

UK, EU Scramble to Reach Brexit Deal



A general view of London is seen from the construction site of 22 Bishopsgate in London, June 25, 2019.

LONDON (AFP) -- British and EU negotiators on Tuesday scrambled to put together a draft text for a Brexit deal with just two days to go before a key European summit.

Both sides voiced cautious optimism that an outline agreement could be reached this week and the upbeat mood saw the pound rally on currency markets.

And European leaders warned that, while they are keen for a deal, time is tight and they will not let Britain use Northern Ireland as a back door to the single market.

EU negotiator Michel Barnier said a text must be on the table by Wednesday morning if it is to be put before leaders at the EU summit starting Thursday -- in time for a special sitting of the British parliament on Saturday.

If this deadline is missed, talks could always resume next week and a special summit be held just in time for Prime Minister Boris Johnson to fulfil his pledge to lead Britain out on October 31.

But European diplomats said London must go further quickly if a deal is to be done this month, despite Johnson having given ground on customs rules for Northern Ireland.

As he arrived in Luxembourg to brief ministers from the other 27 EU states, Barnier struck a cautiously upbeat note.

"This work has been intense all along the weekend and yesterday because even if the agreement will be difficult -- more and more difficult to be frank -- it's still possible this week," he told reporters.

"Let me add also that it is high time to turn good intentions into legal text."

Emmanuel Macron apparently shares Barnier's guarded optimism. An aide to the French president told reporters there was "positive momentum" behind the talks.

Downing Street said Johnson had called Macron and had a "constructive" and "good discussion".

"We want to make progress towards securing a deal as soon as possible and we want to make progress ahead of the EU council on Thursday," a spokesman said.

But German Chancellor Angela Merkel outlined why EU officials are driving a hard bargain and hoping Britain will commit to a "level playing field" in post-Brexit trade and commerce.

"One thing is clear, Britain will develop into another competitor on the doorstep of Europe," she told industrialists. "And therefore the EU will be challenged to become more competitive and to assume geopolitical responsibility."

Washington, D.C. (AP) -- The International Monetary Fund is further downgrading its outlook for the world economy, predicting that growth this year will be the weakest since the 2008 financial crisis, primarily because of widening global conflicts.

The IMF's latest World Economic Outlook released Tuesday foresees a slight rebound in 2020 but warns of threats ranging from heightened political tensions in the Middle East to the threat that the United States and China will fail to prevent their trade war from escalating.

The updated forecast was prepared for the fall meetings this week of the 189-nation IMF and its sister lending organization, the World Bank. Those meetings and a gathering Friday of finance ministers and central bankers of the world's 20 biggest economies are expected to be dominated by efforts to de-escalate trade wars.

The new forecast predicts global growth of 3% this year, down 0.2 percentage point from its previous forecast in July and sharply below the 3.6% growth of 2018. It would be the weakest year since global growth was a negative 0.1% in 2009 as the global economy struggled with the shockwaves from the 2008 financial crisis.

For the United States this year, the IMF projects a modest 2.4% gain, down from 2.9% in 2018.

Next year, the fund foresees a rebound for the world economy to 3.4% growth but a further slowdown in the United States to 2.1%, far below the 3% growth the Trump administration projects.

IMF economists cautioned that that even its projected modest gains might not be realized. "With a synchronized slowdown and uncertain recovery, there is no room for policy mistakes, and an urgent need for policymakers to cooperatively de-escalate trade and geopolitical tensions," Gita Gopinath, the IMF's chief economist, said.

Last week, the United States and China reached a temporary cease-fire in their trade fight when President Donald Trump agreed to suspend a tariff hike on \$250 billion of Chinese products that was to take effect this week. But with no formal agreement reached and many issues yet to be resolved, further talks will be needed to achieve any meaningful breakthrough. The Trump administration's threat to raise tariffs on an additional \$160 billion in Chinese imports on Dec. 15 remains in effect.

The IMF's forecast predicted that about half the increase in growth expected next year will result from recoveries in countries where economies slowed significantly this year, as in Mexico, India, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

The global economy will also get a boost from recoveries or at least more shallow recessions in various stressed emerging market economies such as Turkey, Argentina and Iran.

Predicts Recovery for Iran IMF Downgrades Outlook for Global Economy



The International Monetary Fund (IMF) headquarters building is seen ahead of the IMF/World Bank spring meetings in Washington, U.S., April 8, 2019.

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News in Brief

KANO, Nigeria (Reuters) -- Nigeria's president on Tuesday ordered a crackdown on abuse at Islamic schools, after a second police raid in less than a month revealed men and boys subjected to beatings, abuse and squalid conditions. Nearly 300 had been held captive at a school in the Daura area of Katsina, the home town of President Muhammadu Buhari, where police said they discovered "inhuman and degrading treatment" following a raid on Monday to free the remaining students. Late last month, police freed hundreds from similarly degrading conditions in neighboring Kaduna state. "Mr. President has directed the police to disband all such centers and all the inmates be handed over to their parents," said a presidential spokesman. "The government cannot allow centers where people, male and female, are maltreated in the name of religion," he said. Prior to this week's raid, hundreds of captives had escaped the center, police said on Tuesday.

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- The White House's former national security advisor John Bolton was so alarmed by efforts to pressure Ukraine that he called it a "drug deal," his former aide told lawmakers, according to U.S. media. Bolton warned that President Donald Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani, who is reportedly under federal investigation over his dealings with Ukraine on the president's behalf, is "a hand grenade who's going to blow everyone up." Fiona Hill testified, according to The New York Times. "I am not part of whatever drug deal Rudy and Mulvaney are cooking up," Hill reported Bolton as saying, according to the Times, which cited two sources familiar with her closed-door deposition. Mick Mulvaney is the acting White House chief of staff. Democrats are seeking information related to Trump pressing his Ukrainian counterpart to uncover dirt on 2020 U.S. presidential contender Joe Biden, while allegedly conditioning almost \$400 million in U.S. military aid on that favor. They have demanded documents tied to Trump's withholding of that aid, which was desperately needed by Kiev in its ongoing conflict with Moscow.

BUCHAREST (Reuters) -- Romania's centrist President Klaus Iohannis said on Tuesday he had appointed opposition Liberal Party leader Ludovic Orban as prime minister-designate to form a transitional government until a parliamentary election next year. The Social Democrat government of Viorica Dancila collapsed earlier this month after losing a no-confidence vote in parliament. Lawmakers will likely endorse Orban's cabinet, which he needs to assemble, along with a governing program, within ten days. But the 56-year-old former transport minister will struggle to negotiate majorities for any legal initiative because of a fragmented opposition. Analysts said he could gain enough backing to partially reverse a judicial overhaul that has been described by European Union and U.S. officials as a threat to the rule of law. But they added he may find support wanes quickly, especially if the economy stalls and forces it to cut spending.

QUITO (AFP) -- Ecuador began counting the cost of 12 days of indigenous protests against fuel hikes that left eight demonstrators dead and severely dented President Lenin Moreno's austerity program. Moreno and indigenous leaders reached an agreement Sunday after the president pledged to withdraw subsidy cuts, known as Decree 883, that had more than doubled fuel prices. The cuts were part of an austerity package to obtain a \$4.2 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund to shore up the oil exporter's brittle economy. Moreno wrote on Twitter that the original plan would be replaced by new measures that "contain mechanisms to focus resources on those who need them most." Thousands of indigenous people began leaving Quito on Monday in convoys of trucks, returning to communities in the Andes and the Amazon rainforest that they left more than a week ago to vent their outrage at the increases.

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) -- The corruption trial of South Africa's embattled former president Jacob Zuma has been delayed again after his lawyer announced Tuesday he would appeal. The last-minute move pushes back a long-awaited trial over bribery allegations dating back to a 1990s arms deal. Zuma dismissed the charges as a conspiracy. If it goes ahead, the trial would be the first time Zuma faces a court on graft charges, despite a string of accusations over his long political career. The High Court in the southeastern city of Pietermaritzburg last week rejected his request to have 16 charges of fraud, graft and racketeering dismissed, clearing the way for the trial to start on Tuesday. But Zuma's lawyer Thabani Masuku told the court at the start of the trial that the ex-president would appeal, dragging on a case that has seen numerous legal twists over 15 years. After the hearing, Zuma told a small group of supporters gathered outside court that "there have been many conspirators against me." "There is no justice that will be served by continuing with this case," he told the crowd in Zulu.

Jailed Catalan Leader: New Referendum Inevitable



Jailed Catalan politician Oriol Junqueras attends the first session of parliament following a general election in Madrid, Spain, May 21, 2019.

BARCELONA (Reuters) - The Catalan separatist leader hit by the heaviest jail sentence by Spain's Supreme Court for his role in the region's failed secession bid told Reuters a new referendum on independence was unavoidable.

Oriol Junqueras, the Catalan regional government's former deputy leader, said in emailed answers to questions that the prison sentences imposed on him and eight others on charges of sedition only made

them and their movement stronger and more determined.

The court on Monday slapped the longest prison term, 13 years, on Junqueras. The convictions sparked protests across the region.

"What I'm sure of is that this conflict is to be resolved via ballot boxes ... we are convinced that sooner or later a referendum is inevitable because otherwise, how can we give a voice to the citizens?" he wrote from prison, adding that he did not regret having organized a referendum in 2017.

In his first interview after the sentence, Junqueras told Reuters that he and others planned to appeal the sentences with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. When asked what message he would give to the independence movement after the sentencing, Junqueras said: "That we will carry on and not give up because we never have and won't do it now. That prison and exile have made us stronger and makes us ever more convinced, if that is possible, in our profoundly democratic beliefs."

Junqueras' responses were transmitted to Reuters by his staff late on Monday.

All defendants were acquitted of the gravest charge, rebellion. Three other defendants were found guilty only of disobedience and not sentenced to prison.

"I'm sure this sentence will not weaken the independence movement, quite the contrary," he said. Catalonia's independence drive has been a major challenge for Spain for years, attracting world-wide attention when separatist leaders defied courts and conducted a referendum on secession in October 2017 and a subsequent short-lived declaration of independence.

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India Again Blocks SMS Services in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India (AFP) -- Text messaging services were blocked in Indian Kashmir just hours after being restored when a truck driver was killed by suspected militants and his vehicle set ablaze, authorities said Tuesday.

Separately, Indian officials said a 24-year-old woman died in the latest exchange of artillery fire with Pakistan over their de-facto border dividing the blood-soaked Himalayan region.

Three people -- a father and his two children aged 10 and 11 -- were killed in a Pakistani district next to the Line of Control after mortar shells hit their homes, officials said on Tuesday.

Indian security sources said the deci-

sion to cut text messaging services was taken to reduce the ability of militants to communicate.

Authorities had only restored call and text services for mobile phones on Monday, following a 72-day blackout in the restive northern territory imposed after New Delhi scrapped the region's semi-autonomous status.

The seven million-plus people of the Kashmir Valley -- the main hotbed of resistance to Indian rule -- are still cut off from the internet, however.

Authorities said SMS services were cut again on Monday night following the attack on the driver of a truck carrying apples in Shopian.

Residents said two masked gunmen

told the driver to use his truck to block the road, but it skidded and got stuck.

"The gunmen then fired at the truck and set it on fire," a witness told AFP.

Apples are a sensitive issue in Kashmir, which exports vast quantities of the fruit to markets across India.

Many orchard owners say they are refusing to harvest this year to protest against the government's move to scrap Kashmir's autonomy.

Indian authorities say that militants -- backed by arch-rival Pakistan -- have been intimidating farmers and businessmen.

The latest death from Pakistani artillery fire over the Line of Control dividing Kashmir brings the number of fatalities on the Indian side to three in the past four days, the Press Trust of India reported.

Two Indian soldiers were killed in two separate incidents on Friday and Sunday, PTI said.

Also on Tuesday, police arrested 13 women activists in Srinagar after they staged a protest calling for civil liberties and the release of detainees.

Hong Kong Leader Rejects Concession to Rioters



Riot police detain a protester during an anti-government rally in central Hong Kong, China October 6, 2019.

HONG KONG (Dispatches) -- Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam on Tuesday ruled out making any concessions to rioters in the face of escalating violence, which police said was now "life threatening" citing the detonation of a small bomb.

"I have said on many occasions that violence will not give us the solution. Violence would only breed more violence," Lam told a news conference.

"For concessions to be made simply because of escalating violence will only make the situation worse. On the other hand, we should consider every means to end the violence."

Hong Kong has been rocked by four months of unrest, with massive marches and at times violent protests involving tear gas, petrol bombs and live rounds. Beijing accuses Western countries, like the United States and Britain, of stirring up trouble.

The unrest poses the biggest popular challenge to Chinese President Xi Jinping since he came to power in 2012. He has warned that any attempt to divide China would be crushed.

On Sunday night, protesters and police clashed in running skirmishes in shopping malls and on the streets. Black-clad rioters threw 20 petrol bombs at one police station.

A crude explosive device, which police said was similar to those used in "terrorist attacks", was remotely detonated as a police car drove past and officers cleared road-

blocks. A police officer also had his neck slashed by a protester.

An 18-year-old school student has been charged with attacking the officer with a box cutter intent on causing grievous bodily harm.

Police have arrested more than 2,300 people since June when the unrest escalated, scores of them teenagers, some as young as 12, according to Lam.

Lam said she would focus on land and housing initiatives in her annual Policy Address on Wednesday, seeking to restore confidence in the city's future.

Hong Kong is facing its first recession in a decade, with tourism and retail hit hard by the unrest.

High street retail rents have experienced the sharpest quarterly decline since the first quarter of 1998 at the time of the Asian financial crisis, says commercial real estate investment firm CBRE.

U.S. Senator Josh Hawley, visiting Hong Kong on Sunday, claimed the city was in danger of sliding into a "police state". Lam rejected such criticism on Tuesday.

"The Hong Kong police force is a highly professional and civilized force," she said. "I would challenge every politician to ask themselves if the large extent of violence acts and all those petrol bombs and arson and really deadly attacks on policeman happened in their own country, what would they do?"

NAME CHANGE

I, Hasan S/O Syed Haider Mehdi Rizvi, R/O 230-120, Katra Abaturab Khan, Lucknow, UP, has Changed my name to *Syed Hasan Razavi* for all purpose vide affidavit no. 72AD 989076 dated 16-01-2019