

FRANCE PROTESTS
Govt warns of 'great violence' in Paris
REUTERS, Paris

French authorities warned another wave of "great violence" and rioting could be unleashed in Paris this weekend by a hard core of 'yellow vest' protesters, as senior ministers sought to defuse public anger with conciliatory languages on taxes.

Despite capitulating this week over plans for higher fuel taxes that inspired the nationwide revolt, President Emmanuel Macron has struggled to quell the anger that led to the worst street unrest in central Paris since 1968.

Rioters torched cars, vandalised cafes, looted shops and sprayed anti-Macron graffiti across some of Paris's most affluent districts, even defacing the Arc de Triomphe. Scores of people were hurt and hundreds arrested in battles with police.

An official in Macron's office said intelligence suggested that some protesters would come to the capital tomorrow "to vandalise and to kill."

Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said 65,000 security personnel would be deployed across the country on that day to keep the peace.

In a bid to defuse the three-week crisis, Philippe had told parliament late on Wednesday that he was scrapping the fuel-tax increases planned for 2019, having announced a six-month suspension the day before. Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told a conference he was prepared to bring forward tax cutting plans and that he wanted workers' bonuses to be tax-free.

The threat of more violence poses a security nightmare for the authorities, who make a distinction between peaceful 'yellow vest' protesters and violent groups, anarchists and looters from the deprived suburbs who they say have infiltrated the movement.

Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer urged people to stay at home during the coming weekend. Security sources said the government was considering using troops currently deployed on anti-terrorism patrols to protect public buildings.



Youth and high school students block a tram line during a protest against the French government's reform plan, in Bordeaux, France, yesterday. Inset, French police apprehend a youth during clashes with students.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Yemen peace talks begin in Sweden
AFP, Rimbo

Talks between Yemen's government and rebels, locked in a devastating war for nearly four years, opened Thursday as tension remained high despite what the UN envoy called a "critical opportunity".

Yemen's government and rebels doubled down on their rival demands yesterday, just moments before hard-won consultations were due to open in Sweden under the auspices of the United Nations.

The talks will not include negotiations on a solution to the conflict between the Saudi-backed government of Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi and Yemen's Huthi rebels, UN envoy Martin Griffiths told reporters.

One of the most impoverished countries in the world, the Arabian Peninsula state of Yemen is now home to what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with 14 million people facing imminent mass starvation.

The talks have been



No delay to Brexit vote

Parliament vote to go ahead on Dec 11 despite warnings that it might bring down the conservative government

REUTERS, London

Parliament's vote on British Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal will go ahead on Dec 11, her office said yesterday, despite a newspaper report ministers had sought a delay to prevent a defeat so big it might bring down the government.

May has repeatedly said that if lawmakers reject her deal with Brussels, which would see Britain exit the EU on March 29 with continued close ties, the only alternatives are leaving without a deal or reversing Brexit.

The British parliament is mid-way through a five-day debate on the Brexit deal, ahead of the crunch vote which will define Britain's departure from the EU and could determine May's own future as leader. She currently looks set to lose that vote.

The Times newspaper reported that senior ministers were urging the prime minister to delay it for fear of a rout.

The day before the vote, on Dec 10, the European Union's top court will deliver a judgment on whether Britain can unilaterally halt Brexit.

EU negotiator Michel Barnier said on Thursday that the only deal available was the one agreed with Brussels.

"The agreement that is on the table -- the withdrawal

agreement and the agreement on the future relationship -- are, in our view, the only and best possible to organise an orderly withdrawal," Barnier said.

May used an interview on BBC radio on Thursday to press on with her bid to persuade lawmakers to back her deal.

"There are three options: one is to leave the European Union with a deal ... the other two are that we leave without a deal or that we have no Brexit at all," she said.

In one small potential change, May said she was speaking to lawmakers about giving parliament a bigger role in deciding whether to trigger a so-called Northern Irish backstop.

Concerns about the backstop are a key driver of opposition to the deal among both May's own Conservative lawmakers and the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which props

up her minority government.

Supporters of a clean break with the EU say the backstop, intended to ensure no hard border between British-ruled Northern Ireland and the EU-member Irish Republic, could leave Britain forced to accept EU regulations indefinitely, or Northern Ireland treated differently from the rest of Britain.

EU court to issue Brexit ruling on Dec 10
Rebels defy UK PM's charm offensive



Canada detains Huawei CFO
China demands explanation, calls for her immediate release

REUTERS, Vancouver/Beijing

The daughter of Huawei's founder, a top executive at the Chinese technology giant, was arrested in Canada and faces extradition to the United States, roiling global stock markets as it threatened to inflame Sino-US trade tensions afresh.

The shock arrest of Meng Wanzhou, 46, who is Huawei Technologies Co Ltd's chief financial officer, raises fresh doubts over a 90-day truce on trade struck between Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping on Saturday - the day she was detained.

Her arrest, revealed late on Wednesday by Canadian authorities, is related to US sanctions, a person familiar with the matter said. Reuters was unable to determine the precise nature of the possible violations.

Sources told Reuters in April that US authorities have been investigating Huawei, the world's largest telecoms equipment maker, since at least 2016 for allegedly shipping US-origin products to Iran and other countries in violation of US export and sanctions laws.

US stock market and Asian shares tumbled as news of the arrest heightened the sense a major collision was brewing between the world's two largest economic powers, not just over tariffs but also over technological hegemony.

Huawei is already under intense scrutiny from US and



Police clashes with protesters yesterday in Athens, during a demonstration to commemorate the 10th anniversary of fatal shooting of a teenager which sparked major riots in Greece, in 2008.

PHOTO: AFP

Bush Sr to be buried after 4-day tribute

AFP, Houston

George HW Bush was to be laid to rest yesterday, concluding a four-day tribute to the 41st president that saw America briefly set aside its political divisions.

After a state funeral Wednesday in Washington that was attended by the country's five living presidents and foreign dignitaries, Bush's flag-draped coffin was flown to Houston.

He will lie in repose at St Martin's Episcopal Church, where the Bushes worshipped for decades, until he is buried.

Bush will be interred at his presidential library in College Station next to his wife Barbara, who died in April, and their daughter Robin who died of leukemia at age three.

At the memorial service President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania shared a front row pew in the National Cathedral with past presidents Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter and their wives as an honor guard brought Bush's casket into the prayer hall.

Former president George W Bush tapped the casket twice when he walked up to deliver a rousing eulogy, fighting through tears as he sang the praises of his father and predecessor as commander-in-chief, who died Friday at age 94.

Wednesday's funeral capped a national homage that saw Bush lie in state in the US Capitol rotunda, where thousands paid respects to a statesman who steered the nation through turbulent times including the end of the Cold War.

Bush was a decorated World War II aviator who nearly died when he was shot down on a bombing mission.

He served as a congressman, envoy to China, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and vice president to Ronald Reagan before winning the White House.

From dream to nightmare
Violence forces Afghan 'Little Messi' to flee home

AFP, Kabul

Murtaza Ahmadi moved the world with his love for footballer Lionel Messi in 2016. His dream of meeting the Argentinian came true, but now the seven-year-old boy is living a nightmare as one of thousands of Afghans displaced by war.

Murtaza and his family abandoned their home in southeastern Ghazni province in November, along with hundreds of others fleeing intense fighting after the Taliban launched an offensive in the previously safe area.

Now they are among the thousands of similarly uprooted people struggling to get by in Kabul, and also living with the fear that the Taliban are hunting for their famous son.

The image of Murtaza sporting a makeshift Messi jersey -- made of a blue and white striped plastic bag and with Messi's name and famous number 10 written carefully on the back in felt-tip pen -- flooded media and social networks in 2016.

The media hype drew the football superstar's attention, and that year Murtaza met his idol in Qatar, where he walked out onto the pitch clutching Messi's hand as a mascot for a Barcelona friendly.

Messi, a UNICEF goodwill ambassador, also

gave his tiny fan an autographed jersey and a football.

But the moment of happiness has quickly dissipated.

The family belongs to the Shia-denominated Hazara ethnic group, who were targeted by the Sunni Taliban in their November operation in Ghazni.

The UN says up to 4,000 families fled, with

witnesses describing "absolute terror" to AFP. Hundreds of civilians, soldiers, and insurgents were killed in the fighting.

Sports were rarely tolerated under the 1996-2001 Taliban regime, and the Kabul football stadium was a well-known venue for stonings and executions.



Troubled ICC gets members backing

AFP, The Hague

Countries signed up to the International Criminal Court renewed their backing Wednesday for the embattled global legal body, targeted by the Trump administration, but urged it to speed up its work.

"The European Union strongly supports the International Criminal Court and its work as an independent and impartial judicial institution," said Heidemaria Guerer at the annual meeting of the court's 123 member states in The Hague.

Other countries including those in Africa where the ICC is active, such as Nigeria and Uganda, also pledged continued support.

This year the ICC is celebrating 20 years since its founding mandate, the Rome Statute, was agreed upon to prosecute the world's worst crimes.

But the court has since come under attack by some African states, who have accused it of being biased. Trump in September accused the ICC of lacking any legitimacy, saying it violated "all principles of justice" and had no authority.

In the same month, White House National Security Advisor John Bolton threatened to arrest ICC judges and officials if they moved against Israel and the United States. Neither country is a member of the ICC but both are under scrutiny by the court's prosecutors.

Meng Wanzhou was detained on US request, faces extradition

Arrest relates to 'violation of US sanctions on Iran, other countries'

Move raises fresh doubt over 90-day Sino-US trade war truce

other western governments about its ties to the Chinese government, driven by concerns it could be used by the state for spying. It has been locked out of the United States and some other markets for telecom gear. Huawei has repeatedly insisted Beijing has no influence over it.

Meng was arrested on Dec 1 at the request of US authorities and a court hearing has been set for Friday, a Canadian Justice Department spokesman said. Trump and Xi had dined in Argentina on Dec 1 at the G20 summit.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a daily briefing yesterday that China had asked Canada and the United States for an explanation of Meng's arrest, but they have "not provided any clarification". On Wednesday, China's embassy in Canada said it resolutely opposed the arrest and called for her immediate release.

Jia Wenshan, a professor at Chapman University in California, said the arrest "runs a huge risk of derailing the US-China trade talks".

While Meng's arrest comes at a delicate time in US-China relations, it was not clear if the timing was coincidental.