

# Wildfires add heat to US campaign

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Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has called President Donald Trump a “climate arsonist” for failing to acknowledge the role of global warming in the Western wildfires, while Trump said forest management was the key to controlling the blazes.

Wildfires across Oregon, California and Washington state have destroyed thousands of homes and a half-dozen small towns since August, scorching more than 4 million acres (1.6 million hectares) and killing more than two dozen people.

Biden, slammed by Republicans for not visiting disaster areas, spoke from his home state of Delaware on the threat of extreme weather that climate scientists have said is supercharging fires.

The Republican president, who trails Biden in national polls ahead of the Nov. 3 election, met with firefighters and officials in California after Democrats blasted the president for remaining mostly silent about the largest wildfires in state history.

“I think this is more of a management situation,” Trump said, when asked by a reporter if climate change was a factor behind the fires, saying many other countries were not facing a similar problem. He said forest management changes were something that could be tackled quickly, whereas climate change would take more time.

“When you get into climate change, well is India going to change its ways? And is China going to change its ways? And Russia? Is Russia going to change its ways?” he said after landing in McLellan Park, California.

Trump has referred to climate change as a “hoax” and in 2017 pulled the United States out of the Paris accord that laid out an international approach to global warming, while Biden says climate change is on his list of major crises facing the United States.

Calling Trump a “climate arsonist,” Biden said: “If we have four more years of Trump’s climate denial, how many suburbs will be burned by wildfires? How many suburban neighborhoods will have been flooded out?”

California Governor Gavin Newsom acknowledged that his state had not done enough to manage forests and has acknowledged that over 100 years of fire suppression has



**Bobcat fire approaches Sierra Madre and Arcadia communities in California. Infernos across California, Oregon and Washington state have burned more than five million acres this year. Photo was taken on Sunday.** PHOTO: REUTERS

allowed fuel to build up.

But he said global warming was driving fires, reminding Trump that 57 percent of forests in the state were under federal management.

“We come from a perspective humbly where we submit the science is in and observed evidence is self-evident: that climate change is real, and that is exacerbating this,” the Democratic governor said during a meeting with the president.

Trump, who has authorized federal disaster aid for both California and Oregon, questioned that science.

“It’ll start getting cooler, you just watch,” he said. “I don’t think science knows.”

The heated words and denial come as US government scientists says this summer was the hottest ever recorded

in the northern hemisphere.

June, July and August were 1.17C (2.11F) above the 20th-century average, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (Noaa).

CNN meteorologist Brandon Miller said that it is no coincidence that California, Oregon and Washington are having record-shattering fire years in the year that the Northern Hemisphere temperatures are at their hottest.

“That is because climate change is making heat waves hotter and more frequent. Rising temperatures are making droughts and fires more widespread. And the Northern Hemisphere has a large majority of the Earth’s land and population. So the worst impacts tend to occur during the time when the Northern Hemisphere temperatures are the highest,” he said.

## INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS ALONG LAC

# India hikes budget

*China denies laying cables to bolster communications at border flashpoint*

REUTERS, New Delhi

India has doubled the budget for vital roads and bridges along the undemarcated border with China in recent years in response to Beijing’s rapid infrastructure development on its side, the Indian defence minister said yesterday.

Troops of the two countries are locked in their most serious face-offs for years along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) or informal border in the western Himalayas, raising fears of a broader conflict.

One of the reasons for the tensions has been India’s recent construction of roads and airfields near the border in the Ladakh region bordering Tibet, the Chinese side has said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh told parliament that China had been building up its infrastructure in the remote mountains for decades and the government was trying to close the gap.

“Our government too has stepped up the budget for border infrastructure development to about double the previous levels. As a result, more roads and bridges have been completed in the border areas,” he said. He provided no figure.

Military officials say the development of roads and airfields on both sides of the border has also helped troops mobilise quickly in large numbers and in close proximity at some points in the Ladakh area.

Singh said Indian and Chinese troops have had face-offs on the unsettled border in the past, but the scale of deployment of troops and the number of disputed areas was much more than the past.

“As of now, the Chinese side has mobilized a large number of troops and armaments along the LAC as well as in the depth areas,” he said, listing Gogra, Kongka La and the north and south banks of the Pangong lake as “friction points.”

“In response to China’s actions, our armed forces have also made appropriate counter deployments in these areas to ensure that India’s security interests are fully protected,” he said to thumping of desks in parliament.

Meanwhile, China yesterday denied a report that said Chinese troops were laying a network of fibre optic cables at a western Himalayan flashpoint with India, suggesting they were digging in for the long haul despite high-level talks aimed at resolving a standoff there.

# Can’t let EU to break up UK

*Says Johnson as Brexit treaty breach plan clears first hurdle at House*

REUTERS, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson lashed out at the European Union on Monday as he won initial approval for a plan to breach the Brexit treaty, saying the move was needed because the bloc had refused to take a “revolver off the table” in trade talks.

Johnson won the so-called second reading parliamentary vote on the Internal Market Bill 340 to 263. A wrecking amendment was defeated shortly beforehand, though more will follow as he faces a growing rebellion in his party.

The EU says Johnson’s bill would collapse trade talks and propel the United Kingdom towards a messy Brexit while former British leaders have warned that breaking the law is a step too far that undermines the country’s image.

Johnson, though, said it was essential to counter “absurd” threats from Brussels including that London put up trade barriers between Britain and Northern Ireland and impose a food blockade - steps he said threatened the United Kingdom’s unity.

“The EU still have not taken this revolver off the table,” Johnson told parliament before the vote. “What we cannot do now is tolerate a situation where our EU counterparts seriously believe that they have the power to break up our country.”

The EU has demanded Britain scrap the main parts of the bill by the end of September and that if not, there will be no trade deal at the end of the year



to cover everything from car parts to food.

To back up its message, the European Commission has delayed a crucial decision on allowing London to continue clearing euro transactions for EU-based clients, a derivatives source told Reuters.

Johnson made clear that he would press ahead with the bill which he cast as a defensive insurance policy aimed at preventing a foreign power from dividing the United Kingdom by using Northern Ireland as leverage.

Many lawmakers, though, are disturbed by such an explicit bid to breach international law. All five of Britain’s living former prime ministers have expressed concern about his plan.

“I understand how some people will feel uneasy over the use of these powers and I share that sentiment

myself,” Johnson said. “They are an insurance policy and if we reach agreement with our European friends, which I still believe is possible, they will never be invoked.”

But some EU diplomats believe London is playing a game of chicken, inviting the collapse of trade talks to either get the deal it wants or leave without a deal.

Now the bill has passed its second reading, it will face four more days of debate on its fine print - a stage at which lawmakers can try to insert revisions that could change the entire meaning of the bill, or even kill it.

The main battleground is likely to be an attempt by Bob Neill, a Conservative lawmaker, to amend the bill to ensure any attempt to use the clauses that breach the Brexit divorce agreement receive prior approval from parliament.

# Covid pushed back global health progress by 25 yrs

*Says Gates Foundation as pandemic rages*

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The knock-on effects of the coronavirus pandemic have halted and reversed global health progress, setting it back 25 years and exposing millions to the risk of deadly disease and poverty, a report by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation warned yesterday.

Because of Covid-19, extreme poverty has increased by 7%, and routine vaccine coverage - a good proxy measure for how health systems are functioning - is dropping to levels last seen in the 1990s, the report said.

“It’s a huge setback,” Bill Gates, co-chair of the Foundation and a leading philanthropic funder of global health and development, told a media briefing on the report’s findings.

The Foundation’s Goalkeepers report, which tracks progress on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of reducing poverty and improving health, found that in the past year, by nearly every indicator, the world has regressed.

Alongside dropping rates of routine immunisation, which the report described as “setting the world back about 25 years in 25 weeks”, rising levels of poverty and economic damage from the pandemic are reinforcing inequalities, it said.

It found that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women, racial and ethnic minority communities and people living in extreme poverty.

“After 20 consecutive years of declines in extreme poverty, we’ve now seen a reversal,” said Mark Suzman, chief executive of the Gates Foundation, in an interview with Reuters. “We’ve had nearly 40 million people thrown back into extreme poverty. That’s well over a million a week since the virus hit.”

Meanwhile, at least 17 members of the Indian parliament have tested positive for the coronavirus, government officials said yesterday, underlining the widening spread of infections set to cross five million cases soon.

The lawmakers were screened ahead of the re-opening of parliament on Monday after six months. MPs cleared by the tests wore masks, occupied seats with glass enclosures and worked for truncated hours.

Twelve of the 17 infected MPs were from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, according to a government official who is a member of the 545-member lower house of parliament.

India appeared to be on course to cross the milestone of 5 million cases today, as its tally of 4.93 million is just 70,000 short.

Australia yesterday recorded its first day without a Covid-19 death in two months, as states began to lift restrictions amid growing confidence that a second wave of infections has been contained.

Officials said there were 50 cases in the past 24 hours, a small increase from a day earlier.



**Pak PM eyes chemical castration for rapists**

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Monday he would like convicted rapists to be publicly executed or chemically castrated, reacting to a question on the rape of a woman on a highway last week that has caused uproar in the South Asian nation.

Last week, a mother of two driving along a major highway near Lahore was dragged out of her car and raped by two men at gunpoint - one of whom was arrested by police.

“The way there is first degree, second degree, third degree murder, this should be graded in the same way, and when there is first degree, castrate them. Operate on them and make them unable to do this,” Khan said in an interview on a Pakistan news channel.

The shocking assault sparked nationwide protests and calls for the resignation of officials as well as the public hanging of rapists in Pakistan.



## QASEM SOLEIMANI KILLING

# Iran, US trade war of words

AFP, Washington

Iran yesterday warned the US against making a “strategic mistake” after President Donald Trump threatened Tehran over reports it planned to avenge the killing of top general Qasem Soleimani.

“We hope that they do not make a new strategic mistake and certainly in the case of any strategic mistake, they will witness Iran’s decisive response,” Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiee told a televised news conference.

Trump vowed on Monday that any attack by Iran would be met with a response “1,000 times greater in magnitude,” after reports that Iran planned to avenge the killing of top general Qasem Soleimani.

A US media report, quoting unnamed officials, said that an alleged Iranian plot to assassinate the US ambassador to South Africa was planned ahead of the US presidential election in November.

“According to press reports, Iran may be planning an assassination, or other attack, against the United States in retaliation for the killing of terrorist leader Soleimani,” Trump tweeted.

“Any attack by Iran, in any form, against the United States will be met with an attack on Iran that will be 1,000 times greater in magnitude!”

On Monday, Iran’s foreign ministry denied the report of an assassination plot as “baseless” and part of “repetitive and rotten methods to create an anti-Iranian atmosphere”.

# EU sends tough message to Xi

*Demands China to lift trade barriers, presses on climate, human rights, Hong Kong*

REUTERS, Brussels

European Union leaders told Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday to open up markets, respect minorities and step back from a crackdown in Hong Kong, also asserting that Europe would no longer be taken advantage of in trade.

Anxious to show that the EU will not take sides in a global standoff between China and the United States, German Chancellor Angela Merkel joined the bloc’s chief executive and chairman to deliver a tough-talking message to Beijing.

“Europe is a player, not a playing field,” European Council President Charles Michel, who chaired the video summit, told reporters in reference to a growing sense in Europe that China has not met its promises to engage in fair and free trade.

With more than a billion euros a day in bilateral trade, the EU is China’s top trading partner, while China is second only to the United States as a market for EU goods and services.

China’s Xi was not part of the post-summit news conference and there was no joint statement, but the state-owned Xinhua News Agency reported that Xi rejected any interference in Chinese affairs, particularly on human rights.

“Chinese people will not accept ‘an instructor’ on human rights and oppose ‘double standards’, Xinhua reported Xi as saying during the video summit. “China is willing to strengthen exchanges with the European side based on the principle of mutual respect so that the two sides can both make progress.”

The European Union accuses China of



**Demonstrators take part in a march against China's changes to school curriculums that remove Mongolian language from core subjects, in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, yesterday.** PHOTO: REUTERS

breaking a host of global trade rules, from overproduction of steel to stealing Western intellectual property, which Beijing denies.

European attitudes have also hardened towards Beijing because of the novel coronavirus, which many scientists believe originated in China, and because of a new security law on Hong Kong that the West says curtails basic rights.

“Overall, cooperation with China must be based on certain principles - reciprocity, fair competition. We are different social systems, but while we are committed to multilateralism, it must be rules-based,” Merkel said.

The EU also wants stronger commitments on climate change from China, world’s top polluter.

China yesterday invited EU observers to visit Xinjiang to “truly understand” the situation. Rights groups say over a million Uighurs languish in political reeducation camps, while a campaign of forced assimilation has targeted academics, religious leaders and activists from mostly Muslim minority groups. Beijing describes its Xinjiang camps as vocational training centres where education is given to lift the population out of poverty and to chisel away at Islamic radicalism.

On Monday US customs said it would bar a raft of Chinese products including cotton, garments and hair products, from Xinjiang over fears they were made using forced labour.



**Amitabh to lend voice to Amazon's Alexa**

AFP, Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan will be the first Indian celebrity to lend his voice to Amazon’s Alexa digital assistant starting next year, as the Silicon Valley giant expands its presence in the massive market.

The 77-year-old actor has been a household name in India for nearly half a century, and his deep baritone is instantly recognisable to listeners in the country of 1.3 billion.

Foreign firms such as Amazon have spent tens of billions of dollars in India in recent years as they fight for a piece of the Asian giant’s burgeoning digital economy.

In a blog post on Monday, Amazon India said Bachchan’s “voice experience” feature will become available for purchase on Alexa next year.

“It will include popular offerings like jokes, weather, shayaris (poetry), motivational quotes, advice and more,” the firm said.