

RUSSIA PROBE

MUELLER MOVES RATTLE TRUMP

President Donald Trump's intensifying attacks this week against the Russia collusion investigation underscore a growing nervousness over how much evidence investigators may have accumulated on the 2016 Trump campaign's ties to Moscow.

COHEN TALKED TO TOP PUTIN AIDE

Cohen, who was Trump's personal lawyer and a senior executive in the president's real estate business, the Trump Organization, admitted to having lied to Congress about trying to negotiate a deal for a Trump Tower in Moscow well into the middle of 2016, even when Trump had wrapped up the Republican nomination for president.

THE WIKILEAKS NEXUS

Mueller has already shown he has evidence that the Trump campaign and Trump's family entertained offers of dirt on Clinton from Russia. He is expected to soon charge conservative activist Jerome Corsi and campaign advisor Roger Stone in relation to their alleged attempts to coordinate with WikiLeaks over July-October 2016 as the group published Democratic emails damaging to Trump's election rival Hillary Clinton.



emails were hacked by Russian intelligence which supplied them to WikiLeaks, aiming to tilt the election in Trump's favor. Mueller has already indicted 25 Russians as part of a criminal "conspiracy" to influence the election.

MANAFORT'S BROKEN COOPERATION DEAL

On Monday Mueller accused former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort of violating a cooperation deal by lying to investigators. What the lies were about remains a mystery, but it could underscore what most observers believe: that Mueller has far more evidence than his targets know.

MUELLER'S QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TRUMP

The new Cohen and Manafort charges came just after Trump returned answers to a long list of questions submitted to him by Mueller that focus on Russia contacts. The White House delayed answering the questions since the beginning of this year, worried that Trump could be trapped in a possible lie by making statements contrary to evidence presented Mueller by others.



Participants of the G20 Leaders' Summit in Buenos Aires, pose for a family photo yesterday. G20 powers open two days of summit talks yesterday after a stormy buildup dominated by tensions with Russia and US President Donald Trump's combative stance on trade and climate fears.



Ukraine bars Russian men from entry amid tensions

EU to extend Russia sanctions in December

Ukraine yesterday barred Russian men aged 16-60 from entry as tensions mounted between the two countries over Moscow's seizure of three Ukrainian ships last week.

The move came after Kiev imposed martial law in border regions this week in response to the Russian seizure of the ships and 24 sailors off Moscow-annexed Crimea.

The incident was the most dangerous in years between the ex-Soviet neighbours -- who are locked in conflict over Russian-backed separatist regions -- and has raised fears of a wider escalation.

"As of today, entry is restricted for foreigners -- in the first instance for male citizens of the Russian Federation age 16 to 60," the head of the border service Petro Tsyhykal said at a meeting with President Petro Poroshenko that was broadcast live.

Poroshenko said the restriction will not apply to "humanitarian cases." Moscow slammed the move, but said it will not impose similar restrictions on Ukrainians.

Moscow and Kiev have traded angry accusations since Russian navy vessels fired on, boarded and captured the three Ukrainian ships last Sunday.

Courts in Crimea sentenced the 24 Ukrainian sailors to two months detention, despite international calls for their release.

US President Donald Trump scrapped a planned meeting at the G20 summit with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin over Moscow's detention of the sailors.

Russia insists they crossed into Russian waters illegally, with Putin saying the border guards "fulfilled their military duty" in seizing the ships.

European leaders this week rebuffed calls from Ukraine for greater support against Russia, after Kiev urged Nato to send ships into waters disputed with Moscow.

European Council President Donald Tusk yesterday said the bloc will extend its existing economic sanctions on Russia next month.

US raid kills 23 Afghan civilians

Most them are women, children: UN

A United Nations investigation has found that at least 23 Afghan civilians, most of them women and children, were killed in a US airstrike in the southern province of Helmand this week, the latest in a growing toll of casualties from air operations.

The US military says it is investigating the incident on Tuesday in which a helicopter hit a compound during a joint operation with US and Afghan forces in Garmsir district in Helmand.

Local residents said at least 30 people were killed in the strike, which came amid a surge in air operations as the US military takes a more aggressive approach to force the Taliban towards peace negotiations.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan noted a sharp increase in civilian casualties from air strikes and said it was particularly concerned that children have been hit.

Up to 10 children and eight women were among the victims of the latest attack, it said.

According to UN figures, there were 649 civilian casualties from air strikes in the first nine months of the year, more than in any entire year since at least 2009, when UNAMA began systematic documentation of casualty figures.

In the first nine months of the year, US aircraft released 5,213 weapons, more than in any other year since 2011 when there were more than 100,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Hong Kong bus crash kills 5; 32 injured

Five people were killed and 32 injured when a coach carrying Cathay Pacific staff to Hong Kong's airport collided with a taxi yesterday, police said. The taxi driver, two men and two women coach passengers were killed, according to police.

90 inmates flee in Indonesia jailbreak

A jailbreak in western Indonesia has left 90 inmates on the run after they escaped by breaking down fences when they were supposed to be at a prayer gathering, an official said yesterday. Out of 726 inmates, 113 ran away. But authorities recaptured 23. Police have launched a massive hunt for the escapees and heightened security at the prison.

Congo Ebola outbreak world's 2nd biggest

The Ebola outbreak in eastern Congo is now the second biggest in history, with 426 confirmed and probable cases, the health ministry said late on Thursday. It is believed to have killed 245 people in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. The epidemic is now only surpassed by the 2013-2016 outbreak in West Africa, where more than 28,000 cases were confirmed.

BITS OF HISTORY (NOVEMBER 30)

- 1900: The Irish wit and dramatist Oscar Wilde died in poverty in Paris. His works included the play "The Importance of Being Earnest" and the novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray".
1939: Twenty Russian divisions - almost half a million men - invade Finland in the "Winter War".
1982: Michael Jackson's "Thriller" album released.
1995 - Bill Clinton became the first US president to visit Northern Ireland.

Trump decries scrutiny of 'very legal' real estate business

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday reiterated his innocence in connection with a Moscow real estate deal that has reportedly been a focus of a probe into whether his 2016 presidential campaign conspired with Russian operatives.

Trump's tweets came one day after his ex-lawyer pleaded guilty to lying to Congress over the ultimately shelved Trump Tower deal in a bid to limit the Russia investigation.

"Oh, I get it! I am a very good developer, happily living my life, when I see our Country going in the wrong direction (to put it mildly)," Trump tweeted from the G20 summit in Argentina.

"Against all odds, I decide to run for President & continue to run my business - very legal & very cool, talked about it on the campaign trail," he said.

"Lightly looked at doing a building somewhere in Russia," the Republican leader continued. "Put up zero money, zero guarantees and didn't do the project. Witch Hunt!"

Michael Cohen, who once famously said he would take a bullet for the Republican

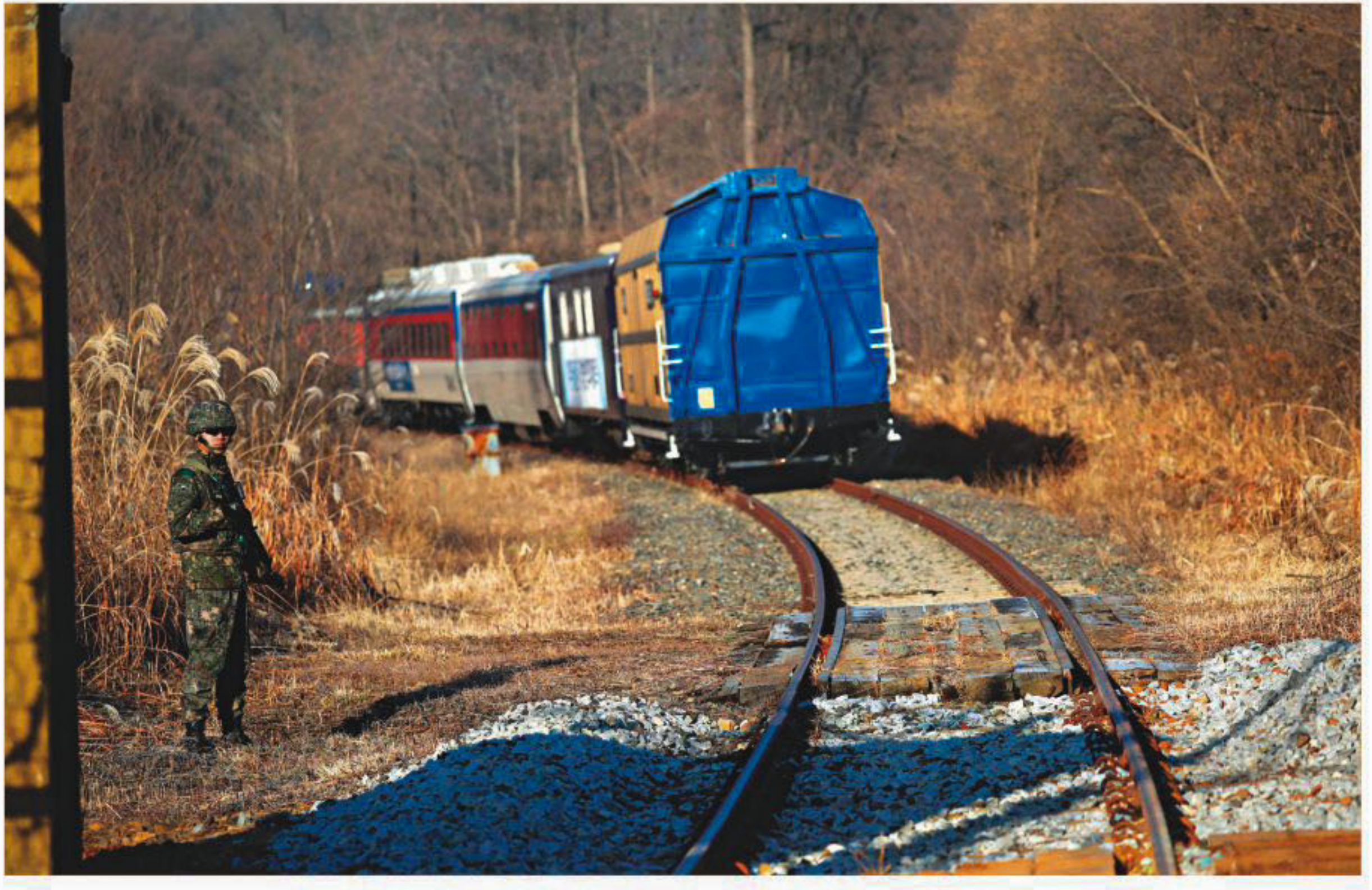
billionaire, said that he lied in written testimony to Congress in which he suggested the project was shelved in January 2016 -- before the first caucus and primary voting began.

Contrary to his original testimony, the project was discussed multiple times within the company -- beyond January 2016 -- and with efforts to obtain Russian governmental approval being discussed as late as June of that year.

Cohen also mulled traveling to Russia in connection with the project and in May 2016 was offered a possible introduction to either the Russian president or prime minister on the sidelines of a Russian forum in June 2016.

Trump ultimately secured the Republican nomination for president just weeks later in July 2016. On Thursday, the president branded Cohen a "weak person" and emphasized that the property deal was ultimately dropped.

"He is lying about a project that everybody knew about," Trump told reporters at the White House before heading to Argentina for what is sure to be a tense two-day summit of world leaders.



LANDMARK JOURNEY

A South Korean train moves into North Korea through demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas in Paju, yesterday. The train crossed into North Korea for the first time in a decade -- packed with engineers on a mission to upgrade the North's dilapidated rail tracks and create a linked, cross-border network.

G20 welcomes Saudi prince

Despite Khashoggi killing, Prince Salman gets warm reception

AFP, Buenos Aires

World leaders welcomed Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman yesterday at the G20 summit, showing he was no pariah less than two months after the kingdom killed a dissident journalist.

The 33-year-old heir apparent was seen chatting with US President Donald Trump and his daughter Ivanka and shaking hands with French President Emmanuel Macron at the start of a two-day meeting of the world's top economies in Buenos Aires.

Prince Mohammed and Russian President Vladimir Putin both grinned broadly and shook hands robustly as leaders converged for a group photo.

British Prime Minister Theresa May also said she would meet Prince Mohammed.

She said she would press the crown prince both on the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the Saudi-led offensive in Yemen, where millions are on the brink of starvation in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.



knew about Khashoggi's death and that Saudi Arabia was important for business and for its hostility to Iran.

The US Senate nonetheless moved this week to end support for the Saudi-led war against rebels in Yemen amid outrage over attacks on civilian sites including a school bus and hospitals.

Israel strikes Iranian target in Syria

AFP, Beirut

Israel struck several positions south of Damascus, a war monitor said Friday, in the first strikes since Syrian air defences were upgraded following the accidental downing of a Russian plane in September.

Damascus claimed its air defence systems shot down all "hostile targets" late Thursday. Israel did not confirm carrying out raids but denied any losses.

According to the Syria Observatory for Human Rights, the strikes hit two positions in the south of Damascus province, including an area believed to be an Iranian weapons depot near the capital. Another missile hit the area of Harfa, where there is a Syrian military base, it said.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

1.5m children need emergency aid: UN

AFP, Geneva

Two-thirds of all children in Central African Republic need emergency aid, the UN said yesterday, sounding an alarm about the impoverished country's worsening "neglected" crisis.

Some 1.5 million children nationwide are in need of humanitarian assistance, an increase of 300,000 compared with 2016, the United Nations children's agency UNICEF said in a new report.

The agency's top representative in the country, Christine Muhigana, told reporters in Geneva that the situation in CAR is "probably even worse" than during the country's sectarian conflict of 2013.

That year, longtime leader Francois Bozize, a Christian, was overthrown by a predominantly Muslim rebel alliance called the Seleka.

Much of the country, roughly the size of France, is now controlled by rival militia groups.

"What we are trying to do under these extraordinary circumstances is to keep children alive," Muhigana said.

Beyond those in need of aid, UNICEF said that one in four children are either internally displaced or have fled the country as refugees.

Responding to those in need has also become increasingly difficult as attacks on aid workers in CAR have quadrupled this year.