



(From left, clockwise) People react amidst the remnants of their house after a wildfire destroyed it in Phoenix, Oregon; Firefighters monitor the Brattain Fire from Withers Ranch as it burns in the Fremont National Forest in Paisley, Oregon; and a helicopter makes a water drop over a wildfire in the Angeles National Forest during the Bobcat Fire in Los Angeles, California. Intermittently heavy showers brought some relief to flame-stricken western Oregon on Friday, helping firefighters to further subdue deadly blazes that have ravaged much of the state. The fires have raged thousands of homes and businesses and killed at least 35 people in Oregon, California and Washington states.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

India parliament session may be cut short by Covid-19

India's parliament session that began this week is likely to be cut short after 30 lawmakers were found infected with the coronavirus, two senior parliament officials said, as the number of cases in the country rose to 5.3 million. The Indian parliament met for the first time in six months on September 14 and was to function until Oct. 1, but the two officials said its duration could be reduced by a week. India, which recorded 93,337 new infections in the last 24 hours, has been posting the highest single-day caseload in the world since early August, according to a Reuters tally.

Trump says US dealing well with 'tough,' 'smart' Taliban

President Donald Trump on Friday complimented the Taliban for being tough and smart, and said the United States is dealing well with the Afghan militant group. The Taliban, whose rigid Islamist government was overthrown by U.S. forces which invaded Afghanistan a month after the Sept 11, 2001, attacks, began peace negotiations with the Afghan government this week to end two decades of war. "We're dealing very well with the Taliban," Trump told a news conference. "They're very tough, they're very smart, they're very sharp, but you know it's been 19 years and even they are tired of fighting, in all fairness." Trump, who is seeking re-election on Nov 3, is eager to claim an end to America's longest conflict.

Japan's Abe visits war shrine, days after leaving office

Shinzo Abe, who stepped down this week as Japan's prime minister, yesterday visited a war shrine seen by neighbouring countries as a symbol of Tokyo's past militarism. Abe last visited the controversial shrine in December 2013, sparking fury from wartime foes Beijing and Seoul and earning a rare diplomatic rebuke from close ally the United States. Abe posted a picture of himself in a dark suit walking along a wooden corridor at the shrine in central Tokyo on Saturday, escorted by a Shinto priest in a white robe. "Today, I paid my respects at the Yasukuni Shrine and reported to the spirits of the war dead my resignation as prime minister," the nationalistic politician tweeted. Yasukuni honours 2.5 million war dead, mostly Japanese, who perished in the country's wars since the late 19th century.

Amal Clooney quits UK envoy post over Brexit bill

Prominent human rights lawyer Amal Clooney on Friday resigned her post as a UK envoy for media freedom, in protest at the government's "lamentable" decision to breach its EU divorce treaty. Clooney became the third lawyer to part ways with PM Boris Johnson's government, after it introduced legislation that would rewrite its post-Brexit obligations to the European Union over Northern Ireland. Undermining the rule of law "threatens to embolden autocratic regimes that violate international law with devastating consequences all over the world," she wrote in a letter to Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab explaining her decision.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Ginsburg hoped to outlast Trump

AFP, Washington

US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who died Friday at the age of 87, told her granddaughter she didn't want to be replaced until "a new president is installed," US media reported.

A few days before her death, Ginsburg dictated the statement to her granddaughter Clara Spera: "My most fervent wish is that I will not be replaced until a new president is installed," according to NPR.

A progressive icon, Ginsburg -- affectionately known as the Notorious R.B.G. -- was a staunch opponent of President Donald Trump.

She was outspoken in her condemnations of the president, a man she criticized for his "ego" and whose impact on the court she said she did not "even want to contemplate."

Her death less than two months before a high-stakes presidential election will likely see Trump move quickly to name her successor, in an effort to stack the court with conservative justices and make good on one of his campaign trail promises -- dismantling Roe v. Wade, which protects women's right to an abortion.

A tireless champion of justice

AGENCIES

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a diminutive yet towering women's rights champion who became the United States Supreme Court's second female justice over 25 years ago, died Friday at her home in Washington, DC. She was 87.

Ginsburg died of complications from metastatic pancreatic cancer, the court said -- and her death just weeks before Election Day is expected to set off a heated battle over whether US President Donald Trump should nominate, and the Republican-led Senate should confirm, her replacement.

Ginsburg spent her final years on the bench as the unquestioned leader of the court's liberal wing and became something of a rockstar to her admirers.

Young women especially seemed to embrace the court's Jewish grandmother, affectionately calling her the Notorious R.B.G., for her defence of the rights of women and minorities, and the strength and resilience she displayed in the face of personal loss and health crises.

Those health issues included five bouts with cancer beginning in 1999, falls that resulted in broken ribs, insertion of a stent to clear a blocked artery and assorted other hospitalisations after she turned 75.

Her appointment by President Bill Clinton

in 1993 was the first by a Democrat in 26 years. She initially found a comfortable ideological home somewhere left of centre on a conservative court dominated by Republican appointees. Her liberal voice grew stronger the longer she served.



She argued six key cases before the court in the 1970s when she was an architect of the women's rights movement. She won five.

"Ruth Bader Ginsburg does not need a seat on the Supreme Court to earn her place in the American history books," Clinton said at the time of her appointment. "She has already done that."

On the court, where she was known as a straightforward writer, her most significant majority opinions were the 1996 ruling that ordered the Virginia Military Institute to accept women or give up its state funding, and the 2015

decision that upheld independent commissions some states use to draw congressional districts.

Besides civil rights, she took an interest in capital punishment, voting repeatedly to limit its use.

Ginsburg authored powerful dissents of her own in cases involving abortion, voting rights and pay discrimination against women.

She said some were aimed at swaying the opinions of her fellow judges while others were "an appeal to the intelligence of another day" in the hopes that they would provide guidance to future courts.

Justice Ginsburg was born as Joan Ruth Bader, in Brooklyn, New York, in 1933, the second daughter in a middle-class family. Her dream, she has said, was to be an opera singer.

Ginsburg graduated at the top of her Columbia University law school class in 1959 but could not find a law firm willing to hire her. She had "three strikes against her" -- for being Jewish, female and a mother, as she put it in 2007.

She had married her husband, Martin, in 1954, the year she graduated from Cornell University. She attended Harvard University's law school but transferred to Columbia when her husband took a law job there. Martin Ginsburg went on to become a prominent tax lawyer and law professor. He died in 2010. She is survived by two children, Jane and James, and several grandchildren.



Nawaz Sharif considering comeback in Pak politics

NDTV ONLINE

Pakistan's deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is set to make a comeback in active politics following a year-long absence after Pakistan Peoples Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari invited him to virtually attend the Opposition-led multi-party conference aimed at launching a protest movement against the Imran Khan-led government today.

Nawaz Sharif, 70, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) chief, has been living in London since November last year after the Lahore High Court granted him permission to go abroad for treatment.

The three-time former prime minister, who was deposed in 2017, has been sentenced to jail in multiple cases. He was given eight weeks to return but failed to come back due to health complications.

The opposition meet will evolve a strategy to counter the government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) which, they said, has failed to address issues like price hike and poverty.

Quoting sources, Pakistan's Express Tribune reported that the meeting will decide to go for a street movement. It said that every party wanted to send the government led by Khan packing, adding that approaches might be different but this is exactly what all parties are attending the APC for - to agree on a unified approach.

'SNAPBACK' SANCTION ON IRAN

US risks diplomatic isolation

AFP, Washington

The United States will unilaterally declare this weekend that UN sanctions against Iran are once again in force, a move that risks increasing Washington's diplomatic isolation while also stoking international tensions.

"Virtually all UN sanctions on Iran will come back into place this weekend at 8:00 pm Eastern Time (midnight GMT) on Saturday the 19th," said Elliott Abrams, the Trump administration's special representative for Iran.

But on this point, Washington is almost alone in the world: all the other great powers -- China, Russia and also the US' own European allies -- have challenged the claim.

How did the UN arrive at this spectacular stand-off between the leading superpower and the rest of the planet? To answer that, one has to go back at least one month.

In mid-August, President Donald Trump's administration suffered a resounding defeat at the UN Security Council when it tried to extend the embargo on conventional weapons being sent to Tehran, which was due to expire in October.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made an unusually vehement attack on allies France, Britain and Germany, accusing them of

"siding with Iran's Ayatollahs," and on August 20 announced a controversial move known as the "snapback," which aims to re-establish all sanctions against Tehran a month later.

The sanctions were lifted in 2015 when Iran signed on to an international agreement not to seek to build nuclear weapons.

But Trump said that the landmark accord, negotiated by his predecessor Barack Obama, was insufficient and withdrew the US from the agreement in 2018, then renewed and even strengthened Washington's bilateral sanctions.

At the moment, the United States is insisting it is still a participant in the agreement that it stormed out of, but only so that it can activate the "snapback" option.

Britain, France and Germany told the UN Security Council on Friday that UN sanctions relief for Iran -- agreed under a 2015 nuclear deal -- would continue beyond Sept.20, when the United States asserts that all the measures should be reimposed.

In a letter to the 15-member body, seen by Reuters, the three European parties to the nuclear deal and long-time US allies said any decision or action taken to reimpose UN sanctions "would be incapable of legal effect." The United States quit the nuclear deal in 2018.



A pro-democracy protester holds a placard as he attends a mass rally against government in Bangkok, Thailand, yesterday. Thousands of protesters in Thailand's capital demonstrated against the government of former coup leader and Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha on yesterday, with many also demanding reforms to the powerful monarchy.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Vaccines for all Americans by April

Promises Trump as record surge in cases in Europe brings back lockdown fears

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump said he expects enough Covid-19 vaccines "for every American" will be produced by next April, as a host of European countries imposed new local restrictions to reduce their spiralling case loads.

Israel went a step further, becoming the first major country to impose another national lockdown that will last for three weeks.

As leader of the world's hardest-hit country, Trump sees the swift approval of a vaccine as vital to immunizing his reelection campaign against criticism by Joe Biden, who is leading in polls in the run-up to the November 3 vote.

"Hundreds of millions of doses will be available every month, and we expect to have enough vaccines for every American by April," he told reporters.

The president has hinted the first vaccine could be green-lighted by October, a timeline viewed as overly optimistic by his own health officials who say the end of the year or start of 2021 is more likely.

The pandemic has killed at least 953,025 people in the world since emerging in China late



last year, according to an AFP tally at 1100 GMT yesterday based on official sources.

More than 30.5 million people have been infected.

The United States has the most deaths with 198,597, followed by Brazil with 135,793, India with 85,619, Mexico 72,803 and Britain 41,732.

European countries from Denmark to Greece announced new restrictions on Friday to curb surging coronavirus infections in some of their largest cities, while Britain was reported to be considering a new national lockdown.

Madrid authorities imposed a partial lockdown on nearly a million people, the British government

unveiled new measures limiting social contact in several regions, and Ireland banned indoor dining at restaurants and pubs in Dublin.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said there was "no question" that his country was "now seeing a second wave coming in" as he toured the site of a new vaccine center.

Cases in the United Kingdom almost doubled to 6,000 per day in the latest reporting week, hospital admissions rose and infection rates soared across parts of northern England and London.

Authorities in the southern French city of Nice banned gatherings of more than 10 people in public spaces and restricted bar opening hours, following fresh curbs introduced earlier this week in Marseille and Bordeaux.

In Denmark, where the 454 new infections on Friday was close to a record of 473 in April, PM Mette Frederiksen said the limit on public gatherings would be lowered to 50 people from 100 and ordered bars and restaurants to close early.

Iceland ordered entertainment venues and pubs in the capital area to close for four days between September 18-21, while in Ireland indoor restaurant dining and indoor events were banned in Dublin after a surge in cases in recent days.

US MOVES ON TIKTOK, WECHAT  
China launches sanctions regime

AFP, Shanghai

China yesterday launched a mechanism that would allow it to sanction foreign companies, upping the ante in a tech war with the United States a day after Washington moved to curb popular Chinese apps TikTok and WeChat.

China's long-expected "unreliable entities list" is seen as a weapon for Beijing to retaliate against the United States, which has used its own "entity list" to shut Chinese telecom giant Huawei out of the US market, while also moving against TikTok and WeChat.

Its implementation comes just a day after the US Commerce Department stepped up the pressure by ordering a ban on downloads of video app TikTok and effectively blocking use of WeChat, the Chinese super-app.

An announcement by China's Ministry of Commerce did not mention any specific foreign entities that could be targeted. But it said the new system would consider sanctions on entities whose activities "harm China's national sovereignty, security, and development interests" or violate "internationally accepted economic and trade rules".

Punitive measures may include fines against the foreign entity, banning it from conducting trade and investment in China, and restrictions on the entry of personnel or equipment into the country.