

BREXIT PROPOSALS FOR N IRELAND

UK signals it could soften stances

Britain hinted yesterday that it could be open to changes to its latest Brexit proposals for Northern Ireland, as European leaders piled pressure on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to revise the plans.

Brexit Secretary Stephen Barclay reiterated that the ideas formally submitted to Brussels this week were "a broad landing zone" to be discussed during "intense negotiations in the coming days".

He urged the bloc to show "creativity and flexibility" to secure a deal ahead of October 31 -- when Johnson has vowed Britain will end its 46 years of EU membership with or without an agreement.

"We've set out very serious proposals including compromise on our side," Barclay told the BBC.

"We do need to get into the intensive negotiations on the text to clarify what the deal is."

Barclay added the government was considering holding a parliamentary vote ahead of a make-or-break EU summit on October 17-18 to show bloc leaders that Johnson's plans have MPs' support.

But European leaders, who have reacted tepidly to the propositions and urged London to offer a revised, viable way forward, are yet to agree even to ramp up negotiations.

Brussels reportedly balked at Britain's request to keep initial discussions on the proposals going through the weekend, and they will resume today.

The EU instead want reworked plans submitted by the end of the week, with time running out ahead of the summit.

"If the offer from the UK turns out to be a take-it-or-leave-it, it's going to be very difficult," Latvian Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins told the BBC yesterday.



Riot police detain a protester during an anti-government rally in central Hong Kong, yesterday. Hong Kong was rocked by fresh violence yesterday as tens of thousands hit the streets to defy a ban on face masks, sparking clashes with police, street fights and vandalism across the strife-torn city.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Saudi hotels now open to unmarried foreign couples

Saudi Arabia yesterday announced it would allow unmarried foreign couples to rent hotel rooms together as the ultraconservative kingdom begins offering up tourist visas for the first time. The tourism authority said in a statement published on Twitter that Saudi women travelling alone would also be able to check into a hotel by presenting valid ID. In the past, couples wanting to stay in a hotel had to prove they were married. Saudi Arabia announced on September 27 it was opening its doors to holidaymakers with the goal of diversifying its oil-dependent economy. The kingdom had previously only issued visas to Muslim pilgrims, foreign workers, and recently to spectators at sporting or cultural events.

Outsiders battle political elite as Tunisia votes

Outsider candidates challenged Tunisia's political elite yesterday as voters returned to the polls weeks after a presidential election that reshaped the country's post-Arab Spring political landscape. The ink-stained fingers once proudly displayed after the 2011 revolution were briskly wiped clean as Tunisians fed up with the status quo cast ballots for MPs for the third time since the uprising. More than 15,000 candidates on 1,500 lists are contesting 217 seats in a parliament dominated by the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha. Polling stations for the seven-million electorate are to remain open until 6:00 pm (1700 GMT), with preliminary official results scheduled for Wednesday although exit polls will be released from late yesterday. Surveys circulated informally due to a ban on their publication predict Ennahdha will lose ground to the new Qalb Tounes (Heart of Tunisia) party of jailed business tycoon Nabil Karoui, who has won a place in a two-way presidential runoff on October 13.

Sri Lanka president Sirisena abandons re-election bid



Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena has decided not to stand for re-election in November polls as the politically influential Rajapakse family nominated two candidates by final registration yesterday. Sirisena's name was not on a list of 41 candidates who paid deposits by yesterday's noon deadline to contest the November 16 presidential poll, according to Election Commission records. It means Sirisena will leave office the day after the election, cutting short his five-year term by 52 days. A spokesman for Sirisena's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) confirmed he was not seeking re-election. Some 15.99 million men and women over the age of 18 years are eligible to vote in the election.

SOURCE: AFP

US, N Korea talks falter

Pyongyang says no negotiations on nukes unless US ends hostilities; US insists to meet again in 2 weeks

AFP, Seoul

North Korea said yesterday it has "no intention" to continue nuclear talks unless the United States takes steps to end hostilities, a day after negotiations in Sweden broke down.

The discussions in Sweden followed months of stalemate following a February meeting between the North's leader Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump, and came after Pyongyang's defiant test of a sea-launched ballistic missile on Wednesday.

The North walked away from the Sweden talks saying it was disappointed at the lack of "new and creative" solutions offered by Washington, although the US insisted it was willing to meet again in two weeks.

But a spokesman at the North's foreign ministry said Washington's claims about another meeting was "ungrounded".

"We have no intention to hold such sickening negotiations as what

happened this time before the US takes a substantial step to make complete and irreversible withdrawal of the hostile policy toward the DPRK," he said using the acronyms of the North's official name.

In a statement carried by the North's Korean Central News Agency, the spokesman warned that their

North blames US for not giving up 'old attitude'

Xi, Kim hail 'immortal' China-N Korea ties

"dealings" may immediately end if the US sticks to its old playbook.

"The fate of the future DPRK-US dialogue depends on the US attitude, and the end of this year is its deadline," he added.

In Stockholm, the nuclear-armed North's leading negotiator, Kim Myong Gil, blamed the US for not giving up

their "old attitude" which led to talks ending "without any outcome".

But Washington called the talks "good discussions", saying the comments by North Korea did not reflect the content or the spirit their eight-and-a-half-hour discussion.

The United States accepted host Sweden's invitation to resume talks in two weeks' time, State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortugus said.

Ortagus added in a statement that the US "previewed a number of new initiatives" that would allow progress on the statement reached in Singapore at the first Trump-Kim summit last year.

Meanwhile, Chinese President Xi Jinping has promised to promote a "long-term, sound and stable" relationship with North Korea, state news agency Xinhua said yesterday, as the two countries mark 70 years of diplomatic relations.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un also sent a message to Xi saying their countries' "invincible friendship will be immortal on the road of accomplishing the cause of socialism."

Iraq PM pledges reforms to calm angry protests

UN says violence must stop after death of at least 99 protesters

AFP, Baghdad

The Iraqi government announced a series of reforms early yesterday after an "extraordinary" session overnight in response to sweeping anti-government rallies that have left nearly 100 dead in less than a week.

The United Nations on Saturday urged an end to violence in Iraq, after five days of protests calling for the government to resign.

Confronted by its biggest challenge since coming to power just under a year ago, Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi's cabinet issued a decree including 17 planned reforms, such as land distributions and increased welfare stipends for needy families.

The decree ordered construction of 100,000 new housing units. In September, local authorities launched demolitions of houses in informal settlements, home to three million Iraqis across the country.

In response to staggering youth unemployment, which has reached around 25 percent according to the World Bank, the government said it would create large market complexes and boost benefits for those without work.

The public sector remains the largest employer in Iraq, a country of 40 million people, but it has struggled to absorb new university graduates in recent years.

In the southern city of Kut last month, a young Iraqi man died after he set himself alight in despair after authorities seized his mobile kiosk.

The government has officially designated those killed as "martyrs," granting their families a special set of benefits.

The Iraqi Human Rights Commission said Saturday that 99 people have died and nearly 4,000 have been wounded since protests kicked off.

NEWSIN brief

Portugal's Socialists tipped for re-election

AFP, Lisbon

Portugal yesterday voted with Prime Minister Antonio Costa's Socialists tipped to win a second straight term after presiding over a period of solid economic growth following years of austerity. His likely re-election bucks the trend of declining centre-left fortunes and the rise of far-right, populist forces seen elsewhere in Europe. Final opinion polls published Friday put support for the Socialist Party (PS) at 36-39 percent, compared to 25-30 percent for nearest rivals the centre-right Social Democrats (PSD).

Kansas bar shooting kills 4; 5 wounded

CNN ONLINE

Nine people were shot at a private Kansas bar overnight, and authorities say the assailant is on the run. The shooting broke out at 1:27 am at the Tequila KC bar in Kansas City, Kansas, said police adding four of the victims died inside the bar. The five other shooting victims are hospitalized in stable condition. The motive remains unclear.

Paris kicks off global climate protests

AFP, Paris

Hundreds of climate activists barricaded themselves into a Paris shopping centre for hours ahead of a planned series of protests around the world by the Extinction Rebellion movement. The protest comes ahead of planned disruption to 60 cities around the world from Monday in a fortnight of civil disobedience, from Extinction Rebellion (XR), which is warning of an environmental "apocalypse".



Demonstrators attend a pro-independence march from Holyrood to the Meadows in Edinburgh, Scotland, on Friday. Scotland rejected independence by 55 percent in 2014 but the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) went from strength to strength in an election the following year. Another Scottish independence referendum could only be legally held with the permission of the British government.

PHOTO: AFP

Saudi Arabia, Iran take steps towards indirect talks: report

NYT says Saudi crown prince asked leaders of Iraq, Pakistan to speak to Iran about defusing tensions

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Saudi Arabia and Iran have taken steps towards indirect talks to defuse tensions in the Middle East, with Riyadh asking Iraq and Pakistan to speak with the Iranian leadership about de-escalation, according to the New York Times.

In a report on Saturday, the Times said Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) asked the leaders of Iraq and Pakistan to intervene in the wake of the attacks on two Saudi oil facilities on September 14.

The United States and Saudi Arabia blamed Iran for the attacks, which knocked out five percent of the global crude supply, despite Yemen's Houthi rebels claiming responsibility for them.

But the Times reported that US President Donald Trump's refusal to order a military response "raised questions for the Saudis about the American commitment to Saudi security, which has underpinned

the strategic layout of the Persian Gulf for decades".

The US's lack of action "prompted Saudi Arabia to seek its own solution to the conflict," it added.

The Saudi government told the Times that Baghdad and Islamabad had offered to mediate talks, but denied the move was at MBS' request.

Tehran has meanwhile said talks with Riyadh will solve many regional problems.

The Times, citing unnamed Iraqi and Pakistani officials, said MBS asked Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan to mediate during a meeting in Jeddah last month. Khan's two-day visit ran from September 19 to 20. The crown prince told Khan: "I want to avoid war," the senior Pakistani official told the Times.

Afterwards, Khan spoke to Iran's President Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT BILL

Amit Shah woos unwilling Mizoram

NDTV ONLINE

Indian Home Minister Amit Shah has assured Mizoram that the draft Citizenship (Amendment) Bill will be tweaked to accommodate a "special safeguard" aimed at ensuring that it does not override a long-standing provision that checks the unabated entry of outsiders into the state.

Shah placed special emphasis on protecting Mizoram's inner line permit (ILP) in meetings with Chief Minister Zoramthanga, top leaders of civil society groups and student organisations amid fears that the proposed legislation will result in migrants flooding the state.

ILP is a travel document for those who want to enter a protected area for a limited period. Visitors are not allowed to purchase property in these regions.

Zoramthanga described his meeting with Amit Shah as "good". On Friday, the CM told Shah that the people of the state are opposed to the proposed amendment to the Citizenship Act, 1955. Mizoram had earlier witnessed massive protests against the Bill, which seeks to expedite the citizenship process for non-Muslim migrants who arrived in India before December 31, 2014.

The conflict in Mizoram is over the inclusion of the Chakma community, which is believed to have migrated to the state from Bangladesh. A largely Buddhist group of about 1 lakh people, they have a history of ethnic conflict with the indigenous population.

After two months, Abdullahs allowed to meet party leaders

Elizabeth Warren concerned over situation in J&K

NDTV ONLINE

National Conference chief Omar Abdullah and his father and party patriarch Farooq Abdullah were allowed to meet their party leaders for the first time yesterday since he was put in detention two months ago.

After the meet, party leaders said the party would not participate in the elections for the Block Development Council -- the second tier of the Panchayat Raj system in the state -- because the "entire leadership is in jail".

The government had relaxed the restrictions in Jammu and Kashmir days after the announcement of the Block Development elections. While all detained political leaders in Jammu were released, Farooq Khan, advisor to Governor Satya Pal Malik, said the Kashmiri leaders would be released in a phased manner.

Around 400 political leaders of the state -



were placed under detention or house arrest as part of the statewide lockdown to prevent any backlash as the government announced its move to end special status granted to the state under the Article 370 and bifurcated it into two Union Territories on August 4.

PDP chief and former CM Mehbooba Mufti and Jammu and Kashmir People's Conference chairman Sajjad Lone were also detained. Mehbooba was to meet her party leaders today, sources said.

Meanwhile, US Senator Elizabeth Warren on Saturday became the second presidential candidate of the Democratic party to voice concerns over the communications lockdown in Jammu and Kashmir. The influential American politician's statement comes a month after fellow Democrat Bernie Sanders expressed similar concerns.

'Fire of interests' burning Amazon

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Francis opened a synod yesterday to champion the Amazon's poverty-stricken and isolated indigenous communities by condemning the destructive "interests" he blamed for the fires that devastated the region.

"The fire set by interests that destroy, like the fire that recently devastated Amazonia, is not the fire of the Gospel," he said before the bishops from the nine countries of the pan-Amazonian region and representatives of indigenous peoples.

"The fire that destroys blazes up when people want to promote only their own ideas, form their own group, wipe out differences in the attempt to make everyone and everything uniform."

The working document for the synod denounced in scathing terms social injustices and crimes, including murders, and suggested a Church action plan.

"Listen to the cry of 'Mother Earth', assaulted and seriously wounded by the economic model of predatory and ecocidal development... which kills and plunders, destroys and devastates, expels and discards," the 80-page document said.

