

'Competitor', not 'enemy'

Trump on Putin

AFP, Brussels

US President Donald Trump yesterday said that he sees his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin as a "competitor", not an "enemy", days before they meet for a high-stakes summit.

"Someone said 'is he an enemy?' No, he's not my enemy. Is he your friend? No, I don't know him well enough, but the couple of times I've gotten to meet him we got on very well."

"But ultimately he's a competitor. He's representing Russia, I'm representing the United States," Trump added. "Hopefully some day he'll be a friend, I just don't know."

Trump said he would be discussing the civil war in Syria, the conflict in Ukraine, as well as allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 US election.

"I will be asking about meddling, your favourite question," he told reporters during a press conference on the sidelines of a Nato summit in Brussels.

The US president was also asked if he would be prepared to recognise Crimea as part of Russia after it was annexed from Ukraine by Moscow in 2014.

Some news reports and analysts have suggested Trump might be prepared to concede the territory to Putin in exchange for cooperation in Syria.

He also said that he expected to discuss Nato military exercises near the Russia border in the Baltic Sea, which Moscow considers provocative.

European nations are desperate for the US to maintain its military commitment to continue defending the continent under the Nato military alliance.

"We'll be talking about it," Trump said.

Trump claims Nato victory

Leaves Brussels for 'hotspot' London after forcing allies to boost defence spending

REUTERS, Brussels

Donald Trump claimed a personal victory at a Nato summit yesterday after telling European allies to increase spending or lose Washington's support, an ultimatum that forced leaders to huddle in a crisis session with the US president.

Trump emerged declaring continued commitment to a Western alliance built on US military might that has stood up to Moscow since World War Two.

People present said he had earlier warned he would "go it alone" if allies, notably Germany, did not make vast increases in their defence budgets for next year.

"I let them know that I was extremely unhappy," he said, but added that the talks ended on the best of terms: "It all came together at the end. It was a little tough for a little while."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who called the summit "very intense", and other leaders including French President

Nato members agree to spend 2 percent GDP on defence spending

US president, after questioning May's Brexit plan, arrives in Britain



US President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump arrive at Stansted Airport, Britain, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

From Brussels, Trump yesterday landed in London beginning a protest-laden trip to by questioning whether Prime Minister Theresa May will deliver on UK voters' intentions when they decided to quit the European Union.

Ignoring all diplomatic niceties, the convention-shredding US president set up the four-day visit with a rebuke of his beleaguered host as she battles to stop her government falling apart over Brexit.

Shrugging off the plans for mass protests, he said in Brussels: "They like me a lot in the UK. I think they agree with me on immigration. I think that's why Brexit happened," he told a news conference before flying to Stansted Airport north of London.

He said Britain was "a pretty hot spot right now with a lot of resignations".

Some 77 percent of Britons have an unfavourable view of Trump, according to a poll by YouGov with 1,648 respondents.



A heifer jumps over revellers at the bullring during festivities of the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, northern Spain yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

UK publishes Brexit plan that sparked rebellion

AFP, London

The British government yesterday published its long-awaited Brexit blueprint that it hopes will restart talks with the EU, but its launch was mired in farce after a protest by MPs briefly suspended a sitting of the House of Commons.

The policy paper, which sets out plans for close economic ties with the bloc after Britain leaves the EU in March, had already sparked two ministerial resignations and revived talk of a revolt against May.

When Brexit Secretary Dominic Raab stood up to present the plan in the Commons, MPs loudly complained they had not seen a copy beforehand -- prompting the speaker to suspend proceedings for five minutes to allow them to obtain one.

Raab, who was appointed on Monday after his predecessor David Davis quit, then continued his statement, describing the proposal on offer as "innovative".

It suggests a free trade area and "common rule book" with the EU in goods after pressure from businesses to allow cross-border trade to continue as normal.

Britain would still leave the EU single market and customs union and set its own

path on the far bigger services sector, hoping to be able to curb EU immigration and strike its own trade deals with third countries.

For the City of London the plan would accept that firms lose their "passporting" rights to operate in the EU, but seeks a hybrid arrangement.

Catherine McGuinness, head of policy for the City of London Corporation, said the proposals represented a "real blow" for finance firms.

The plan has also caused outrage among eurosceptic members of May's Conservative party, and foreign minister Boris Johnson joined Davis in dramatically quitting this week in protest.

Their departures, followed by a clutch of junior aides, destabilised May's government and revived talk of a leadership challenge.

"What we are doing is delivering on the vote of the British people... that's what our proposal does," she told reporters at a Nato summit in Brussels.

The prime minister is also likely to face some opposition in Brussels, where officials have repeatedly warned Britain to lower its expectations about how close ties can be.



NEWSIN brief

72 gets life in prison for failed Turkey coup

REUTERS, Istanbul

A Turkish court sentenced 72 defendants to life in prison yesterday for their role in killing 34 people when rogue soldiers seized control of a suspension bridge in Istanbul two years ago during an attempted coup, state media said.

Another 27 defendants were sentenced to more than 15 years in prison for helping that effort, according to Anadolu news agency.

Trump accuser Daniels arrested in Ohio

REUTERS, Washington

US adult film star Stormy Daniels, who claims she had an affair with President Donald Trump in 2006, was arrested in a strip club on Wednesday in what her lawyer said was a setup.

Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, was arrested in a Columbus, Ohio, club for allowing a customer to touch her in a non-sexual manner while on stage, lawyer Michael Avenatti said on Twitter.

10 people killed in Afghan landslide

AFP, Kabul

At least 10 people were killed and hundreds of homes destroyed in a remote area of northeastern Afghanistan after melting snow triggered a landslide, officials said yesterday.

A mountain lake in Panjshir overflowed and sent water and mud cascading over Peshghor village, Omar Mohammadi, spokesman for the disaster management ministry, told AFP.

Ex-Catalan leader can be extradited

Says German court

REUTERS, Berlin

A German court ruled yesterday that former Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont could be extradited to Spain for alleged misuse of public funds, but it rejected a request to send him back to answer a more serious charge of rebellion.

Puigdemont fled to Brussels after Spanish courts issued a warrant for his arrest over his role in Catalonia's declaration of independence last October. This was illegal under Spain's constitution, according to Spanish law.

A source in Puigdemont's legal team said the former Catalan leader would appeal a decision to extradite him from Germany on any charge. If extradited for misuse of funds, Puigdemont could not be tried for rebellion in Spain.

A spokesman for the Schleswig Holstein court said: "The court decided this morning that an extradition due to the accusation of misuse of public funds is permissible."

Responding to the court decision, German prosecutors said they would soon decide whether to authorise the extradition of Puigdemont, who was arrested in March while travelling through Germany.

The German court decision comes after Spain's new Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez met with the new pro-independence Catalan leader Quim Torra on Tuesday in a move aimed at easing tensions between Barcelona and Madrid.

'A state above the state'

Ex-Pak PM Sharif takes a dig at military, vows return

AFP, London

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif has said he would return to Pakistan this week despite being sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison by a corruption court there.

"Despite seeing the bars of prison in front of my eyes, I am going to Pakistan," he told a conference of his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party in London.

"Put Nawaz Sharif in prison for life, send him to the gallows but you will have to answer the questions that the people of Pakistan are asking and they will stop only after getting answers," he said to cheering from supporters on Wednesday.

Sharif also alluded to the power of Pakistan's security establishment, saying: "There was a time when we used to say a state within a state, now it's a state above the state".



At the conference, held in the ballroom of the Grosvenor House hotel in central London's plush Mayfair district, one man held a placard reading: "Leave democracy alone".

Attendees chanted "Nawaz Sharif, We Love You!" as he concluded his speech.

Sharif was sentenced by a court in Islamabad last week over the purchase of high-end properties in London.

He was ousted from his third term as prime minister by the Supreme Court last year following a corruption investigation and banned from politics for life but remains a powerful symbol for his ruling party.

Sharif was scheduled to leave London yesterday and arrive in Lahore in Pakistan at around 0600 or 0700 GMT.

Meanwhile, Pakistani police detained hundreds of members of the former ruling party in the central city of Lahore yesterday, weeks before the country heads to the polls, party officials said.

FLOODS, LANDSLIDES

Japan tackles clean-up as toll tops 200

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese rescue workers yesterday searched the ruins of homes looking for dozens of people still missing after deadly rains that killed more than 200 people.

Operations were under way to dig out and clear up after the devastating floods and landslides that engulfed entire neighbourhoods.

But with around 60 people still feared missing, local authorities said they would continue searching house by house looking for survivors, or victims.

"The critical 72 hours have passed," acknowledged Mutsunari Imawaka, an official with Okayama prefecture, one of the worst-hit regions.

"But we will continue our search believing there are still survivors," he told AFP.

He said at least 18 people were missing in Okayama alone, and that several thousand people were checking houses across the region.

Television footage showed dozens of rescuers, including troops, removing massive rocks with mechanical diggers from houses buried in landslides.

Rescuers were also manually shovelling dirt to search for missing people.



A boy smiles as he uses an improvised raft to maneuver through the floodwater after incessant rainfall in Bhaktapur, Nepal, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS