

Barr releases Mueller probe report

Investigation neither finds that Trump had committed obstruction of justice nor exonerates him

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report on his inquiry into Russia's role in the 2016 U.S. election detailed a series of actions by President Donald Trump to impede the probe, raising questions about whether Mr. Trump committed the crime of obstruction of justice.

Thursday's release of the 448-page report after a 22-month investigation was a watershed moment in Mr. Trump's tumultuous presidency and inflamed partisan passions ahead of his 2020 re-election bid in a deeply divided country.

Democrats said the report contained disturbing evidence of wrongdoing by Mr. Trump that could fuel congressional investigations, but there was no immediate indication they would try to remove him from office through impeachment.

An explosive case

Mr. Mueller built an extensive case indicating that Mr. Trump had committed obstruction of justice but stopped short of concluding

he had committed a crime, though the Special Counsel did not exonerate the President. Mr. Mueller noted, however, that Congress has the power to address whether Mr. Trump violated the law.

"The conclusion that Congress may apply the obstruction laws to the President's corrupt exercise of the powers of office accords with our constitutional system of checks and balances and the principle that no person is above the law," the report stated. Mr. Mueller, a former FBI Director, also unearthed "numerous links" between the Russian government and Mr. Trump's campaign, but concluded that there was not enough evidence to establish that the campaign engaged in a criminal conspiracy with Moscow in its election meddling.

The report, with some portions blacked out to protect sensitive information, provided fresh details of how the Republican President tried to force Mr. Mueller's ouster, directed members of his administration to publicly vouch for his innocence and dangled a pardon to a



In defence: Attorney-General William Barr, centre, speaking about the Mueller report in Washington on Thursday. •AP

former aide to try to prevent him from cooperating with the Special Counsel.

The report noted that some Trump aides did not carry out some of Mr. Trump's demands, including the one to fire Mr. Mueller.

The report stated that when former Attorney-General Jeff Sessions told Mr. Trump in May 2017 that a Special Counsel was being appointed by the Justice Department to look into allegations that the Republican's campaign colluded with Russia, Mr. Trump slumped back in his chair and said, "Oh my god. This is terrible. This is the end of my presidency.

I'm f****." Mr. Trump appeared to be in a celebratory mood on Thursday, saying at a White House event with wounded U.S. troops that he was "having a good day" following the report's release, adding, "It's called no collusion, no obstruction." Mr. Trump has long described Mr. Mueller's inquiry as a "witch-hunt."

After receiving a confidential copy of Mr. Mueller's report in March, Attorney General William Barr made his own conclusion for the Justice Department that Mr. Trump had not committed obstruction of justice. But he told a news conference on

Thursday that Mr. Mueller had detailed "10 episodes involving the President and discusses potential legal theories for connecting these actions to elements of an obstruction offense."

Impeachment unlikely

Any impeachment effort would start in the Democratic-led House of Representatives, but Mr. Trump's removal would require the support of the Republican-led Senate — an unlikely outcome. Many Democrats steered clear of threatening impeachment on Thursday, although a prominent liberal Congresswoman, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, directly brought it up. The House, when it voted to impeach President Bill Clinton in 1998, included obstruction of justice as one of the charges. The Senate ultimately decided not to remove Mr. Clinton from office.

The Democratic chairman of the House Judiciary Committee said he would issue subpoenas to obtain the unredacted Mueller report and asked Mr. Mueller to testify before the panel by May 23.

Pak. Finance Minister quits as Imran reshuffles Cabinet

The government had earlier denied news of a shake-up

MEHMAL SARFRAZ
LAHORE

Pakistan's Finance Minister Asad Umar stepped down on Thursday as part of a reshuffle of the Cabinet initiated by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

"As part of a Cabinet reshuffle, PM desired that I take the Energy Minister portfolio instead of Finance. However, I have obtained his consent to not take any Cabinet position. I strongly believe @ImranKhanPTI is the best hope for Pakistan and inshallah will make a naya Pakistan," Mr. Umar tweeted on Thursday.

Abdul Hafeez Sheikh will be Adviser on Finance.

Sources said Petroleum Minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan was also asked to step down, but he refused to do so. He reportedly said that he will leave Prime Minister Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party if he's forced to quit the Cabinet. He has now been made Federal Minister for Aviation.

More changes

Shehryar Afridi, State Minister for Interior, has now been made Minister for States and Frontier Regions. The new Federal Minister of Interior will be Brigadier Ijaz Shah (retired). Brig. Shah was Federal Minister Parliamentary Affairs earlier, a portfolio now assigned to Azam Swati.

Federal Minister for Information Fawad Chaudhry will now be the Minister for Science and Technology. Firdous Ashiq Awan will be Special Adviser to Prime Minister for Information.

According to sources, Health Minister Aamir Kiani, Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Ali Amin Gandapur and Minister for



Asad Umar, who resigned as Finance Minister; and, right, Fawad Chaudhry, whose portfolio was changed. •AFP

PM desired that I take the Energy Minister portfolio. However, I have obtained his consent to not take any position

ASAD UMAR

Housing and Works Tariq Bashir Cheema also lost their jobs.

Earlier, when media reported that a reshuffle was in the offing, the government had issued a denial.

Senior journalist Kashif Abbasi — who worked on this story for weeks and confirmed from various sources before breaking it — told this writer that the denial was given because the government was still mulling over replacements.

"Since one of them was the Finance Minister, any premature news on his departure would have affected the economy."

Pakistan's economy is going through a tough phase. Former Finance Minister Miftah Ismail told this writer that it is not enough to change a Minister or two. "The real problem is the direction set by the PM."

Anchor Shahzad Iqbal

said some Ministries were under-performing. The Finance Ministry, for example, had failed to reform the Federal Board of Revenue and achieve the tax target. "Bringing the economy on track was one of the biggest challenges for this government. The expectations were high but so far, they have not been fulfilled," he said. Mr. Iqbal added that eight months were not enough to judge any Finance Minister's performance, especially when a weak economy was handed over to him. "Asad Umar should have been given more time."

Senior anchor Mansoor Ali Khan said Prime Minister Khan has created a hard shell around himself and has stopped caring about what the Opposition will say. "Khan took resignations from his Ministers when they landed in trouble."

Mr. Mansoor Ali Khan said it is needed because this is Mr. Khan's first time in federal government.

"This is a coalition government with an inexperienced Cabinet. I hope that with the passage of time, the captain and his Cabinet will learn their lessons through trial and error."

N. Korea calls for Pompeo to be dropped from talks

Pyongyang says the U.S. should replace Secretary of State with someone 'more mature'

REUTERS
SEOUL

North Korea said on Thursday that it no longer wanted to deal with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and said he should be replaced in talks by someone "more mature", hours after it announced its first weapons test since nuclear talks broke down. The North's official KCNA news agency quoted senior Foreign Ministry official Kwon Jong-gun as warn-

ing that no one could predict the situation on the Korean peninsula if the U.S. did not abandon the "root cause" that compelled North Korea to develop nuclear weapons.

The statement came shortly after North Korea announced that leader Kim Jong-un had overseen the testing of a new tactical guided weapon, which KCNA said has a "peculiar mode of guiding flight" and "a powerful warhead". It was the

North's first weapon test since talks in Vietnam between Mr. Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump in late February broke down over conflicting demands by North Korea for sanctions relief and by the United States for North Korea to abandon its nuclear programme.

KCNA gave no details on the weapon that was tested on Wednesday but "tactical" implied a short-range weapon rather than the long-

range ballistic missiles that have been seen as a threat to the United States.

KCNA quoted Mr. Kwon, who is in charge of U.S. affairs, as saying the Vietnam summit showed that talks could go wrong "whenever Pompeo pokes his nose in". "I am afraid that, if Pompeo engages in the talks again, the table will be lousy once again and the talks will become entangled," Mr. Kwon said. "Therefore, even in the

case of possible resumption of the dialogue with the United States, I wish our dialogue counterpart would be not Pompeo but other person who is more careful and mature in communicating with us." A spokeswoman for the State Department said it was aware of the report about Mr. Pompeo and added: "The United States remains ready to engage North Korea in a constructive negotiation."

ELSEWHERE



Iran asks neighbours to 'drive back Zionism'

TEHRAN

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani on Thursday called on countries in West Asia to "drive back Zionism", in an Army Day tirade against the Islamic republic's arch-foe Israel. Mr. Rouhani called on Muslim nations to band together and "restore the historical right of the nation of Palestine". •AFP

Kim to meet Putin in Russia later this month

MOSCOW

North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un will visit Russia for talks with Vladimir Putin this month, the Kremlin said on Thursday, as tensions between Washington and Pyongyang reached fever pitch. The Kim-Putin meeting will be the first between the two leaders, as Moscow seeks to play a role in another global flashpoint. •AFP

Germany charges former Nazi guard

HAMBURG

German prosecutors on Thursday charged a 92-year-old man, identified as Bruno Dey from Hamburg, with aiding and abetting the murder of 5,230 people at a guard at a Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War. He worked between August 1944 and April 1945 at the camp. •AFP

Sudan arrests brothers of ex-President Bashir

KHARTOUM

Sudanese military council on Thursday announced the arrests of former President Omar al-Bashir's two brothers, Abdullah and Abbas al-Bashir, on corruption charges. The brothers' detention was likely another concession by the military to the protesters, who have demanded that all key figures and ranking officials from the former President's circle be arrested. •AP

Fugitive Saudi sisters to apply for asylum in Georgia

'Protection of their rights is guaranteed,' says Tbilisi

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TBILISI

Georgian immigration officers have visited two Saudi sisters who pleaded for international help after fleeing the ultra-conservative kingdom and will help them apply for asylum, an official said on Thursday. The two women had issued pleas for international protection on a Twitter account called @GeorgiaSisters, saying they were "trapped in Georgia" after Saudi authorities cancelled their passports.

They posted photographs of their passports identifying themselves as 28-year-old Maha Alsubaie and 25-year-old Wafa Alsubaie. "We are in danger," Maha Alsubaie said in one video posted on Twitter. "Please help us." "We want to apply for asylum in any safe country," one



Seeking help: The two women issued pleas for international protection through their Twitter account. •TWITTER

of the women said in another video that does not show her face. "If we go back to Saudi we will be killed."

Georgia's Interior Ministry spokeswoman Sopho Mdinardze said that representatives of the Ministry's migration department "visited the women on Thursday and invited them to start asylum procedures. "They can feel safe, the protection of their

rights is guaranteed in Georgia," Ms. Mdinardze said. The Ministry said later in a statement that the women "agreed to move to a facility for asylum seekers to undergo the procedures envisaged by Georgian law."

The Saudi women began posting tweets about their situation on Tuesday, initially not revealing their identities.

Holiday turns tragic



Caught by surprise: The Portuguese island of Madeira began three days of mourning after 29 German tourists died when their bus spun off the road and tumbled down a slope before crashing into a house. The 50-odd tourists were on their way to the regional capital Funchal for dinner when the accident occurred on Wednesday. Picture shows wreckage of the bus. •AFP

Both Indonesian candidates claim victory

Authorities warn against 'mass demonstrations' in reaction to preliminary results

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JAKARTA

Indonesia's Joko Widodo said on Thursday that his reelection as head of the world's third-biggest democracy was all but assured, calling for calm as his firebrand ex-General rival insisted he had in fact won the nation's top job.

Mr. Widodo, 57, said he had received phone calls from world leaders to congratulate him on his country's biggest-ever election, but added he would await the final results before formally declaring victory.

Quick counts

He cited a series of so-called "quick counts" by pollsters, which are based on samples, that showed him as much as 11 percentage points ahead of Mr. Subianto.



Another term? Indonesian President Joko Widodo, centre, delivering a speech in Jakarta on Thursday. •AP

Quick counts have been reliable indicators in past elections. But "we still have to wait for the numbers from the KPU (General Elections Commission)", Mr. Widodo told reporters. "Let's continue to work and maintain our unity and harmony as a nation," he added.

"Sandiaga Uno and I are declaring victory as the President and Vice-President,"

he told cheering supporters in Jakarta, ending his speech with shouts of *Allahu Akbar* (God is Greatest) and *Merdeka* (freedom).

Some supporters of Mr. Subianto called for a march near Jakarta's biggest mosque after prayers on Friday.

The competing claims came as authorities warned against unrest over Wednesday's "smooth and safe" polls, and warned of arrests. "If there are any illegal or unconstitutional actions that threaten public stability and security, (authorities) will take firm action," National Police Chief Tito Karnavian said Thursday. "We won't tolerate it. I urge everyone against mass demonstrations, whether it's to celebrate or to express dissatisfaction" at the results, Mr. Karnavian added.

Amazon to shut down operations in China

Move comes amid tough competition

REUTERS
SAN FRANCISCO

Amazon.com Inc said it will shut its China online store by July 18, as the U.S. e-commerce giant focusses on the lucrative businesses of selling overseas goods and cloud services in the world's most populous nation.

The move underscores how entrenched, home-grown e-commerce rivals have made it difficult for Amazon's marketplace to gain traction in China. Consumer research firm iResearch Global said Alibaba Group Holding's Tmall marketplace and JD.com controlled 82% of the Chinese e-commerce market last year.

An Amazon spokeswoman said on Thursday that it is notifying sellers that it will



no longer operate a marketplace, nor provide seller services on Amazon.cn.

"We are working closely with our sellers to ensure a smooth transition and to continue to deliver the best customer experience possible," the spokeswoman said.

"Sellers interested in continuing to sell on Amazon outside of China are able to do so through Amazon Global Selling." Amazon will wind down support for domestic-selling merchants in China in the next 90 days and review the impact on its fulfilment centres in the country a source said.

14 killed in Balochistan bus attack

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
QUETTA

Gunmen killed at least 14 people after forcing them to disembark from buses in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, officials said on Thursday.

The attackers, who numbered around two dozen, were wearing uniforms from the paramilitary Frontier Corps, said provincial home secretary Haider Ali.

They "stopped buses on the Makran Coastal Highway and gunned down 14 people", he said.

Provincial Home Minister Mir Zia Langov said a full-scale investigation had been launched into the attack and to track down the gunmen, who he said had fled the scene.