

ELSEWHERE



Kazakh capital officially renamed as 'Nur-Sultan'

ALMATY
Kazakhstan renamed its capital Astana as Nur-Sultan on Saturday in honour of veteran leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, who unexpectedly resigned this week after almost 30 years in power. The renaming was made official in a decree signed by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. REUTERS

Norway airlifts people from cruise ship

OSLO
Emergency services said on Saturday they were airlifting 1,300 passengers off a cruise ship off the Norwegian coast. The Viking Sky cruise ship sent an SOS message due to "engine problems in bad weather", southern Norway's rescue centre said on Twitter, while police reported the passengers would be evacuated by helicopter. AFP

Pope accepts Chilean Cardinal's resignation

VATICAN CITY
Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati, the Archbishop of Santiago and the highest ranking member of the Catholic Church in Chile, who has been caught up in the country's sex abuse scandal. Cardinal Ezzati, 77, faces multiple charges of cover up. AFP

Algerian lawyers call for Bouteflika's resignation

ALGIERS
Hundreds of Algerian lawyers protested again on Saturday in the capital to demand the immediate resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who has been in power for 20 years. They gathered in Algiers' centre, the scene of mass protests for one month. REUTERS

Mueller submits Russia probe report

Lawmakers could receive conclusions by the weekend; no new indictments announced

REUTERS
WASHINGTON/WEST PALM BEACH

The top U.S. law enforcement official was reviewing a report by Special Counsel Robert Mueller on Russia's role in the 2016 U.S. election, but a U.S. Justice Department official said he is not expected to release a summary of findings to Congress and the public on Saturday.

President Donald Trump remained silent on the report of an investigation that also looked into any potential wrongdoing by Mr. Trump, whose legal woes go beyond the end of the Mueller inquiry.

U.S. Attorney-General William Barr, who received the report from Mr. Mueller on Friday, told lawmakers in a letter that he may be able to inform them of Mr. Mueller's "principal conclusions as soon as this weekend."

A Justice Department official



U.S. President Donald Trump and Special Counsel Robert Mueller in a combination photo. •AFP

said Mr. Barr and his deputy were working closely with principal advisers to determine what to include in a letter to Congress. Mr. Barr will not deliver the summary on Saturday, the official said.

Legal risks

Senator Chris Coons, a Democratic member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said Mr. Trump and his core

team could still face legal risks even if the Mueller report does not find that they committed crimes. Mr. Trump's business, his charity and his presidential transition operation remain under investigation, Mr. Coons said, and congressional Democrats would keep looking into his activities.

Under Department of Justice regulations, Mr. Barr is

empowered to decide how much to disclose publicly. He said in the letter that he is "committed to as much transparency as possible."

Mr. Trump, who is spending the weekend at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, has not commented to reporters.

Topic of investigation

The big question is whether the report contains allegations of wrongdoing by Mr. Trump or exonerates him. Mr. Mueller investigated whether Mr. Trump's campaign conspired with Moscow to try to influence the election and whether the Republican President later unlawfully tried to obstruct his investigation.

Mr. Mueller did not recommend any further indictments, a senior Justice Department official said, signalling that there might be no more criminal charges

against Trump associates. Mr. Mueller brought charges against 34 people and three companies, with prison sentences for some of Mr. Trump's former aides.

House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, the two top Democrats in Congress, said it was "imperative" that the full report be made public, that Mr. Barr not give Mr. Trump and his team a "sneak preview" of the findings, and that the White House not be allowed to interfere in decisions about what parts are made public.

They said the investigation focused on questions that "go to the integrity of our democracy itself: whether foreign powers corruptly interfered in our elections, and whether unlawful means were used to hinder that investigation."

Anti-IS campaign ends after 5 years of fighting

But sleeper cells of group are still active

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BAGHOUZ

The nearly five-year global campaign against the Islamic State (IS) saw a U.S.-led coalition unleash more than 1,00,000 strikes.

The campaign has left a trail of destruction in cities in Iraq and Syria, likely killed tens of thousands and drove hundreds of thousands from their homes.

It put an end to the militants' proto-state, which at its height four years ago was the size of Britain and home to some eight million people. But the extremist group still maintains a scattered presence and sleeper cells across Syria and Iraq.

It is not known whether the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is still alive or where he might be hiding.

Lone-wolf attacks

IS affiliates in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, Afghanistan and other countries continue to pose a threat, and the group's ideology has inspired so-called lone-wolf attacks that had little if any connection to its leadership.

The end of the 'caliphate' also marks a new phase in Syria's civil war, now in its ninth year.

The country is carved up, with the Iranian and Russian-backed government of President Bashar al-Assad controlling the west, centre and south, the U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces holding the north and east, and Turkish allies controlling a pocket in the north. The fear now is of new conflict among those players.

At a ceremony held later on Saturday at the nearby al-Omar oil field base, a senior U.S. diplomat, William Roebuck, said the territorial defeat of the IS is a "critical



A Syrian Democratic Forces fighter flashing the victory sign in Deir Ezzor. •AFP

milestone" that delivers a crushing and strategic blow to the extremist group. But he stressed it remains a significant threat. "We still have much work to do to achieve an enduring defeat of IS," he said.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Gen. Mazloum Abdi, appealed for continued assistance to his group until the full eradication of the extremist group. He spoke at the ceremony during which fighters marched to a military band.

The victory declaration sets the stage for President Donald Trump to begin withdrawing most of the 2,000 U.S. troops stationed in northern Syria, as he abruptly announced in December that he would do.

Mr. Trump, however, later agreed to leave a small peacekeeping force of 200 soldiers in Syria to ensure Turkey will not get into a conflict with the Kurdish-led SDF.

The Kurds fear being abandoned by the Americans. They are squeezed between a belligerent Turkey from the north, which regards them as a national threat, and Mr. Assad's forces from the south.

Italy signs new 'Silk Road' protocol with China

29 MoUs worth €5 billion-€7 billion signed as President Xi Jinping seeks to allay Western concerns

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ROME

Italy on Saturday signed a "non-binding" protocol with China to take part in Beijing's new "Silk Road" of transport and trade links stretching from Asia to Europe.

In doing so, Italy became the first G7 country to sign up for the massive project which has sparked unease in the U.S. and the European Union (EU) as China aspires to a greater world role.

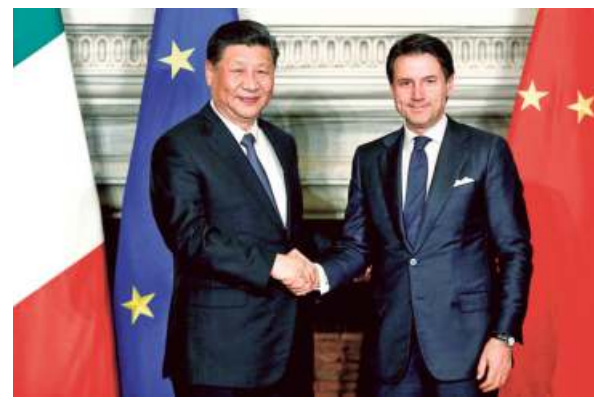
Visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte both attended a ceremony for the signing of 29 Memoranda of Understanding which Italian media said were worth €5 billion-€7 bil-

lion. Also signing the accords were the chairman of China's National Development Commission He Lifeng and Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development Luigi Di Maio.

Italian financial daily *Il Sole 24 Ore* said the value of the Chinese investments could rise to €20 billion but would for now be limited to the strategic ports of Genoa and Trieste.

Red-carpet welcome

Italy has rolled out the red carpet for Mr. Xi, who on Friday sought to allay Western unease over his transformational infrastructure initiative by emphasizing the \$1



New avenues: Chinese President Xi Jinping with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte in Rome on Saturday. •REUTERS

trillion project's mutual benefits. The accords also foresee the opening up of the Chinese market for Italian oranges as well as a partner-

ship for Chinese tourism giant Ctrip, notably with Rome's airports.

Cultural tie-ups including town twinnings are also on

the agenda while Beijing is pushing to have several Serie A football matches played in China - although that would currently contravene regulations of the game's governing body FIFA.

In what some perceived as a snub, Italy's far-right Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini did not attend Friday's state dinner for Mr. Xi at Matarella's Quirinal Palace, having stated that Italy would be "no-one's colony."

Mr. Salvini has notably urged caution about using Chinese telecom giant Huawei's next generation 5G mobile technology, whereas coalition partner Luigi Di Maio is keener for Chinese partnerships.

Peace ambassador



Dubai's Burj Khalifa tower was lit on Friday with an image of New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, in appreciation of her stance following the Christchurch attacks. •AFP

Cyclone Idai death toll in Mozambique rises to 417

Two million people have been affected

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIRA

The death toll in Mozambique on Saturday climbed to 417 after a cyclone pummeled swathes of the southern African country, flooding thousands of square kilometres, as the UN stepped up calls for more help for survivors.

Cyclone Idai smashed into the coast of central Mozambique on Friday last week, unleashing hurricane-force winds and rains that flooded the hinterland and drenched eastern Zimbabwe, leaving a trail of destruction. The new numbers take the combined death toll of the two neighbouring countries to 676.

The UN, warning of more suffering, stepped up calls for help in Mozambique as aid agencies struggle to assist tens of thousands of people battered by one of southern Africa's most po-

werful cyclones. A week after the storm lashed Mozambique with winds of nearly 200 km per hour, survivors are struggling in desperate conditions - some still trapped on roof tops and those saved needing food and facing the risk of outbreaks of disease such as cholera.

"The situation will get worse before it gets better," UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said on Saturday.

The World Food Programme late on Friday night declared the flood crisis a level three emergency, putting it on a par with crises in Yemen, Syria and South Sudan. More than two million people have been affected in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and in Malawi where the storm started as a tropical depression causing flooding which killed 60. Hundreds are still missing.

'Pakistan doesn't believe in wars'

President Alvi says the country's real battle is against poverty

MEHMAL SARFRAZ
LAHORE

Pakistan's President Arif Alvi said on Saturday that the country wants to end long-standing disputes in South Asia through dialogue.

"Our real war is against poverty and unemployment and should remain so. We are a responsible nation. We have learnt from our past mistakes and are now building our future keeping that in mind. We want to end hate and long-standing disputes in the region for prosperity and peace. As a democratic country, we don't believe in wars," Mr. Alvi said while addressing the annual military parade marking the Pakistan Day in Islamabad.

"We respect the sovereignty of all nations and be-



Pakistani President Arif Alvi. •REUTERS

lieve in peaceful relations with all countries. But our wish for peace should not be misconstrued as our weakness. Pakistan is a reality. India should also accept this reality. This region needs peace. Instead of war, we need to focus on education, health and providing employment," he added.

The event was attended by foreign dignitaries, including Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, as well as Pakistan's civil and

military leadership. "Dialogue is the solution to unresolved issues. India's attitude has been irresponsible, which has put this region's peace in danger. The aftermath of Pulwama attack is a testament to this," he added.

"Pakistan was blamed without any evidence, war-mongering statements led to war hysteria. And then in violation of all international laws, Pakistan's airspace was violated. We retaliated in response as it was our right."

Mr. Alvi added that the parade "is giving the message that we are a peaceful nation but we are know how to defend ourselves... Terrorism is the greatest threat to world peace. We have fought a long war against terrorism. More needs to be done in this regard."

Anti-Brexit march sees big turnout

REUTERS
LONDON

Hundreds of thousands of people opposed to Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (EU) marched through central London on Saturday to demand a new referendum as the deepening Brexit crisis risked sinking Prime Minister Theresa May's premiership. After three years of tortuous debate, it is still uncertain how, when or even if Brexit will happen.

Marchers set off in central London with banners proclaiming "the best deal is no Brexit" and "we demand a People's Vote" in what organisers said was a march that was more than one million people strong and the biggest anti-Brexit protest yet.