



Under the dome:  
 Fears Pacific nuclear  
 'coffin' is leaking

## Race to lead Britain out of EU pits old foes



US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump join Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his wife Akie Abe for dinner in Tokyo yesterday. (inset) Trump and Abe pose for a photograph while playing a round of golf at Mobara Country Club in Chiba. —AFP

# Trump downplays N Korea missile launches

## Trade beef aside, Trump and Abe bond over burgers, sumo and golf

TOKYO: US President Donald Trump yesterday downplayed recent North Korean missile launches as he teed off a state visit to Japan with a round of golf and a trip to the sumo with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Before his official schedule began, Trump tweeted that North Korea had tested "some small weapons" that had "disturbed some of my people, and others, but not me". This appeared to be a reference to US National Security Advisor John Bolton, who said Saturday there was "no doubt" the launches had contravened UN Security Council resolutions. But Trump said: "I have confidence that Chairman Kim will keep his promise to me."

The American president maintains that North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un has pledged he is serious about denuclearization, although experts say there is still a wide gulf between the two sides over what that means. Trump and Abe's talks are expected to touch on tensions with Pyongyang, which have mounted after a summit in February in Hanoi collapsed without an agreement, and trade negotiations as Tokyo and Washington attempt to thrash out a deal.

On trade, Trump tweeted that "great progress" was being made but "much will wait" until after Japanese upper house elections expected in July - with rumors rife Abe

might also call a snap general election at the same time. The serious diplomacy starts today, when Trump will be the first foreign leader to meet Japan's new emperor, Naruhito, who has been on the Chrysanthemum Throne for less than a month following his father's historic abdication. Yesterday was about cementing diplomatic bonds between the two countries through the leaders' shared passion for golf and a chance for Trump to see one of Japan's most famous sports - sumo.

### 'The President's Cup'

Trump entered the hallowed Ryogoku Kokugikan sumo stadium to loud cheers - and a few scattered boos - with spectators standing to take photos as the US president waved and smiled. He and his wife Melania, accompanied by Abe and his wife Akie, sat in special seats a few rows from the sumo ring. Front-row seats at the sumo are usually on the floor, but the two couples were given modified seats with backs, and were ringed by security personnel. Trump looked serious as he listened to explanations from Abe and others around him about the bouts between the sport's top wrestlers.

The US leader then presented tournament winner, Japanese wrestler Asanoyama, with the "President's Cup," a

specially made trophy weighing 27-32 kg and measuring 1.4 m that was unveiled to an audible murmur of appreciation from the audience. A set of wooden steps leading up to the raised "dohyo" sumo ring were installed for Abe and Trump to walk up, with both leaders donning shiny black slippers to enter the space, which is considered sacred. Trump read in English from a scroll, offering Asanoyama the cup "in honor of your outstanding achievement", before lifting the massive trophy with the help of a sumo official and presenting it to the wrestler with an enormous grin.

### Wagyu and ice cream

The presidential sumo visit prompted high security, with long lines forming at metal detectors in the blazing heat before the tournament kicked off. "I thought we would see some level of tight security. But I didn't realize that it was going to be this much," 76-year-old Hisato Koizumi from Tokyo told AFP as he waited. "We got today's tickets by chance. I don't like this." Miyo Hirase, 80, called the measures "overkill". "It's a pain. There aren't so many bad people in Japan," she said. Excitable fans were also warned against throwing their seat cushions - as tradition dictates whenever a yokozuna or grand champion is felled - lest the president be hit. After the sumo,

self-employed Masamitsu Kurokawa, 56, said Trump had an "aura" and was "in a different class".

Earlier, Trump and Abe kicked off the visit with a round of golf - the fifth time the leaders have played together. Trump arrived at the course outside Tokyo by helicopter, sporting a red sweater and black trousers with a red USA cap. He was greeted by a casually-dressed Abe, who later tweeted a selfie of the two leaders grinning into the camera. Aerial footage on local television showed the pair practicing and putting on the manicured greens despite the unseasonably warm weather. They were accompanied by Isao Aoki, one of Japan's most successful golfers.

The two leaders rounded out the day with a meal at a traditional Japanese grill restaurant, with wagyu beef and vanilla ice cream among the menu items. Trump said he and Abe had discussed "trade and military and various other things". "I think we had a very productive day." Despite the bonhomie, trade was never far from mind. "Great progress being made in our trade negotiations with Japan. Agriculture and beef heavily in play," Trump tweeted after arriving back in Tokyo from the suburban golf course where the two played 16 holes. "Much will wait until after their July elections where I anticipate big numbers." —AFP

### News in brief

#### Rivlin says Jews unsafe in Germany

JERUSALEM: Israeli President Reuven Rivlin said yesterday that Germany's warning to Jews on the dangers of wearing the traditional kippah cap were a "capitulation to anti-Semitism" and evidence Jews were unsafe there. Germany's government commissioner on anti-Semitism, Felix Klein, said in an interview published Saturday he "cannot advise Jews to wear the kippah everywhere all the time in Germany," due to increasing anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish attacks there. Rivlin said Klein's remarks "shocked" him, and while appreciating the German government's "commitment to the Jewish community", accused it of bowing to those targeting Jews in Germany. Anti-Semitic crimes rose by 20 percent in Germany last year, according to interior ministry data which blamed nine out of 10 cases on the extreme right. —AFP

#### Ireland votes to relax divorce law

DUBLIN: Ireland voted by an overwhelming majority to relax its constitutional restriction on divorce, results showed yesterday, the latest in a series of reforms to modernize the charter of the once devoutly Catholic nation. Some 82 percent of voters cast their ballots in favor of removing a provision requiring couples to live separately for four out of the previous five years before dissolving their marriage. The Irish government has signaled it will bring forward new legislation shortening the requirement to two out of the prior three years. The outcome of Friday's referendum will also see Irish lawmakers granted powers to recognize foreign divorces once it is signed into law by the president. The mandated separation period was a hangover condition from the 1995 referendum which granted Irish couples the right to divorce by a slim majority of 50.3 percent. —AFP

## Kurdish prisoners end hunger strike after Ocalan call

ANKARA: Thousands of inmates in Turkish prisons ended their mass hunger strike yesterday, heeding a calling by militant Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan whose jail conditions they were protesting. The action had grown to involve some 3,000 people held in different prisons, since the first hunger strike was launched last November by a detained lawmaker from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) over Ocalan's isolation in prison. But after the militant leader was allowed to see legal representatives for the first time in eight years this month, Ocalan told his lawyers the hunger strikes "had achieved their goal" and called for them to end. "After the call... we are ending our hunger strikes," the prisoners' representative, Deniz Kaya, said in a statement, quoted by Kurdish news agency ANF. Ocalan, the co-founder of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), has been held on Imrali island off Istanbul since 1999.

The first visit by his lawyers took place on May 2. After Turkish authorities lifted an official ban on lawyers' visits to Ocalan, a second trip by two of his lawyers was made on May 22. The hunger strike was initially launched by the MP Leyla Guven while she was in custody, although she was later released. Other detainees then followed suit. Eight people also killed themselves over the issue, according to the HDP.

Guven, announcing the end of her hunger strike, said in a statement that although the action was successful, "our struggle against isolation and our struggle for social peace will continue in all areas". "With this resistance, Turkey's peoples, Turkey's democracy has won," Guven later told reporters in Diyarbakir in the Kurdish-majority southeast. Three other HDP MPs said they would also end their hunger strike.

### Role in Syria?

Ocalan's PKK, blacklisted by Ankara and its Western allies as a terror group, has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 during which more than 40,000 people have been killed. Ocalan was caught in Feb 1999 in Kenya and jailed several months later after he was found guilty of treason, separatism



DIYARBAKIR, Turkey: Deputies of Pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Dersim Dag, Tayyip Temel and Murat Sarisac give a press conference to announce the end of their hunger strike yesterday. —AFP

and murder. Despite almost complete isolation, Ocalan is still a key figure of the Kurdish insurgency and the movement generally in the region.

His lawyers said Ocalan indicated he would "play a positive role" in Syria in confronting the issues there "including the Kurdish issue" if he was given the chance. Ocalan previously said in a message following the May 2 visit that "Turkey's sensitivities" should be taken into account in Syria, where the US-backed Kurdish YPG militia is battling the Islamic State group. Turkey says the YPG is a "terrorist offshoot" of the PKK. Guven said Ocalan's voice being heard was "very important for Turkey's democratization and peace in the Middle East".

### No new peace process

The visits come just weeks before a controversial rerun of the Istanbul mayoral election, which was lost by the ruling party of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on

March 31. Experts say Kurdish votes played a significant role in Erdogan's party loss and he is hoping for their support in the repeat vote on June 23. But Turkish Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul said Friday the lawyers' visits "had nothing to do with a peace process" and "no link to the Istanbul elections".

Ocalan had called for a ceasefire in 2013 to allow peace talks a chance to reach a negotiated settlement. However, fighting between Turkey and the PKK intensified after the collapse of the ceasefire in the summer of 2015, dashing hopes of a peaceful solution to the conflict. Ocalan's lawyers said the rebel chief said the permission given for these meetings "did not mean the existence of a negotiation process". Ocalan noted that Turkey fundamentally needed "democratic negotiations and honorable peace", adding through his lawyers that the authorities' reaction to his comments would be clear within "30-40 days" but he gave no further details. —AFP