

World News Roundup

Diplomacy

'Poisoning could benefit UK'

Russia not responsible for spat with West: FM

MOSCOW, April 2, (Agencies): How far a row escalates between Moscow and the West over the poisoning of a former Russian spy in Britain does not depend on Russia, its Foreign Minister **Sergei Lavrov** told a news briefing on Monday.

In times of cold war there were some rules, but now Britain and the United States had dropped all propriety and were playing children's games, he said.

Russia has denied responsibility for the March 4 attack on ex-spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the English city of Salisbury.

Lavrov suggested that the poisoning of a former double agent could benefit the British government by distracting attention from problems around Brexit.

The March 4 attack on Skripal and his daughter in the English city of Salisbury has triggered a wave of tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats between the West and Russia and sent relations plunging to new post-Cold War lows.

"This could be in the interests of the British government which found itself in an uncomfortable situation having failed to fulfil promises to its electorate about the conditions for Brexit," Lavrov said at a press conference in Moscow, referring to Britain's planned departure from the European Union.

Lavrov also suggested that the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter "could also be in the interests of the British special forces who are known for their abilities to act with a licence to kill".

Britain has said it was "highly likely" that Russia was responsible for the attack using a nerve agent developed in the USSR, a view backed up by its Western allies.

But Russia denies any involvement and has called for Britain to give it access to the nerve agent used.

Lavrov insisted that "serious experts" and "leaders of a whole number of countries" are questioning Britain's account of the crime.

Lavrov complained that the British authorities have still not given consular access to "our citizens," and that the situation had not changed despite Yulia Skripal's improved condition.

He said he hoped Sergei Skripal would "also follow this example" and get better.

Lavrov also denied the attack was "sophisticated," saying that if it had been, the victims would have died immediately.

Meanwhile, the Russian Foreign Ministry asked the international agency that monitors chemical weapons for information Sunday about the investigation of the poisoning of a former Russian spy and his daughter in England.

A list of questions submitted to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons includes what sort of assistance Britain requested from the watchdog agency and which sampling procedures were used to collect the substance that sickened Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia.

OPCW representatives were among a group of experts Britain asked to analyze the chemical agent involved in the poisonings. Britain claims it was the Soviet-manufactured nerve agent Novichok and has said Russia is likely responsible, which Moscow adamantly denies.

The Foreign Ministry's request came on the same day that Russian diplomats and their families returned to Moscow on two planes after being expelled from the United States, part of the international fallout from the March 4 attack on the Skripals.

Kremlin denies link to tycoon's arrest: The Kremlin on Monday dismissed any political element to the arrest of the billionaire owner of Summa Group on suspicion of embezzling state funding for construction and energy projects including a World Cup stadium.

Ziyavudin Magomedov, whose fortune has been estimated at \$1.2 billion (975,000 euros) by Forbes magazine, was detained on Saturday in Moscow along with his brother Magomed.

They have been jailed and charged with fraud, embezzling around \$44 million and forming a criminal network.

Russian media focused on Magomedov's links to Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, under whose presidency he won lucrative public contracts, and friendly ties with Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich, with whom he studied economics at the prestigious Moscow State University.

Some observers have suggested that the arrest, with its echoes of the 2003 arrest of oil magnate and Kremlin opponent Mikhail Khodorkovsky, could be part of a power struggle as Vladimir Putin enters his fourth Kremlin term and is set to form a new government.

The arrests "came before the announcement of a new government and consequently can influence its future makeup," wrote Kommersant business newspaper.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that he was not prepared to comment on such speculation.

Peskov said instead that the investigation showed the country's "very tough, targeted" monitoring of state funds.

'Trump proposed WH summit to Putin': Trump proposed White House summit to Putin in March: Kremlin

Moscow, April 2, 2018 (AFP) - US President Donald Trump proposed a White House summit when he called Russian President Vladimir Putin last month, prior to the mass expulsion of Russian diplomats from the US, a top Kremlin aide said Monday.

"Trump proposed holding a meeting at the White House in Washington," Putin's top foreign policy aide, Yuri Ushakov, told reporters.

On March 20, Trump called Putin to congratulate him on his re-election, and the US leader told reporters afterwards that the two would "probably get together in the not-too-distant future."

In calling Putin, Trump ignored explicit advice from his national security advisers not to do so, The Washington Post has reported, quoting officials familiar with the call.



Lavrov



People wearing traditional Bavarian costumes take part in the St Georgi Ride on Easter Monday on April 2 in Traunstein, southern Germany. The annual ride is a horse pilgrimage to honor Saint George and takes the participants from the Bavarian town of Traunstein to the chapel of Ettendorf, where they are blessed. (AFP)



Richard Ratcliffe displays a family photograph of himself and wife Nazanin with their daughter Gabriella, in front of a decorated tree on Fortune Green in West Hampstead, London on April 2, on the second anniversary of his wife's detention. Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British-Iranian woman has been detained in Iran for allegedly plotting to overthrow the government. (AP)

Europe

Czech extradition may hurt ties:

Russia's Foreign Ministry said on Monday that the Czech Republic's extradition to the United States of Yevgeny Nikulin, a Russian charged with hacking US tech companies, appeared to be aimed at damaging ties between Moscow and Prague.

Nikulin, 30, was arrested in Prague in 2016. He was extradited to the United States last week, where he pleaded not guilty to charges that he hacked into the systems of three U.S. technology firms, potentially compromising the personal details of at least 100 million users, including on LinkedIn. (RTRS)

58 rescued off Greek island: Dozens of migrants who sent out a distress call while off the coast of the eastern Aegean island of Samos were rescued Monday after their boat was towed to land, Greek authorities said.

The boat, carrying 58 people, was located north of Samos in rough seas and was towed

to the island by the European border agency Frontex, the Greek coast guard said. (AP)

Italy prez to start talks on govt: Italian President Sergio Mattarella on Wednesday

begins key talks with parties on forming a government after last month's election left a hung parliament. The stalemate puts the spotlight on Mattarella, who has the power to name a prime minister, but it is still unclear whether rivals can find common ground for a coalition government

or whether another vote will be needed. Luigi Di Maio's anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) garnered more than 32 percent of the vote in the March 4 poll but the anti-immigration League of Matteo Salvini leads a coalition that got 37 percent of the ballot. (AFP)

Britain

UK top prosecutor to stand down

Queen praises RAF on 100th 'versary

LONDON, April 2, (Agencies): Queen Elizabeth II has sent congratulations to Britain's Royal Air Force on the 100th anniversary of its founding.

The queen's message was read at a breakfast reception held Sunday at a central London building that served as the RAF's first headquarters.

The Royal Air Force was created on April 1, 1918 through the merger of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service.

Its reputation is strongly associated with the extraordinary bravery and skill of the pilots who defended Britain against Germany's Luftwaffe during World War II.

Elizabeth said in her anniversary wishes that the RAF has "defended our freedom gallantly."

Top air force officers attended the reception, but the job of reading the queen's message fell to 16-year-old Aircraftman Adam Wood, one of the RAF's youngest members.

Britain's director of public prosecutions, who has faced criticism for the collapse of several rape cases, will stand down in October at the end of her five-

year contract, the government said. **Alison Saunders**, who heads the independent Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in England and Wales, was criticised from within the legal profession after police and prosecutors failed to disclose evidence in the cases, causing them to collapse.

She said it was her decision to step down. "DPPs serve a term of five years, I was clear that five years was a good term to serve and I've already decided what I will be doing when I leave in October," she told BBC radio on Monday.

Saunders is due to join the multinational law firm Linklaters, the Attorney General's Office said in a statement.

The CPS has endured a number of controversies under Saunders' tenure, including her decision not to prosecute an member of the House of Lords upper chamber of parliament over accusations of historical child sex crimes that was overruled by an independent lawyer.

The lord died shortly after a judge ruled he was unfit to stand trial.

Britain's opposition Labour Party was facing fresh turbulence on Sunday over an ongoing anti-Semitism row which has seen a donor pull out and a comedian ap-

pointed to its governing body.

Property tycoon **David Garrard**, who has donated around £1.5 million (\$2.1 million, 1.7 million euros) to Labour since 2003, hit out at the way party has been run by leader **Jeremy Corbyn**.

"I have watched with dismay and foreboding the manner in which the leadership has, in my view, over the last two years, conducted itself," he told the Observer newspaper.

"I consider that it has supported and endorsed the most blatant acts of anti-Semitism," Garrard added.

Corbyn has been under increasing pressure to address multiple allegations of anti-Semitism within the party, which last week saw Jewish campaigners hold a protest outside parliament.

Just days later the official in charge of Labour's disputes panel, **Christine Shawcroft**, resigned over allegations she opposed the suspension of a candidate accused of Holocaust denial. On Saturday Shawcroft stepped down from the party's national executive committee.

She was replaced by comedian **Eddie Izzard**, who called on Labour to "stamp out completely the stain of anti-Semitism from a minority of members".

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