



People cool off at the beach during the heatwave in the southeastern coastal town of Benidorm, Spain, yesterday. *Inset*, The effects of the heat haze is seen in this photograph as pedestrians cross a street during a heatwave in Tokyo yesterday. Record high temperatures around Europe this summer have triggered deadly wildfires from Sweden to Greece.

PHOTO: AFP

ARSON ATTACKS FROM GAZA

Israel reimposes fuel blockade

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel reimposed a blockade on fuel deliveries to Gaza yesterday citing a resurgence in kites carrying firebombs over the border and signalling a brief pause in tensions may be ending.

After two deadly military flare-ups in the Gaza Strip and a ceasefire brokered by Egypt and UN officials last month, the number of firebombs being launched over the border to burn Israeli farmland had diminished.

But Wednesday saw seven fires started by the incendiaries, and Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman later announced Israel's Kerem Shalom goods crossing with Gaza would be closed for fuel deliveries "until further notice."

"The decision was made in light of the continued terror with Molotov cocktails and the friction on the fence, Lieberman's office said, referring to months of clashes along the Gaza border between the army and Palestinian protesters.

A previous ban on fuel deliveries last month had resulted in warnings from UN officials that emergency fuel supplies were running low and the shortage was beginning to affect hospitals and water sanitation.

The coastal enclave, run by Islamist movement Hamas, suffers from a severe lack of electricity and relies on fuel-powered generators during outages that last hours at a time.

Israel closed the crossing to most deliveries on July 9 in response to the firebombs and border tension before tightening the blockade to cover fuel on July 17. It lifted the fuel ban a week later.

Months of tension on the Gaza border resulted in two separate military flare-ups in July. The first, on July 14, saw dozens of Israeli air strikes that killed two Palestinians, while some 200 rockets and mortar rounds were fired from the enclave at Israel in response. On July 20, Israel unleashed a wave of strikes across the territory after a soldier was shot dead on the border. Three Hamas militants were killed.

US-Turkey ties hit new low

Washington slaps sanctions on two senior Turkish ministers; Ankara vows to retaliate

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey was yesterday drawing up retaliatory measures after Washington slapped sanctions on two Turkish ministers in the one of the biggest crises between the two Nato allies in recent years.

Tensions have soared over Turkey's detention on terror charges of American pastor Andrew Brunson, who was first held in October 2016 and was moved to house arrest last week.

The sanctions targeting Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul and Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu freeze any property or assets on US soil held by the two ministers, and bar US citizens from doing business with them.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders told journalists both ministers had "played leading roles in the arrest and detention of Pastor Brunson", who led a Protestant church in the Aegean city of Izmir.

The Turkish foreign ministry warned that the move "will greatly damage constructive efforts" to solve outstanding issues and told Washington it would retaliate.

"Without delay, there will be a response to this aggressive atti-

The standoff appears to be one of the most serious crises between Turkey and the United States in modern history, along with the rows over the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus and the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.



tude that will not serve any purpose," it said.

Hours before the sanctions were announced, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused Washington of showing an "evangelist, Zionist mentality".

"A scandalous decision from Washington," said the headline in the pro-government Hurriyet daily. "A historic rupture," added the opposition Cumhuriyet.

In a rare show of unity by Turkey's parliament, two opposi-

tion parties joined Erdogan's ruling party and its main ally by agreeing a joint statement opposing the sanctions.

The row over Brunson escalated last week when US Vice President Mike Pence said Turkey would face "significant sanctions" if this "innocent man of faith" was not freed.

His language was immediately echoed by President Donald Trump, who had enjoyed a relatively warm.

The court trying Brunson has repeatedly refused to allow him to go free. The next hearing is October 12 with the pastor facing 35 years in jail if convicted.

He is accused of acting on behalf of two groups deemed by Turkey to be terrorist organisations -- the movement led by US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen who Ankara says was behind the 2016 coup bid and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

HEATWAVES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Large area of China could soon be uninhabitable

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Vast swathes of China could be left uninhabitable towards the end of the century due to heatwaves scorching the region, according to new research.

As carbon emissions soar and farmland expands across the fertile North China Plain, this area could soon see the biggest climate change-induced loss of human life on Earth, says the study by the team at America's Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Their research suggested that human activity will make deadly heatwaves across the region far more likely in the coming years and leave farming there impossible.

The North China Plain is an important slice of land stretching the length of the Yellow River. It is the most populous region of the most populous country on Earth, and it plays a vital role in feeding the nation's 1.4 billion inhabitants.

The scientists behind the study warned that unless China -- the world largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions -- curbs its pollution there could be serious consequences for its own population.

In their paper, the researchers predict that in the latter half of the century temperatures and humidity will regularly combine across the North China Plain to reach levels at which a healthy person may not be able to survive outdoors for more than six hours. Farming under such conditions would be next to impossible.

The research is the latest in a series conducted by the MIT team, with their other studies focusing on deadly heatwaves striking the Persian Gulf and South Asia.

The report comes as yet another study, published in the journal PLOS Medicine, predicts deaths resulting from severe heatwaves will spike dramatically in tropical regions over the next 60 years.



Israel sees benefits in Assad gains

Russia to deploy military police on Golan Heights

AFP, Jerusalem

Gains by President Bashar al-Assad's forces in the Syrian civil war present advantages for Israel even though the two countries remain technically at war, Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman said yesterday. Meanwhile, Russia yesterday said it will deploy its military police on the Golan Heights frontier between Syria and Israel, after weeks of mounting volatility in the area.

Assad's sweeping away of rebels in southwestern Syria has worried Israel, which believes it could allow his Iranian backers to entrench their troops close to the frontier.

Sergei Rudskoi, a senior Russian defence ministry official, said that Russian military police yesterday began patrolling in the Golan Heights and planned to set up eight observation posts in the area.

He said the Russian presence there was in support of United Nations peacekeepers on the Golan Heights who, he said, had suspended their activities in the area in 2012 because their safety was endangered.

He said the Russian presence there was temporary, and that the observation posts would be handed over to Syrian government forces once the situation stabilised.

Tense calm grips Harare

Army clear streets after violence as Zimbabwe awaits polls results

AFP, Harare

Soldiers and police cleared the streets of central Harare yesterday a day after a deadly crackdown on protestors as the Zimbabwean authorities begged for patience over the release of the results from landmark presidential elections.

The vote -- the first since autocrat Robert Mugabe was ousted last year -- turned bloody on Wednesday when troops opened fire on demonstrations against alleged electoral fraud, leaving three dead and prompting an international outcry.

The Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) pleaded with the public to give it time to collate the results, vowing to release them before Saturday.

"ZEC implores the public to be patient as we collate the final results," said ZEC commissioner Qhubani Moyo.

"Let me not give a specific time whether today or tomorrow, but there is significant progress that is happening."

The government accused the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition party of inciting the unrest and vowed to enforce a security clampdown.

But President Emmerson Mnangagwa said he wanted an independent investigation into the killings, and that he sought to settle differences "peacefully".

In a late-night press conference on Wednesday, Home Affairs Minister Obert Mpofu warned further protests would not be tolerated.

The MDC said the army had opened fire "for no apparent reason," killing unarmed civilians.

The presidential election race has pitted 75-year-old Mnangagwa, Mugabe's former ally in ZANU-PF, against the MDC's leader, Nelson Chamisa, 35 years his junior.

Chamisa yesterday ratcheted up pressure over the country's election count, saying he had won the presidential vote and that the result was being rigged.

"We have won this election," he told reporters. "What they have been trying to do of late is to play around... that is rigging, that is manipulation, trying to bastardise the result, and that we will not allow."

In official results from the parliamentary election, also held on Monday, ZANU-PF won easily -- suggesting Mnangagwa would be on course to retain the presidency.

But the MDC has said it won the elections outright and accused the government and ZEC of rigging the count.

The elections had been meant to turn the page on years of violence-marred elections and brutal repression of dissent after Mugabe's 37-year rule was ended by a brief military takeover in November.

A credible and peaceful vote was meant to end Zimbabwe's international isolation and attract foreign investment to revive the shattered economy.

If no presidential candidate wins at least 50 percent of the ballots cast in the first round, a run-off is scheduled

Death penalty is inadmissible

Says Vatican changing stance

REUTERS, Vatican City

The Roman Catholic Church formally changed its teaching yesterday to declare the death penalty inadmissible whatever the circumstance, a move likely to be criticised in countries where capital punishment is legal.

The 1.2 billion-member Catholic Church had for centuries allowed the death penalty in extreme cases, but the position began to change under Pope John Paul II, who died in 2005.

The Vatican said the change to its universal catechism, a summary of Church teaching, reflected Pope Francis' total opposition to capital punishment.

According to the new entry in the catechism: "the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person."

The Church was working "with determination" for the abolition of the death penalty worldwide, the new teaching says.

The new provision is likely to run into stiff opposition from conservative Catholics in the United States and other countries where capital punishment is legal and many believers support it.

Last year, 53 countries issued death sentences and 23 of them executed at least 993 people, according to Amnesty International, with most executions in China, Iran, Saudi



Kurdish refugee wins 'Nobel of mathematics'

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Kurdish refugee turned Cambridge University math professor Caucher Birkar was among four winners Wednesday in Rio de Janeiro of the prestigious Fields prize, dubbed the Nobel for mathematics, but had his gold medal stolen minutes later.

It was an embarrassing debut for crime-ridden Rio, the first Latin American city ever to host the Fields ceremony, which takes place every four years.

Less than an hour had passed since Birkar, a 40-year-old specialist in algebraic geometry, had been handed his 14 karat gold medal when his briefcase went missing. The organizer behind the event, the International Congress of Mathematics, said it "profoundly regrets" the incident.

Birkar celebrated his achievement -- alongside co-winners Alessio Figalli, Peter Scholze and Akshay Venkatesh -- as a fairy tale come true for the often beleaguered Kurds. "I'm hoping this news will put a smile on the faces of those 40 million people," he said.

The Fields medal recognizes the outstanding mathematical achievements of candidates who were under 40 years old at the start of the year. At least two and preferably four people are honored each time.

In 2014, Maryam Mirzakhani, from Iran, became the award's first and so far only female winner. She died in 2017.

INDEPENDENCE BID IN CATALONIA

Madrid begins talks with separatists

AFP, Barcelona

Spain's new Socialist government held talks with Catalonia's separatist executive on Wednesday in the first such meeting in seven years as tensions eased but sharp divergences remained over the region's self-determination drive.

Representatives of both executives met for almost four hours at the headquarters of the regional government in Barcelona as part of a bilateral commission that has not met since 2011.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and Catalan president Quim Torra agreed to re-activate the commission when they met on July 10 in Madrid.

"There were some important disagreements, but to be able to say normally that we have big disagreements is also important," Spain's minister of regional administration, Meritxell Batet, who headed the central government's delegation, told reporters after the meeting.

Sanchez, who came to power at the start of June after a no-confidence motion toppled his conservative predecessor Mariano Rajoy, promised to improve relations between Madrid and Catalan leaders, who unsuccessfully proclaimed a republic on October 27 following a banned independence referendum.



People row in boats through floodwaters in Hanoi's suburban Chuong My district yesterday. Heavy rains have flooded the area over the past 10 days.

PHOTO: AFP