

NEWSIN brief

UN seeking access to Xinjiang camps

REUTERS, Geneva

The top United Nations human rights official Michelle Bachelet yesterday said that her office is seeking access to China's Xinjiang region to verify "worrying reports" of re-education camps holding Uighurs and other Muslim minorities. China says security measures are needed to combat the influence of "extremist" groups that incite violence there.

Qatar receives Saudi invite to GCC summit

AFP, Doha

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani has received an invite from Saudi Arabia to attend this month's Gulf Cooperation Council summit, despite an ongoing diplomatic crisis, Doha state media said Tuesday. Saudi and its allies have suspended all relations with Qatar, claiming Doha supports terrorism and is too close to Riyadh's great rival, Iran. Qatar denies the allegations.

Yemen gov't team heads to crunch peace talks

AFP, Rimbo

Yemeni government representatives were expected to join a rebel delegation in Sweden yesterday for high-stakes peace talks aimed at ending four years of devastating war. A 12-member team from the Saudi-backed government left Riyadh early yesterday.

BITS OF HISTORY (DECEMBER 5)

- 1914:** Italy announces neutrality in World War One.
- 1926:** The French Impressionist painter Claude Monet died.
- 1977:** Egypt broke ties with Syria, Libya, Algeria, Iraq and South Yemen after they all opposed its peace moves with Israel.
- 2001:** Afghan factions signed an accord to set up a post-Taliban government headed by Pashtun chief Hamid Karzai.
- 2003:** An explosion tore through a morning commuter train just outside Yessentuki station on Russia's southern fringe. Forty-six people were killed and more than 160 injured.



High school students set fire to block the tramway during a demonstration against French government Education reforms yesterday in Bordeaux, southwestern France. After days of protests, the French government yesterday signalled that it was prepared to make further concessions to "yellow vest" protesters, even raising a possible rollback on a controversial move to cut taxes for high earners last year.

PHOTO: AFP

Brexit future looks bleak

May's future uncertain too as she is accused of misleading MPs

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Theresa May was accused yesterday of misleading MPs over her Brexit deal as her government published legal advice likely to increase opposition to the agreement ahead of a crucial vote next week.

Scottish National Party (SNP) lawmaker Ian Blackford was twice reprimanded by the House of Commons speaker for suggesting May had misled MPs "inadvertently or otherwise", before withdrawing the claim.

May denied the claim and said she had been always clear about her government's dealings about Brexit. But she emphasised neither side wanted this to happen, and repeated that the withdrawal agreement struck with Brussels last month was the only viable option.

May on Tuesday suffered a series of stunning defeats in parliament which threaten her government and ultimately could change the course of Brexit.

She effectively lost her majority in the Commons after the Northern Irish party on which she relies sided with the Labour party to find her ministers in contempt of parliament for failing to publish in full the legal advice on the

Brexit deal.

Meanwhile 25 her own Conservative MPs voted with Labour to give the Commons a bigger say in what happens if, as expected, the Brexit deal is voted down on December 11.

The government yesterday finally published the six-page advice from the attorney general to cabinet. It confirms Britain risks remaining "indefinitely" in the so-called backstop, which could keep the whole country in an EU customs union for years after Brexit, while also keeping the province of Northern Ireland in the bloc's single market.

MPs on Tuesday also voted to approve an amendment tabled by Conservative former attorney general Dominic Grieve, which allows parliament to determine what happens if the deal falls.

If May loses the vote next week, the government has 21 days to return to MPs to propose what happens next. Grieve's amendment could allow MPs to amend that statement, raising the possibility they could demand a re-negotiation, a second referendum or even staying in the EU.

There are few people who believe May's deal will survive the vote next Tuesday but the question of what happens next remains wide open.

BREXIT ROW

Northern Irish DUP says will vote against May's deal

25 Conservative MPs to back Labour in case of deal voted down



World figures pay respect to George HW Bush

CNN, Washington

The hilltop cathedral in Washington filled Wednesday with recollections of George HW Bush as a modest but mighty president, a man whose characteristic humility was belied one final time with all the pageantry of a state funeral.

"He valued character over pedigree and he was not a cynic. He looked for the good in everybody, and usually he found it," President George W. Bush told 3,000 political leaders and family members who congregated at the National Cathedral to say goodbye.

"To us," the younger Bush said, "he was close to perfect." As Christian hymns echoed through the cathedral's arches, sung and played by military orchestras and choirs, there seemed to be more laughter than tears in the pews.

His eulogists each captured the successive roles Bush played in his lifetime: World War II flyboy, statesman, friend and father.

"He showed me what it means to be a president who serves with integrity, leads with courage and acts in love with his heart for the citizens of our country," George W. Bush said, describing his father as a man who preferred steaks and vodka martinis over broccoli, speed-boated and skydived as an octogenarian...."

No jail time sought for Flynn

AFP, Washington

Robert Mueller, the special prosecutor in charge of the Russia election meddling probe, recommended Tuesday that President Donald Trump's former national security advisor Michael Flynn face no jail time due to his "substantial" cooperation with the investigation.

Mueller said in a court filing that Flynn, who admitted last year to lying about his contacts with Russians following Trump's November 2016 election victory, had helped in his and other unspecified federal criminal investigations, including being interviewed 19 times.

Mueller also told the Washington Federal court that despite his "serious" offense, the retired three-star general and former Pentagon intelligence chief had a strong record of military and public service.

The surprise recommendation came ahead of Flynn's upcoming sentencing, which had been postponed four times over the past year.

Those postponements indicated that, once hostile to the investigation that threatens Trump and his inner circle, he had possibly become a valuable witness.

Flynn's was the first guilty plea secured by the Mueller investigation into alleged collusion between Trump's elec-

tion campaign and Russia.

In an interview with investigators on January 24, 2017, four days after Trump's inauguration, Flynn lied about conversations he had the previous December with Russia's ambassador to the US, Sergei Kislyak.

In those conversations, apparently recorded by US intelligence, Flynn appeared to be trying to undermine the policy of then-President Barack Obama by making separate political deals with Moscow.

Obama at the time was planning sanctions on Russia for its interference in the 2016 election. Flynn urged the Russians not to retaliate, suggesting Trump would reverse the sanctions.

Within weeks, Flynn was forced to resign after it was alleged that he also had lied to top White House officials about his Kislyak talks.

Then in March 2018, in a second interview with the FBI, Flynn lied about the fact that before and after the election, he had a \$530,000 lobbying contract on behalf of Turkey that he had not reported.

Despite the light sentence recommendation, the memorandum gave no hint as to what Flynn had told the Mueller team about the operations of the Trump campaign and its Russia ties.

MUELLER'S RUSSIA COLLUSION PROBE



KHASHOGGI MURDER

Turkey seeks arrest of MBS's key allies

AFP, Istanbul

A Turkish court has issued arrest warrants for two suspects close to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, raising pressure on the kingdom's de facto leader after two US senators accused him of ordering the hit.

The chief prosecutor's office in Istanbul filed an application on Tuesday to obtain the warrants for Ahmad al-Assiri and Saud al-Qahtani, described in court documents as being "among the planners" of Khashoggi's grisly killing.

Then yesterday, an Istanbul court issued the arrest warrants for Assiri and Qahtani on the charge of "deliberately killing (someone) with monstrous feeling or causing torment".

Assiri, the former deputy head of general intelligence, often sat in during Prince Mohammed's closed-door meetings with visiting foreign dignitaries, while Qahtani was a key counsellor to the crown prince.

Both were sacked after Riyadh admitted Khashoggi was killed in the Saudi consulate.

Saudi Arabia has sought to distance Prince Mohammed from the murder and has received support from the administration of US President Donald Trump, which has downplayed possible links between the crown prince and what happened to Khashoggi.



Trump shaping 'liberal' world order: Pompeo

REUTERS, Brussels

US President Donald Trump's top diplomat promised on Tuesday a new democratic world order in which Washington will strengthen or jettison international agreements as it sees fit to stop "bad actors" such as Russia, China and Iran from gaining.

In a twist on Trump's "America First" policy, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Trump was not abandoning its global leadership but instead reshaping the post-World War Two system on the basis of sovereign states, not multilateral institutions.

"In the finest traditions of our great democracy, we are rallying the noble nations to build a new liberal order that prevents war and achieves greater prosperity," Pompeo told diplomats and officials in a foreign policy speech.

"We are acting to preserve, protect, and advance an open, just, transparent and free world of sovereign states," Pompeo said.

Pompeo's address rejected concerns among many US allies that Trump is undermining the West by withdrawing from climate, free-trade and arms control accords. He said Trump was reforming the liberal order, not destroying it. He cited Britain's decision to quit the European Union as a sign supranational organisations were not working.

He also doubted on the EU's commitment to its citizens. Alluding to Trump's policies in a speech on Monday in Cambridge, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini warned of "the rule of the jungle" replacing the rule of law.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russia has '60 days'

US gives timeline for complying with nuclear treaty; Moscow denies breaching deal; EU calls for saving it

AFP, Brussels

The United States warned Russia on Tuesday it will withdraw from a major Cold War treaty limiting mid-range nuclear arms if Moscow does not dismantle missiles that Washington says breach it within 60 days.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Washington would no longer be bound by the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty unless Moscow withdraws a new system that has threatened to trigger an arms race.

President Vladimir Putin yesterday dismissed US claims Russia is violating the treaty, as a senior general lashed out at Washington's attempts to "contain" Moscow.

"First the American side stated its intention to withdraw from the treaty... then it began to look for the justifications for doing so," Putin said in comments carried by Russian news agencies.

"The primary justification is that we are violating something. At the same time, as usual, no evidence of violations on our part has been provided," he said.

The comments echoed earlier statements from the Russian foreign ministry, which dismissed the accusations against Moscow as "groundless".

In October, President Donald Trump sparked global concern by declaring the United States would pull out of the deal and build up America's nuclear stockpile "until people come to their senses".

But on Monday, the US leader said he wants talks with Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping "to head off a major and uncontrollable arms race".

Meanwhile, the Russian Army Chief of Staff Vasily Gerasimov said that Moscow would increase the capabilities of its ground-based strategic nuclear arms.

EU diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini yesterday pleaded for the treaty to be saved, warning that Europe did not want to become a battlefield for global powers once again, as it had been during the Cold War.

"The INF has guaranteed peace and security in European territory for 30 years now," Mogherini said.