

**MORE EUROPEAN
REGIONS WHICH
CAN FOLLOW
CATALONIA**

FAROE ISLANDS (DENMARK)
After voting narrowly for independence in 1946, the Faroe Islands have been an autonomous, self-governing country within the kingdom of Denmark since 1948. Citing linguistic and cultural differences as well as the 560 miles (900km) that separate the two geographically, four local parties – accounting for 17 of the 33 seats in parliament – seek full independence as a sovereign state.

LOMBARDY AND VENETO (ITALY)
One of Italy's wealthiest regions and home to Milan, Lombardy wants greater autonomy from Rome and more say on how to spend its money. Many voters here and in Veneto (which's capital is Venice) believe their taxes go to the poorer south rather than contributing to local investment.

SICILY (ITALY)
Promoting a distinct local heritage, traditions, culture and language, several movements in Italy's autonomous region of Sicily seek greater autonomy or full independence.

BASQUE COUNTRY (SPAIN)
Basque nationalists have sought political unity and nationhood for all Basque-speaking people in Spain and France since the 19th century. The campaign has become less bloody in recent years after the militant separatist group Eta announced an end to half a century of violence in 2011.

CORSICA (FRANCE)
Corsica's nationalist movement has been seeking greater autonomy for the island since the 1960s. The National Liberation Front of Corsica has been demanding independence since 1976 with a campaign of bombings and assassinations – the island's prefect was killed in 1998 – but recently announced an "end to military operations".

BAVARIA (GERMANY)
Bavarian nationalism has been strong since the state's incorporation into Germany in 1871. While the separatist Bavaria party was a significant player in the 1950s, its electoral share fell over subsequent decades. However, a 2017 poll suggested one in three Bavarians favour independence.

SCOTLAND (UK)
Scotland began seeking home rule in the mid-19th century and the Scottish National party has been campaigning for full independence since it was founded in 1934. More than 84% of Scottish voters cast their ballots in an independence referendum in 2014, with 44.7% voting in favour and 55.3% against.

WALES (UK)
Wales has had an independence movement since the mid-19th century. Like Scotland, Wales voted in favour of devolution in a 1997 referendum. Recent opinion polling suggests more than 40% of Welsh voters support more powers for the assembly, while about 25% are in favour of full independence. SOURCE: WEBSITES



(From top, anti-clockwise) People celebrate after the Catalan regional parliament passes the vote of independence; Catalan president Carles Puigdemont applauds after the parliament decision in Barcelona; and Spain's Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy acknowledges applause after Senate in Madrid decided to impose direct rule over Catalonia.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

'Our goal is not war'

Mattis talks diplomacy in South Korea ahead of Trump's Asia tour

REUTERS, Panmunjom

US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis emphasized diplomatic efforts to resolve the North Korean missile and nuclear crisis as he stood at the tense and heavily fortified border between North and South yesterday, saying: "Our goal is not war."

His remarks came before US President Donald Trump - who has threatened to destroy the North if necessary - leaves on his first trip to Asia next week, including a stop in South Korea to meet President Moon Jae-in.

For his part, Moon, after talks with Mattis, said the "aggressive deployment" of US strategic assets in the region, which have included overflights by US bombers, had been effective in deterring the North Korean threat.

Tension between North Korea and the United States has been building after a series of nuclear and missile tests by Pyongyang and bellicose verbal exchanges between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, stoking fears any miscalculation could lead to an armed confrontation.

"North Korean provocations continue to threaten regional and global security despite unanimous condemnation by the United Nations Security Council," Mattis said in prepared remarks as he visited the demilitarized zone (DMZ).

"As Secretary of State Tillerson has made clear, our goal is not war, but rather the complete, verifiable, and irreversible

denuclearization of the Korean peninsula."

Standing alongside Mattis, South Korean Defense Minister Song Young-moo said: "We together will continue to defend peace through strong will and strong might."

Ahead of Trump's visit to Asia, Mattis has emphasized diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis during his week-long trip to the region.

"That's really what it was all about – to keep the (North Korea) effort firmly in the diplomatic lane for resolution," Mattis said earlier this week after three days of meetings with Asian defense chiefs in the Philippines.

The United States on Thursday imposed sanctions on seven North Korean individuals and three entities for "flagrant" human rights abuses, including killings, torture, forced labor and the hunting down of asylum seekers abroad.

In a speech last month at the United Nations, Trump threatened to destroy North Korea if necessary to defend the United States and allies. Kim has blasted Trump as "mentally deranged."

Separately, North Korea released a South Korean fishing boat which had been found to be in North Korean waters illegally, state media said. The crew of 10 were released yesterday evening, a spokesman for South Korea's coastguard told Reuters. The return of the boat, which had been reported as missing from Saturday, may have eased already strained relations between North and South.

N KOREA CRISIS

US sanctions more North Koreans over human rights abuses

North releases a South Korean fishing boat

Iraqi forces, Kurds agree on ceasefire

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraqi forces and Kurdish Peshmerga fighters reached an agreement yesterday to stop fighting in northern Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) said, although the status of any ceasefire remained unclear.

A spokesman in Baghdad for the US-led coalition against Islamic State earlier said the deal covered all fronts in the conflict, which broke out after Kurdish authorities held an independence referendum last month in areas of northern Iraq.

However, he later told Reuters that the truce had not been officially agreed, while an Iraqi military spokesman declined to comment.

According to the KRG, which is based in the Kurdish autonomous region's capital of Erbil, the ceasefire entered effect at 1:00 am yesterday.

"The ceasefire is holding," Vahal Ali, the director of KRG President Masoud Barzani's media office, told Reuters. "Diplomatic efforts are underway to set a date for talks to start between Erbil and Baghdad."

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi urging for dialogue to start, the Iraqi central government said in a statement.

Iraqi government forces, Iranian-backed militias and Kurdish troops fought alongside each other to defeat Islamic State, also called ISIS, but the alliance has faltered with the militants largely defeated in the country.

CATALONIA'S LONG TUSSLE WITH SPAIN

1714: BARCELONA FALLS: The region of Catalonia sides with Austria and its allies in the War of Succession but its capital Barcelona falls to Spanish and French forces in 1714 after months of siege. Its autonomous institutions are dissolved. The defeat is on September 11 which becomes Catalonia's National Day, enduring today as an enthusiastic and nationalistic celebration honouring the defenders of the city.

1932: FIRST AUTONOMY STATUTE: The Second Spanish Republic is declared in 1931 and the king goes into exile. The following year Spain's parliament grants Catalonia a statute of autonomy for the first time, allowing broad powers over its internal affairs. Both Spanish and Catalan are recognised as official languages.

1934: A STATE FOR A FEW HOURS: On October 6, 1934 left-wing republican Lluís Companys declares the region "a Catalan state in the federal republic of Spain". The Spanish army cracks down immediately; just 10 hours later, after dozens of deaths, Companys surrenders.

1939-1975: SUPPRESSION UNDER FRANCO: In January 1939 General Francisco Franco's forces take control of Barcelona after a three-year civil war in Spain. Catalan autonomy is suppressed and the speaking of Catalan in public is banned across Spain until Franco's death in 1975.

1978: AUTONOMY RESTORED: Spain's new constitution in 1978 recognises Catalonia among various distinct communities in the country but lays down the "indissoluble unity" of the Spanish nation. In a referendum the following year, Catalans approve a new autonomy statute for greater powers in areas such as healthcare, education and culture.

2006: AUTONOMY EXPANDED: A new version of statute is approved, increasing Catalonia's fiscal and judicial powers and describing the region as a "nation".

2010: NO 'NATION': After an appeal, Spain's Constitutional Court rules that the word nation in the statute has "no legal value", even though it approves other parts of the 2006 autonomy charter. It also rejects the "preferential" use of the Catalan language in municipal services. The following month, hundreds of thousands of people protest in Barcelona.

2014: SYMBOLIC REFERENDUM: In defiance of Madrid, Catalonia presses ahead with a symbolic referendum on independence in November. Turnout is just 37 percent, of which over 80 percent vote in favour.

2015: PRO-INDEPENDENCE MAJORITY: In September the pro-independence Together For Yes alliance secures 62 seats in the regional assembly and the radical left-wing separatist group CUP wins 10, giving them together an absolute majority. In November all 72 pro-independence lawmakers vote to start the process to secede. The resolution is struck down by Spain's Constitutional Court.

2017: INDEPENDENCE VOTE: A new independence referendum, deemed illegal by the central government, is held on October 1. Turnout is about 43 percent, of which 90 percent back independence. Madrid moves to assert control but Catalan lawmakers vote on October 27 to declare independence from Spain. SOURCE: AFP

Billionaires' number jumps 10%: study

AFP, Geneva

The number of billionaires worldwide rose above 1,500 last year, a 10 percent jump from 2015, due largely to a surge in Asia, Swiss banking giant UBS and auditors PwC said Thursday.

In an annual report, UBS and PwC said that last year marked the first time it recorded more billionaires in Asia (637) than in the United States (563), crediting the rise of China's entrepreneurs.

Europe took third spot in the report's billionaire database with 342.

The total wealth controlled by the ultra-rich group also shot up to \$6 trillion (5.1 trillion euros), marking a 17 percent rise on the previous year when billionaire wealth actually shrank, the report said.

The group of 1,542 billionaires either owns or partly controls companies that employ 27.7 million people, it added.

While the chasm between the world's rich and poor remains a burning political issue across the continents, UBS and PwC said that billionaire assets are increasingly likely to benefit the needy.

"Looking further forward, we estimate that \$2.4 trillion (2.1 trillion euros) of billionaire wealth will be transferred in the next two decades as billionaires age, with a significant amount going to philanthropic causes," the report said.



A royal chariot carrying the ashes of the late Thai king Bhumbol Adulyadej is escorted towards the gates of the Grand Palace during the funeral procession to transport his ashes from the Royal Crematorium to the Grand Palace in Bangkok, yesterday. Inset, A woman cries as she shows respect to the late king. PHOTO: AFP

UN REPORT ON APRIL SARIN ATTACK

Syria regime to blame

AGENCIES

United Nations investigators on Thursday blamed a sarin gas massacre on Bashar al-Assad's regime, as the United States renewed its warning that he has no role in Syria's future.

The expert panel's report and tough remarks by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson overshadowed the announcement that UN-sponsored peace talks will resume next month.

More than 80 people died on April 4 this year when sarin gas projectiles were fired into Khan Sheikhun, a rebel-held town in the Idlib province of northwestern Syria.

Images of dead and dying victims, including young children, in the aftermath of the attack provoked global outrage and a US cruise missile strike on a regime air base.

The UN placed the death toll at 83 while the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it was 87. Syria and its ally Russia had sug-

gested that a rebel weapon may have detonated on the ground but the UN panel confirmed Western intelligence reports that blamed the regime.

"The panel is confident that the Syrian Arab Republic is responsible for the release of sarin at Khan Sheikhun



'Many inconsistencies' in UN report: Russia
No role for Assad in Syria's future: US
UN rights chief decries hunger in Syrian siege

on 4 April 2017," the report, seen by AFP, says.

Russia yesterday criticised the UN report with a deputy foreign minister saying it contained inconsistencies and unverified evidence.

"Even the first cursory read shows that many inconsistencies, logical discrepan-

cies, using doubtful witness accounts and unverified evidence... all of this is still (in the report)," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told Interfax news agency.

UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein said yesterday the humanitarian

situation in the besieged eastern suburbs of Damascus is "an outrage" and parties to the conflict must allow food and medicine to reach at least 350,000 trapped Syrians, reported Reuters.

The tightening siege has pushed people to the verge of famine in the rebel enclave, residents said.

Court throws Aussie govt in turmoil

AFP, Sydney

The Australian government was thrown into turmoil Friday after losing its one-seat majority with the nation's deputy prime minister kicked out of parliament over his dual citizenship.

Barnaby Joyce was among seven politicians embroiled in a crisis after falling afoul of a previously obscure constitutional rule that bars dual citizens from sitting in parliament.

The court move reintroduced uncertainty into a political landscape that has been turbulent in recent years, with four different prime ministers serving since 2013.

Joyce, the leader of the rural-based National Party, is Australian-born but found out in August he automatically acquired New Zealand citizenship through his father.

Apartheid again!

South African farmers jailed for forcing black man into coffin

AFP, Middelburg

A South African judge yesterday handed down jail terms of 19 and 16 years to two white farmers who filmed themselves forcing a black man into a coffin and threatening to burn him alive.

Willem Oosthuizen and Theo Martins Jackson, who both shifted nervously in the dock, laid their heads on the bench after their sentencing while female family members wept in the public gallery.

"The conduct of the accused was most dehumanising and disgusting," said Judge Segopotje Mphahlele, handing down sentence in the High Court sitting in Middelburg, 165 kilometres (100 miles) east of Johannesburg.

They had pleaded not guilty over the incident last year in the eastern province of Mpumalanga, saying they only intended to scare Victor Mlotshwa whom they accused of stealing copper cables from their farm.

The judge said it was not the first time that the men had forced someone into a coffin against their will, saying their behaviour "raised and fuelled racial tension" in South Africa.

Two clips of footage taken on their mobile phones showed the assailants shoving Mlotshwa down into the wooden coffin and pressing the lid closed with their boots as he begged for mercy.

When the first phone footage emerged several months ago, it triggered national outrage and led to the arrest of the two men.

NEWSIN brief

Opioids a US public health emergency

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency on Thursday, stopping short of a national emergency declaration he promised months ago that would have freed up more federal money. Opioids, primarily prescription painkillers, heroin and fentanyl, are fueling the drug overdoses. More than 100 Americans die daily from related overdoses, according to the CDC.

1 dead as fresh polls protests in Kenya

AFP, Nairobi

One person was shot dead as fresh protests hit western Kenya yesterday, a day after a deeply-divisive election re-run which was marred by low voter turnout and violence, taking the death toll to six. The latest bloodshed occurred as angry opposition supporters took to streets to protest plans by the election board to stage a poll today in four areas where voting had been blocked by election day unrest.

US House passes Trump's tax cuts

REUTERS, Washington

The US House of Representatives helped pave the way on Thursday for deep tax cuts sought by President Donald Trump and Republican leaders, but barely overcame a revolt within party ranks. The Republican-controlled House voted 216-212 to pass a budget blueprint for the 2018 fiscal year. 20 Republicans voted against the bill.