

BOLIVIA WILDFIRES

4m hectares burnt: NGO

Wildfires in Bolivia have razed more than four million hectares (10 million acres) of forest and grassland since August, an NGO warned Wednesday, as a state of emergency spread to the country's northeast.

The fires have torched some of the country's most environmentally sensitive areas for weeks, and the government of the northeastern department of Beni declared a red alert on Wednesday.

"The area burned in the department of Santa Cruz amounts to three million hectares," said the Friends of Nature Foundation (FAN), an environmental non-profit.

That represents nearly 75 percent of the total area affected by fires nationwide, which it put at 4.1 million hectares.

The FAN based its estimate on satellite images from Nasa and the European Space Agency, as of September 15.

Iran threatens 'all-out war'

Warns against any attacks; Pompeo calls for 'peaceful resolution' after meeting Gulf allies

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Iran's foreign minister yesterday said a military strike on Iran would trigger "all-out war", as the United States and its Gulf allies accuse Iran of being behind attacks on Saudi oil facilities.

Asked about the consequence of "an American or Saudi military strike on Iran" in an interview with CNN aired on Thursday, Mohammad Javad Zarif responded: "An all-out war."

"We don't want war, we don't want to engage in a military confrontation," he said, warning it would lead to "a lot of casualties".

"But we won't blink to defend our territory," he added.

The statement came after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denounced the attacks as an "act of war" by Iran.

Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels have claimed responsibility

ATTACKS ON SAUDI OIL HEARTLAND

Trump says 'many options' at his disposal

Khamenei approved Saudi strike: report

Rouhani may skip UN meet over US visa delay



for Saturday's strikes on Saudi oil infrastructures, but the United States says it has concluded the attack involved cruise missiles from Iran.

Saudi Arabia, which has been bogged down in a five-year war in neighbouring Yemen, has said Iran "unquestionably sponsored" the attacks and the weapons used in them were Iranian-made, but has not directly blamed its regional rival.

The attacks on the heart of the Saudi oil industry knocked out half its production.

Pompeo, after talking with Gulf allies, yesterday said his country wanted a "peaceful resolution" to the crisis.

"We'd like a peaceful resolution. I hope the Islamic Republic of Iran sees it the same way," he told reporters after talks with the leaders of the United

Arab Emirates.

Pompeo flew to Abu Dhabi from the Saudi city of Jeddah, where he met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who has said the assault poses a "real test" of global will.

The two sides "agreed that the Iranian regime must be held accountable for its continued aggressive, reckless, and threatening behaviour," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortugas said in statement after their talks.

On Wednesday, Riyadh unveiled new evidence it said showed the assault was "unquestionably" sponsored by Tehran. Saudi officials displayed what they said were fragments of 25 drones and cruise missiles fired on Saturday at two facilities in the country's east, engulfing them in flames.

Huthi military spokesman Brigadier

Yahya Saree said however that the assault on the two facilities was launched from three locations inside Yemen, using advanced drones with long-range capabilities.

Asked by reporters about a possible US attack on Iran, US President Donald Trump on Wednesday said "there are many options. There's the ultimate option and there are options a lot less than that." He explained that by "ultimate option" he meant "war."

US military planners weighing retaliation have reportedly forwarded a list of Iranian targets including the Abadan oil refinery, one of the world's largest, or Khark Island, the country's biggest oil export facility, the New York Times said. Other potential targets include missile launch sites and other assets of the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and bases in the southwest where unusual activity suggests they had a role in the strikes.

Late Wednesday CBS News cited an unnamed US official as saying that Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei approved the attack, on condition that it be carried out in a way to deny Iranian involvement.

Meanwhile, Iran's state news agency IRNA said President Hassan Rouhani and his delegation could be forced into skipping next week's UN General Assembly because the United States has yet to issue them visas.



Russia detains shaman on mission to 'banish Putin'

Russian police yesterday said they had detained a Siberian shaman walking to Moscow on a mission to drive out President Vladimir Putin who he describes as a "demon". Police in the eastern Siberian region of Buryatia said they had detained the shaman, Alexander Gabyshev, on a highway near Lake Baikal and would send him back to his home region where he is "wanted for committing a crime". Gabyshev's eccentric bid to walk from his home city of Yakutsk to Moscow, a distance of some 5,000 kilometres (3,000 miles), has seen a group of followers join him on the way. Gabyshev began walking in March. He planned to reach Moscow in 2021. Shamanism is still practised in numerous regions of Russia.

Fukushima disaster: Court acquits energy bosses



A Japanese court yesterday cleared three energy firm bosses of professional negligence in the only criminal trial stemming from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear meltdown. The three men were senior officials at the TEPCO firm operating the Fukushima Daiichi plant and had faced up to five years in prison if convicted. The court said in the ruling that the executives could not have predicted the scale of the tsunami that overwhelmed the plant and triggered the accident. The massive tsunami that swamped the nuclear plant in March 2011 after a 9.0-magnitude undersea earthquake killed at least 18,500 dead or missing. No one was killed in the nuclear meltdown. The decision is likely to be appealed.

Trump names O'Brien as national security advisor

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday named his pointman for hostage situations, Robert O'Brien, to replace his hawkish national security advisor sacked just as relations with Iran are entering a new crisis point. Trump made the announcement by Twitter and later appeared with O'Brien in front of reporters while traveling in California, where he said his new foreign policy aide was "highly respected." Last week, Trump abruptly fired John Bolton, a vigorous proponent of using US military force abroad and one of the main hawks in the administration on Iran. O'Brien, 53, has until now served as Trump's envoy for situations involving US hostages abroad. He comes into the new job with backing from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and senior Republicans in Congress.

SOURCE: AFP

'Wake up'

Greta Thunberg urges US lawmakers; junior official to represent US at UN climate summit

AGENCIES

Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, who has inspired a global movement for climate change, delivered a strong message to US lawmakers on Wednesday: "Wake up."

Wrapping up a six-day visit to Washington, DC, the 16-year-old Thunberg rallied a room full of Democratic lawmakers and activists, urging them to follow scientific warnings and push for strong measures to combat climate change.

"This is not the time and place for dreams. This is the time to wake up," Thunberg said behind a lowered podium at the ornate House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee room.

Thunberg spent the day in Congress and on the steps of the SC, lending her star power to US and youth activists who were drumming up attention and support ahead of a global climate strike on Friday.

She began with a pointed message before a US congressional hearing: "I don't want you to listen to me. I want you to listen to the scientists."

Thunberg, founder of the "Fridays For Future" weekly school walkouts to demand government climate-change

action, submitted a 2018 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change at the hearing in lieu of testimony. It urged rapid, unprecedented changes to the way people live in order to keep temperatures from rising by 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2030.

Thunberg was one of four students invited to a joint hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy and the Environment and the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, to provide the next generation's views on climate change.

Her first appearance took place last Friday in front of the White House, where she encouraged fellow young activists to keep fighting to be heard.

As world leaders head to New York for a climate summit called by the United Nations, the United States will be represented by a junior official.

Marcia Bernicat, the principal deputy assistant secretary of state for oceans and international environmental and scientific affairs, "will represent the United States at the UN Secretary General's Climate Summit," a State Department spokeswoman said.



DEATH OF MOTHER OR BABY AT CHILD BIRTH

One dies in every 11 seconds: UN

AFP, Geneva

Global child and maternal deaths have fallen sharply in recent decades, but new UN statistics released yesterday show unequal progress, with more than five childbirths a minute ending in tragedy.

Two reports by several United Nations' agencies showed clear global progress in reducing the number of pregnant women or new mothers and young children who die each year, pointing to improved access to affordable, quality health services.

"In countries that provide everyone with safe, affordable, high-quality health services, women and babies survive and thrive," World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement.

Since the turn of the century, the number of deaths among children under the age of five has been cut almost in half to some 5.3 million worldwide last year.

Almost half of those deaths occurred during the first month of life, meaning that around 7,000 newborns still died every single day last year.

At the same time, the number of women dying due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth dropped by more than a third to around 295,000 in 2017, compared to 451,000 in 2000.

While this marks a huge improvement, some 800 women still died each day from complications in pregnancy and childbirth in 2017, the UN numbers showed.

In all, the statistics reveal that an estimated 2.8 million women and newborns die every year, mostly from preventable causes.

'No artificial deadline'

UK rebuffs Finland's call for Brexit solution by end-Sept

AGENCIES

The Finnish EU presidency yesterday demanded Britain deliver a written proposal by the end of September on leaving the EU or face a no-deal Brexit, an ultimatum London immediately rejected.

The clock is ticking down on Britain's departure from the European Union, currently set for October 31, but it appears increasingly likely it will crash out without any agreement.

A spokesman for Finnish Prime Minister Antti Rinne told AFP that Britain must deliver a written plan for a solution to the stalemate.

But Britain rejected the Finnish demand. "We will table formal written solutions when we are ready, not according to an artificial deadline, and when the EU is clear that it will engage constructively on them," a spokesman for the government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson said.

The Finnish deadline comes a day after Rinne met French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris, where he said the EU is unlikely to grant an extension to the current October 31 exit date, and thus avoid a no-deal exit, unless London proposes concrete

measures.

The British government spokesman said however that London has submitted "a series of confidential technical non-papers" to the EU, setting out Britain's ideas for an alternative to the customs backstop on the Irish border.

Technical "non-papers" are documents used in negotiations that do not represent a formal position.

"We have received documents from the UK and on this basis we will have technical discussion today and tomorrow on some aspects of customs, manufactured goods and sanitary and phytosanitary rules," said Commission spokeswoman Mima Andreeva.

She added that the EU and British Brexit negotiators, Michel Barnier and Stephen Barclay, will also discuss Brexit in Brussels yesterday.

The UK side said it had shared with Brussels "technical non-papers which reflect the ideas the UK has been putting forward," without going into further detail.

Andreeva added that there was no formal deadline for Britain to submit formal proposals but stressed that every day counted now as the Brexit date nears on Oct 31.



Mostefa Souag (C), acting director general of Al-Jazeera media network, speaks during a solidarity campaign for the release of their detained journalist Mahmoud Hussein (portrait) at Al-Jazeera headquarters in Doha, yesterday. Mahmoud Hussein was arrested on arrival in Egypt on December 20, 2016 and has now been detained without any formal charges in Egypt for 1,000 days.

PHOTO: AFP

Ruling on parliament suspension 'next week'

Says UK SC

AFP, London

Supreme Court judges will rule early next week on whether British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's decision to suspend parliament in the run-up to Brexit was lawful, the court's president said yesterday.

"We know that this case must be resolved as quickly as possible, and we hope to be able to publish our decision early next week," judge Brenda Hale said as the third and final day of hearings wrapped up.

Johnson has suspended parliament for five weeks, with MPs only allowed to return on October 14 -- a fortnight before Britain's planned exit from the European Union on October 31.

The Conservative leader, who took office in July, insists it was a routine move to allow his government to launch a new legislative programme next month.

But critics accuse him of trying to silence critical MPs at a crucial time, with Britain's exit terms -- and departure date -- still uncertain.

"I must repeat that this case is not about when and on what terms the United Kingdom leaves the European Union. The result of this case will not determine that," Hale said in brief closing remarks.

"We are solely concerned with the lawfulness of the prime minister's decision to advise her majesty (Queen Elizabeth II) to prorogue parliament on the dates in question."

Scotland's highest civil court found the suspension was unlawful, but the High Court in England said it was not a matter for judges to intervene in.

Gantz rejects Netanyahu's offer

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel's weakened Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu saw his offer yesterday for a coalition with his strongest political rival, Benny Gantz, swiftly rebuffed after failing to secure a governing majority in a tight election.

Netanyahu's surprise move was an abrupt change of strategy for the right-wing leader. Its rejection could spell weeks of wrangling after Tuesday's election, which followed an inconclusive national ballot in April.

Gantz's centrist Blue and White party emerged from the second round of voting this year slightly

BID TO BUILD UNITY GOVT IN ISRAEL



ahead of Netanyahu's Likud, but also short of enough supporters in the 120-member parliament for a ruling bloc.

Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving leader, said in a video clip in which he urged Gantz, the country's former military chief, to meet him "as soon as today", that he had pledged during the election campaign to form a right-wing Likud-led government.

Responding to Netanyahu's call, Gantz made no mention of the prime minister and said he himself would head a "liberal" coalition.

But he then left it to Moshe Yaalon, a fellow Blue and White leader, to deliver a stinging rejection of a partnership with Netanyahu.

"We will not enter a coalition led by Netanyahu," Yaalon said, echoing a position Gantz had taken throughout the election campaign

and appearing to suggest that an alliance with Likud would be possible if it dumped its veteran chief.

"The time has come for you to tell Netanyahu, 'thank you for all you've done,'" Yaalon urged Likud members - who have shown no sign so far of rebellion.

With Israeli media reporting more than 95 percent of votes counted in Tuesday's election, a Likud-led right-wing, religious bloc looked poised to control 55 of parliament's 120 seats, with 56 going to a centre-left alliance.

Once all the votes are counted, President Reuven Rivlin will hold consultations with parties that won representation in parliament and give one of its leaders up to 42 days to form a government.

The political deadlock left former defence minister Avigdor Lieberman, head of the far-right Yisrael Beiteinu party, as a potential kingmaker in the coalition-building. He has called for a secular unity government.

'Deeply sorry'

Trudeau begs forgiveness for brownface photo

AFP, Ottawa

Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized Wednesday for wearing brownface makeup at a party 18 years ago, as he scrambled to get on top of a fresh blow to a re-election campaign dogged by controversy.

Time magazine published the photograph one week into a federal election campaign with Trudeau's Liberal Party in a tight contest against the Conservatives led by Andrew Scheer.

The black-and-white photograph shows Trudeau, then 29, wearing a turban and robes with his face, neck and hands darkened at the gala in 2001.

The picture appears in the 2000-2001 yearbook of West Point Grey Academy, a private school where Trudeau taught at the time, the US-based Time magazine said.

Trudeau confirmed it was him in the photo "at the school's annual dinner which had a costume theme of 'Arabian Nights'."

"I have worked all my life to try to create opportunities for people, fight against racism and intolerance," he told a televised news conference on his campaign aircraft.

"I can say I made a mistake when I was younger and I wish I hadn't. I wish I had known better then, but I didn't and I'm deeply sorry for it."

"Now I recognize it was something racist to do," he said.

Gantz party urges Likud to dump Netanyahu for alliance

Election on Tuesday ended in deadlock

Weeks of negotiations could be ahead