

World News Roundup

Britain

Harry promises to listen

PM faces parliament 'criticism' over Syria

LONDON, April 16, (Agencies): British Prime Minister Theresa May faced criticism on Monday for bypassing parliament to join weekend air strikes against Syria, with some lawmakers calling for a potentially damaging vote on her future strategy.

May, who has regained confidence after winning support for her tough stance on Syria and Russia, made a statement to parliament on her decision to join the United States and France in Saturday's strikes in retaliation for a suspected gas attack.

She repeated Saturday's assertion that Britain is "confident in our own assessment that the Syrian regime was highly likely responsible" and that it could not wait "to alleviate further humanitarian suffering caused by chemical weapons attacks", according to excerpts of her speech.

But she was grilled over why she broke with a convention to seek parliamentary approval for the action, a decision that she and her ministers say was driven by the need to act quickly.

Much of the criticism will come from opposition lawmakers, but the prime minister may also have to work hard to defend her speed of action to members of her own Conservative Party who had wanted parliament recalled.

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"She could have recalled parliament last week," the veteran peace campaigner said on Sunday.

"I think what we need in this country is something more robust, like a War Powers Act, so governments do get held to account by parliament for what they do in our name," he told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show.



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Strikes

Britain has said there are no plans for future strikes against Syria, but foreign minister Boris Johnson warned President Bashar al-Assad that all options would be considered if chemical weapons were used against Syrians again.

At a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg on Monday, he again said the strikes were not aimed at regime change in Syria, but rather sent the message that the world has "had enough of the use of chemical weapons".

Corbyn's drive for legislation to limit the government's power to launch future military action could win support in parliament, where some Conservatives have expressed fears that taking military action could worsen the situation in Syria.

Despite winning international backing, May, who has weathered questions over her leadership due to Brexit and party scandals, has a precarious position in parliament after losing the Conservatives' majority in an ill-judged election in June.

She now relies on the support of a small Northern Irish party, which has supported the action in Syria, and has tried to dodge votes that might not go her way.

Nicola Sturgeon, first minister of Scotland, whose Scottish Nationalist party has 35 seats in parliament, told the BBC there was a danger that the strike "makes the situation worse, not better".

May's predecessor, David Cameron, lost a vote on air strikes against Assad's forces in 2013, with many in Britain wary of entering another conflict, especially after an inquiry concluded that then-prime minister Tony Blair's decision to join the 2003 US-led war against Iraq was based on flawed intelligence.

It was not clear whether Labour or other opposition parties would be able to force an emergency debate after May's statement, or whether the speaker in the House of Commons would grant what one party source called a "meaningful vote".

Outcry over treatment of immigrants: A simmering dispute over Britain's treatment of people who came to the country as children decades ago has erupted — as the country prepares to host leaders from the 53-nation Commonwealth.

Britain had wanted to use this week's summit in London of the alliance of the UK and its former colonies to help Britain bolster trade and diplomatic ties around the world after it leaves the European Union next year. But trade topics are being overshadowed by anger over what some in the Commonwealth see as the UK's shabby treatment of residents of Caribbean origin.

British Prime Minister Theresa May's office said Monday that she would meet with her Caribbean counterparts in London for the Commonwealth summit to discuss the situation of long-term UK residents who say they have been threatened with deportation to their countries of birth.

Members of the "Windrush generation" — named for the ship Empire Windrush, which brought the first big group of post-war Caribbean immigrants to Britain in 1948 — came from what were then British colonies or newly independent states and had an automatic right to settle in the UK.

But some from that generation, now aging and long-times residents in Britain, say they have been denied medical treatment or threatened with deportation because they can't produce papers to prove it.

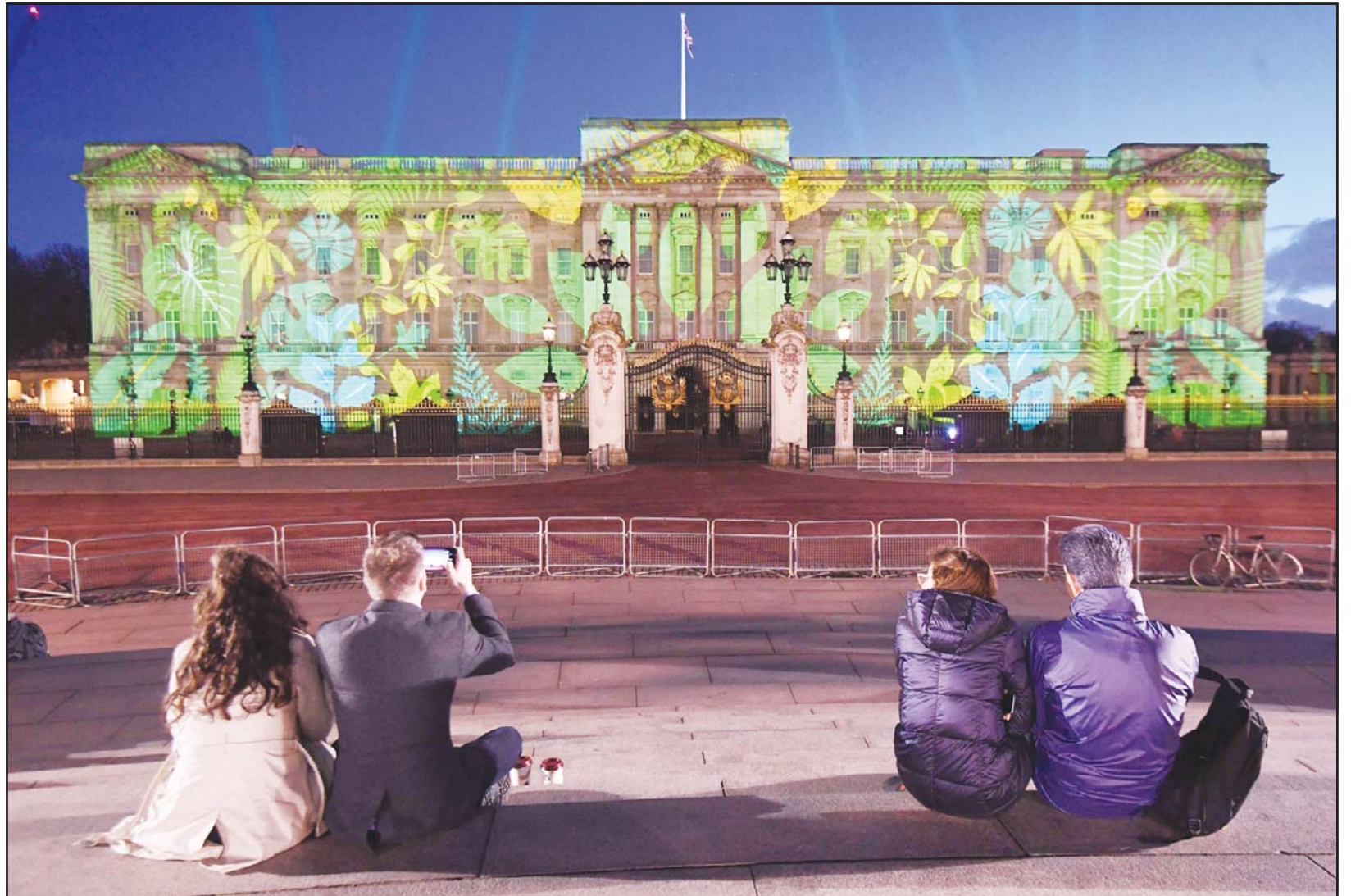
The British government has taken an increasingly tough line on immigration, which has increased dramatically over the last 10 or 15 years, largely as result of people moving to the UK from other EU countries. A desire to control immigration was a major factor for many who voted in 2016 for Britain to leave the bloc.

Harry starts Commonwealth job: Prince Harry has been appointed a Commonwealth youth ambassador, his highest-profile public role to date and a job that will see him working with his future wife encouraging young people to use the network of mostly former British colonies.

Queen Elizabeth awarded the position to her 33-year-old grandson who is fifth-in-line to the throne and has led a rebranding of the monarchy in a bid to make it more modern and relevant.

"I know that serving as ambassador to young people I'm going have to try to keep up with you all... my job will be to listen to you, my duty will be to ensure that your ideas, concerns, thoughts and hopes are heard," Harry told the opening of a Commonwealth forum discussing youth issues.

The announcement coincides with the start of a summit of the Commonwealth Heads of Government in London this week, which will seek to boost the network at a time when Britain is negotiating its departure from the European Union.



A rainforest design is projected on to Buckingham Palace in London as part of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II's Commonwealth Canopy project (QCC), a global conservation initiative in the Queen's name which seeks to preserve precious areas of forest for future generations on April 15. (AFP)



French President Emmanuel Macron (left), welcomes Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau upon his arrival at the Elysee Palace in Paris on April 16. (AFP)



Yildirim

Sarkisian

Europe

Macron defends economic policy: French President Emmanuel Macron faced down a grilling over unpopular economic reforms by two veteran journalists on Sunday, in a heated, 2-1/2-hour exchange that also touched on issues ranging from Syria to railway union strikes.

In his second television interview in less than a week, part of a media offensive designed to win over a sceptical public as he pushes ahead with economic reforms, neither Macron nor the interviewers pulled any punches.

In a break with the often deferential tradition of French presidential interviews, Macron took questions from two famously combative journalists to mark his first year in office.

It coincides with a wave of railway strikes designed to challenge his reforms and his broader economic programme.

Hostilities started when Macron accused one of the reporters of asking a "biased" question over a raft of protests in the country, to which the piqued interviewer responded: "You are not our professor and we are not your pupils." (RTS)

Terror accusation reopens wounds: The trial of seven men and one woman accused of beating two police officers and their girlfriends two years ago in northern Spain opened Monday amid controversy because of the terrorism charges brought against the defendants.

The fight at a bar in the small town of Alsasua in the early hours of Oct 15, 2016, left one off-duty officer with a broken ankle and caused psychological trauma to all the victims, according to Civil Guard unions.

Prosecutors say the brawl should be punished under the country's terrorism laws, as crimes of terrorist intent. They claim the attackers were members of Basque activism groups and that targeted the off-duty officers as part of their campaign to oust Spanish security forces from Basque areas a goal also shared by the militant separatist group ETA.

Areas with a strong Basque identity are grappling to overcome decades of violence at the hands of ETA, which killed more than 800 people including police agents, politicians and entrepreneurs before giving up its armed campaign for Basque independence in 2011. (AP)

Turkey warns Greece: Turkey warned Greece on Monday to refrain from "provoca-

tions" after a Greek flag was hoisted on a disputed, uninhabited islet in the Aegean Sea off the Turkish coast.

Prime Minister Binali Yildirim told reporters that the Turkish coast guards had removed the flag from the island off the coast of the Aegean resort of Didim.

Yildirim said the incident was similar

Diplomacy

German min wants EU united front with aim to reduce tensions

'Bring Russia to negotiating table'

BERLIN, April 16, (RTS): German Europe Minister Michael Roth called for the European Union to adopt a united front against Russia with the aim of reducing tensions, warning that "anti-Russian reflexes" were as dangerous as naivete about Russia's "nationalist" course.

Roth's intervention, in an article for Die Welt newspaper, came amid signs that under conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel and Social Democrat (SPD) Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, Germany's position towards Russia is hardening, especially since a poison attack in Britain, widely blamed on Russia.

Roth, in remarks that seemed designed to reflect the more pro-Russian views of the SPD's members, said Europe's sanctions against Russia should be maintained, but with the aim of bringing Russia to the negotiating table.

"Sanctions aren't a goal in themselves," he wrote. "They should encourage people back to the negotiating table to work on reasonable solutions ... Anti-Russian reflexes are just as dangerous as naively relativising the nationalist-tinged policies of the Russian leadership."

Criticism

Meanwhile, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas on Sunday criticised Russia for a series of activities beyond its borders, blaming it for a cyber attack on his own ministry, and said Moscow must change its ways.

Maas listed a series of what he called problematic actions that also included the lack of progress in implementing a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine, a poison gas attack in Britain, support for the Syrian government, and efforts to influence Western elections.

"We had an attack on the Foreign Ministry where we have to assume that it stemmed from Russia," he told the German broadcaster ZDF. "We can't just wish all that away ... And I think it's not only reasonable but necessary to point out that we do not view those as constructive contributions."

to one in 1996 when the two NATO allies went to war over uninhabited islets known as Imia in Greek and Kardak in Turkish which both Turkey and Greece claim.

"Our advice to Greece would be to stay away from provocations and agitations," Yildirim said adding that Turkey was "determined to give the necessary response" to



A man holds his hand on a plain metal plaque during a wreath ceremony at the commemorative ceremonies for the 73rd anniversary of the liberation of the former Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald near Weimar, Germany on April 15. The metal plaque bearing the names of fifty nations in alphabetical order is inserted in the ground. The middle section is kept at 37°C, the temperature of the human body. (AP)

German government officials in February disclosed what they called an "isolated" cyber attack on the government computer network that was first discovered in December.

Agency

The head of Germany's domestic intelligence agency last week said there was "a high likelihood" that Moscow was behind the attack.

Maas, a Social Democrat who has adopted a tougher stance on Russia than his predecessors from the same party, told the other German public broadcaster, ARD, on Sunday that Moscow had been an increasingly "difficult partner" but Berlin was committed to maintaining dialogue, particularly on the crisis in Syria.

"It is time, I think, to point out that we expect constructive contributions from the Russian side, including on the Syrian conflict. And also that they don't always simply protect (Syrian President Bashar) al-Assad," he said.

Russia has denied any efforts to influence Western elections, and scoffed at suggestions it was behind the cyber attack in Germany. It also denied involvement in a poison gas attack on a former Russian double agent and his daughter in Britain.

Western air strikes aimed at destroying Syria's chemical weapons facilities have exacerbated tensions between Moscow and the West, already at a new post-Cold War high after the expulsion of more than 130 Russian diplomats in response to the nerve agent attack on ex-spy Sergei Skripal.

Syria denied using chemical weapons against its civilian population.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, another Social Democrat, who has served as foreign minister, on Sunday warned against demonising Russia and said Germany had a particular role to play in maintaining dialogue with Moscow, given its history.

Steinmeier told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper he was concerned about a

"galloping alienation between Russia and the West" and urged German politicians to avoid portraying Russia and its people as an enemy.

Maas on Saturday called for a new international effort to end the war in Syria, and said Germany would use its relationship with Moscow to ensure Russia played a "constructive" role.

"Whether we like it or not, the Syrian conflict cannot be resolved without Russia," he said on Sunday.

Germany, which relies on Russia for about a third of the gas it uses, has long walked a careful line with Moscow — pushing for continued sanctions over Ukraine and eastern Ukraine while also maintaining dialogue and trade relations.

Also:

MOSCOW: New US sanctions against Moscow will be hard for Russia but do more damage to the United States and Europe, RIA news agency cited a senior Russian lawmaker as saying on Sunday.

US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said earlier on Sunday that Washington was preparing new sanctions against Russia over its support for Syrian President Bashar al Assad.

Evgeny Serebrennikov, deputy head of the defence committee of Russia's upper house of parliament, said Moscow was ready for the new penalties.

"They are hard for us, but will do more damage to the USA and Europe," RIA quoted Serebrennikov as saying.

Russia will not delay adopting legislation in response to new US sanctions, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on Monday, RIA news agency reported.

Senior members of the lower house of parliament have said they are considering legislation to give the Kremlin powers to ban or restrict a list of US imports. Ryabkov said Moscow was discussing what he called Washington's abuse of the dollar's status as the global reserve currency.

Such as. Despite two decades of efforts to improve relations, Greece and Turkey have seen a spike in tensions in recent weeks over disputed Aegean boundaries as well as over oil-and-gas drilling rights off the divided island of Cyprus. (AP)

Armenians protest ex-leader's move: Several thousand protesters staged rallies on Monday in the Armenian capital against former president Serzh Sarkisian as he moves to maintain a chokehold on power as prime minister.

Demonstrators marched through the centre of the capital Yerevan and blocked streets in opposition to a change of government that will see Sarkisian maintain huge influence under a new parliamentary system of government.

Some protesters chanted "Armenia without Serzh" and "Serzh is a liar." "Our goal right now is to prevent Serzh Sarkisian from becoming the country's leader for a third time without violence and the use of force," said opposition leader Nikol Pashinian who led the protesters.

Sarkisian, 63, ended his second and final presidential term last week.

On Monday, the ruling Republican Party and the government-friendly Dashnaksutyun Party formally nominated Sarkisian as candidate for the post of prime minister despite the protests. The pro-Moscow politician is expected to be elected by parliament on Tuesday.

The protesters took to the streets after opposition leader Pashinian called on Armenians to stage rallies to prevent Sarkisian's political transition. (AFP)