



One killed, 14 wounded in Ohio nightclub shooting

CHINA'S FAVORITE LAM WINS HK LEADERSHIP, VOWS TO HEAL RIFTS

Page 12

Page 9



LONDON: This file photo taken on June 4, 2012 shows a boy getting a boost to see the action from the Mall waiting for the start of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Concert at Buckingham Palace. — AFP

BRITAIN PREPARES TO LAUNCH BREXIT

AN UNPRECEDENTED STEP INTO THE UNKNOWN

LONDON: Britain will take an unprecedented step into the unknown on Wednesday with the first formal move towards leaving the European Union, starting a two-year process that has already divided the country. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets of London on Saturday to protest against Brexit, and Scotland's parliament tomorrow is set to vote in favor of holding an independence referendum.

Scots voted to stay in the EU but the majority verdict in Britain's EU referendum last year was 52 percent in favor of putting an end to a loveless marriage that has lasted more than four decades. Those in favor are impatient for Brexit talks to begin and accuse Prime Minister Theresa May of playing for time since the June referendum. But europhiles are increasingly concerned.

"Stop this madness!" read a banner held up at Saturday's march to parliament held just three days after a terror attack there to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the EU's founding treaty of Rome. Prime Minister Theresa May's formal letter of notification to EU President Donald Tusk will trigger Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty: an exit

clause that no member state has ever used. The EU is expected to issue a first response later this week, followed by a summit of EU leaders on April 29 to adopt guidelines for the talks.

The exit negotiations themselves are not expected to start until at least three weeks after that. The referendum campaign created bitter rifts between different parts of the country, generations and social classes, as well as exposing a chasm between the haves and have-nots of globalisation. Brexit has also sparked a round of soul-searching in the European Union, even fears of a wider break-up. EU leaders at a summit on Saturday adopted a declaration that enshrines for the first time a so-called "multi-speed" Europe, in which some countries can push ahead on key issues while others sit out.

'No deal' scenario

May has said she will respond to a major demand of the Brexit campaign by cutting the numbers of EU immigrants who move to Britain—hundreds of thousands every year

and will have to pull Britain out of the European single market to do so. She has advocated a "clean break" but has also said she wants an "implementation phase" to keep the status quo between Britain leaving the EU and any new arrangement to allow her country to adapt.

As the countdown begins, there is a real chance that negotiations will break down and Britain will be forced out of the EU without any deal in place. Anand Menon of the UK in a Changing Europe research group estimated a 50-percent possibility of this happening, meaning Britain and the EU will have to trade with higher tariffs than now under World Trade Organization membership rules.

Stage is set

"A deal will take a lot more time, goodwill and tact than has been on display from either side," he said. Business leaders have warned that this would be by far the worst scenario but May has said that "no deal is better than a bad deal" and she has the support of pro-Brexit hardliners in her Conservative Party.

The EU says "everything is ready" for Britain to begin its EU exit and officials in Brussels have already outlined a divorce bill for Britain of between 55 and 60 billion euros (\$59 and \$65 billion). "When a country leaves the union there is no punishment, there is no price to pay to leave. But we must settle the accounts, no more, no less," the EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier said on Wednesday.

Britain could get away with not paying anything, according to a recent report published by the House of Lords, but doing so would severely undermine its credibility. The real question will be how much it will pay. London also wants guarantees on the status of more than a million Britons living in other parts of the European Union, using the status of some three million EU citizens in Britain as a bargaining tool. The trickiest part of the negotiations will be on trade relations, which could take years to work out. Former WTO chief and European commissioner Pascal Lamy warned about the complexity of the Brexit process last week, likening it to "removing an egg from an omelette". — AFP

OPPOSITION LEADER ARRESTED, RUSSIANS DEFY PROTEST BANS

MOSCOW: Thousands of Russians demonstrated across the country yesterday to protest against corruption, defying bans on the rallies called by prominent Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny—who was arrested along with scores of others. Navalny called for the protests after publishing a detailed report this month accusing Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev of controlling a property empire through a shadowy network of nonprofit organizations.

The report has been viewed over 11 million times on YouTube, but so far Medvedev has made no comment on the claims. Navalny, who has announced plans to run for president in next year's election, has been rallying supporters in major Russian cities in recent weeks. In Moscow, Navalny called on supporters to walk along the main Tverskaya street, and people congregated on the nearby squares lined with dozens of police vans and rows of riot officers as a police helicopter hovered overhead.

"We have all seen the movie, it gives specific examples of corruption, and there has been no reaction," said Nikolai Moisey, a 26-year-old factory worker. "They steal and they lie but still people will be patient to the end. The protest is a first push for people to start acting." Police detained Navalny shortly after 2:00 pm (1100 GMT) as he was walking to the protest, putting him in a police minibus, and the surrounding crowd briefly tried to block it from driving off, shouting "Shame!" and "Let him out!"

"Guys, I am all right, go on along Tverskaya," Navalny tweeted from the van. Thousands of people filled Pushkin Square, with some shout-

ing "Russia without Putin", referring to President Vladimir Putin. Some climbed on lamp posts and monument to poet Alexander Pushkin, shouting "impeachment!" Moscow police estimated the protest turnout at seven or eight thousand people, making it one of the biggest non-authorized demonstrations in recent years.

Police officers moved to detain protesters and clear the square, with some using truncheons and pepper spray to disperse the crowd, AFP correspondents observed. "Over 130 people have been detained in Moscow," OVD Info, a website that monitors the detention of activists, said in a Twitter post, adding later that the arrests were continuing. The group had said earlier that its website had been shut down by a distributed denial of service, or DDoS, attack. "The whole country is tired of corruption on such a scale," 50-year-old Natalia Demidova said. "Medvedev should be fired once such exposes come to light." Despite the dramatic scenes in the city, state TV channels did not cover the protests, instead showing soap operas and nature films.

'99 cities'

Elsewhere in the country, about 2,000 gathered in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, carrying signs such as "No to corruption," according to local news website Sib.fm. Some held up images of yellow rubber ducks, following reports that Medvedev has a special house for a duck on one of his properties.

In Saint Petersburg, about 4,000 people

gathered in the city centre. "We're tired of the lies, we have to do something," Sergei Timofeyev told AFP. Local media estimated about 1,500 people turned out in each of the Siberian cities of Krasnoyarsk and Omsk. The Russian constitution allows public gatherings, but recent laws have criminalized protests unauthorized by city authorities, who frequently refuse to grant permission for rallies by Kremlin critics.

Navalny said on his website that 99 Russian cities planned to protest, but that in 72 of them the local authorities did not give permission, citing reasons such as street cleaning, a bell-ringing concert and rival events by various pro-Kremlin groups. Authorities had also pressured students not to attend, with some cities even scheduling exams for Sunday, according to reports.

In the far-eastern city of Vladivostok, about 700 people nonetheless turned up, local website Prima Media said, and a dozen of people were detained by the national guard. In the Urals city of Yekaterinburg, about 1,000 people turned up, according to local Znak.com website. Navalny, a 40-year-old lawyer by training, has pledged to run for president next year, after winning a surprise 27 percent of the vote in Moscow mayor election in 2013. But he has been the subject of several legal prosecutions in recent years, and in February he was found guilty of embezzlement and given a five-year suspended sentence which could make him ineligible to run in next year's election. — AFP



MOSCOW: Police officer detains a protester in downtown Moscow. — AP