

## Top British EU official attacks 'dangerous' PM

Britain's most senior EU official launched a stinging attack on Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday, branding his comments about death threats against lawmakers "crass and dangerous".

Johnson's combative return to parliament on Wednesday following his humiliating Supreme Court defeat drew further criticism in Brussels, with a senior member of the European Parliament's Brexit steering group accusing him of deliberately "antagonising" this way to a no-deal Brexit he can blame on others.

The prime minister is facing an angry backlash at home for his dismissive response to MPs complaining about his rhetoric and citing the fate of a colleague murdered by a far-right extremist during the Brexit referendum campaign.

Julian King, since 2016 Britain's member of the European Commission, the bloc's powerful executive,



Protesters confront police outside the local parliament building in Surabaya yesterday, during a rally against the government's proposed change in its criminal code laws and plans to weaken the anti-corruption commission. After the mass protests, Indonesian President Joko Widodo yesterday said he is considering revoking the new law, which has alarmed activists and helped drive the biggest student protests in decades.



## JACQUES CHIRAC (1932-2019) DEATH OF A 'STATESMAN'

Jacques Chirac, the former French president who was a colossal figure in the country's politics for three decades, died yesterday at the age of 86, his family told AFP.

The centre-right Chirac, acknowledged even by foes as a supreme political fighter, rose to prominence as mayor of Paris before becoming prime minister and then serving as head of state from 1995 to 2007.

Former opponents and supporters paid tribute to a man with a genuine love for France, while world leaders including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed him as a great statesman.

"President Jacques Chirac died this morning surrounded by his family, peacefully," his son-in-law Frederic Salat-Baroux told AFP. His time at the Elysee Palace saw France adopt the euro single currency and, in a landmark moment for relations with Washington, loudly oppose the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Always tenacious, he bounced back from defeats in the 1981 and 1988 presidential elections to finally claim the Elysee in 1995. His legacy is overshadowed by a conviction for graft dating to his time as mayor of Paris, which saw him handed a suspended jail term. But this did little to dent his popularity among supporters. Critics questioned how much Chirac had actually achieved, arguing he spent most of his political energy trying to stay in power rather than achieving change.

Chirac's 12 years in the Elysee Palace in two mandates made him France's second longest-serving postwar president after his Socialist predecessor Francois Mitterrand.

"Jacques Chirac is part of the history of France," said parliament speaker Richard Ferrand from the centrist party of President Emmanuel Macron as he announced Chirac's passing to parliament.

Both chambers -- the lower House National Assembly and the upper house Senate -- observed a minute of silence after the news was announced.

A conservative politician but with an appeal that extended beyond the right, Chirac also served two stints as prime minister, in 1974-76 and 1986-88, and was mayor of his native Paris from 1977-1995. The Socialist Mitterrand was a longtime political adversary, with the two enduring a famously uneasy power-sharing period of "cohabitation" when Chirac was premier.

A politician with a popular touch who loved the company of farmers and was famed for pithy one-liners, Chirac was regarded by supporters as one of France's most charismatic postwar politicians.

Jean-Claude Juncker, European Commission chief and former Luxembourg premier, was "moved and devastated" to learn of Chirac's death, a spokeswoman said, adding that Europe was losing a "great statesman".

Putin heaped praise on Chirac as a "wise and far-sighted statesman" and also singled out "his intellect and huge knowledge", the Kremlin said.

Merkel said he was "an outstanding partner and friend to us Germans" while British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Chirac had "shaped the destiny of his nation".

Former British premier Tony Blair, who along with former US president George W. Bush backed the Iraq war that Chirac so vehemently opposed, described him as "a towering figure in French and European politics."

SOURCE: AFP

## IMPEACHMENT PROBE AGAINST TRUMP OVER UKRAINE CALL

# Whistleblower alleges 'cover up'

AFP, Washington

The White House moved to "lock down" all records of Donald Trump's phone call seeking Ukraine's interference in the 2020 US election, a whistleblower's complaint released yesterday alleges, in the latest explosive episode in the rapidly unfolding impeachment drama.

The top-secret complaint, declassified by the administration and released by Congress, caps a stunning week of revelations that have put Trump in the sharpest political and legal jeopardy of his presidency.

White House officials told the whistleblower they had likely "witnessed the president abuse his office for personal gain" in the July call with Ukraine leader Volodymyr Zelensky, according to the document.

In the days that followed, "I learned from multiple US officials that senior White House officials had intervened to 'lock down' all records of the phone call, especially the official word-for-word transcript



of the call that was produced," the whistleblower said.

Democrats have accused Trump of a "mafia-style shakedown" of Kiev by urging a probe into his political rival Joe Biden -- prompting the whistleblower complaint and triggering a congressional impeachment probe.

The anonymous official presented the nine-page complaint on August 12 to the inspector general of the intelligence community, a Trump appointee who found it a credible and "urgent concern" and

forwarded it to the acting Director of National Intelligence.

But the DNI, Joseph Maguire, at first refused to deliver the complaint to Congress, raising concerns from Democrats that members of Trump's administration were improperly protecting the president.

With the scandal swelling, the top Democrat in Congress, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, accused Trump of betraying his oath of office as she announced an official impeachment inquiry on Tuesday.

Yesterday she stepped up the ante calling white House efforts a

'cover up'.

Trump has acknowledged that he urged Ukraine to launch an anti-corruption probe against Biden, potentially his chief rival in the 2020 presidential race, and Biden's son.

He says he exerted "no pressure" on Kiev -- a claim echoed by Zelensky -- and the president took to Twitter yesterday to attack what he called "THE GREATEST SCAM IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN POLITICS."

Critics say Trump had held up \$400 million in military aid to Ukraine, to be released only on condition that it investigate the Bidens.

The non-verbatim record of the call did not show Trump explicitly tying aid to Zelensky probing Biden.

Some Republicans have also voiced deep concerns over the latest revelations.

"There is a lot in the whistleblower complaint that is concerning," House Republican Will Hurd said. "We need to fully investigate all of the allegations."

## Venezuelans will end up 'free': Trump

US President Donald Trump said Wednesday that Venezuela was suffering "a tragedy of historic proportions" as he pledged to do everything in his power to isolate Nicolas Maduro's regime. Trump told around two dozen Latin American leaders on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly that socialism had "destroyed" oil-rich Venezuela, but that the country's people "will be free." Trump simultaneously suspended senior members of the Maduro government from entry into the United States via a proclamation posted on the White House website.

## Landslide at Chad gold mine kills at least 30

A landslide at an illegal gold mine in Chad has killed about 30 people, a government minister said yesterday. The mine in the Tibesti region near the Libyan border collapsed early on Tuesday and more victims might still be buried in the rubble, defence minister Mahamat Sala told Reuters. Tibesti has witnessed rapid growth in illegal mining in recent years, often by refugees from Sudan looking for quick money to head to Europe or by rebels fighting the army.

## Emirati becomes first Arab to reach ISS

An Emirati has made history as the first Arab to reach the International Space Station, after blasting off from Kazakhstan. The Russian spacecraft carrying Hazzaa al-Mansoori of the United Arab Emirates, who was accompanied by Russia's Oleg Skripochka and NASA astronaut Jessica Meir, docked Wednesday after a six-hour trip. Mansoori will spend eight days on the ISS and will be the first Emirati and the first Arab on the orbiting laboratory, but not the first Muslim.

## UK PM loses new House vote

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday lost yet another vote in parliament over a government request for a three-day recess to allow his Conservative party to hold its annual conference. The government lost the vote, which could affect the timing of the conference in Manchester, by 306 votes to 289. The vote could force the party to shorten its party conference, which is scheduled to last from Sunday to Wednesday, or even cancel it altogether.

SOURCE: REUTERS, AFP



Smoke billows from a chemical factory in Rouen, northwestern France. Thick black smoke billowed over the northern French town of Rouen yesterday after a spectacular fire broke out at a chemical factory, forcing authorities to close schools and warn of potential pollution risks for the nearby Seine river.

PHOTO: AFP

## Netanyahu tapped by Israel's president to form new govt

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launched into what could prove to be an impossible mission to form a new government yesterday after the president tasked him with doing so following deadlocked elections.

The mandate from President Reuven Rivlin on Wednesday night gave Netanyahu a temporary victory, but he must now cobble together a coalition without a clear path to a majority.

He will attempt to do so while facing potential corruption charges pending a hearing scheduled for October 2-3, and there are warnings that Israel could soon find itself headed to yet another election -- a third since April.

When accepting the mandate, Netanyahu again called on his main opponent Benny Gantz to join him in a unity government, but his challenger dismissed the premier's negotiating tactics so far as unserious.



Gantz says he should be prime minister under a unity government since his centrist Blue and White party finished as the largest, while also insisting he will not serve in a government with a premier facing a serious indictment.

Blue and White has sought to convince members of Netanyahu's right-wing Likud to replace him as leader and form a unity government together, but there is no sign for now of that happening.

The situation has led Netanyahu's critics to accuse him of effectively holding the country hostage, arguing that a unity coalition would be possible if he would step down.

But Netanyahu points out he has the support of more smaller parties in parliament than Gantz and has vowed not to abandon them in coalition talks.

He has given no indication he would willingly give up the post he has held for more than 13 years in all, a tenure that has made him Israel's longest-serving prime minister.

## Europe untrustworthy

Says Khamenei; IAEA says Iran using advanced centrifuges

AFP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader accused European governments of "hostility" yesterday, saying their actions showed they cannot be trusted.

"The Europeans present themselves as mediators and say many things, but they are all hollow," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a statement on his official website.

"The countries which hold up the flag of hostility towards the Islamic system should not be trusted, principally America but some of these European countries as well, as they have a clear hostility towards the Iranian nation."

A landmark 2015 deal that put curbs on Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief has been on life support since May last year when President Donald Trump withdrew the US from it and reimposed sanctions.

The remaining parties to the deal with Iran -- Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia -- have tried to salvage the accord, but Tehran has repeatedly accused Europe of not doing enough.

Khamenei's remarks follow a failed European



push led by French President Emmanuel Macron to arrange a meeting between Trump and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York this week.

Addressing the UN General Assembly on Wednesday, Rouhani ruled out a meeting with Trump as long as the US maintain its economic pressure.

Khamenei went further, tweeting that the "doors are open to interaction, negotiation with all countries of the world except Zionist regime & US."

Meanwhile, the UN's nuclear watchdog yesterday said Iran has started using advanced models of centrifuges to enrich uranium, in a new breach of the faltering 2015 deal with world powers.

Advanced centrifuges at Iran's Natanz facility "were accumulating, or had been prepared to accumulate, enriched uranium", the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a report seen by AFP.

Under the 2015 deal with world powers, Tehran is only meant to enrich uranium using less efficient IR-1 centrifuges.

## 2m animals perish in Bolivia wildfires

AFP, La Paz

More than two million wild animals, including jaguars, pumas and llamas, have perished in weeks of wildfires that devastated huge swaths of Bolivian forest and grassland, environmental experts said Wednesday.

The fires devastated the Chiquitania tropical savanna in the east of the country.

"We have consulted the biologists of Chiquitania and we have exceeded the estimate of more than 2.3 million missing animals in many protected areas," Professor Sandra Quiroga of Santa Cruz University told AFP.

Latin American ocelots, and other wild cats like pumas and jaguars, as well as deer, llamas -- and smaller forest animals like anteaters, badgers, lizards, tapirs and rodents -- were victims of the fires, according to biologists investigating the scale of the damage.

Local media showed images of charred animal carcasses in the smouldering forests and birds fleeing to zones spared by the flames.

The fires, which have devastated more than four million hectares (10 million acres) since August, has completely destroyed the "primary forest" extending over 100 hectares in the Tucavaca reserve in the eastern Santa Cruz department.

"The forest is totally charred and the damage is irreversible. It will never get back to normal," said Quiroga.

The eastern department of Santa Cruz has been the hardest hit of Bolivia's nine departments since the fires began in May and intensified in late August.

Bolivia in August enlisted special firefighting planes, a Supertanker Boeing 747 and a Russian Ilyushin, as well as helicopters, 5,000 firefighters, soldiers and police but the fires have still not been extinguished.