

# Trump delays Congress speech over shutdown

## Senate prepares to hold votes on bills to reopen shuttered federal agencies

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump backed down late Wednesday in a spat with Democrats over his State of the Union address, agreeing to delay it until a government shutdown ends, although the more than month-long impasse dragged on.

The US Senate meanwhile prepared to hold two showdown votes yesterday on measures to reopen the shuttered federal agencies, but Trump's toxic sparring with House speaker Nancy Pelosi essentially assured no solution was at hand.

An intensifying war of words between the president and Pelosi came to a head Wednesday with the top Democrat effectively blocking Trump from delivering his annual address in Congress until the partial government shutdown, now in its 34th day, is brought to an end.

But in a tweet sent after 11:00 pm, Trump wrote, "As the Shutdown was going on, Nancy Pelosi asked me to give

the State of the Union Address. I agreed." "She then changed her mind because of the Shutdown, suggesting a later date. This is her prerogative - I will do the Address when the Shutdown is over."

As acrimony in Washington grew, lawmakers across the political spectrum were left searching in vain for an exit strategy for the longest-ever halt to federal operations, as furloughed government employees and contractors vented their fury on Capitol Hill.

The prospects for Trump getting to deliver his national address in Congress next Tuesday as planned were dim, with the Senate votes -- one on Trump's proposal that includes money for his border wall

and changes to immigration policy, the other by Democrats seeking to reopen government before negotiating border security -- bound to fail.

Traditionally the president's annual speech is delivered before a joint session of Congress in the ornate chamber of the House of Representatives.



US federal employees holding empty plates stage a rally to call for a vote on the shutdown on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. The Republican-led US Senate planned votes on competing proposals to end the partial government shutdown.

PHOTO: AFP



### RUSSIA PROBE

## Cohen delays testimony over Trump 'threats'

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump's former personal lawyer Michael Cohen is postponing his February 7 testimony to the US Congress because of threats against his family from Trump, his adviser said on Wednesday.

Cohen, who has pleaded guilty to crimes including campaign finance violations during Trump's 2016 election campaign and is cooperating with investigators, had received "ongoing threats against his family from Trump" and Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani, the adviser, attorney Lanny Davis, said in a statement.

Trump called Cohen a "rat" in a tweet last month for cooperating with prosecutors. Cohen had been Trump's self-described longtime "fixer" and once said he would take a bullet for the New York real estate developer.

In a Fox News interview this month, and other forums, Trump also suggested he had damaging information on Cohen's father-in-law. "That's the one that people want to look at," Trump said in the interview. Giuliani also referred to possible issues with him.

Cohen's father-in-law, Fima Shusterman, could not immediately be reached for comment. He has been involved in the taxicab business like Cohen himself.

Cohen was expected to appear before the US House of Representatives Oversight Committee.

# World faces fragmentation

## Warns UN chief referring to ties between US, Russia and China

AFP, Davos

The world is facing worrying "fragmentation", UN chief Antonio Guterres said yesterday, warning that the relationship between the United States, Russia and China was worryingly out of kilter.

"The relationship between the three most important powers, Russia, the United States and China, has never been as dysfunctional as it is today," the UN secretary-general told the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Guterres said the ongoing shift away from a world dominated previously by two Cold War superpowers was creating "a bit of a chaotic situation".

"We no longer live in a bipolar or unipolar world, but we are not yet in a multipolar world," he said.

"Power relations (are) becoming unclear," he added, urging countries to work together and support multilateralism.

The United States has been locked in a trade war with China and others that has rocked the financial markets and sparked fears of a slowdown in the global economy.

And US relations with Moscow have been hit by allegations of Russian meddling in US politics and a stand-off over the fate of a Cold War-era nuclear weapons treaty.

The dysfunction is evident "in the economy, but it is also

true in the Security Council," Guterres said, lamenting the recurring "paralysis" of the UN's top body.

"We are in a world in which global challenges are more and more fragmented, and the responses are more and more fragmented," he said.

"If this is not reversed, it is a recipe for disaster."

He acknowledged that many around the world feel disconnected from those in power and from the work of international organisations such as the UN, fuelling nationalism and populism.

"We need to demonstrate to all of those who feel that they were left behind that our ideas, our policies, our programmes aim at solving their problems or helping them to solve them," he said.

Earlier, Guterres demanded bolder action from governments to arrest catastrophic warming.

Following a UN summit last month in Poland, which was designed to advance the Paris climate accord, Guterres said he was "not hopeful" that nations would find the necessary resolve.

But he stressed: "We need political will and we need governments who understand that this is the most important priority of our times."

The Paris accord has been shaken by the withdrawal of the United States under President Donald Trump, and by threats to do the same by Brazil's new hard-right leader, Jair Bolsonaro.

### WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM SUMMIT

Guterres urges countries to work together and support multilateralism

US locked in trade war with China and others



## Scientist makes fuel from tree waste

REUTERS, Lund

Might tree roots, twigs and branches one day be used to power cars? That's what a Swedish researcher is hoping after developing a pulp byproduct that - on a modest scale - does just that.

Chemical engineering scientist Christian Hultberg, from Lund University, has used the black liquor residue from pulp and paper manufacturing to create a polymer called lignin.

After purification and filtration, that is then turned into a gasoline mixture.

"We're actually using the stuff of the wood that they don't use when they make paper and pulp... It adds value to low-value components of the tree," he told Reuters.

In environmental terms, he says that gives it an advantage over other biofuels such as ethanol. "A lot of the controversy with ethanol production has been the use of feedstock that you can actually eat," he said.

Hultberg has a pilot plant in operation and hopes the forest fuel will be available in service stations by 2021.

Though it will only serve a fraction of the demands of Swedish motorists, he is hopeful that, along with other renewable products under development, it could help wean us off our addiction to fossil fuels.



Riot police clash with opposition demonstrators during a protest against the government of President Nicolas Maduro on the anniversary of the 1958 uprising that overthrew the military dictatorship, in Caracas on Wednesday. Story on page 20.

PHOTO: AFP

## UN urges Nepal to focus on war crimes victims

AFP, Kathmandu

The United Nations yesterday cautioned Nepal that it risked failing war crimes victims as a deadline for investigating atrocities during its decade-long Maoist conflict draws near without a single case being resolved.

Nepal established two commissions in 2015 to probe abuses by government forces and Maoist rebels during the civil war that left 17,000 dead and others missing without a trace.

The government had promised to deliver justice to victims but three years later, rights watchdogs say almost no progress has been made.

With the mandate for both commissions set to expire in a fortnight, Kathmandu has yet to extend its commitment to continuing the peace process.

"Any solution should have the needs of victims at its heart. Only then can the peace process move forward", the UN said in a statement jointly signed by the US, UK, France and Germany, among other nations.

"We are united in the view that without broad public trust in the process, Nepal will not be able to bring closure to the wounds and grievances that persist from the conflict era, nor be able to complete the peace process," the statement said.

More than 60,000 complaints have been filed to both commissions -- one investigating an estimated 3,000 forced disappearances and the other focusing on crimes such as rape and murder.

But critics say the truth and reconciliation process has been poorly designed from the outset and stymied by a lack of funding and political will.

The government has not granted the commissioners the legal powers necessary to prosecute war crimes, while a provision granting amnesty to perpetrators is still on the books.

# Back second Brexit vote

## UK lawmakers appeal to Corbyn; EU's Barnier says time-limited Irish backstop not possible

REUTERS, London

A group of British lawmakers yesterday appealed to Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn to back a second referendum on Brexit, saying they did not have enough support in parliament to persuade the government to stage such a vote.

Parliament is in deadlock over Britain's departure from the European Union after resoundingly rejecting Prime Minister Theresa May's plan last week, throwing up several outcomes, including leaving without a deal or a second referendum.

May has ruled out staging a second vote, saying parliament should respect the 2016 referendum when 52 percent of Britain voted to leave the EU. Corbyn also does not support a second referendum but says the option should remain on the table.

people to decide.

"The clock is ticking and at this late stage, I appeal to Jeremy Corbyn to do the right thing by the majority of our voters, our supporters and members and back a people's vote," Labour lawmaker Luciana Berger said.



Meanwhile, European Union's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said that the "backstop" provision in the agreement for Britain's withdrawal from the bloc could not be time-limited, since that would defeat its purpose of guaranteeing no hard Irish border.

His comments, made on Germany's DLF public radio, undermine the hopes of some in London that May could win pro-Brexit legislators for her deal by securing a time limit to the no-border commitment.

Barnier said the withdrawal agreement, roundly rejected by Britain's parliament two weeks ago, was the best one available given the "famous red lines", including an end to freedom of movement and to single market membership, that May had set out to define the future relationship.

Barnier, who was due to meet German Chancellor Angela Merkel for talks in Berlin yesterday, said that the commitment, seen by Dublin as an essential guarantor of peace on the island, had to be credible.

## DR Congo ushers in new president

AFP, Kinshasa

Opposition leader Felix Tshisekedi was sworn in as president of Democratic Republic of Congo yesterday, marking the country's first-ever peaceful handover of power after chaotic and bitterly-disputed elections.

Tshisekedi took the oath of office before receiving the national flag and a copy of the constitution from outgoing president Joseph Kabila, stepping aside after 18 years at the helm.

A moment of drama was injected into the ceremony when the newly-minted president was taken ill during his speech. After a 12-minute interruption, Tshisekedi returned to the microphone, saying: "A famous president of our country said in his time: 'understand my emotion'."

# Turkey, Russia agree to coordinate action closely

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan at a meeting in Moscow on Wednesday night vowed to coordinate their actions more closely in Syria.

"Cooperation between Russia and Turkey is a touchstone for Syrian peace and stability," Erdogan said in translated comments at a joint press conference after their talks, which lasted around three hours.

"With our Russian friends we intend to strengthen our coordination even more."

"We agreed how we'll coordinate our work in the near future," Putin said, calling the talks which included the countries' defence ministers "effective".

issues of regional security and actively cooperate on Syria".

Erdogan used the same term for Putin and said "our solidarity makes a weighty contribution to the security of the region".

The two leaders are on opposite sides of the Syria conflict: Russia provides critical support to the Syrian government, while Turkey has backed rebel groups fighting President Bashar al-Assad's forces.

Despite this, they have worked closely to find a political solution to the seven-year conflict.

Russia and Turkey have agreed to coordinate ground operations in Syria following US President Donald Trump's shock announcement last month about pulling 2,000 American troops out of Syria.

Putin said that if carried out, the withdrawal of US troops from northeastern Syria "will be a positive step, it will help stabilise the situation in this restive area".

### WAR IN SYRIA

Putin, Erdogan vow to battle terrorists in Idlib

Putin says withdrawal of US troops from Syria will be a positive step