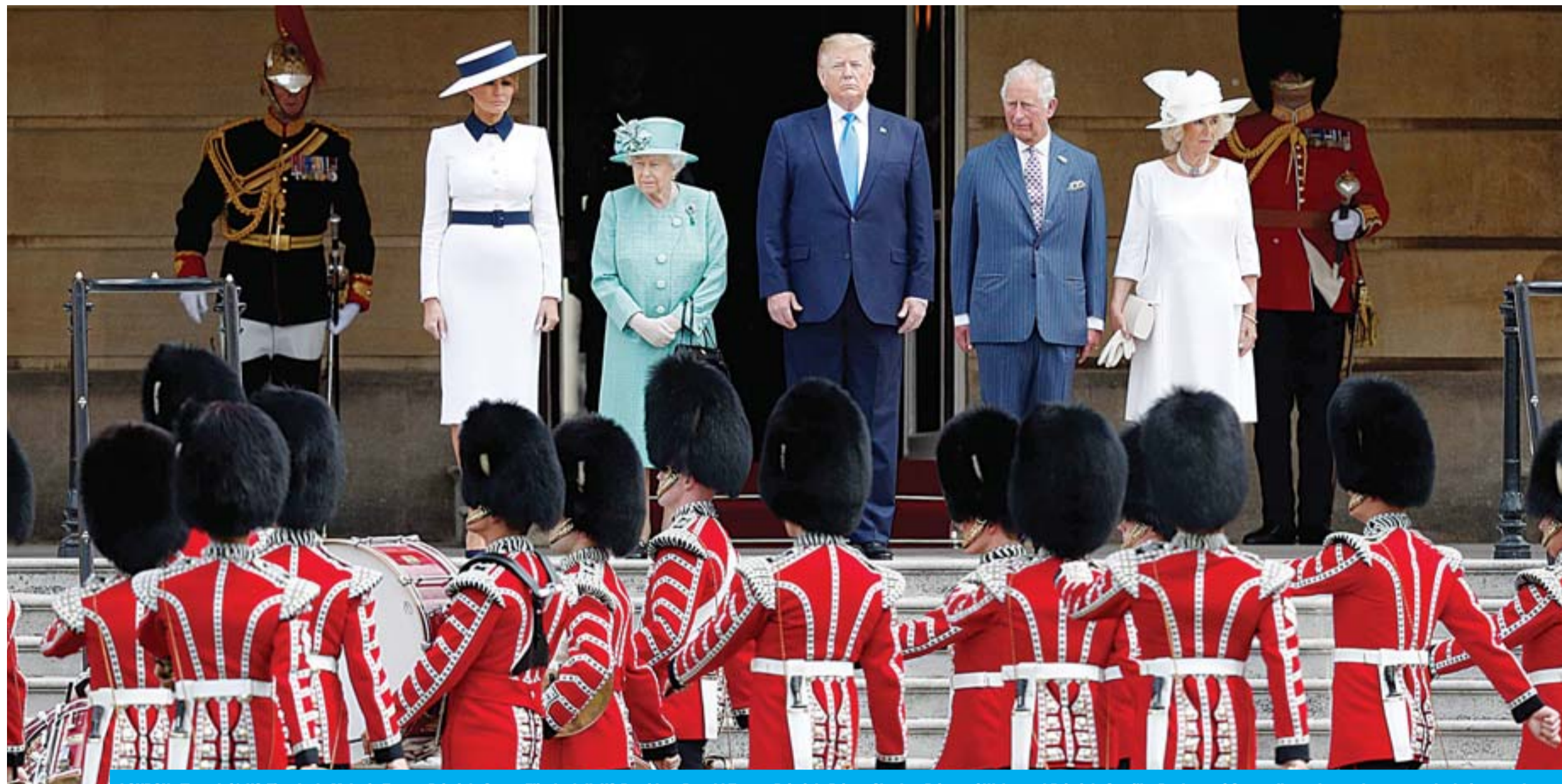




Drowning in waste, Russians fume over lack of recycling

New Delhi to offer free public transport for 850,000 women



LONDON: (From left) US First Lady Melania Trump, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, US President Donald Trump, Britain's Prince Charles, Prince of Wales and Britain's Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall watch guardsmen parade during a welcome ceremony at Buckingham Palace yesterday. —AFP

Trump meets queen after insulting mayor

US president, first lady get taste of pomp, royal pageantry

LONDON: US President Donald Trump met Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace yesterday after kicking off his UK state visit by branding the London mayor a "loser" and weighing in on the Brexit debate. With a 41-gun royal salute ringing out across the royal palace's lawn, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Charles shook hands with the US leader and First Lady Melania Trump before British soldiers played the national anthems of the two countries. The queen then led the couple inside for a private lunch, to be followed in the evening by a glittering banquet.

Trump's plane had not even touched down when he tweeted that London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who has been highly critical of the red-carpet welcome laid out for Trump, was doing a "terrible job". The president called the mayor a "stone cold loser", adding: "Kahn reminds me very much of our very dumb and incompetent Mayor of NYC, (Bill) de Blasio, who has also done a terrible job - only half his height. In any event, I look forward to being a great friend to the United Kingdom," he added.

Backing for Boris

Trump's three-day visit comes with Britain in political turmoil. Prime Minister Theresa May is due to step down

within weeks over her handling of her country's exit from the European Union. Trump weighed in on the divisive issue, declaring before he arrived that Britain's former foreign minister Boris Johnson would make an "excellent" choice to succeed May. In a round of British newspaper interviews, he also recommended her successor walk away from talks with Brussels, refuse to pay Britain's agreed divorce bill and leave the EU with no deal.

The UK-US "special relationship" was already under strain over different approaches to Iran, the use of Chinese technology in 5G networks, climate change, and Trump's personal politics. Labour's Khan has led opposition to the three-day visit, writing a newspaper article on Sunday in which he compared the US leader to European dictators from the 1930s and 1940s. "Donald Trump is just one of the most egregious examples of a growing global threat," Khan wrote. His spokesman called Trump's tweets "childish" and "beneath the president of the United States".

Baby Trump blimp

Huge protests are being organized in London, with organizers crowdfunding a bright orange "baby Trump" blimp depicting the US leader in a diaper - aiming for an

even larger version than the one flown during his visit last year. The leaders of Britain's main opposition parties and the speaker of parliament are boycotting the state banquet yesterday night.

In an effort to brush past the controversy, May and Trump are expected to emphasize the wider benefits of their old alliance when they hold talks at Downing Street today. Tomorrow, they will join other world leaders in the English port of Portsmouth to commemorate 75 years since the D-Day landings, which changed the course of World War II. "Our relationship has underpinned our countries' security and prosperity for many years, and will continue to do so for generations to come," May said ahead of the visit.

No-deal Brexit

May announced her resignation last month after failing to get her Brexit deal through parliament and twice delaying Britain's EU departure. She will formally quit as her Conservative party's leader on Friday, but will stay on as caretaker prime minister while her successor is chosen. Three years after the referendum vote for Brexit, Britain remains divided. Trump recommended the new govern-

ment make a clean break with the EU if necessary, adding that there was "tremendous potential" for Britain to trade with his country after Brexit. Causing more potential embarrassment for May, Trump said he might also meet with Johnson and pro-Brexit leader Nigel Farage during his UK visit. "They want to meet. We'll see what happens," he told reporters before he left the United States.

Strained special relationship

May was the first foreign leader welcomed to the White House after Trump's election victory in Nov 2016, but their relationship has not always been rosy. They have clashed over Trump's migration policies, while Britain still backs the Iranian nuclear deal and the Paris climate accord, both of which Trump has abandoned. Washington has also been putting pressure on Britain to exclude Chinese tech giant Huawei from its 5G network over security concerns, suggesting it might harm intelligence-sharing. Trump's first official visit to Britain last year was overshadowed by criticism of May's approach to Brexit, as well as large demonstrations. He is not expected to meet Prince Harry and his American wife Meghan Markle, after saying her previous criticism of him was "nasty". —AFP

Damascus pounds Idlib, ignoring Trump warning

MAARET AL-NUMAN, Syria: Bombardments by the Syrian regime killed six civilians in northwest Syria yesterday, hours after US President Donald Trump urged Damascus and its allies to "stop bombing the hell" out of the jihadist-held region. Trump's call came after Washington's Israeli ally carried out a series of strikes against Syria over the weekend, leaving at least 15 dead among pro-government forces, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The bombardment by Damascus and regime ally Russia of Idlib province and neighboring areas has killed more than 300 people and displaced thousands since late April, according to the Britain-based war monitor. The violence, which comes despite a truce deal brokered by Moscow and Ankara in September, has raised fears of a humanitarian catastrophe on a scale yet unseen in Syria's eight-year conflict, which has already claimed more than 370,000 lives.

The Kremlin insisted yesterday that the Russian army was only targeting "terrorists" in Syria's Idlib region, which is controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a group dominated by former members of Al-Qaeda's Syria affiliate. It accused them of firing at civilians and Moscow's troops. "Terrorist fire in Idlib is of course unacceptable," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. "Measures are being taken to neutralise such firing positions."

The comments came in response to a Tweet by Trump on Sunday calling for an end to the bombing on the jihadist-dominated enclave, a large area which is home to almost three million people. "Hearing word that Russia, Syria and, to a lesser extent, Iran, are bombing the hell out of Idlib Province in Syria, and indiscriminately killing many innocent civilians. 'The World is watching this butchery. What is the purpose, what will it get you? STOP!' the US president said.

'Indiscriminate weapons'

But, the aerial bombardment yesterday did not relent. According to the Observatory, at least four civilians were killed in regime strikes on the town of Maarat al-Numan. Another civilian was killed in the nearby town of Heish, while



MAARET AL-NUMAN, Syria: Members of the Syrian Civil Defense (known as the White Helmets) evacuate a wounded man from under the rubble following an air strike on this town in Idlib province yesterday. —AFP

a sixth was killed by rocket fire on a village in the neighboring province of Hama, it said. Human Rights Watch on Monday accused the Syrian regime and its ally Russia of using "internationally banned and other indiscriminate weapons in unlawful attacks on civilians in northwest Syria in recent weeks."

It said they "used banned cluster munitions and incendiary weapons... along with large air-dropped explosive weapons with wide-area effects, including 'barrel bombs'." Analysts predict that President Bashar al-Assad and his allies will continue to chip away at the area, but not unleash a major assault that would create chaos on Turkey's doorstep. In recent weeks, jihadists and pro-government have engaged in fierce battles over positions on the fringes of the enclave. Yesterday, the regime tried advance against jihadists in the north-east of Latakia province. According to the Observatory, the clashes killed 12 pro-regime fighters and seven jihadists.

Israeli strikes

The latest violence in Syria's jihadist-held northwest comes amid soaring tensions between Syria and neighboring Israel. Syria accused Israel of targeting an airbase in Homs province overnight, reportedly killing five people, just hours after carrying out raids on military and intelligence posts south of Damascus that killed 10. "Our air defenses thwarted an Israeli aggression and destroyed two of the rockets that targeted the T-4 airbase," a military source told state news agency SANA. —AFP

13 dead as Sudan military rulers break up sit-in

KHARTOUM: Sudan's military rulers forcefully broke up a weeks-long sit-in outside Khartoum's army headquarters yesterday, leaving at least 13 dead, a doctors' committee said as gunfire echoed from the site. Heavily armed security forces in pickup trucks mounted with machine guns were deployed in large numbers all around the capital, while gunshots were heard from the protest site by an AFP journalist. The United States and Britain called for an end to the crackdown on demonstrators, who want the generals behind the overthrow of veteran president Omar al-Bashir to hand over to civilian rule.

The Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, which is close to the protesters, updated the death toll "raising the number of martyrs to 13" in a Facebook statement. It also reported a "large number of critical casualties" and called for "urgent support" from the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations to help the wounded. The military council has denied multiple reports of their forces violently dispersing the sit-in in front of army headquarters, as protesters took to the streets in towns around the country.

But protest leaders said the site had been cleared of demonstrators. "The Rapid Support Forces and the army and police and militia battalions dispersed the peaceful sit-in," the Alliance for Freedom and Change, the protesters' umbrella group, said in a statement. Outside the army headquarters "there is no one, but the pure bodies of our martyrs that it has not been possible to evacuate from the site".

'Bloody massacre'

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which spearheaded nationwide protests that started in December, said it amounted to a "bloody massacre" and hundreds of people had been wounded.



KHARTOUM: A Sudanese protester walks past burning tyres as military forces tried to disperse the sit-in outside Khartoum's army headquarters yesterday. —AFP

It called on Sudanese to take part in "total civil disobedience" to topple the military council. The doctors' committee said forces were also opening fire inside the city's East Nile Hospital and "chasing peaceful protesters". It said another hospital near the site of the sit-in was surrounded and volunteers were prevented from reaching it.

Rallies against Bashir's authoritarian, three-decade rule led to his ouster in April, but protesters had remained outside the army headquarters calling on the generals to cede power to a transitional authority. Near the demonstration site, a witness living in the Burri neighborhood said he could "hear the sound of gunfire and I see a plume of smoke rising from the area of the sit-in." Another resident of the area, in east Khartoum, said he had seen forces in "police uniform" trying to expel the demonstrators.

The military council "did not disperse the sit-in by force," its spokesman said. "The tents are there, and the youth are moving freely," Shamseddine Kabbashi told Sky News Arabia. Protests erupted in towns across Sudan in response to the violence in Khartoum. "Now the streets are closed (with barricades made) from stone and the chant is going round 'Just fall, that's all, the whole Council,'" a witness in Port Sudan on the Red Sea said. A witness in Atbara, in northern Sudan, said the city's roads were closed and "even the streets that link it to other towns." —AFP