

IN BRIEF



China ex-internet czar sentenced for graft

BEIJING
China's former internet censor Lu Wei has been sentenced to 14 years in prison on corruption charges on Tuesday. In its ruling, a court said Mr. Lu had abused his authority in various positions, including as a Deputy Propaganda Minister and as head of a government internet security advisory body, accepting gifts in return for favours. AP

Gaza tense after Israel, Hamas exchange fire

JERUSALEM
The Gaza border region was tense on Tuesday after a night of heavy fire as Israeli aircraft bombed targets across the Gaza Strip and militants fired rockets into Israel, just two weeks before the Israeli election. Schools and colleges in southern Israel were closed even as the military imposed restrictions on civilian public gatherings. AP

Pakistan shelters 2 Hindu girls after conversion

ISLAMABAD
A Pakistani court on Tuesday placed two teenage sisters from the minority Hindu community in a government shelter even as authorities launched an investigation into whether they were abducted and forced to convert and marry two Muslim men. AP

Pentagon approves \$1 bn for Trump's border wall

WASHINGTON
Acting Pentagon chief Patrick Shanahan has authorized \$1 billion to build part of the wall sought by Donald Trump along the U.S.-Mexico border, the first funds designated for the project under the President's emergency declaration. AFP

MPs wrest control of Brexit process from government

To give indicative votes to chart alternative routes for U.K.'s exit from the EU

VIDYA RAM
LONDON

British MPs are set to debate and take part in a series of indicative votes on Wednesday to help chart a course that could command support in the Parliament.

This came after the government suffered a major political defeat on Monday night, as MPs voted to wrest control of the Brexit timetable from the government, to hold the votes, despite assurances from the government that it would be willing to hold a series of such votes itself. Three ministers resigned in order to be able to vote for the amendment.

It also comes as the government continues to struggle to rally MPs behind the Prime Minister's controversial withdrawal deal. While some hard line Brexiters – notably European Research Group chair Jacob Rees-Mogg – have indicated their willingness to support the deal if it means avoiding no Brexit at all, the Democratic Unionist Party and other Conservative MPs have held fast in their opposition, a day after the Prime Minister acknowledged she didn't have the majority in Parliament but warned that the alternatives included no Brexit at all or a "slow Brexit".

Following another lengthy debate on Monday night, MPs voted by 329 to 302 in favour of an amendment to a motion – introduced by Conservative MP Oliver Letwin – to enable the series of unspecified votes to take place.

The precise system that will be used – and what the options offered to MPs – will become clear on Wednesday itself, when a business of the House is set to be put to MPs and debated between 2pm



In unison: Anti-Brexit protesters hold flags while demonstrating outside the British Parliament in London on Tuesday. AP

and 3pm U.K. time, and then voted on, setting the course of how these votes would take place and what the MPs will have to answer. The indicative votes could take place later that day.

Tricky move

Striking the right note in the indicative votes will be crucial and tricky, to avoid any suggestion that the ordering of the questions compromised or predetermined the way that MPs answered the questions. A process along these lines has only ever been used by MPs once before – in 2003, to identify the best way to reform the House of Lords. However, at that time, it failed to provide clarity as MPs rejected all the options before them.

Even if MPs were able to agree to a particular route ahead in the indicative votes, there is no guarantee that the government will abide by them. "I cannot commit the Government to delivering the outcome of any votes held by the House, but I do commit to engaging con-

structively with the process," Theresa May told MPs on Monday ahead of the vote on the Letwin amendment.

The government is continuing to attempt to rally support behind the withdrawal deal, despite clear indications from many – including the DUP – that they would not change their mind. However, Jacob Rees-Mogg, a vocal critic of the Prime Minister indicated, in a podcast interview on the website Conservative Home, that he could be persuaded to back the beleaguered Withdrawal Agreement as the options facing the U.K. dwindled.

Ms. May on Monday appeared to rule out a no-deal Brexit, and instead pointed to other options, including a "slow Brexit" that would require the U.K. to take place on European parliamentary elections on May 23.

After the EU agreed to delay Brexit last week beyond March 29 if no withdrawal deal is agreed this week, the U.K. will have time till April 12 to come up with alternative routes forward. If it were

accepted, then the U.K. will leave the EU on May 22.

Mr. Letwin, setting out his amendment on Monday, had told the House that a compromise would be needed if MPs were to be able to find the road ahead. "We need not just a majority for something but a majority for something that will continue to persist as the various stages have to be carried through."

While Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn hailed Parliament for "taking control", the government warned that the vote upended "the balance between our democratic institutions and sets a dangerous, unpredictable precedent for the future".

However, some EU politicians welcomed the actions taken by Parliament. Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's Brexit coordinator, said Parliament taking control was an "opportunity to build a cross-party cooperation leading to an enhanced political declaration and close future relationship."

Hand over full Mueller report, not summary, say Democrats

Trump says release of the report 'wouldn't bother me at all'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

House Democrats pressed the Justice Department to provide the full report from special counsel Robert Mueller even as Republicans gleefully called for them to "move on" from the Russia investigation. President Donald Trump accused those responsible for launching Mr. Mueller's probe of "treasonous things against our country" and said they "certainly will be looked into".

Mr. Trump said the release of Mr. Mueller's full report "wouldn't bother me at all", and Democrats quickly put that statement to the test, demanding that his administration hand over the entire document and not just Sunday's four-page summary from Attorney-General William Barr.

Six House Democratic committee chairmen wrote to Mr. Barr that his summary is "not sufficient" and asked



U.S. President Donald Trump slammed the supporters of the Russia probe.

to have Mr. Mueller's full report by April 2. They also want to begin receiving the underlying evidence the same day. The information is "urgently needed by our committees to perform their duties under the Constitution", they wrote, implying that the information would be subpoenaed if it is not turned over by the deadline.

Mr. Barr said in his letter to Congress that Mr. Mueller did not find that Mr. Trump's

campaign "conspired or coordinated" with the Russian government to influence the 2016 presidential election.

No conclusion

But he also said Mr. Mueller reached no conclusion on whether Mr. Trump obstructed the federal investigation, instead setting out "evidence on both sides" of the question and stating that "while this report does not conclude the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him". Absent a recommendation from Mr. Mueller, Mr. Barr stepped in and decided there wasn't sufficient evidence to establish that the President obstructed justice. Democrats said Mr. Barr's judgment is not the final word.

"All I'm interested in is them releasing the full report, the full Mr. Mueller report," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

Amid U.S. tensions, Xi says China, EU 'advancing together'

Chinese President urges EU leaders to overcome suspicions

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday stressed the growing convergence between Beijing and the European Union on global issues from climate change to trade, urging the two sides to overcome their "suspicions."

At a meeting in Paris between Mr. Xi, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela

Merkel and European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker, the leaders declared their desire to work together.

"Of course there are differences and competition, but it's positive competition," Mr. Xi said. "We are advancing together. We shouldn't let suspicions lead us to be constantly looking backwards."

European and Chinese leaders have both faced

challenges from U.S. President Donald Trump's "America-first" nationalism and his attacks on international agreements covering global warming, trade or Iran's nuclear programme.

Working together

In a joint statement at the end of Mr. Xi's three-day trip to France, Mr. Xi and Mr. Macron committed to working together to promote a rules-based international order.

Nawaz Sharif granted bail for six weeks on health grounds

But former Pakistan PM is not allowed to leave the country

MEHMAL SARFRAZ
LAHORE

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been granted bail for six weeks by the Supreme Court on health grounds. The terms of the bail include that Mr. Sharif "shall not leave or be allowed to leave the country". He can now be treated anywhere in the country.

The leadership of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) hailed this decision. Mr. Sharif's daughter Maryam Nawaz and younger brother Shehbaz Sharif "thanked God" in their tweets for this temporary relief.

Ahsan Iqbal, a senior leader of the PML-N, told *The Hindu* that this decision by the Supreme Court validates their position that Mr. Sharif has serious health issues. "It also negates what the [PTI] government was



Former Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif has been battling poor health for long. AP

doing, such as making fun of his health, making statements to that effect and playing politics with Mian sahib's health. The court has given him bail because he has serious health issues. We will now focus on his treatment as Mian sahib is an asset for the country."

Pakistan's Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry told *The Hindu* he hopes

that this relief will lessen Mr. Sharif's tensions. "He [Mr. Sharif] should get the required medical treatment in these six weeks and get well so he can go back to jail after these six weeks are over. He should either complete his sentence or return the looted money in a plea bargain if he wants his freedom," added Mr. Chaudhry.

A win-win situation

Senior journalist Suhail Warraich thinks it's a win-win for all parties. "Both the establishment and the judiciary don't want to look cruel. The PML(N) got relief. The PTI, which was under pressure due to Mr. Sharif's health, will also come out of pressure now."

Anchorperson Gharidah Farooqi said Mr. Sharif might continue to remain silent on the issue let Shahbaz Sharif's mediation continue.

Reporters quit over Vatican call

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
VATICAN CITY

The all-female editorial team behind the Vatican's women's magazine have resigned over what they describe as attempts to stifle their reporting and bring in more "obedient" journalists, its founder said Tuesday.

"We are throwing in the towel because we feel surrounded by a climate of distrust and progressive de-legitimation," *Woman Church World* founder Lucetta Scaraffia wrote in an editorial published by Italian religious news blog *Il Sismografo*.

Ms. Scaraffia said the new editor of *L'Osservatore*, Andrea Monda, was attempting to "weaken" the monthly by bringing in external collaborators in a bid to control the editorial line.

"They are returning to selecting women who ensure obedience," she said.

U.S. upset as Russian planes land in Venezuela

A reckless escalation of situation in South American nation, says State Dept.

REUTERS
WASHINGTON/CARACAS

The United States on Monday accused Russia of "reckless escalation" of the situation in Venezuela by deploying military planes and personnel to the crisis-stricken South American nation that Washington has hit with crippling sanctions.

The Russian planes and military personnel arrived outside the Venezuelan capital Caracas on Saturday, according to local media reports, two months after the Trump administration disavowed President Nicolas Maduro.

Washington has recognized opposition leader Juan



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the U.S. won't remain idle on Venezuela.

Guaido as the country's legitimate President and demands that Mr. Maduro leave power, which Russia has described as a U.S.-backed

coup against the socialist government.

"The United States condemns Russia's deployment of military aircraft and personnel to Caracas, which is another contradiction of both Nicolas Maduro's and Russia's calls for non-intervention in Venezuela and is a reckless escalation of the situation," a State Department spokesman said.

The Vice-President of Venezuela's Socialist Party, Diosdado Cabello, confirmed that two planes had flown in from Russia.

"The planes from Russia landed in Venezuela because they were authorized by the only government that there

is in Venezuela, and it's called the government of Nicolas Maduro," Mr. Cabello said in a speech broadcast on state television.

The Kremlin declined to comment on the planes on Tuesday or to the accusations from the U.S. State Department.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in a phone call on Monday that Washington would "not stand idly by" as Russia backed Mr. Maduro, who has overseen a dramatic collapse of a once-bustling economy.

Russia has warned the United States against a military intervention in Venezuela.