



**It won't be from sea-to-sea; how long will wall be?**

US, AUSTRALIAN OFFICIALS WARN OF RETURNING FOREIGN FIGHTERS



ST PETERSBURG, Russia: In this June 3, 2017 photo, Russian President Vladimir Putin talks with Megyn Kelly during an interview with NBC's "Sunday Night with Megyn Kelly". — AP

**PUTIN DISMISSES US INVOLVEMENT CLAIMS**

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT DENIES KNOWLEDGE OF KUSHNER PROPOSAL

**WASHINGTON:** Russian President Vladimir Putin says claims about Russian involvement in US elections are untrue, and says the United States actively interferes with elections in other countries. And he is dismissing as "a load of nonsense" the idea that Russia has damaging information on President Donald Trump. "I never met with him. We have a lot of Americans who visit us," Putin said in an interview with NBC's "Sunday Night with Megyn Kelly." He added: "Do you think we're gathering compromising information on all of them right now or something? Are you all - have you all lost your senses over there?"

US intelligence agencies have concluded that Russia meddled in the presidential election to hurt the bid of Democrat Hillary Clinton. Trump himself has been dogged by questions about any business dealings with Russia - he says he has none - as well as reports of a Russian dossier of damaging personal information. "Well, this is just another load of

nonsense," Putin said. "Where would we get this information from? Why, did we have some special relationship with him? We didn't have any relationship at all."

Putin again denied any Russian involvement in the US presidential election and any knowledge of Russian contacts with the Trump campaign. A special counsel appointed by the Justice Department and congressional committees are investigating. Former FBI Director James Comey, whom Trump fired after allegedly asking him to drop an investigation into former national security adviser Michael Flynn and his Russian contacts, is scheduled to testify Thursday before the Senate's intelligence committee. In the NBC interview, Putin was asked about reports of Trump adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner's attempt to set up a secret communications channel with Russia. Putin said he knew nothing about it and that he had not discussed with Ambassador Sergey Kislyak any meeting with Kushner. "Had there been any-

thing significant he would have reported it to the minister. The minister would have reported it to me," Putin said. "There weren't even any reports. There's nothing to even talk about. There wasn't even any kind of specific discussion about sanctions or anything else. For me, this is just amazing. You created a sensation out of nothing." Putin suggested that skilled hackers anywhere, including the US, could shift the blame for hacking onto Russia. He also alleged that the US actively interferes with electoral campaigns of other countries. "Put your finger anywhere on a map of the world, and everywhere you will hear complaints that American officials are interfering in internal electoral processes," he said. As far as the findings of US intelligence agencies, Putin said, "They have been misled."

**Comey testimony**

As the Senate prepared for Comey's appearance, Trump appeared unlikely to try to

block him from testifying. The public hearing is expected to shed light on his private conversations with Trump in the weeks before his dismissal, including any discussion about the Flynn investigation. There's been no final decision as to whether Trump would invoke executive privilege, and the matter remains under discussion, according to two administration officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations. Trump is known to change his mind on major issues.

On Sunday, lawmakers from both parties urged Trump not to stand in the way of Comey's testimony. "Clearly, it would be very, very troubling if the president of the United States is interfering in investigations that affect potentially the president and his closest associates," said Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate intelligence committee.

Sen Roy Blunt, a Republican member of the intelligence committee, said Comey's testimony would be critical to address mounting ques-

tions about possible obstruction of justice. The Senate intelligence committee also has invited the top spy of the US and law enforcement officials to testify Wednesday at a hearing about the federal law governing foreign intelligence collection. Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe and deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein also are expected to testify.

For Thursday's hearing, Trump could invoke executive privilege by arguing that discussions with Comey pertained to national security and that he had an expectation of privacy in getting candid advice from top aides. But legal experts say Trump likely undermined those arguments because he publicly discussed the conversations in tweets and interviews. Trump's argument in favor of privilege also may be overcome because the investigation is focused on corruption and possible obstruction of justice. Warner spoke on CNN's "State of the Union" and CBS' "Face the Nation." Blunt appeared on "Fox News Sunday." — AP

**TRUMP ASSAILS JUSTICE DEPT COURT STRATEGY ON TRAVEL BAN**

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump lashed out at his own Justice Department Monday for seeking the Supreme Court's backing for a "watered down, politically correct version" of the travel ban he signed in March. In a series of early morning tweets, Trump urged the Justice Department to ask for an "expedited hearing" at the high court and seek a "much tougher version" of the order temporarily blocking entry to the US from a half-dozen majority Muslim countries. He called the courts, which have blocked two versions of the travel ban, "slow and political".

It's unclear whether the president has conveyed his requests to the Justice Department, which he oversees, in a forum other than Twitter. The president criticized the legal strategy in the wake of the vehicle and knife attack in London that left seven people dead and dozens injured. The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attack. Last week, the Justice Department formally asked the Supreme Court to let a ban on visitors from six mostly Muslim countries and refugees from around the world to be put in place. The high court also is being asked to uphold the constitutionality of the Trump travel policy, which lower courts have blocked because it shows anti-Muslim prejudice.

The directive that would go before the Supreme Court is a narrower version of the executive order the president signed during

his first week in office. The second order removed Iraq from the list of banned countries. An indefinite halt to entry from Syrian refugees was replaced by a temporary pause. Trump's criticism came a day after he said he would do whatever is necessary to protect the United States from a "vile enemy" that he said has waged war on innocents for too

long. "This bloodshed must end, this bloodshed will end," he vowed.

Trump was commenting Sunday evening on the vehicle and knife attack that killed at least seven people in London at the conclusion of a Sunday night fundraiser for Ford's Theater, scene of one of the most famous acts of bloodshed in American history: The assass-

ination of President Abraham Lincoln.

"America sends our thoughts and prayers and our deepest sympathies to the victims of this evil slaughter and we renew our resolve, stronger than ever before, to protect the United States and its allies from a vile enemy that has waged war on innocent life, and it's gone on too long," Trump said in an appearance at a Ford's Theater event, his first comments in public on the attack late Saturday in a busy section of London. He previously had commented via a series of Twitter posts Saturday. "As president, I will do what is necessary to prevent this threat from spreading to our shores and work every single day to protect the safety and security of our country, our communities and our people," he said. Trump said he had spoken with British Prime Minister Theresa May to express America's "unwavering support" and offer US assistance as the British government works to protect its citizens and bring the guilty to justice.

After more than 20 people were killed in a bomb attack last month at a concert in Manchester, England, Trump condemned the assault as the act of "evil losers" and called on nations to band together to fight terrorism. Earlier Sunday, Trump had criticized London's mayor after the mayor sought to reassure residents about a stepped-up police presence following the attack, the third in the country in past three months. — AP



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump and US first lady Melania Trump leave after Ford's Theatre's annual fundraiser on Sunday. — AFP

**LAWMAKERS ASK COURT TO NULLIFY MARTIAL LAW**

**MANILA:** Philippine opposition lawmakers petitioned the Supreme Court yesterday to review and nullify President Rodrigo Duterte's imposition of martial law in the southern third of the country. The petition filed by six House lawmakers led by Rep. Edcel Lagman said there was no revolution or invasion where public safety required the declaration of martial law and suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. It said the proclamation contained "fatal inaccuracies and falsities."

The petitioners said Congressional leaders and the majority of lawmakers allied with Duterte were derelict in their constitutional duty by refusing to convene a joint session of Congress to vote whether or not to revoke the martial law proclamation. Duterte made the declaration May 23 after extremists allied with the Islamic State group laid siege to Marawi city. The declaration lasts through mid-July but could be extended with the consent of Congress.

The martial law proclamation said the militants openly attempted to remove that part of the country from its allegiance to the Philippine government by taking over a hospital, establishing several checkpoints in the city, burning down certain government and private facilities, and flying the flag of the Islamic State group in several areas. But the petitioners said even the military admitted the conflict in Marawi was precipitated by troops' operation to neutralize or capture Isnilon Hapilon, a high-profile militant commander. They also said the claim that militants took over a hospital and Duterte's claim that a local police chief was decapitated both turned out to be wrong. "The President's proclamation of martial law in Mindanao has no sufficient factual basis as it is feebly based on mostly contrived and/or inaccurate facts, self-serving speculations, enumeration of distant occurrences and mere conclusions of fact and law on the purported existence of 'rebellion or invasion,'" the lawmakers said. — AP