

World News Roundup

Probe

Dems draft own memo

Trump willing to be queried under oath

WASHINGTON, Jan 25. (Agencies): President Donald Trump declared he's "looking forward" to being questioned — under oath — in the special counsel's probe of Russian election interference and Trump's possible obstruction in the firing of the FBI director.

Trump said he would be willing to answer questions under oath in the interview, which special counsel Robert Mueller has been seeking but which White House officials had not previously confirmed the president would grant.

"I'm looking forward to it, actually," Trump said late Wednesday when asked by reporters at the White House. As for timing, he said, "I guess they're talking about two or three weeks, but I'd love to do it."

He said, as he has repeatedly, that "there's no collusion whatsoever" with the Russians, and he added, "there's no obstruction whatsoever."

The full scope of Mueller's investigation, which involves hundreds of thousands of documents and dozens of witness interviews, is unknown. And there have been no signs that agents aren't continuing to work on ties between Trump's campaign and a Russian effort to tip the 2016 election.

But now that Mueller's team has all but concluded its interviews with current and former Trump officials, and expressed interest in speaking with the president himself, the focus seems to be on the post-inauguration White House. That includes the firing of FBI Director James Comey and discussions preceding the ouster of White House national security adviser Michael Flynn.

The timing and circumstances of a Trump interview are still being ironed out. But soon it will probably be the president himself who will have to explain to Mueller how his actions don't add up to obstruction of justice. And that conversation will be dominated by questions tied to whether he took steps to thwart an FBI investigation.

Fair

Asked if he thinks Mueller will be fair, Trump replied: "We're going to find out." He then reiterated that there is "no collusion."

In a potential signal of his defense, Trump suggested that he didn't obstruct — he simply fought back against a false accusation.

So far, witness interviews and the special counsel's document requests make clear Mueller has a keen interest in Comey's May 9 firing and the contents of Comey's private conversations with the president, as well as the ouster months earlier of Flynn and the weeks of conversations leading up to it.

A focus on potential obstruction has been evident almost since Mueller's appointment as special counsel. And recent interviews with administration officials, including Attorney General Jeff Sessions, have shown that Trump is dealing with prosecutors who already have amassed a wealth of knowledge about the events he'll be questioned about.

Prosecutors have interviewed numerous Trump aides, including close confidants such as White House counsel Don McGahn, former chief of staff Reince Priebus and the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

Sessions, who had urged Comey's firing, was interviewed for hours, becoming the highest-ranking Trump administration official known to have submitted to questioning. Mueller also wants to interview former adviser Steve Bannon, who has called Comey's firing perhaps the biggest mistake in "modern political history."

The White House initially said the firing was based on the Justice Department's recommendation and cited as justification a memo that faulted Comey's handling of the Hillary Clinton email investigation. But Trump himself said later he was thinking of this "Russia thing" and had intended to fire Comey anyway.

Sessions, the target of the president's ire since he stepped aside last March from the Russia investigation, would have been able to offer close-up insight into the president's thinking ahead of the termination. He also could have been able to speak to the president's relationship with Comey, which Comey documented in a series of memos about conversations with Trump that bothered him.

Memo

Meanwhile, US House Intelligence Committee Democrats have drafted their own "memo" about the investigation of Russia and the 2016 US election, after calls for the release of a Republican memo critical of a special counsel's criminal probe, the panel's ranking Democrat said on Wednesday.

Amid growing partisan rancor over the investigation of possible collusion between President Donald Trump's campaign and Moscow, many of Trump's fellow Republicans have been clamoring for the release of a classified memorandum commissioned by Republicans, which they say shows anti-Trump bias at the US Department of Justice.

Democrats have criticized that memo as "highly misleading" talking points intended to undermine the investigation led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into Trump and his associates. They accused Republicans of inappropriately releasing classified information by allowing every House of Representatives member to read it.

Moscow denies attempting to influence the presidential election. Trump denies any collusion.

"Regrettably, it has been necessary for Committee Democrats to draft our own memorandum, setting out the relevant facts and exposing the misleading character of the Republicans' document so that members of the House are not left with an erroneous impression of the dedicated professionals at the FBI and DOJ," Representative Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat, said in a statement.

The dispute has fueled doubts about whether the House panel's investigation has become too politicized to produce a credible report. House Intelligence is one of three congressional committees looking into the issue, along with the Senate Intelligence and Senate Judiciary Committees.



Trump



US President Donald Trump and Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May shake hands during a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, eastern Switzerland on Jan 25. (AFP)

Brexit

Pre-referendum Brexit forecasts no longer valid: finmin

Ministerial turnover disrupts Brexit

LONDON, Jan 25, (Agencies): The high turnover of ministers in the British government is hampering progress towards Brexit, a think-tank said Thursday.

The merry-go-round of faces in Prime Minister Theresa May's administration will also make it tougher for her to achieve her domestic objectives, the Institute for Government (IFG) said.

While May has kept her top four ministers in place since taking office in July 2016, the report found that 71 percent of ministers — 85 out of 122 — are new to their jobs since the June 2017 general election.

"Political turbulence and ministerial turnover — particularly at junior levels — have disrupted the government's preparations for Brexit, its ability to pass crucial legislation and its capacity to deal with urgent public service challenges," the institute said in a report.

Only Brexit minister David Davis and one of the four junior ministers have stayed at the Department for Exiting the European Union since its creation in July 2016. The

month after Britain's EU referendum.

Meanwhile every minister in the Cabinet Office and three-quarters of those in the justice ministry were replaced in this month's reshuffle.

Both the Justice Department and the Work and Pensions Department have seen a third minister take the helm since May took office.

Meanwhile, the top official at Britain's finance ministry said his department's forecasts of a big hit to the economy from Brexit, made shortly before the June 2016 EU membership referendum, were no longer applicable.

Brexit supporters have long criticised the projections as part of a "Project Fear" they say was led by former prime minister David Cameron and his finance minister George Osborne.

The forecasts said that within 15 years Britain's economy could be between 3.4 and 9.5 percent smaller if it left the EU than if it had stayed in.

Tom Scholar told lawmakers on

Wednesday the forecasts were based on an assumption that Britain would immediately start the process of leaving the European Union, and they did not include any stimulus measures for the economy.

Brexit supporters are gearing up for a fightback against "ultra-Remainers" to ensure the result of Britain's referendum on leaving the European Union is fully respected, a prominent campaigner said on Wednesday.

Steven Woolfe, a member of the European Parliament and former leadership hopeful for the UK Independence Party (UKIP), said on Wednesday he was coordinating Brexit groups to challenge what he called the Remain campaign's "rearguard action" to weaken Britain's hand and secure a divorce in name only.

After winning the June 2016 referendum, many Brexit or Leave campaigners feel they are losing ground to voices questioning the meaning of the vote, a debate which has deepened divisions and prompted some to predict a "Brexit betrayal".



Britain's Kate, Duchess of Cambridge, arrives to meet patients and staff at the Mother and Baby unit at the Bethlem Royal Hospital in south London on Jan 24. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are expected to have their third baby in April 2018. (AP)

Britain

May to visit China: British Prime Minister Theresa May will visit Beijing next week, China said Thursday, as her country looks to bolster trade links ahead of its departure from the European Union.

The relationship between the two countries has grown in importance as London contemplates its economic future after it officially leaves the EU in March 2019.

May will be in China from Jan 31 to Feb 2 in what the Chinese foreign ministry touted as a "historical visit".

The visit to China will be May's first as her country's leader. (AFP)

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Labour reverses ticket discount:

Britain's Labour Party said Wednesday it had reversed a decision to lower ticket prices for ethnic minorities attending a speech by leader Jeremy Corbyn after it was deemed to be potentially unlawful.

Corbyn is due to speak at the East Midlands Regional Conference in Loughborough on Feb 17, and the party had set the price

at £40, but with a £10 discount for BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) attendees.

Conservative MP Andrew Bridgen made a complaint to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Britain's national equality body, accusing the main opposition party of discrimination. (AFP)

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Assang's 'health at risk':

The ongoing six-year confinement of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in London's Ecuadorian embassy is dangerous to his physical and mental

health, according to new clinical assessments.

A pair of doctors reached the verdict after spending 20 hours over three days in October performing "a comprehensive physical and psychological evaluation" of Assange. The Guardian reported Wednesday.

The duo — Sondra Crosby, a doctor and associate professor at Boston University's school of medicine and public health, and Brock Chisholm, a London-based clinical psychologist — renewed calls for Assange to be given safe passage to a hospital. (AFP)

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