

We'll leave 'blood-stained' ME

Trump says US no longer needs to be world's policeman, lifts Turkey sanctions; Kurdish forces start Syria-Turkey border pullback respecting deal

Agencies

President Donald Trump has ended sanctions against Turkey, drawing a line under American involvement in "blood-stained" Syria, as Turkish and Russian troops seized territory previously held by US troops and their beleaguered Kurdish allies.

Trump spoke on Wednesday in a special address from the White House and declared a change of course in US relations with the Middle East, where he said too many American service members had died.

"We're getting out. Let someone else fight over this long blood-stained sand. The job of our military is not to police the world," the US president said.

Trump has been under fire for abruptly withdrawing US troops from northern Syria, with many accusing him of abandoning Kurdish forces, who had been one of the US's main allies in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS).

"Other nations must step up and do their fair share," said Trump of conflict in the region. "We have spent \$8 trillion on wars in the Middle East, never really wanting to win those wars," he added.

It was unclear when American troops in the

Turkey 'heading in wrong direction': Pentagon chief

More than 100 IS prisoners have escaped in Syria



region would begin returning home. Hundreds previously deployed in Syria are now based in western Iraq.

Trump also said some forces would remain in Syria's oil fields despite the broader US withdrawal from the country.

Following the pullout, Turkey launched an offensive against Kurdish fighters in the region. Last week, Turkey agreed to a five-day ceasefire to allow Kurdish forces to withdraw from the border area.

Meanwhile, Kurdish forces in northeastern Syria left several positions along the long border with Turkey yesterday, complying with a deal

that sees Damascus, Ankara and Moscow carve up their now-defunct autonomous region.

Russian forces have started patrols along the flashpoint border, filling the vacuum left by a US troop withdrawal that effectively handed back a third of the country to the Moscow-backed regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

Some 300,000 people have fled their homes since the start of the Turkish offensive and the Kurds among them seem unlikely to return.

Trump said he was lifting the sanctions because a ceasefire was holding in the area.

Rejecting accusations that he betrayed the



Facebook to unveil 'big' journalism project this week

Facebook is set to make a "big announcement" this week aimed at supporting news and journalism, chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said Wednesday. Zuckerberg, appearing at a congressional hearing on its digital coin Libra, said during questioning that the leading social network is moving forward on a project "supporting high-quality journalism." The comments appeared to refer to Facebook's planned "News Tab" which will be a separate section that includes articles from professional news organizations. Facebook last week confirmed that it would include content from News Corp, publisher of The Wall Street Journal. Facebook is expected to pay some of the news organizations that will contribute to the News Tab but has yet to disclose full details. The company has said a human team will select relevant, reliable breaking and top news stories for the tab and the number of publishers involved will grow over time.

Spain exhumes dictator Franco's remains

Spain yesterday exhumed the embalmed body of Francisco Franco from a grandiose state mausoleum ahead of its relocation it to a more discreet grave in a country still conflicted over the dictator's decades-long regime. The long-awaited exhumation process began at around 11:00 am with his coffin carried out of the imposing basilica at the Valley of the Fallen some two hours later. The coffin was carried by eight family members and placed into a hearse and driven to a helicopter where it was to be transferred to a grave just north of Madrid. His body was reburied alongside that of his wife in Mingorrubio state cemetery. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has made moving Franco's remains a priority since coming to power in June 2018, saying Spain should not "continue to glorify" a man who ruled with an iron fist after the bloody 1936-39 civil war won by his Nationalist forces.

\$1m for parking space!

Hong Kong might be heading for recession after months of violent protests but that hasn't stopped one businessman from forking out almost \$1 million for a parking spot. The mind-boggling sum paid by Johnny Cheung Shun-ye highlights the gaping inequality that has helped fuel nearly five months of demonstrations in the financial hub, where one in five people live below the poverty line. The HK\$7.6 million (\$970,000) price tag is more than 30 times the average annual wage in Hong Kong and about the same as a one-bed apartment in London's plush Chelsea area. It is situated in The Centre, the city's fifth-highest skyscraper, which hit the headlines in October 2017 when it became the world's most expensive office building after Hong Kong's richest man sold it for more than \$5 billion.

SOURCE: AFP

Trudeau rules out coalition govt

AFP, Ottawa

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Wednesday ruled out forming a coalition government despite an election victory that left his Liberals short of a majority.

Trudeau said he would consult with leaders of Canada's other parties on their priorities, and how they might work together.

"They will be varied conversations, but I can tell you it is not in our plans at all to form any sort of formal or informal coalition," he said.

His new cabinet will be sworn in on November 20. Like his first in 2015, Trudeau said it would be made up of an equal number of women and men.

The Liberals emerged the winners in Monday's ballot, but lost their comfortable majority in parliament after a close race with the Tories.

Official results give the Liberal Party 157 seats in the 338-member House of Commons, down from 177 at its dissolution.

Four years ago, Trudeau, then a rookie leader who waded into crowds to take selfies with adoring young fans, led the Liberals to a landslide win in the last elections.

But his star power has dimmed amid a major ethics scandal and an embarrassing blackface controversy. The Conservatives won 121 seats but beat the Liberals in the popular vote, taking 34.4 percent to their 33.1 percent.

In his first national address since Monday's election, Trudeau said he would speak with leaders of the Conservatives, Bloc Quebecois, New Democratic Party (NDP) and Green Party to sort out a path forward.



Riot police use water cannon on demonstrators in Santiago, on the sixth straight day of street violence which erupted over a now suspended hike in metro ticket prices, on Wednesday. Thousands of Chileans flooded the streets of Santiago and other cities in a general strike on Wednesday, upping the pressure on beleaguered President Sebastian Pinera after days of social unrest that left 18 dead.

PHOTO: AFP

UK PM calls for Dec 12 polls

EU mull 3-month delay as Brexit impasse drags on

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday called for a general election on Dec 12 to break Britain's Brexit impasse, a goal the leader has sought but so far failed to push through parliament.

Johnson said in a letter to opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn he would hand parliament more time to approve his Brexit deal but that lawmakers must back a December election, Johnson's third attempt to try to force a snap poll.

Just a week before Britain was due to leave the EU, the bloc looked set to grant Johnson a Brexit delay, something he has repeatedly said he does not want but was forced to request by the country's divided parliament.

An election is seen by his team as the only way of breaking the deadlock over Brexit after parliament voted in favour of his deal, but then, just minutes later, rejected his preferred timetable which would have met his Oct. 31 deadline.

But he has twice failed before to win the votes in parliament for an election, where he needs the support of two-thirds of its 650 lawmakers. The main opposition Labour Party has repeatedly said it will only back an election when it is sure that he cannot lead Britain out



of the EU without a deal.

"We will make available all possible time between now and 6 November for the WAB (Withdrawal Agreement Bill) to be discussed and voted through ... this means we could get Brexit done before the election on 12

December," Johnson wrote in a letter to Corbyn, posted on Twitter.

"But if parliament refuses to take this chance and fails to ratify by the end of 6 November, as I fear it will, then the issue will have to be resolved by a new parliament."

More than three years after voting 52%-48% to be the first sovereign country to leave the European project, the future of Brexit is as unclear as ever with Britain still debating when, how or even whether it should go ahead.

At a meeting of his political cabinet of top ministers, there was disagreement over whether the government should try for an early election, fearing that going to the polls before Brexit was settled might damage the governing Conservatives.

But, with another Brexit delay in the offing, local media reported there was eventual agreement that a new polls was the only way forward to try to reset the parliament, which voted down Johnson's predecessor's deal three times.

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT INQUIRY

Republican lawmakers storm hearing, disrupt testimony

REUTERS, Washington

A US House of Representatives impeachment inquiry devolved into chaos on Wednesday as Republican lawmakers, encouraged by President Donald Trump to get tougher in fighting Democratic efforts to impeach him over dealings with Ukraine, stormed into a high-security hearing room and delayed testimony by a witness.

The more than two dozen Republican lawmakers, who were not authorized to attend the hearing, entered before Laura Cooper, the US defense official who oversees Ukraine and Russia matters, was due to testify behind closed doors before Republican and Democratic lawmakers.

The Republicans yelled complaints that the Democrats in charge of the inquiry were conducting it in private, lawmakers and aides said. Republicans who are members of the three congressional committees

conducting the inquiry have taken part in the process throughout.

After a delay of about four hours, Cooper began her testimony.

It was a dramatic confrontation in the House of Representatives inquiry that threatens Republican Trump's presidency even as he seeks re-election next year.

Democrats are investigating whether there are grounds to impeach Trump over his July 25 request in a phone call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to investigate a domestic political rival, former Vice President Joe Biden. Biden is a front-runner for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination.

Zelenskyy agreed during the call. US security aid that had been approved by the US Congress but was being withheld from Ukraine was later provided. Federal election law prohibits candidates from accepting foreign help in an election.



Jailed Uighur wins Sakharov rights award

AFP, Strasbourg

The European Parliament yesterday awarded the Sakharov Prize for human rights to Uighur intellectual Ilham Tohti, who has been sentenced to life imprisonment in China for "separatism".

The outspoken former professor of economics at a Beijing university was sentenced in 2014 by Chinese courts in a trial that provoked an outcry from foreign governments and human rights organisations.

European Parliament head David Sassoli urged China to immediately release Ilham Tohti as he announced the award, which was certain to sow diplomatic tensions with Beijing.

"Despite being a voice of moderation and reconciliation, he was sentenced to life in prison following a show trial in 2014," Sassoli told a plenary session of parliament.

"By awarding this prize, we strongly urge the Chinese government to release Tohti and we call for the respect of minority rights in China", added the top MEP from Italy.

Tohti, who turns 50 on Friday, in September won another of Europe's top human rights awards, the Vaclav Havel prize, for "giving the entire Uighur people a voice".

Rights groups and experts say more than one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim ethnic minorities have been rounded up in internment camps in Xinjiang.

Louvre blockbuster spotlights Leonardo da Vinci 500 yrs on

AFP, Paris

Leonardo da Vinci is the star in a blockbuster retrospective opening yesterday at the Louvre museum in Paris to mark 500 years since the death of the Renaissance master.

Some 240,000 people have already reserved their place in line for the exhibition, the biggest ever organised to showcase the Tuscan polymath's indelible contributions to humanity -- with an emphasis on his painting.

A decade in the planning, the show simply titled "Leonardo da Vinci" groups 162 works, including 24 drawings loaned by Queen Elizabeth II of Britain from the Royal Collection.

The British Museum, the Hermitage of Saint Petersburg and the Vatican have also contributed, as well as Italy.

The exhibition in the Hall Napoleon, which runs until February 24, features 10 of the fewer than 20 paintings definitively

attributed to the Renaissance master, as well as drawings, manuscripts, sculptures and other objets d'art.

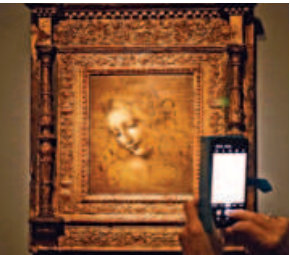
Two standouts are missing from the show, starting with the Mona Lisa. Organisers decided the world's most famous painting should remain in the Louvre's Salle des Etats -- its normal home -- to help avoid overcrowding.

By itself, the masterpiece attracts nearly 30,000 people a day.

The other notable no-show is the Salvator Mundi, the work that became the most expensive painting ever sold when it fetched \$450 million (400 million euros) at a Christie's auction in 2017.

Mystery now surrounds the painting -- whose authenticity is disputed by some experts -- as it has not been seen in public ever since the record-shattering sale.

The Louvre has said the museum's request to borrow the work is still pending, but a last-minute appearance would be a stunning surprise.



A wildfire approaches grape vines during the Kincade fire near Geyserville, California, yesterday. The fire broke out in spite of rolling blackouts by utility companies in both northern and Southern California.

PHOTO: AFP