her counterparts from Lithuania, Belgium and Denmark in Brussels.

The EU insists Britain must tie up divorce terms -- the bill, the Irish border and the rights of EU nationals living in Britain -- before there can be any talks on future relations.

At a meeting in Gothenburg a week ago, Tusk gave May until the start of December to make "much more progress" in order to unlock trade negotiations at an EU summit on December 14-15.

Opposition agrees to unite

Says Assad must go; Russia to reduce Syria presence by year's end

AFP, Riyadh

Syria's disparate opposition groups announced an agreement early yesterday to send a united delegation to next week's UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva, as international diplomatic efforts intensify to end the six-year conflict.

The announcement came on the second day of a Saudi-sponsored meeting in Riyadh, where around 140 opposition figures are gathered to unify their ranks before direct talks with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime on November 28.

Several rounds of talks hosted by the United Nations have failed to bring an end to the Syrian conflict, which has killed more than 330,000 people since 2011 and forced millions from their homes.

"We have agreed with the groups here in Riyadh, along with the Cairo and Moscow platforms, to form one united delegation to participate in the Geneva talks," Syrian opposition member Bassma Kodmani told reporters in Riyadh.

Kodmani added that further meetings would be held to finalise the names and number of representatives each group would have in the 50-strong unified delegation.

The delegates at the meeting have been under heavy pressure to row back on some of their more radical demands after a series of battlefield victories that have given Assad's regime the upper hand.

But there were still lingering differences.

Kodmani said the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee (HNC) and its closest allies maintained their longstanding demand that Assad step down from power as a prerequisite for a transitional phase to end the Syrian war, prompting "reservations" from the Moscow group.

The Riyadh talks come as Syrian regime ally Russia is seeking to organise a "congress" to bring together Assad's forces and various opposition groups to reinvigorate the hobbled peace process.

But Kodmani remained non-committal about the

opposition's participation.

Meanwhile, Russia's military on Thursday said it plans to reduce its involvement in Syria this year as it is nearing the completion of its goals there. It said some military will be left behind even after Moscow scales back its involvement in bombing and combat.



Sergei Lavrov (R) greets UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura in Moscow, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Plants as spies!

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The US military wants to deploy plants as "the next generation of intelligence gatherers".

Genetically modified plants could be employed as self-sustaining sensors to gather information in settings unsuitable for more traditional technologies.

The Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), which is responsible for the development of emerging technologies in the US military, has called for scientists to submit ideas for how to harness the power of plants.

In the past, DARPA has produced information-gathering technologies such as the satellites and seismographs employed to ensure Soviet compliance with the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

But in this new initiative, termed the Advanced Plant Technologies (APT) programme, the agency is looking to the natural world for help.

The idea is that plants' natural capabilities can be co-opted to detect relevant chemicals, harmful microorganisms, radiation and electromagnetic signals.

Modifying the genomes of plants would enable the military to control the types of sensing they are doing, and also trigger certain responses that can be monitored remotely using existing hardware.

Technology already exists to monitor plants from the ground, air and even from space.



Palestinians run from tear gas fired by Israeli troops during clashes at a protest against the closure of a road by Israeli troops in the West Bank city of Hebron, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SPECIAL PROBE ON ALLEGED RUSSIAN MEDDLING IN US POLLS

Flynn 'to cooperate with Mueller'

AFP, Washington

Former White House national security advisor Michael Flynn is moving to cooperate with a special prosecutor probing possible collusion between Donald Trump's campaign team and Russia during last year's election, The New York Times reported Thursday.

Lawyers for Michael Flynn notified the president's legal team in recent days that they could no longer discuss the investigation by special prosecutor Robert Mueller, the Times reported, citing four people involved in the case.

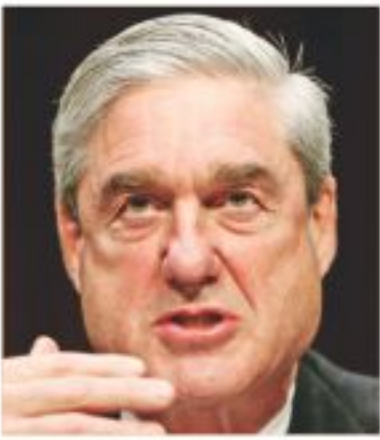
The development indicates that Flynn is cooperating with prosecutors or is negotiating such a deal, the report said.

Flynn's lawyers had been sharing information with Trump's legal team about Mueller's probe related to Russian interference in last year's presidential vote, which saw Trump defeat his Democratic challenger Hillary Clinton.

"That agreement has been terminated," the Times' sources said.

Mueller has a broad mandate and has honed in on the activities of Flynn, one of the highest-profile figures to come under his scrutiny.

Flynn, a retired lieutenant general who previously led the Defense Intelligence Agency, became the White



Robert Mueller



Michael Flynn

House national security advisor after Trump took office on January 20 this year.

He was forced to resign three weeks later amid reports about his communications with then Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak and claims he had misled Vice President Mike Pence about them.

Mueller's investigation has already led to the arrest of Trump's one-time campaign chairman Paul Manafort, Manafort's partner Rick Gates, and George Papadopoulos, a campaign foreign policy advisor.

Papadopoulos pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his Russian contacts, in a deal that made clear he is cooperating with Mueller.

Three congressional committees have also been probing Russian meddling in US politics.

Although nothing has linked the president directly to the Russians, US media have reported that his firing of FBI director James Comey has drawn Mueller's attention. Trump fired Comey in May, citing the FBI chief's probe into the alleged links between the presidential campaign and Russian interference, as well as Comey's alleged protection of Clinton. Comey, for his part, wrote a memo alleging Trump had asked him to drop his investigation into Flynn.

Tibet wants to stay with China, says Dalai Lama

TNN, Kolkata

Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama said on Thursday that Tibet did not seek independence from China but greater development.

Speaking at an interactive session hosted by the Indian Chamber of Commerce here, he said, "We are not seeking independence... We want to stay with China. We want more development."

He added, "Tibet has a different culture and a different script... The Chinese people love their own country. We love our own country."

He said, "From Yangtze to Sindhu rivers, major rivers ... come from Tibet. Billions of lives are involved. Taking care of the Tibetan plateau is not only good for Tibet but for billions of people."

He also lauded India's "spirit of religious tolerance", adding that there were "problems sometimes because of politicians trying to manipulate that".

He took a dig at the average Indian's laziness as well — describing them as "lazier than the Chinese".

"I think Indian people are lazy but that may be due to the climate. But India is more stable and can play a role in the world stage," he added. "India has a tradition of living together. (It is) a living example of different traditions being carried together," the Buddhist monk said, adding: "I can proudly state the same about Tibetan culture."

India should combine modern education with basic human values rooted in its traditional teachings, he said. "This could pave the way for peace in the 21st century after the violence that has prevailed in the last 100 years," said the monk. "Religion, too, has become a lip service and failed to bridge the divide between humans," he added, blaming politicians for often using it in a wrong way.

"India is rich in traditional teachings. These, rather than just religion, can help bring people together. If modern India can combine newage education with lessons on inner values in a secular way, then the country can head in the right direction. Modern education is a bit too materialistic," he said.

NEWSIN brief

3 peacekeepers killed in Mali: UN

AFP, Bamako

At least three peacekeepers and a Malian soldier were killed in an attack in north-east Mali, the UN's MINUSMA mission to the country said yesterday. Besides an initial toll of four dead it said saying another Malian soldier and several other peacekeepers were wounded, some critically. It did not give the nationalities of the UN troops involved but contingents from Togo and Nigeria are deployed in the area.

Blast kills senior Pak police official

AFP, Peshawar

A top police official in Pakistan's northwest was killed along with his bodyguard when a suicide bomber on a motorbike rammed into their vehicle yesterday morning, police said. Five other people were injured in the incident, which occurred in the restive city of Peshawar as the Additional Inspector General for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Ashraf Noor, and his guard were travelling to work.

Germany's SPD says ready for talks

AFP, Berlin

Germany's Social Democrats (SPD) yesterday said they were ready to hold talks that may help caretaker Chancellor Angela Merkel resolve a deep political crisis without calling new elections. Merkel's conservative bloc won a September 24 vote, but without a clear majority. Veteran leader Merkel has since failed to find coalition partners to govern the EU's largest economy for her fourth term.