

## International

# Stop playing 'stupid' Brexit blame game, EU warns UK prime minister

## 'A compromise or its no-deal Brexit'

**LONDON:** The European Union accused Britain of playing a "stupid blame game" over Brexit yesterday after a Downing Street source said a deal was essentially impossible because German Chancellor Angela Merkel had made unacceptable demands. With just 23 days before the United Kingdom is due to leave the bloc, the future of Brexit remains deeply uncertain and both London and Brussels are positioning themselves to avoid blame for a delay or a disorderly no-deal Brexit.

In a sign that Johnson's last-ditch proposals to bridge the impasse have failed, a Downing Street source said Merkel and Johnson spoke yesterday morning and she made clear that a deal was "overwhelmingly unlikely". The Downing Street source said that if Merkel's position on Northern Ireland remaining in the EU's customs union was the bloc's position, then a deal was impossible.

"If this represents a new established position then it means a deal is essentially impossible not just now but ever," the Downing Street source said. A spokesman for the German chancellor confirmed the call had taken place but declined to comment further. The EU was scathing. "Boris Johnson, what's at stake is not winning some stupid blame game," European Council President Tusk said on Twitter. "At stake is the future of Europe and the UK as well as the security and interests of our people. You don't want a deal, you don't want an extension, you don't want to revoke, quo vadis?"

Such abrupt remarks indicate the Brexit blame game has begun in earnest, and that now both London and European capitals are preparing for an acrimonious and potentially chaotic Brexit for which neither side wants to be held responsible. A disorderly Brexit could rip apart the United Kingdom, hurt global growth and shape the future of the European Union which was built on the World War Two ruins of

Europe. The pound fell 0.5% to a one-week low of \$1.2226, and weakened more than 0.7% against the euro, touching a low of 89.93 pence - its weakest level since Sept 9.

### Brexit blame game

Merkel said that for a deal, Northern Ireland would have to stay in the EU's customs union and full alignment with the EU forever, the Downing Street source said. The leader of the small Northern Irish party that supports Johnson's government accused the EU and Ireland of trying to trap the British territory in a permanent customs union.

The opposition said Johnson was trying to apportion blame for the failure of the negotiating process. "This is yet another cynical attempt by Number 10 to sabotage the negotiations," said Keir Starmer, Brexit spokesman for the Labour Party, adding that the British parliament needed to unite to stop him. "Boris Johnson will never take responsibility for his own failure to put forward a credible deal. His strategy from day one has been for a no-deal Brexit."

A separate Downing Street source told Reuters that unless the European Union compromises and does a Brexit deal shortly, then the United Kingdom will leave without a deal. "If the EU doesn't do a deal shortly, then we leave without a deal," the source said. "We are leaving the European Union." Johnson has consistently said the United Kingdom will leave the EU on Oct 31 with or without a deal, though a law passed by parliament demands he write a letter to the EU asking for a delay if he cannot strike an exit deal by Oct 19.

He has said he would abide by the law but Britain would leave the EU by the end of the month, without explaining that contradiction. He has also repeatedly demanded an election but parliament has refused to



**NEWRY:** A lorry is seen passing a sign on a main road outside Newry, Northern Ireland, pointing towards an old customs and excise station near the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. —AFP

grant one. The Spectator magazine quoted an unidentified source in Downing Street as saying that Britain would take an aggressive stance towards the EU if Brexit talks break down, possibly even by withholding security cooperation.

"This government will not negotiate further so any delay would be totally pointless," the source was

quoted as saying. "We'll either leave with no deal on 31 October or there will be an election and then we will leave with no deal." However, Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary Julian Smith said any threat on withdrawing security cooperation were not in the interests of Northern Ireland or the union of the United Kingdom. —Reuters

### News in brief

#### US pastor arrested in Rwanda

**KIGALI:** Rwandan police have arrested an American pastor who was to hold a news conference in the capital and whose radio station in the country was shut down by authorities last year. Gregg Schoof was arrested for "disturbing public order," police spokesman John Bosco Kabera told Reuters. Rwandan authorities last year closed Schoof's radio station, Amazing Grace, after it aired a sermon that women's rights activists said "spread hate against women." The sermon described women as "evil." On Sunday, Schoof emailed Rwandan journalists inviting them to a news conference he said he wanted to host before leaving the country. "Pastor Gregg Schoof will have a final press conference to update all about the radio being closed, court cases, and other things," the email read. Police arrested him at the venue where the news conference was to occur. The police spokesman said Schoof was handed over to the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) "for further management." —Reuters

#### Doomed ferry crew 'drunk'

**WELLINGTON:** Crew members of an overloaded Kiribati ferry which sank in the Pacific claiming 95 lives were drunk, leaving passengers to die slow deaths from starvation and hypothermia, a damning report has found. The report gives the first official account of the loss of the ferry MV Butirai, which sank in January last year after setting off from Nonouti island bound for the capital Tarawa. It details a string of failures that led to the sinking and also gives a glimpse of the horrors endured by victims, who were missing in the vast ocean for eight days before the alarm was raised. "Most, if not all, victims died from hunger, dehydration and hypothermia," it found. "One died while giving birth in (these) most unhealthy and extreme conditions," it said. The deaths of 84 passengers and 11 crew was the worst maritime disaster ever in Kiribati, a collection of 33 atolls and reefs scattered over an area the size of the continental United States. —AFP

#### Thai zoo solves mystery

**BANGKOK:** When a celebrity giant panda died suddenly last month while on loan to Thailand's Chiang Mai Zoo, millions of social media users in China demanded to know "What killed Chuang Chuang?" Yesterday, they learned it was heart failure, according to a Chinese-assisted autopsy on the death of 19-year-old Chuang Chuang, who had been on loan from China since 2003 with his mate Lin Hui. They were celebrities in Thailand, with media extensively covering their love life - including a "wedding" ceremony in 2005. Chuang Chuang's relatively early demise sparked mourning among Thai fans and an outcry on Chinese social media, where a hashtag seeming to blame Thailand for the death was viewed 250 million times. Pandas generally live 14-20 years in the wild but can live up to 30 years in captivity. —Reuters

#### Iran opposes Syria military action

**TEHRAN:** Iran's top diplomat Mohammad Javad Zarif told his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu in a phone call that Tehran is opposed to military action in Syria, the foreign ministry said. "Zarif voiced opposition to military action" and "urged respect for Syria's territorial integrity and national sovereignty," Zarif was quoted as saying in a statement issued late Monday. The Iranian foreign minister also "stressed the need for the fight against terrorism and for the establishment of stability and security in Syria". President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday that Turkey was poised to launch a military operation against Kurdish forces in northern Syria, after US President Donald Trump gave him the green light. —AFP

## Democrats subpoena Pentagon docs in the impeachment inquiry

**WASHINGTON:** Congressional Democrats slapped subpoenas Monday on the Pentagon and White House budget office as part of their advancing impeachment probe, demanding documents tied to President Donald Trump's withholding of military aid to Ukraine. The chairmen of three House panels leading the impeachment investigation are seeking information related to Trump pressing his Ukrainian counterpart to uncover dirt on 2020 US presidential contender Joe Biden - and the alleged conditioning of aid on that favor.

The chairmen ordered Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Office of Management and Budget acting director Russell Vought to hand over the documents by October 15. The materials are "necessary for the committees to examine... the reasons behind the White House's decision to withhold critical military assistance to Ukraine that was appropriated by Congress to counter Russian aggression," they said.

Failure to comply "shall constitute evidence of obstruction of the House's impeachment inquiry," wrote House Intelligence Committee chairman Adam Schiff, foreign affairs panel head Eliot Engel and oversight committee head Elijah Cummings. Pentagon officials last week "proactively" issued an internal directive to retain documents potentially related to the investiga-

## EU urged to share refugees as boat tragedies mount

**LUXEMBOURG:** A nucleus of four EU countries was trying yesterday to coax more reluctant member states to take a share of rescued asylum-seekers, a day after another Mediterranean migrant boat tragedy. Germany, France, Italy and Malta were seeking support from colleagues in an EU interior ministers' meeting in Luxembourg for an agreement they worked out September 23 in

## Venezuelans turn to alternative medicine amid shortages

**CARACAS:** The small waiting room at the home of self-styled healer "Brother Guayanes" in Caracas' rundown Petare district fills up quickly with patients-business has never been better. With Venezuela's chronic medicine shortages and hyperinflation, more and more people are turning to alternative medicine to treat common ailments in the crisis-ravaged South American country.

"We go to the hospital and there's nothing there. They don't have medicines, or they're too expensive, what are we to do?" said Rosa Saez, 77, who has come to get treatment for a painful arm. Carlos Rosales-he uses the more ceremonious "Brother Guayanes" for his business-is finishing up a "spiritual intervention" on a patient in what passes for his surgery.

tion, Defense Department spokeswoman Jessica Maxwell said. "As we've stated previously, we are prepared to work with Congress and other relevant parties on questions related to the issue of Ukrainian aid as appropriate," she told AFP.

Democrats have heaped pressure on the Trump administration since launching the impeachment investigation, including last week when subpoenas were delivered to the White House and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Democrats also obtained a string of text messages between US diplomats that showed the Trump administration's effort to pressure Ukraine into investigating Biden and his son Hunter, and that some diplomats in the text chain expressed concern that such actions were inappropriate.

One of the diplomats, US envoy to the European Union Gordon Sondland, a major donor to Trump's 2016 campaign, heads to Capitol Hill Tuesday for a deposition before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Former US ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch testifies before the panel Friday. Yovanovitch was removed earlier this year for resisting White House pressure to get Kiev to investigate Biden, according to US media reports.

Trump withheld nearly \$400 million in military aid for months but it was eventually released to Ukraine. The subpoena for documents, and the congressional appearances, focus in part on Trump's July 25 call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. A released memorandum of the call shows the two leaders discussed Zelensky's desire to receive the military aid, followed by Trump asking for a "favor" and then bringing up Biden.

Malta meant to serve as a six-month, stop-gap plan pending a long-delayed reform of the EU's asylum policy. The meeting came after a boat packed with around 50 migrants capsized Monday off Italy's island of Lampedusa, resulting in the drowning deaths of at least 13 women, some of them pregnant.

The aim of the so-called Malta declaration is to avoid such tragedies in the future, and to find a solution for NGO rescue ships filled with migrants often being refused entry to EU waters for weeks. "Listen to me, we cannot continue like this, with what is happening in the Mediterranean," the EU commissioner for migration, Dimitris Avramopoulos,

said as he arrived for the meeting in Luxembourg. He added, however: "We cannot try to find only ad hoc solutions, we need a permanent mechanism."

### Risky crossings

The temporary agreement wants to ease the burden of first-call countries such as Italy and Malta which currently are required to host the migrants arriving by sea while their asylum cases are looked at. Under the deal, France and Germany have volunteered to host a share of the asylum-seekers. It also wants to find a way of breaking the business model of people-smugglers who push flimsy, overcrowded boats of



**WASHINGTON:** Adam Schiff (D-CA), Chairman of the House Select Committee on Intelligence Committee arrives to a closed-door meeting regarding the ongoing impeachment inquiry against US President Donald Trump at the US Capitol yesterday. —AFP

Details of the call emerged last month in an explosive whistleblower complaint by an unidentified intelligence official. The complaint alleged that he or she learned about details of the call from other personnel, and that White House officials aware of the gravity of what had transpired on the call moved to "lock down" all records of it. Meanwhile a second whistleblower has come forward, one with first-hand information of the events that triggered the impeachment investigation, the informant's lawyer said Sunday. —AFP

migrants from North Africa headed towards Europe in the hope of rescue or landfall-a risky bid with sometimes fatal consequences.

Monday's capsizing off Lampedusa added to a litany of migrant boat tragedies. Since 2016, at least 19,000 migrants have drowned or gone missing while making the perilous Mediterranean crossing, according to the UN's International Organization for Migration. Yet some EU states are wary that the Malta declaration will act as a "pull" factor, encouraging more boat crossings. Others argue they are already taking on a disproportionate number of asylum seekers relative to their populations. —AFP

The patient lies, eyes closed, on a cot as, in a series of swishes and clicks, the healer waves five pairs of scissors one after another over his prone body. The healer says he performs 200 such interventions a week in a dim, candle-lit room that features two camp beds and an array of plaster statues that Rosales says represent "spiritual entities". A regular visitor to the spiritual center, Saez says she has faith in Rosales' methods: "He healed my kidneys."

### Natural healing

All across Venezuela, but particularly in poor areas like Petare, patients cannot hope to afford the price of medicines that due to the economic crisis, have become exceedingly rare. Venezuela's pharmacists' federation say pharmacies and hospitals have on average only about 20 percent of the medicine stock needed. Rosales' clinic is muggy with the smell of tobacco. A crucifix suspended from a chain around his neck, he practices a seeming mixture of smoke-blowing shamanism, plant-based medicine and mainstream religion.

Posters hung near the entrance remind clients to arrive with a candle and tobacco and "Don't forget that payment is in cash."



**CARACAS:** Venezuelan Esperanza Castillo (center) 74, is treated at the clinic of Venezuelan spiritual healer 'Guayanes Brother' in Petare neighborhood, Caracas. —AFP

Much like a general practitioner, Rosales spends time consulting with his patients, examining them with a stethoscope, before offering a diagnosis. Often he prescribes

potions based on plants and fruit, such as pineapple and a type of local squash known as chayote. "We know medicines are necessary," he says. —AFP