

ELSEWHERE



Tsipras to call confidence vote after resignations

ATHENS
Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras on Sunday said he would call a confidence vote in his government after his coalition ally quit, leaving him bereft of a parliamentary majority. Earlier, Defence Minister Panos Kammenos resigned in protest at a deal ending a long-running dispute with Macedonia over its name, saying he was taking his other six Ministers in Cabinet with him. ■ REUTERS

Toll in China mine accident rises to 21

BEIJING
The toll in a coal mine roof collapse in northern China has risen to 21 after rescuers found two more miners dead on Sunday. A total of 87 people were working underground in the Shaanxi province mine at the time of the accident on Saturday, Xinhua reported. Rescuers had been searching for two remaining trapped miners but found them dead on Sunday morning, Xinhua said. ■ AFP

Trump rubbishes claim that he hid details of meet with Putin

A report said that there is no detailed record of his talks with the Russian President

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump has rejected a *Washington Post* report that he has refused to share details of his conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin with top U.S. government officials.

Mr. Trump, in a telephone interview late on Saturday with Fox News, dismissed as "ridiculous" the *Post* story that alleged that he went to great lengths to hide the content of his talks with Mr. Putin, even confiscating the notes of his interpreter and ordering that person to not discuss what was said. Mr. Trump said he had "a great conversation" with Mr. Putin in Helsinki in July 2018.

When asked why he has not released details of the nearly two-hour conversation, Mr. Trump said: "I would, I don't with care."

"I mean, I had a conversation like every President does. You sit with the Presi-



More allegations: President Donald Trump with Vice-President Mike Pence in Washington last week. ■ AP

dent of various countries... We were talking about Israel and securing Israel and lots of other things... I'm not keeping anything under wraps, I couldn't care less. I mean, it's so ridiculous."

He added: "Anybody could have listened to that meeting, that meeting is up for grabs."

According to the *Post*, there is no detailed record of Mr. Trump's personal talks with Mr. Putin at five locations over the past two

years. The newspaper quotes unnamed current and former government officials as sources for the story.

On probe by FBI

Mr. Trump also took aim at an earlier story in *The New York Times* stating that the FBI launched a previously undisclosed counterintelligence investigation to determine whether he posed a national security threat, at the same time that it opened a criminal probe into possible

obstruction of justice.

The FBI investigation was later folded into the broader probe by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election. Fox asked if he had ever worked for Russia. "I think it's the most insulting thing I've ever been asked," he said, without directly answering the question.

He slammed the *Times* story as "the most insulting article I've ever had written and if you read the article, you'd see that they found absolutely nothing."

No evidence has publicly emerged that Mr. Trump was secretly in contact with or took direction from Russian officials, *The Times* said.

The FBI had been suspicious of Mr. Trump's ties to Russia during the 2016 campaign, but it held off on opening a probe until the President sacked James Comey, who refused to roll back the Russia investigation, *The Times* said.

Riyadh must hold Khashoggi's killers accountable: Pompeo

U.S. Secretary also asks Gulf states to end dispute with Qatar

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
DOHA

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Sunday that he will ask Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to ensure that the killers of journalist Jamal Khashoggi are held accountable for their crime.

Mr. Pompeo spoke ahead of a politically sensitive visit to Saudi Arabia, which has faced intense international scrutiny over Khashoggi's murder inside its Istanbul consulate. "We will continue to have a conversation with the Crown Prince and the Saudis about ensuring the accountability is full and complete with respect to the unacceptable murder of Jamal Khashoggi," Mr. Pompeo told reporters at a press conference in Qatar.

"So, we'll continue to talk about that and make sure we have all the facts so that they are held accountable, certainly by the Saudis but by the United States as well."

Mr. Pompeo was due to



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Doha on Sunday. ■ AFP

travel to Saudi Arabia later on Sunday as part of an eight-day trip to Amman, Cairo, Manama, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Riyadh, Muscat, and finally Kuwait City.

Talking to Qatar

He was speaking to journalists in Doha after meeting his Qatari counterpart, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani. Mr. Pompeo also called on Qatar and other Gulf countries to end the worst political rift in the re-

gion for years, which has seen Doha isolated by neighbouring countries for the past 19 months.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt – all U.S. allies – cut ties with Qatar in June 2017, accusing it of supporting terrorist groups and seeking closer ties to Saudi arch-rival Iran. Qatar – also a U.S. ally – denies the allegations and accuses the countries of seeking regime change. "As for the GCC... we are all more powerful when we're working together when we have common challenges in the region and around the world," Mr. Pompeo said, referring to the six member nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council. He added that "President Trump and I both believe the ongoing dispute in the region has gone on too long."

The U.S. and Qatar held the second bilateral "strategic dialogue" on Sunday, and signed agreements on defence, education and culture.

May warns MPs against rejecting Brexit deal

Parliament is to vote on it on Tuesday

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

British Prime Minister Theresa May on Sunday warned MPs ready to reject her European Union (EU) divorce deal next week that failing to deliver Brexit would be a "catastrophic and unforgivable breach of trust in our democracy".

"Doing so would be a catastrophic and unforgivable breach of trust in our democracy," Ms. May wrote in *The Sunday Express* newspaper. "So my message to Parliament this weekend is simple: it is time to forget the games and do what is right for our country."

The Opposition Labour Party has suggested that it will seek a no-confidence vote in the government if MPs throw out the plan. *The*



A pro-EU protest in London last week. ■ AP

Observer newspaper reported on Sunday that its lawmakers have been told it could be tabled "within hours" of that on Tuesday, with the confidence vote to be held the following day.

If the government lose a no-confidence motion, there will be a period of 14 days in which parties can seek to find an alternative working majority in Parliament. If they fail to do so, an election would be called.

'White House sought options to strike Iran'

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

The White House's security team last fall asked the Pentagon to provide it with options for striking Iran after a group of militants aligned with Tehran fired mortars into an area in Baghdad that is home to the U.S. Embassy, *The Wall Street Journal* reported on Sunday.

The request by the National Security Council, headed by John Bolton, sparked deep concern among Pentagon and State Department officials, the newspaper reported, citing current and former U.S. officials. The Pentagon complied with the request, but it is not known whether the options for a strike were also provided to the White House or if President Donald Trump knew about it.

Court to rule on jurisdiction in Vedanta case

The company's mining subsidiary in Zambia has been accused of river water contamination

VIDYA RAM
LONDON

Britain's Supreme Court will decide if over 1,800 Zambian villagers can take Vedanta and its Zambian subsidiary Konkola Copper Mines (KCM) to court in the U.K. over allegations relating to the pollution of a river there.

Lower courts had upheld the jurisdiction of U.K. courts in the case, which Vedanta has appealed all the way up to the Supreme Court. The issue will be heard on Tuesday and Wednesday, with a decision potentially expected by April.

Release of effluents

The villagers, represented by U.K. law firm Leigh Day, say that their water sources and farming land have been contaminated due to the release of by-products from KCM's

copper mining operations over the past 15 years, resulting in health problems to the people and harm to their crops. Their lawyers are set to argue that the case can be heard in the U.K. where Vedanta remains domiciled, because the company should bear equal responsibility for the damage.

In 2017, the Court of Appeal upheld the 2016 judgment of a lower court, enabling the case to go ahead. The lawyers for the villagers do not believe that their case is impacted by the decision of Vedanta Resources to delist in London last year.

"Our clients continue to suffer from the effects of the pollution both on their health and their livelihoods," said Oliver Holland of Leigh Day. "The clients first came to us almost four years ago

Villagers have suffered severe pollution of water resources ever since Vedanta took over the mines

ZAMBIAN CAMPAIGNERS

and we are very unfortunately still dealing with a preliminary issue which has prevented our clients' claims from moving forward. We hope that if the Supreme Court allows the claims to proceed in this jurisdiction that Vedanta will then come to the table speedily to resolve these claims."

"Vedanta and KCM believe that the Zambian court system is the natural forum for the hearing of the claims. KCM, the operating company, is domiciled in Zambia and all of its operations are located in Zambia, and that

is where the claimant communities live and the alleged claims arise," said Vedanta and KCM in a statement.

Acquisition in 2004

The claims date back to 2004, when Vedanta Resources Holdings Limited, a subsidiary of Vedanta, acquired a 51% stake in KCM, and gradually increased its stake. The villagers allege that both Vedanta and KCM were aware of the discharge of harmful effluents into the waterways that they used as their primary source of clean water. They point to studies, including a 2014 Zambian government report that noted high levels of toxicity.

Arguments also centre on whether the villagers would be able to properly pursue the case in Zambia, with the judge in the initial case con-

cluding that there was a risk they would "not obtain justice". "Villagers along the River Kafue as well as Chingola residents have suffered severe pollution of water resources ever since Vedanta took over the mines. Despite our twelve years of legal campaigning in Zambia, nothing has been done to improve the desperate situation for the most affected communities..." said Zambian campaigners George Mumbi and Esson Simbeys.

Many campaign groups, including Foil Vedanta, are expected to protest outside the court. "While the... gains from copper have been allowed to flow seamlessly out of the country, justice risks being restricted by economic and institutional barriers of territoriality," said Samarendra Das of Foil Vedanta.

Iran summons Polish envoy over hosting of summit

REUTERS
DUBAI

Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned a senior Polish diplomat to protest at Poland jointly hosting a global summit with the United States focussed on West Asia, particularly Iran, state news agency IRNA reported on Sunday.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday said the summit – to be held in Warsaw over February 13-14 – would focus on stability and security in the region, including the "important element of making sure that Iran is not a destabilising influence".

An Iranian Foreign Ministry official told Poland's charge d'affaires in Tehran that Iran saw the decision to host the meeting as a "hostile act against Iran" and warned that Tehran could reciprocate, IRNA added. "Poland's charge d'affaires provided explanations about the conference and said it was not anti-Iran," it added.

The Polish Foreign Ministry confirmed that the meeting took place on Saturday.

On Friday, Iran Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif criticised Poland for hosting the meet and tweeted: "Polish Govt can't wash the shame: while Iran saved Poles in WWII, it now hosts desperate anti-Iran circus." Mr. Zarif was referring to Iran hosting more than 1,00,000 Polish refugees during the Second World War.

100 years since Rosa



Red salute: Germany's left-wing parties on Sunday commemorated revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg on the 100th anniversary of her murder. Organisers said thousands turned out in memory of 'Red Rosa' and fellow leftist Karl Liebknecht in Berlin. ■ AFP

Italian militant arrested in Bolivia, to be extradited

Cesare Battisti lived for years in Brazil

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BRASILIA

Cesare Battisti, an Italian ex-militant captured in Bolivia and convicted of four murders in Italy in the 1970s, will be extradited to Rome "in the coming hours", Italy government said on Sunday.

Mr. Battisti, who has been sentenced to life in prison, "will return to Italy in the coming hours, on a flight leaving from Santa Cruz directly to Rome," Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte posted on Facebook after speaking to Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.

Mr. Battisti, who lived for years in Brazil while on the run from Italian justice, was captured on Saturday in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Mr. Battisti was convicted in 1979 of belonging to the Armed Proletarians for Communism, an outlawed leftist group. He escaped from prison and was subsequently convicted in *absentia* of four murders.

After taking refuge in France, he skipped bail in 2004 and turned up in Brazil, where he lived for years under the protection of former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Saudi refugee reaches her new home in Canada

Qunun, who fled an abusive family, was offered asylum by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau last week

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TORONTO

Tired but smiling, Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun, 18, arrived on Saturday in Canada, which offered her asylum in a case that attracted global attention after she mounted a social media campaign.

"This is Rahaf al-Qunun, a very brave new Canadian," Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said arm-in-arm with the Saudi woman in Toronto's airport.

Dramatic week

Ms. Qunun smiled broadly as she exited an airport arrival door sporting a Canada zipper hoodie and a UN High



A warm welcome: Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun, centre, with Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland, right, at Toronto Pearson International Airport on Saturday. ■ REUTERS

Commissioner for Refugees hat, capping a dramatic week that saw her flee her family while visiting Kuwait

and before flying to Bangkok. Once there, she barricaded herself in an airport hotel to avoid deportation

and tweeted about her situation.

On Friday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that Canada would accept Ms. Qunun as a refugee. Her situation has highlighted the cause of women's rights in Saudi Arabia, where several women fleeing abuse by their families have been caught trying to seek asylum abroad in recent years and returned home.

Getting settled

Ms. Freeland said Ms. Alqunun preferred not to take questions Saturday. "She is obviously very tired after a long journey and she pre-

ferred to go and get settled," Ms. Freeland said. "But it was Rahaf's choice to come out and say hello to Canadians. She wanted Canadians to see that she's here, that she's well and that she's very happy to be in her new home."

After arriving she was off to get winter clothes, said Mario Calla, executive director of COSTI Immigrant Services, which is helping her settle in temporary housing and applying for a health card. Ms. Qunun flew to Toronto via Seoul, South Korea, according to Thai immigration Police Chief Surachate Hakpam.

Bangladesh workers get pay raise after protests

This came after more than a week of protests, leading to the death of one person

REUTERS
DHAKA

Garment manufacturers in Bangladesh have agreed to raise workers' pay, the Commerce Minister said on Sunday, urging people to return to work after a week of violent demonstrations.

Last week, at least one worker was killed and dozens wounded during protests over salaries, prompting the government to form a panel of factory owners, union leaders and government officials to investigate the demands. On Sunday, 20 people were injured in further clashes between protesters and police outside Dhaka.

All parties involved agreed to raise wages across 6 of the 7 pay grades, leaving the minimum wages un-



United we stand: Police officers confronting garment industry workers during a protest in Dhaka on Saturday. ■ REUTERS

changed at 8,000 taka (\$95), Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi told reporters after a meeting of the panel.

Low wages and trade deals with Western countries have made the sector a \$30 billion industry, ac-

counting for 80% of Bangladesh's exports, making it the world's second-biggest garment exporter behind China. The revised wages are effective from December and will be adjusted from January, Mr. Munshi said.

Amirul Huq, who represented union leaders on the panel which met with Mr. Munshi, said the wage increases were welcome. "The discrepancies in the wage structure have been resolved by the Prime Minister's intervention. We welcome the new wages... Workers will go back to work," he said.

The government had said in September that the minimum wage for garment workers would increase by up to 51% to 8,000 taka (\$95) a month, payable in January, the first increase since 2013.

But union leaders said that increase will benefit only a small percentage of workers in the garment sector, which employs four million out of the country's 165 million people.