



A wounded Syrian child receives emergency treatment at a makeshift hospital in Douma, following reported bombardment by regime forces of the rebel-held town, on the outskirts of the capital Damascus, yesterday. Inset: Smoke billows from the area after Syrian government airstrikes.



PHOTO: AFP

UK PM IN CHINA

# Xi wants 'new level' of ties

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday told British Prime Minister Theresa May that their countries should take trade ties to "a new level" as London scouts the globe for fresh partnerships after its contentious EU exit.

Hounded by Brexit rows at home, May is seeking to deepen trade relations with the world's second largest economy as Britain prepares to leave the European Union next year.

The embattled prime minister and senior Chinese leaders championed a "golden era" of relations between their two countries throughout her visit.

But criticism in London over her domestic agenda and her handling of Britain's vexed divorce with the European Union loomed large, prompting her to declare she was "not a quitter" before her arrival on Wednesday.

"As the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union we're going to be more outward looking and looking to enhance our relationships around the world, and this relationship with China is an important part of that," May told state broadcaster CCTV.

May held talks with Xi at the Diaoyutai State Guest House tea after visiting an agricultural sciences academy, later taking part in a traditional tea ceremony with the Chinese leader and his wife Peng Liyuan.

"We must strengthen the pragmatism of Sino-British relations in the golden era, and push economic and trade cooperation between the two countries to a new level," Xi said during their meeting, according to CCTV.

Xi said the two countries can "develop mutually benefi-



cial cooperation on a wider scale, at a higher level and on a deeper level" though his cherished One Belt One Road initiative.

The massive infrastructure programme is aimed at reviving ancient Silk Road trade routes by building rail and maritime networks across the world.

But the project has spurred both interest and anxiety in many countries, with some saying it mainly benefits Chinese state-run firms and has whiffs of expansionism.

May had said on Wednesday that London welcomes the initiative but she cautioned that the two countries would continue to work together to ensure that the endeavour "meets international standards".

May said the two countries would sign nine billion pounds (\$12.7 billion) in business deals during her visit.

The two countries agreed new measures to improve access to the huge Chinese market and set up a special panel to explore trade opportunities, she said Wednesday.

Brexit crept into her talks with Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday, though her Chinese counterpart reassured her that their "golden era" of relations would not be affected by London's EU departure.

## STANDOFF IN YEMEN'S ADEN

# Saudi, UAE step up efforts to end crisis

AFP, Aden

Saudi and Emirati envoys shuttled between Yemeni government forces and besieging southern separatists in second city Aden yesterday in a bid to end a tense standoff after days of deadly fighting.

The Sunday assault on the embattled government's headquarters by its former allies has opened up a new front in the devastating civil war that has created what the United Nations says is the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the two major contributors to a military coalition that has backed President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi since he fled into exile in 2015.

But they have struggled to keep together the disparate alliance supporting him against Huthi Shia rebels who control the capital Sanaa and much of the north.

South Yemen was an independent country until union with the north in 1990 and Hadi has relied heavily on militia that support its restoration.

The separatists said they were in full control of Aden on Thursday.

Only the presidential palace in the north of the city remains under the control of government forces, military sources said.

At least 38 people have been killed and 222 wounded in Aden since Sunday, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

# France can't give lessons

Says Turkey after Macron issues stark warning over incursion

AGENCIES

Turkey yesterday told France to stop lecturing it over its campaign in Syria, where Ankara is pressing a fierce offensive against a Kurdish militia.

The warning from Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu came a day after French President Emmanuel Macron told Ankara it would be a "real problem" if its intervention turned into an outright "invasion".

"France cannot give us lessons on this issue," Cavusoglu told reporters in televised comments.

"We are not France, which occupied Africa," he said referring to France's colonial past.

Turkey launched an offensive on January 20 against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and last week President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened to expand the operation, hiking tensions with its Nato allies.

Turkey says the YPG is a terror organisation allied to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

But Washington has backed the YPG as a key secular ally in the fight against

the Islamic State group, reported AFP.

Cavusoglu said European leaders had initially expressed support for Turkey's campaign in Syria during talks with Ankara, but that they appeared to have changed their stance in public comments.

"Unfortunately Europeans are two-faced," he remarked.

Reacting to Macron's remarks,

a "Day of Remembrance of the (Armenian) genocide" in talks with Armenian groups in France.

Many historians and Western nations consider the World War I-era mass killings and deportation of up to 1.5 million Armenians under the Ottoman Empire a genocide -- a term forcefully rejected by Turkey.

Cavusoglu denounced Macron's comment as a domestic political move which amounted to little more than "populism."

Turkey's armed forces said yesterday Turkish warplanes struck 19 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) targets in northern Iraq on Monday, killing 49 militants, reported Reuters.

The Turkish military destroyed shelters, hideouts and weapon positions of the militant group, which was believed to be preparing an attack on Turkish border posts, it said.

Meanwhile, The United States has extended a special protected status for Syrians that keeps some 7,000 of them from being deported back to their war-ravaged country, the Department of Homeland Security said Wednesday.

Earlier in the week, Macron had also angered Ankara by pledging to observe

## ANTI-KURDS OPS IN SYRIA

Turkish airstrikes kill 49 Kurdish militants in northern Iraq

US extends protected status for 7,000 Syrians

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said that any suggestion that Ankara had broader designs in Syria, beyond pushing the YPG back from the border, was "totally wrong".

"The whole world knows, or should know, that Turkey is not engaged in an invasion," he said on Wednesday.

Earlier in the week, Macron had also angered Ankara by pledging to observe

# France to finance exports to Iran, risking US anger

REUTERS, Paris

France will start offering euro-denominated credits to Iranian buyers of its goods later this year, a move to bolster trade while keeping it outside the reach of US sanctions, the head of state-owned investment bank Bpifrance said.

France and other European countries have been looking to increase trade with Iran since Paris, Washington and other world powers agreed in 2015 to lift many economic sanctions in exchange for controls on Iran's nuclear programme.

The plan is to offer dedicated, euro-denominated export guarantees to Iranian buyers of French goods and services. By structuring the financing through vehicles without any US link, whether to the currency or otherwise, the aim is to avoid the extraterritorial reach of US legislation.

The move could anger US President Donald Trump, who has threatened to pull out of the Iran nuclear agreement reached by his predecessor Barack Obama. Washington has maintained some financial restrictions, leaving private banks - even those based outside the United States - wary of financing deals.

There is a pipeline of about 1.5 billion euros in potential contracts from interested French exporters, Dufourcq told lawmakers on Wednesday.

France, which has had close business ties with Iran since before the fall of the Shah in 1979 and still operates several large factories there including Renault and PSA plants, is not alone in Europe in seeking to deepen trade ties.

A French banking source said Italy, Germany, Austria and Belgium were also working on mechanisms that would shield their companies from the risk of US sanctions.

Meanwhile, Russia's UN ambassador on Wednesday said Russia does not believe there is a case for United Nations action against Iran over Tehran's alleged involvement in Yemen war.

## Russia says no case for UN action against Tehran

## Record price lures UK to sell its 'Thai embassy'

AFP, London

Britain is to move its embassy in Bangkok after the record £420 million (\$596 million) sale of its current premises in the Thai capital, the UK's foreign ministry announced Wednesday.

The sale of the embassy in Bangkok's Lumpini neighbourhood was the foreign ministry's biggest ever such deal and the biggest land deal in Thai history, according to the ministry.

The 1920s building was purchased by property firm Hongkong Land and Thai conglomerate Central Group.

Embassy staff are due to relocate to the AIA Sathorn Tower by the end of the year.

# EU pledges \$53m to help build Palestinian state

US puts Hamas chief Haniya on terror blacklist

AGENCIES

The European Union has announced a new funding package of 42.5 million euros (nearly \$53m) to help the Palestinians build their new state.

The announcement came as Brussels urged the US to not go it alone in any effort to make peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

The EU warned that doing so would end in failure.

"Any framework for negotiations must be multilateral and must involve all players - all partners - that are essential to this process. A process without one or the other would simply not work, would simply not be realistic," EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said.

"Nothing without the United States, nothing with the United States alone," Mogherini told reporters in Brussels.

The meeting was the first of its kind since

US President Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital, breaking with an international consensus that the holy city's status should be resolved in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Mogherini said "this is a difficult moment" for the region. She said that Wednesday's meeting would focus on ways to promote a two-state solution to the conflict and expressed hope that it "could be an element of facilitation for restoring some trust and a level of confidence".

Meanwhile, the United States on Wednesday put the head of Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, Ismail Haniya, on its terror blacklist and slapped sanctions on him -- a move sure to raise tensions.

The 55-year-old Haniya, who was named head of Hamas in May 2017, represents the more pragmatic wing of the movement, which said the US move would not deter the group's "resistance."



Palestinians warm themselves inside their house in the northern Gaza Strip on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Turkey sends Amnesty chief back to jail

AFP, Istanbul

An Istanbul court yesterday scrapped its decision to release Taner Kilic, the head of Amnesty International in Turkey, and ordered him to remain in jail for the duration of his trial on terror charges, the rights group said.

"The Istanbul court has now overturned its own release verdict ... Taner will stay in pre-trial detention," Turkey's Amnesty researcher Andrew Gardner said on Twitter.

"This is devastating for Taner's family and a disgrace to justice," he added.

Kilic has been held since June 2017 in the western city of Izmir, accused of links to US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen who Turkey says ordered the July 2016 coup bid.

Amnesty has denounced the allegations against Kilic

## British MPs vote to move out of Westminster!

AFP, London

British MPs on Wednesday voted in favour of moving out of their historic Westminster home, to make way for major renovation work of the iconic Houses of Parliament.

Lawmakers backed the decision for a "full and timely decant" of parliament by 234 votes to 185, paving the way for a multi-billion-pound revamp of the dilapidated complex.

"This debate arguably should have taken place about 40 years ago," said House of Commons leader Andrea Leadsom at the start of the debate.

Much of the Palace dates from the mid-1800s, while Westminster Hall was built in 1099.

# US missile defence test fails in Hawaii

AFP, Washington

A test of a US missile interceptor failed in Hawaii on Wednesday, a defense official said, marking the second such unsuccessful attempt in less than a year.

The test using the Aegis Ashore system occurred at the Pacific Missile Range Facility on the island of Kauai, Missile Defense Agency spokesman Mark Wright said in a statement.

Wright said the test was of an SM-3 Block IIA missile, made by arms giant Raytheon and designed to intercept intermediate-range ballistic missiles.

A defense official told AFP the test was a failure and investigators have opened a probe.

Wednesday's failure comes after another unsuccessful test in June of the missile, which is being jointly developed by the United States and Japan.

A test firing in February 2017 was successful. According to the MDA, America has so far spent about \$2.2 billion on the system and Japan about \$1 billion.

The failure comes amid heightened tensions over North Korea's ballistic missile program.

Hawaii is on edge after its Emergency Management Agency triggered mass panic with a false alert of a ballistic missile headed for the Pacific islands.



as "baseless".

Gulen and his followers meanwhile deny any links to the coup, and reject the Turkish government's attempt to label them as a terrorist group.

The Istanbul court had on Wednesday ordered his release on judicial control, to the delight and relief of his family and friends.

But their joy was sapped hours later after he was taken back into custody straight after his release.

Authorities accused Kilic of having an encrypted messaging application on his phone in August 2014 called ByLock, which Ankara claims was especially created for Gulen supporters.