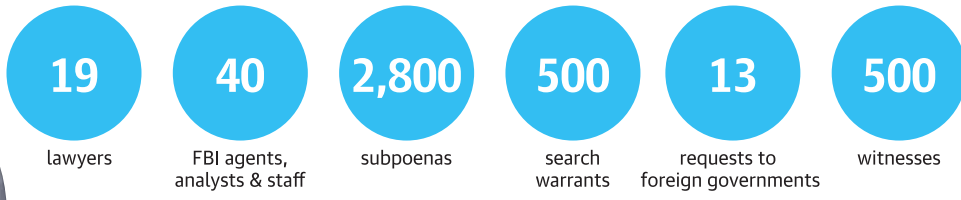




No collusion, but no exoneration

Bill Barr, the U.S. Attorney General, on Sunday presented a summary of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report that looked into allegations whether President Donald Trump's campaign colluded with Russia

THE PARAPHERNALIA



THE FINDINGS



Bill Barr

- 1 No further indictments
- 2 There were two elements to Russian interference in U.S. elections:
 - a) Disinformation campaign by Russian organisation Internet Research Agency
 - b) Russian government's effort to conduct computer hacking operations
- 3 While the report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it does not exonerate him either
- 4 Evidence is not sufficient to establish an 'obstruction-of-justice' offence against Trump

The Trump campaign was not found to be involved in either of these

IN THE DOCK | A TOTAL OF 34 INDIVIDUALS HAVE BEEN INDICTED BY MUELLER

| CONVICTED & JAILED | PLEADED GUILTY | CHARGED |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paul Manafort Financial fraud and obstruction of justice 7.5 years in prison | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael Cohen Former lawyer Bank fraud, Tax fraud and campaign finance violations 36 months in prison | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael Flynn Ex-NSA Lying to the FBI Awaiting sentencing |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rick Gates Ex-campaign staffer Financial fraud Awaiting sentencing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alex van der Zwaan Ex-campaign staffer Lying to FBI Jailed for 30 days, fined \$20,000 and deported | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> George Papadopoulos Dutch lawyer Lying to FBI Jailed for 30 days, fined \$20,000 and deported |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roger Stone Adviser Obstruction, lying to Congress Witness tampering Awaiting sentencing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Konstantin Kilimnik Ex-Manafort aide Obstruction of justice Has not answered to the charges | |

Source: Reuters

Trump is triumphant after being cleared of collusion

Mueller report finds no evidence that President's team worked with Russia



Not guilty: A copy of the letter from Attorney General William Barr on Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report • AP

Special Counsel Robert Mueller found no evidence of collusion between U.S. President Donald Trump's campaign and Russia in the 2016 election, but left unresolved the issue of whether Mr. Trump obstructed justice by undermining the investigations that have dogged his presidency.

Even though Mr. Mueller's findings on obstruction of justice were inconclusive, U.S. Attorney General William Barr said in a summary released on Sunday that Mr. Mueller's team had not found enough proof to warrant bringing charges against Mr. Trump.

It marked a political victory for Mr. Trump. He quickly claimed complete and total exoneration "while his Democratic opponents expressed dissatisfaction with the outcome and vowed to continue congressional probes into his business and personal dealings.

Mr. Mueller's 22-month investigation ended with a finding that no one in Mr. Trump's campaign "conspired or coordinated with the Russian government," according to Mr. Barr's four-page summary of Mr. Mueller's confidential report.

The long-awaited report into whether Mr. Trump's 2016 campaign colluded with Russian efforts to help him defeat his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, marked a major milestone of his presidency as he prepares for his 2020 re-election battle.

'A takedown that failed' Mr. Trump describes the Mueller probe as a "witch-hunt", saying there was no collusion with Russia and deny

nying he obstructed justice. "This was an illegal takedown that failed," Mr. Trump told reporters on Sunday. "It's a shame that our country had to go through this."

Many of Mr. Trump's opponents had accused the President of obstructing the Russia probe when he fired former FBI Director James Comey in 2017.

Mr. Mueller himself did not reach a conclusion on whether Mr. Trump broke the law, but he presented his evidence to Mr. Barr to make a determination.

"While this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him," Mr. Barr quoted Mr. Mueller as writing in the final report on an investigation

that led to indictments and convictions of several of Mr. Trump's senior former aides.

Mr. Barr said he and Deputy-Attorney General Rod Rosenstein concluded that the evidence did not justify bringing obstruction charges. Democrats, however, said they wanted to see Mr. Mueller's report for themselves as they launch congressional investigations of their own into the 2016 election and Mr. Trump's business and financial dealings.

House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said the fact that Mr. Mueller did not clear Mr. Trump on the obstruction issue "demonstrates how urgent it is that the full report and underlying documentation be made public without any further delay."

Mr. Mueller formally ended his investigation on Friday after bringing charges against 34 people, including Russian agents and former key allies of Mr. Trump, such as his campaign chairman Paul Manafort, former National Security Adviser Mike Flynn and his personal lawyer Michael Cohen.

None of those charges, however, directly related to whether Mr. Trump's campaign worked with Moscow.

More legal battles in the offing

Many other investigations against the President and his associates are in progress

That the Special Counsel investigation, into whether Donald Trump and his associates colluded with Russians in their (the Russians') attempts to meddle in the 2016 presidential election, found no evidence of collusion, is indeed a significant and positive outcome from Mr. Trump's perspective.

However, the conclusions of Robert Mueller's probe and Attorney General William Barr's four-page summary of it to Congress on Sunday raise more questions than they answer. Legal and political battles around the conduct of Mr. Trump and his associates in the run-up to and following the 2016 election will continue in Washington and beyond.

The President and his inner circle are, not surprisingly, projecting the revelations as a complete victory. "No Collusion, No Obstruction, Complete and Total EXONERATION. KEEP AMERICA GREAT!" Mr. Trump tweeted. While the 'no collusion' finding is a boost for the Pre-

sident, Mr. Trump is incorrect to call this a "total exoneration". The report, as per the summary from Mr. Barr, does not give Mr. Trump a clean chit with regard to obstruction of justice allegations. "While this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him," Mr. Barr quoted the report as saying.

The obstruction issue Significantly, Mr. Barr and Deputy-Attorney General Rod Rosenstein have decided that the evidence from the investigation is "not sufficient to establish that the President committed an obstruction-of-justice offense."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer questioned Mr. Barr's suitability to make such a decision on Sunday. "Given Mr. Barr's public record of bias against the Special Counsel's inquiry, he is not a neutral observer and is not in a position to make objective determinations about the report," they said in a statement.

Sunday's conclusions are likely to be just the start of another round of battles in Washington. Congressman Jerrold Nadler, who heads

the powerful House Judiciary Committee (it has impeachment processes in its portfolio), denied that Mr. Trump was exonerated by the Mueller findings.

On Sunday, Democrats reiterated a need for the entire Mueller Report and its supporting documents to be released. Additionally, top Democrats, including Mr. Nadler, on Sunday, asked Mr. Barr to appear before the House panel "without delay". In addition, the House Judiciary Committee had sent 81 individuals and organisations requests for information earlier this month as it embarked on an investigation into the President and his associates. This means the investigations around Mr. Trump and his inner circle will continue. It also means, regardless of the specific outcomes, informa-

tion will be gathered that will be used as part of the Democrats' campaign in 2020.

Leverage for GOP But these events and processes are also likely to be used by the GOP and Mr. Trump. The GOP has, by and large, stood by the President. While some congressional Republicans have repeatedly and openly questioned Mr. Trump or the administration's policies, they have mostly towed the party line. The Mueller probe gives Republicans who have been conflicted the perfect opportunity to huddle together as one GOP and use what the report found – or did not find – as leverage.

The Mueller probe may have concluded, but it is just one event in the saga of the Trump presidency. More than a dozen federal and State investigations around Mr. Trump and his associates are under way. These are looking into potential campaign finance violations, foreign donations, tax violations and so forth.

ELSEWHERE



Ardern orders top-level inquiry into shootings

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced on Monday a royal commission, a powerful form of public inquiry, into the events leading up to a March 15 attack on two mosques in Christchurch that killed 50 people. She said a major focus of the inquiry would be whether there were any clues that were missed. REUTERS

Saudi sisters leave Hong Kong for third country

HONG KONG Two Saudi sisters marooned in Hong Kong have arrived in a safe third country after securing humanitarian visas, their law firm said on Monday, ending a months-long ordeal as they sought sanctuary from an abusive family. The siblings, aged 20 and 18, said they were "thrilled" their story had a "happy ending". AFP

Boeing plane diverted after smoke in cockpit

NOUMEA A United Airlines Boeing 787-900 jet was diverted to the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia on Monday after reports of smoke coming from the cockpit, a local official said. The U.S. aircraft flying 256 passengers from Melbourne, Australia, to Los Angeles, touched down safely at La Tontouta airport in New Caledonia's capital Noumea. REUTERS

May shelves plan for third vote on Brexit agreement

British PM acknowledges that she still doesn't have support of a majority of the MPs in Parliament

VIDYA RAM
LONDON

British Prime Minister Theresa May has shelved plans for a third vote on her withdrawal agreement as she acknowledged that she still was unable to muster the necessary parliamentary majority, despite a series of meetings with Conservative MPs, the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, and Labour Party to attempt to find a road ahead.

"I continue to believe that the right path forward is for the United Kingdom to leave the EU as soon as possible with a deal, now on 22nd May," she told Members of the House of Commons on Monday, adding that she

would continue discussions to attempt to bring the vote forward if she could get the necessary support.

Time till April 12 Last week, the EU said it would delay Brexit till May 22 – just before elections to the European Parliament – if Ms. May's deal was passed by Parliament this week and would give it till April 12 to come up with alternative options if the deal were not passed.

Ms. May also said that the government would not commit to holding indicative votes later this week. These are intended to identify a route forward. She insisted that it would be irresponsi-



An anti-Brexit demonstrator in London on Saturday. • AP

ble for the government to blindly agree to something that could contradict manifesto commitments to leave the single market and customs union. However, she appeared to rule out a no-deal Brexit as she told MPs that "unless this House agrees to it, no deal will not

happen." She warned of the risk of "no Brexit" as well as a "slow Brexit", which extended Article 50 beyond May 22, requiring the U.K. to take part in elections to EU Parliament. "[I]t would mean that we will not have been able to guarantee Brexit," she said.

The political tumult in the U.K., which came despite the EU's extension, has raised concerns about a no-deal on April 12. On Monday, the EU published details of its "completed" preparations for a no-deal Brexit, as it warned that that scenario was becoming "increasingly" likely.

The EU outlined details of its plans of what would happen were the U.K. to crash

out of the EU on April 12. Under the plan, the EU would treat the U.K. as a "third country without any transitional arrangements" and would apply World Trade Organisation rules and tariffs at its border with the U.K. This would result in U.K. citizens travelling to the U.K. no longer being able to go through the EU queue, while goods from the U.K. would be faced with stringent checks, and "significant delays".

According to a leaflet published on Monday, U.K. nationals would be subject to entry checks, including on the duration of their stay, the purpose of their visit and whether or not they have sufficient funds.

China reiterates backing for India-Pak. 'engagement'

ATUL ANEJA
BEIJING

China on Monday reiterated its intent to remain engaged in easing tensions between India and Pakistan.

In response to a question regarding the exchange of greetings between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan on the occasion of Pakistan's National Day, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said China welcomed "the goodwill sent out to each other by both India and Pakistani leaders."

He added: "We support the two sides in maintaining

engagement and improve their relations, stabilise the situation and resolve their differences."

'A constructive role' China, he said, will "continue to play a constructive role to this end."

Asked specifically whether Beijing would pursue "mediation" between India and Pakistan, Mr. Geng said: "China's position on the Issue of India-Pakistan relations is consistent. These two are important South Asian countries, and we hope they will resolve the issues through dialogue and consultation."

Golan Heights belongs to Israel: U.S.

Trump signs proclamation in Netanyahu's presence

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his side, U.S. President Donald Trump declared on Monday that the Golan Heights belongs to Israel. Mr. Netanyahu spared no praise as he watched Mr. Trump sign the Golan proclamation at the White House, likening him to President Harry S. Truman, who recognised Israel, and even to Cyrus the Great, the Persian king who freed the Jews of Babylon.

"Your decision to recognize Israel's sovereignty on the Golan Heights is so historic," Mr. Netanyahu told



A house in Mishmeret, Israel that was damaged following Monday's rocket strike. • AP

Mr. Trump. The Jewish state captured the territory from Syria during the Six-Day War of 1967. "Your recognition is a two-fold act of historic justice. Israel won the Golan Heights in a just war of self-

defence, and the Jewish people's roots in the Golan go back thousands of years," he said. Mr. Netanyahu was visiting Washington for the conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee but cut his visit short after a rocket fired on Monday from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip hit a house north of Tel Aviv, wounding seven Israelis in an unusually long-range attack.

Just as Mr. Netanyahu entered the White House, Israeli warplanes struck targets in Gaza linked to Hamas with the Prime Minister vowing to respond "forcefully to this wanton aggression".

Thai Opposition parties allege cheating in poll

REUTERS
BANGKOK

Thailand's first general election since a military coup five years ago was thrown into disarray on Monday as two Opposition parties alleged cheating and the Election Commission said it could be weeks until the make-up of Parliament becomes clear.

Confusion over the outcome of Sunday's election raised the spectre of a protracted struggle to form a government, spoiling hopes of a clear-cut result that could have ended 15 years of political turmoil in Southeast Asia's second-largest economy.

The pro-Thaksin Pheu



Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha. • AP

Thai party said it was considering a legal challenge over what it said were poll irregularities after partial results showed Mr. Chan-o-cha's Palang Pracharat party with an unexpected lead in the popular vote.

Pak. police arrest seven over forced marriage of Hindu girls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAHORE

At least seven people, including a man who assisted in solemnising the wedding of two teenage Hindu girls after their alleged abduction and forced conversions, have been detained in Pakistan, amid reports that the victims approached a court seeking protection.

The two were allegedly kidnapped by a group of "influential" men from their home in Ghotki district in Sindh on the eve of Holi. Soon after the kidnapping, a video went viral in which a cleric was purportedly shown solemnising the ni-

kah (marriage) of the two girls, triggering nationwide outrage. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has ordered a probe.

Citing police, Dawn reported that several raids were conducted on Sunday night in Punjab's Rahim Yar Khan district – where it was believed the girls were taken. Police arrested the nikah khwan, who solemnised their marriages, a leader of the Pakistan Sunni Tehreek, and some relatives of the men who had married the two girls.

The detained suspects were handed over to Sindh police.