



CALIFORNIA WILDFIRE

(From left, clockwise) Smoke rise from The Hilton hotel in Santa Rosa, California; a DC-10 aircraft drops flame retardant chemicals in order to try and contain the spread of the fire near the city of Orange; and blocks of residential buildings are seen burnt to ashes in Coffey Park neighborhood of Santa Rosa. More than a dozen fast-moving wildfires tearing through California's wine country have killed at least 10 people, destroying hundreds of homes, authorities said Monday.



N Korea hacked Seoul's war plan

Says report; EU, UN expand sanctions

South Korean computer hackers have stolen hundreds of classified military documents from South Korea, including detailed wartime operational plans involving its US ally, a report said yesterday.

The report came as South Korea said it was maintaining full military readiness following intense speculation of a possible ballistic missile test by the North as it marks a key anniversary.

North Korea often uses provocative tests to mark key historical commemorations and the country is celebrating the 72nd anniversary of the founding of the ruling Workers' Party on Tuesday.

Rhee Cheol-Hee, a lawmaker for the ruling Democratic party, said the hackers had broken into the South Korea's military network last September and gained access to 235 gigabytes of sensitive data, the Chosun Ilbo daily reported.

Among the leaked documents were Operational Plans 5015 for use in case of war with the North and including procedures for "decapitation" attacks on leader Kim Jong-Un, the paper quoted Rhee as saying.

Rhee, a member of parliament's defence committee, could not be reached for comment but his office said he had been quoted correctly.

It also comes amid heightened fears of conflict on the Korean peninsula, fuelled by US President Donald Trump's continued threats of military action against Pyongyang to tame its weapons ambitions.

In his latest tweet over the weekend, Trump reiterated that diplomatic efforts with North Korea have consistently

Spain remains intact, for now

Catalan leader proclaims independence but suspends it pending talks

Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont yesterday said he had accepted the "mandate of the people" for his region's independence from Spain but suspended the declaration to allow more time for talks with Madrid.

tion, concerned over the country's biggest upheaval since its transition to democracy in the 1970s.

EU nations are watching developments closely amid concern that Catalan independence could put further pressure on the bloc still reeling from the fallout from

the building as crowds watched the session on giant screens, waving Catalan flags and some brandishing signs reading "democracy."

Reaction among those who had hoped to witness a historic moment for a region deeply divided over independence was mixed.



In a speech to regional lawmakers in Barcelona, Puigdemont stopped himself from declaring an outright split but left the door to secession open, leaving some political rivals scratching their heads.



Police deployed en masse around the regional parliament, blocking public access to a park that houses

would not negotiate on Catalonia's independence.

Pro-independence and pro-independence supporters have staged mass rallies in Barcelona over the past week, highlighting divisions in Catalonia.

"At stake is the future of a region of 7.5 million people deeply divided over independence, one of Spain's economic powerhouses whose drive to break away has raised concern for stability in the European Union.

"I assume the mandate for the 50-year-old asked the Catalan parliament to "suspend the effects of the independence declaration to initiate dialogue in the coming weeks."

The central government fired back, with a spokesman rejecting what Madrid termed Catalonia's "tacit" independence declaration.

"Political leaders in Catalonia, Spain and Europe have come out against an independence declara-

People react after seeing President Carles Puigdemont's address at the Catalan regional parliament on a giant screen in Barcelona, Spain, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Britain's shock decision to leave.

Police deployed en masse around the regional parliament, blocking public access to a park that houses

"In essence we're happy but I was expecting more," said 66-year-old Pere Valldeu.

Madrid has repeatedly said it

Turkey boycotts US ambassador

APP, Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday vowed that Turkish officials would boycott the US ambassador to Ankara, stepping up one of the worst rows in decades between the two Nato allies.

Erdogan said Turkey no longer regarded ambassador John Bass as the US representative to Turkey after American missions in the country stopped issuing visas.

The dispute erupted last week when Turkey arrested a Turkish employee of the American consulate on suspicion of links to the group blamed for last year's failed coup.

In response, the United States stopped issuing non-immigrant visas from its missions in Turkey, prompting Turkish missions in the United States to hit back with a tit-for-tat step of their own.

Fear grows over new missile test as Pyongyang marks key anniversary

APP, Seoul



failed, adding that "only one thing will work".

Citing Seoul's defence ministry, Rhee said that 80 percent of the leaked documents had yet to be identified.

But the contingency plan for the South's special forces was stolen, he said, as well as details about annual joint military drills with the US and information on key military facilities and power plants.

A ministry spokesman declined to confirm the report, citing intelligence matters.

Pyongyang has a 6,800-strong unit of trained cyber-warfare specialists, according to the South Korean government. It has been accused of launching high-profile cyber-attacks including the 2014 hacking of Sony Pictures.

The European Union yesterday extended sanctions aimed at punishing North Korea for its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, banning the import of textiles from the parish state and limiting sales of crude oil.

Earlier, the UN also slapped a global ban on four vessels found violating sanctions against North Korea.

A spokesman for the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said its military was closely monitoring the movements of the North Korean army and maintaining full readiness.

Consistent movements of personnel and equipment were being detected in certain locations in the North, Yonhap news agency reported, suggesting that preparations for another weapons test might be under way.

Pyongyang conducted its fifth nuclear test on the anniversary of the founding day of North Korea last year.

EU sets Dec deadline

APP, Brussels

EU President Donald Tusk yesterday warned that the bloc may rethink whether a Brexit deal is possible if there is no progress towards trade talks by December as hoped.

"We hear from London that the UK government is preparing for a 'no deal' scenario. I would like to say very clearly that the EU is not working on such a scenario," Tusk told the EU Committee of the Regions in Brussels.

"We are negotiating in good faith, and we still hope that the so-called 'sufficient progress' will be achieved by December," he added.

With the two sides exchanging barbs about who is to blame about the sluggish pace of the negotiations, EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier separately reminded London that "Brexit is not a game".

Former Polish premier Tusk appeared to dash London's hopes that EU leaders will use a summit on October 19 to agree to move on from decade-long talks to the next phase of negotiations, dealing with a future relationship.

BREXIT BREAKTHROUGH



May told the EU on Monday that the 'ball is in their court' after he unveiled a range of Brexit compromises in a speech in Florence in September, and called for a two-year transition period.

Britain also on Monday outlined proposals for new laws to set tariffs and quotas including if Britain leaves the European Union with no agreement in place, as it prepares for a post-Brexit customs system.

The EU and the UK are this week holding a fifth round of Brexit divorce negotiations, the last before next week's EU summit to decide on whether there is 'sufficient progress' in the talks.

I'm first lady, OK?'

Melania slams Ivana's comments

US First Lady Melania Trump accused her husband's first wife Ivana of making "attention-seeking and self-serving noise" Monday, after the former Mrs Trump jokingly referred to herself as the first lady while trying to sell her memoirs.

In an interview with ABC News to promote her new book -- "Raising Trump" -- the 68-year-old Ivana Trump attempted a little joke when describing her longstanding relationship with Trump.

"I have a direct number to the White House but I don't really want to call him there because Melania is there, and I don't really want to cause any kind of jealousy or something like that because I'm basically first Trump wife, OK? I'm first lady, OK?" she told ABC, with a laugh.

Melania Trump, 47 and normally very reserved, was not amused. In a terse worded statement from her spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham, she said she "is honored by her role as First Lady of the United States... She plans to use her title and role to help children, not sell books," Grisham said.

Ivana is the mother of Trump's three eldest children: Donald Jr, Ivanka and Eric.



Rivals trade blows as Japan campaign starts

APP, Tokyo

Tokyo's popular governor Yuriko Koike and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe traded barbs yesterday as the gloves came off for the official start of a snap election campaign in the world's third-largest economy.

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"Addressing hundreds of commuters at a busy Tokyo station via loudspeaker, Koike called on supporters to 'end the politics of Abe', lashing out to the long-serving Premier over recent scandals that have weighed on his popularity.

"The political status quo has continued while politics itself has lost the public's confidence," charged the former TV anchor

Abé cut a contrasting figure by kicking off his offensive in the bucolic farming country of Fukushima, signalling his commitment to rebuilding the region hard hit by the 2011 nuclear power plant meltdown.

He pledged a major expansion of social programmes, including offering free early-childhood education in a bid to get more women into work, while also talking tough on North Korea. In an obvious dig at Koike, he urged voters to consider his policies, rather than catchy soundbites.

Koike's 'Party of Hope' has swallowed up most of the main opposition party in the space of a week, positioning Japan's static political landscape.

A poll in the top-selling Yomiuri daily suggested that 32 percent of voters plan to vote for Abe's conservative LDP with 13 percent for the Party of Hope.



'War on coal over'

Pruitt says US to end climate plan

APP, Washington

The head of the US Environmental Protection Agency said Monday that President Donald Trump's administration will move to repeal his predecessor Barack Obama's plan to restrict greenhouse gas emissions.

Speaking in Kentucky at a political event attended by coal miners, EPA chief Scott Pruitt said he would Tuesday "be signing a proposed rule to withdraw the so-called Clean Power Plan of the past administration."

The Clean Power Plan sought to reduce carbon emissions in the United States from power plants for the first time -- in line with commitments taken by the Obama administration under the Paris Climate Agreement, from which Trump has declared his intention to withdraw.

"The war against coal is over," said Pruitt, claiming that the rule, enacted in 2015, "was about picking winners and losers."

The past administration was using every bit of power and authority to use the EPA to pick winners and losers and how we generate electricity in this country. That's wrong."

Pruitt, a 49-year-old Republican, is a known fossil-fuel ally, and repeatedly sued the EPA when he was Oklahoma's state attorney general.

He is also a skeptic of climate change, and said earlier this year that he believes carbon dioxide is not a primary contributor to global warming.

NEWS IN brief

Palestinian rivals start Cairo talks

APP, Cairo

Palestinian rivals Fatah and Hamas began detailed negotiations behind closed doors in Cairo yesterday on ending their crippling decade-long split, a delegate told AFP. The talks follow a key breakthrough last week when Palestinian Authority prime minister Rami Hamdallah visited Hamas-run Gaza for the first time since 2015 and his ministers officially took control of government departments there.

Liberians vote to elect new president

APP, Monrovia

Liberians yesterday started voting to elect a new president in a contest set to complete the country's first democratic transition of power in more than 70 years. The country's 2.18 million registered voters are choosing from a crowded field of 20 presidential candidates and also elect 73 seats to the lower chamber, House of Representatives.

Thai junta chief vows elections in Nov 2018

APP, Bangkok

Thailand's junta chief yesterday said the country would hold elections in November 2018, more than four years after the military seized power and imposed a blanket ban on politics. Pravit won't be elected until he promised immediately after his May 2014 coup to return power to civilians within 18 months.

