

Bipartisan Opposition Builds Up Against Trump



Robert S. Mueller III, the special counsel overseeing the Russia investigation

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- A bipartisan group of four senators is moving to protect special counsel Robert Mueller's job as President Donald Trump publicly muses about firing him.

Republican Sens. Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Democratic Sens. Chris Coons of Delaware and Cory Booker of New Jersey planned to introduce legislation Wednesday that would give any special counsel a 10-day window in which he or she could seek expedited judicial review of a firing, according to two people familiar with the legislation. They were not authorized to discuss the bill ahead of its release and

requested anonymity.

The legislation, which combines two bipartisan bills introduced last summer, signals escalating concerns in Congress as Trump has fumed about a Monday FBI raid of the office of his personal attorney, Michael Cohen. Trump has privately pondered firing Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and publicly criticized Mueller and his Russia probe.

In addition to investigating potential ties between Russia and the Trump campaign, Mueller is also examining whether the president's actions constitute obstruction of justice. As the investigation has worn on, Trump has repeatedly called it a "witch hunt."

On Monday, after the Cohen raid, he

said it was "an attack on our country." The raid was overseen by the U.S. Attorney's office in Manhattan and was based in part on a referral from Mueller, said Cohen's lawyer, Stephen Ryan.

Trump's homeland security adviser, Tom Bossert, also resigned, the president's spokeswoman said Tuesday, in the latest departure from the White House of a senior adviser.

An administration official said Bossert, a former deputy national security adviser to President George W. Bush, had left at the request of Trump's new national security adviser, John Bolton, who began working in his White House post Monday.

Bolton's arrival at the White House also prompted the departure of Trump's national security council spokesman, Michael Anton.

Bossert joins a long list of other senior officials who have resigned or been fired since Trump took office in January 2017, including previous national security advisers Michael Flynn and H.R. McMaster, White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, communications directors Hope Hicks and Anthony Scaramucci, economic adviser Gary Cohn and chief strategist Steve Bannon.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Health Secretary Tom Price and Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin have also left.

Myanmar Minister Tours Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh



Myanmar Social Welfare Minister Win Myat Aye (left) arrives at Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh's Ukhia district on April 11, 2018.

KUTUPALONG, Bangladesh (AFP) -- A Myanmar minister on Wednesday toured one of the Bangladesh camps struggling to provide for some one million Rohingya Muslims, the first such visit since a Myanmar army crackdown sparked a massive refugee crisis.

Social welfare minister Win Myat Aye visited the giant Kutupalong refugee camp near the border city of Cox's Bazar, part of a three-day trip to Bangladesh, officials said.

It is the first time a Myanmar cabinet member has visited the fetid and overcrowded camps since a

military crackdown that began last August in response to a spate of insurgent attacks forced some 700,000 of the Muslim minority to flee across the border.

They added to the 300,000 Rohingya refugees Bangladesh already hosted from previous bouts of violence.

Win Myat Aye was "meeting officials at the camps," local police chief Abul Khaer told AFP, adding that International Organization for Migration representatives were involved in the talks.

Rohingya leaders in the camps said they would welcome the opportunity

to meet the minister in person. "We would like to meet face-to face with the minister," one leader, Mohibullah, told AFP.

Sources told AFP he was due to meet some 40 Rohingya community leaders while in Kutupalong camp.

The Rohingya have faced decades of persecution in Myanmar but the most recent crackdown has forced them to flee in unprecedented numbers.

The United Nations and United States has called Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya in the past eight months "ethnic cleansing".

Win Myat Aye is deputy head of a task force led by Myanmar's de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on the crisis in Rakhine state.

He has overseen a stalled agreement with Bangladesh to repatriate some 750,000 refugees.

Myanmar has approved several hundred Rohingya from a list of thousands to return to their homeland but none has yet crossed back.

Many displaced Muslims have said they fear a repeat of persecution that has forced them off their lands if they go back.

Refugees demand recognition as a minority, access to health and education and an assurance they can return to their ancestral villages rather than being shunted into resettlement camps in Rakhine.

Germany Hit by Second Day of Wage Strikes

BERLIN (Reuters) -- Trade unions in Germany piled more pressure onto public sector employers with a second day of nation-wide wage strikes on Wednesday as thousands of workers staged walkouts at hospitals, childcare centers and waste depots.

No flights were affected by Wednesday's action, a day after walkouts caused widespread disruption to air travel, including the cancellation of hundreds of flights which left thousands of passengers stranded.

German union Verdi wants a 6 percent pay rise for 2.3 million public sector employees, but the federal government and municipalities have rejected the demand as too high. The next round of negotiations is due April 15.

The southern states of Bavaria and Baden-Wuerttemberg were among the worst hit on Wednesday but walkouts and demonstrations also affected other regions, including Hessen, Saarland, Bran-

denburg and North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's most populous state.

The president of the Bavarian civil servants' union, Rolf Habermann, told Reuters on Wednesday that it was now time for employers to make an offer that would reflect the strength of Germany's economic upswing.

"There have been enough words exchanged, the rituals have been maxed out," Habermann said.

Germany, Europe's biggest economy, is in solid shape, with buoyant tax revenues and a record budget surplus. Falling unemployment, inflation-busting pay rises and low borrowing costs are fueling a consumer-led upswing.

The European Central Bank is keeping a close eye on the German wage negotiations for any sign that wage growth is picking up, potentially lifting inflation and allowing the ECB to start winding down its massive stimulus program.

Britain Sends Warship to Monitor North Korea



A view shows the front deck of the HMS Sutherland, a frigate of the British Royal Navy, at Mina Zayed port in Abu Dhabi June 28, 2011.

TOKYO (Dispatches) -- A British warship "changed its deployment" and arrived in Japan on Wednesday to police UN sanctions imposed on North Korea over its nuclear and missile programs.

The Royal Navy frigate HMS Sutherland arrived at Yokosuka, the headquarters of Japan's Maritime Defense Force fleet and home port of the U.S. Seventh Fleet's carrier strike group.

The Sutherland arrived even as the two Koreas prepare for a summit this month and U.S. President Donald Trump readies to meet North Korea leader Kim Jong Un as early as May.

"It's about pressure. She is part of an international message that is going to North Korea and for the United Kingdom to see fit to send one of its frigates, to change its deployment from Southeast Asia, is part of that very powerful message," Paul Casson, the British defense attache in Japan, told reporters in Tokyo.

The frigate will join policing operations in the seas around North Korea for about a month and will have the capability to board and inspect ships if called on to do so, Casson added.

Britain plans to send two other ships to Asia in the coming months that will give it an almost unbroken presence in the region this year.

North Korea, which has been developing nuclear-tipped missiles capable of reaching the United States, had vowed never to give up what it calls an essential deterrent against U.S. hostility.

But tensions have eased in recent months, coinciding with the North's participation in the Winter Olympics held in the South in February.

North Korea had told the United States for the first time that it is prepared to discuss the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula when Kim meets Trump, a U.S. official said on Sunday.

Protesters Lay Corpses in Front of UN Mission



The inhabitants of the mainly Muslim PK5 neighborhood demonstrate in front of the headquarters of MINUSCA, the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central Africa Republic, in Bangui, on April 11, 2018, where they deposited more than a dozen bodies of the victims of the clashes of April 10.

BANGUI (Reuters) -- Hundreds of angry demonstrators Wednesday laid the bodies of at least 16 people killed in clashes in Central African Republic's capital in front of the mission headquarters of the United Nations, witnesses said.

UN peacekeepers and local security forces have battled armed groups in Bangui's PK5 neighborhood - a Muslim enclave of the majority Christian city - since Sunday aiming to dismantle their bases there.

One Rwandan peacekeeper was killed and eight others were wounded in fighting Tuesday.

The surge in violence coincides with a visit by Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the UN's head of peacekeeping operations, to the country that has been mired in a cycle of ethnic and religious violence since 2013.

The demonstrators, who blame U. soldiers for firing on residents protesting against the operation in PK5, carried the bodies wrapped in cloth to the gates of mission, known as MINUSCA.

They shouted and carried improvised signs as armed peacekeepers stood before the entrance to the fortified compound.

"We, ourselves, no longer understand anything. Does their mission consist of

shooting at civilians?" said one demonstrator, who gave his name only as Youssouf.

Atahirou Balla Dodo, the mayor of the Bangui district in which PK5 is located, told Reuters that a total of 21 people were killed in the clashes. Seventeen were brought to MINUSCA, while four others, including two women and two children, had remained at a mosque.

The bodies were later removed from MINUSCA by the local Red Cross.

Medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), which operates one of the main hospitals in Bangui, said it had treated more than 40 people for gunshot wounds on Tuesday.

MINUSCA officials were not immediately available on Wednesday to comment on the accusations that peacekeepers were responsible for the deaths.

Violence increased in Central African Republic after Seleka rebels ousted president Francois Bozize in 2013, provoking retaliation killings by "anti-balaka" armed groups, drawn largely from Christian communities.

Self-styled Muslim self-defense groups sprang up in PK5, claiming to protect the Muslim civilians concentrated there against efforts to drive them out.

News in Brief

TOKYO (AP) -- North Korea's parliament was scheduled to convene on Wednesday amid a series of diplomatic moves by leader Kim Jong Un that could have a major impact on the direction the country takes in the months and possibly years ahead. Meetings of the full Supreme People's Assembly are usually brief, once-a-year affairs intended to approve budgets, formalize personnel changes and rubber-stamp Kim's policy priorities. But this year's session was being watched more closely because it was to begin just two weeks before Kim is to meet with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and as Pyongyang and Washington are working out the details of a summit between Kim and President Donald Trump in late May or early June. Kim just completed his first summit, with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing last month. His foreign minister is currently in Moscow, reportedly exploring the possibility of a summit with President Vladimir Putin.

WASHINGTON/SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) -- Facebook Inc. Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg Tuesday navigated through the first of two U.S. congressional hearings without making any further promises to support new legislation or change how the social network does business. During nearly five hours of questioning by 44 U.S. senators, Zuckerberg repeated apologies he previously made for a range of problems that have beset Facebook, from a lack of data protection to Russian agents using Facebook to influence U.S. elections. But the 33-year-old internet mogul managed to deflect any specific promises to support any congressional regulation of the world's largest social media network and other U.S. internet companies. Facebook's shares fell steeply last month after it came to light that millions of users' personal information was harvested from Facebook by Cambridge Analytica, a political consultancy that has counted U.S. President Donald Trump's election campaign among its clients. The latest estimate of affected users is up to 87 million. That disclosure pitched Facebook into a crisis of confidence among users, advertisers, employees and investors who were already struggling with Facebook's reaction to fake news and its role in the 2016 election.

MOSCOW (AFP) -- Six people died Wednesday when a helicopter operated by a local airline crashed in a city in far eastern Russia, investigators said. The Mi-8 helicopter belonging to Vostok airline crashed in Khabarovsk at 11:30 am local time, the Investigative Committee, which probes serious incidents, said in a statement. The helicopter was carrying six crew members. "As a result of the crash, there are no survivors," the regional emergency services ministry said. The city of Khabarovsk is located more than 6,000 kilometers east of Moscow and is home to some 600,000 people. Vostok airlines, which operates passenger and cargo flights from Khabarovsk, said the helicopter was in a training flight when it crashed in a ravine around three kilometers from the landing pad and burst into flames.

THE HAGUE (Reuters) -- UN war crimes judges Wednesday imposed a prison sentence of 10 years on Serbian ultra-nationalist Vojislav Seselj, overturning an earlier acquittal on charges of persecution, deportation and inhumane acts. Seselj, a close ally during the Balkan wars of then Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, has already spent 12 years in pre-trial detention and the judges said his sentence was considered already served. He was not present at the ruling in The Hague, having returned to Serbia in 2014 to undergo treatment for colon cancer. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ITCY) acquitted Seselj in 2016 of all charges against him, which also included murder, for allegedly stoking ethnic hatred at the start of the wars that broke apart the Yugoslav federation.

BERLIN (AP) -- The European Space Agency plans to remotely update the software on its Mars Express probe to ensure the aging spacecraft remains stable. The probe arrived at Mars in late 2003 for a two-year mission, but almost 15 years later it's still operating.

ESA said Wednesday four of Mars Express' six gyroscopes - used to measure the probe's rotation - are failing, which would end the mission in 2019. So engineers decided to rewrite the spacecraft's computer code so it can orient itself using pictures of surrounding stars most of the time. The code was uploaded last Sunday. A reboot is planned Monday.

JAKARTA (AP) -- Deaths from drinking toxic bootleg alcohol in Indonesia have spiraled past 100 already this month, police said Wednesday as they vowed a "scorched earth" crackdown on the makers and distributors of black-market liquor. Deputy National Police Chief Muhammad Syafruddin said deaths have been concentrated in populous West Java and Jakarta, the capital, but there were also cases in South Kalimantan and other regions that bring fatalities to more than 100. Indonesian TV has broadcast images of distraught relatives in several cities and lines of hearsees bearing dead bodies in hospital hallways as the death toll relentlessly climbed since late last week. There were 31 deaths in Jakarta and satellite cities at the beginning of the month followed by a dramatic surge in deaths in West Java and hospitalizations of dozens of people suffering nausea, blurry vision and loss of consciousness.