



A vehicle drives along Highway 36 while flames tear through the area as the Park fire continues to burn near Paynes Creek in unincorporated Tehama County, California. The so-called Park Fire burned more than 350,000 acres as of Saturday evening, making it the seventh-largest ever recorded in California history, the Cal Fire said.

PHOTO: AFP

15 killed, 6 hurt in China landslide

AFP, Shanghai

A landslide caused by flooding in central China's Hunan province destroyed a guesthouse and killed 15 people yesterday, state media reported.

Officials initially believed that 18 people had been buried by the landslide but rescuers have since found fifteen bodies and six injured survivors, the official Xinhua news agency said yesterday night.

The landslide was caused by flash flooding on a mountain, which destroyed the guesthouse, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

More than 300 emergency personnel were sent to the scene, according to Xinhua.

A video published by the state-run Beijing Youth Daily showed a swath of mud and debris cutting through a green hillside and an uprooted tree lying in front of a three-storey building.

An aerial video on Xinhua showed what appeared to be the ruined bottom half of a building at the top of the debris trail, as well as damaged buildings at the foot of the hill.

China has suffered a summer of extreme weather, with flash floods in the north and southwest killing at least 20 people this month.

A highway in southern China collapsed in May after days of rain, killing 48 people.

Extraordinary US election enters the homestretch

AFP, Washington

The 100-day sprint to the US election began yesterday, the final act in a campaign transformed by an assassination attempt and the stunning exit of President Joe Biden.

After weeks of infighting and despondency over Biden's candidacy, Democrats have largely consolidated behind Vice President Kamala Harris, radically reshaping a race that was fast becoming Republican nominee Donald Trump's to lose.

Republican strategist Matt Terrill said Harris's uniting of the Democrats had ensured a photo finish on November 5 -- a ballot that will largely be decided by around 100,000 swing voters in a handful of battleground states.

"It comes down to those independent, undecided voters. Inflation, immigration, the economy and crime -- those are the issues they care about," he told BBC News.

While American election campaigns typically last almost two years, the 2024 edition has effectively been reset, making it unofficially the shortest in modern history.

The Democratic convention in mid-August is expected to be a jubilant celebration of the party's new standard-bearer Harris, who is enjoying record fundraising, growing grassroots support and an early boost in polling.

It all looked so different just a month ago.

Dogged by voters' concerns about his age and mental

acuity, the 81-year-old Biden was an outside bet at best, trailing his predecessor in the first presidential rematch since Dwight Eisenhower trounced Adlai Stevenson in 1956.

Biden's dismal June 27 debate showing ignited a five-alarm fire within his party.

The flames were fanned by a flawless show of unity behind 78-year-old Trump at the Republican national convention

in Wisconsin and has raised more than \$120 million in recent days, with disenchanted donors returning to the fold.

Trump's previous three-point nationwide lead in polling averages has been practically halved in a week, and the contest has become a margin-of-error tussle in most of the crucial swing states that decide elections.

But Democrats enjoying the sugar high of the last week have



-- an event galvanized by the failed bid, just days earlier, to assassinate the former president at a rally in Pennsylvania.

After an initial show of defiance, Biden bowed to the inevitable and dropped out last weekend.

Harris, a generation younger at 59, threw her hat in the ring -- turning what had been a stale contest between two unpopular, aging, white male candidates into a dynamic and unpredictable showdown.

The former Biden-Harris ticket -- now just the Harris campaign -- held its biggest-ever rally Tuesday

been cautioned by party elders to sober up, with Harris still facing an uphill battle to beat the oldest major party nominee in history.

Trump, who has seen his favorability ratings tick upward since the July 13 attempt on his life and the successful Republican convention, will rally this weekend in the traditionally Democratic state of Minnesota.

Harris, meanwhile, heads to Massachusetts for a fundraising event and will send her surrogates -- including some favorites in the contest to be her running mate -- out across battleground states.

America going bankrupt: Musk

AGENCIES

Rising national debt has long been a pressing issue in America, and it has caught the attention of Tesla CEO Elon Musk.

"America is going bankrupt btw," Musk wrote in a recent post on the social media platform X. He was responding to a post by Billy Markus, the creator of Dogecoin.

Markus' post included a screenshot of a headline reading, "Interest Payments on US National Debt Will Shatter \$1,40,000,000,000 This Year -- Eating 76% of All Income Taxes Collected: Report."

The headline originated from an article on The Daily Hodl, which featured an analysis by economist EJ Antoni. Antoni delved into the latest Monthly Treasury Statement from the Bureau of the Fiscal Service.

He pointed out a striking detail: in June 2024, the US government spent \$140.238 billion on interest for Treasury debt securities. For context, the government collected \$184.910 billion in individual income taxes that same month.

This means that an amount equivalent to 76 percent of June's individual income tax revenue was used solely for interest payments on the national debt, not including principal repayment.

35 killed in Pak sectarian clashes

AFP, Peshawar

A land feud between tribes in northwestern Pakistan has spilled over into days of sectarian fighting with machine guns and mortars, killing 35 people so far, officials said yesterday.

The Sunni Muslim Madagi and Shiite Mali Khel tribes have been fighting since Wednesday, when a gunman opened fire at a council negotiating a decades-long dispute over farmland, local police official Murtaza Hussain said.

While no one was wounded in that attack, Hussain said it reignited longstanding religious tensions between the clans who live side-by-side in the Kurram district on Afghanistan border.

"Initially a land dispute, the issue has now escalated into sectarian violence," Hussain told AFP.

Inter-family feuds are common in Pakistan. However, they can be particularly protracted and violent in the mountainous northwestern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where communities abide by traditional tribal honour codes.

A senior government official from Kurram district, who asked to remain anonymous, also gave a death toll of 35 but said 151 more people had been wounded.

"The conflict, now in its fifth day, has escalated into a Shia-Sunni dispute," he said. "All attempts to resolve the conflict have failed."

A police source, who asked not to be identified, said both sides were using automatic weapons and mortars in fighting focused around the town of Parachinar, which had been blockaded by law enforcement.

Khamenei grants Masoud Pezeshkian presidential powers

AFP, Tehran



Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday gave his official endorsement of Masoud Pezeshkian as the Islamic Republic's ninth president, following snap elections won by the reformist camp's candidate.

In a message read by the director of Khamenei's office, he said: "I endorse the vote (for) the wise, honest, popular and scholarly Mr Pezeshkian, and I am appointing him as the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran".

The new reformist president is due to be sworn in before parliament on Tuesday.

The endorsement ceremony was held in the capital Tehran in the presence of senior Iranian officials and foreign diplomats.

It took place as banks and most government offices were ordered shut nationwide on Sunday to tackle an extreme heatwave.

Following the event, acting president Mohammad Mokhber handed over official responsibilities to 69-year-old Pezeshkian.

Later Sunday, Pezeshkian appointed reformist Mohammad Reza Aref, 72, as his first vice president, according to an announcement carried by state TV.

Aref has represented Tehran in parliament and served as first vice president and communications minister under Iran's last reformist president Mohammad Khatami, who held office from 1997 to 2005.

Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon and parliament member for the northwestern city of Tabriz since 2008, was Khatami's health minister.

On July 5 the reformist candidate won a runoff race against the ultraconservative Saeed Jalili to replace Ebrahim Raisi who died in a helicopter crash in May.

US, Japan deepen ties, take swipe at China

AFP, Tokyo

The United States and Japan issued scathing verbal attacks on China and Russia yesterday after high-level discussions on enhancing already close defence collaboration between Tokyo and Washington in an increasingly unstable region.

A joint statement issued after "2+2" talks in Tokyo between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and their Japanese counterparts said China's "foreign policy seeks to reshape the international order for its own benefit at the expense of others".

They also reiterated their "strong objections" to China's "unlawful maritime claims, militarization of reclaimed features, and threatening and provocative activities in the South China Sea".

The communique also criticised Russia's "growing and provocative strategic military cooperation" with China, as well as Moscow's procurement of ballistic missiles and other equipment from North Korea "for use against Ukraine". It also expressed alarm at China's "ongoing and rapid expansion of its nuclear weapons arsenal".

Blinken said US alliances were all "defensive in nature".

"They have no ambitions toward anyone else, and never have been or ever will

be offensive in nature," he told a news conference.

"But at a time when unfortunately these threats are increasing, our alliances, our partnerships, they're getting deeper, they're getting stronger, they're getting more effective," he said.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa said: "We are at a historic turning point."

"Developments that shake the very foundation of a free and open international order based on the rule of law are continuing."

"We must deepen and develop the US-Japan alliance to safeguard the international order and enhance deterrence," she said.

China claims the South China Sea, through which trillions of dollars of trade passes annually, almost in its entirety, while Tokyo and Beijing are also at loggerheads over disputed Japan-controlled islands in the East China Sea.

The statement also confirmed US plans to establish in Japan a new Joint Force Headquarters, headed by a three-star US commander, for the 54,000 US military personnel stationed there.

It will serve as a counterpart to Japan's planned Joint Operations Command for all its armed forces, making the two militaries more nimble in the case of a crisis over Taiwan or the Korean peninsula.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin meet with Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa and Defense Minister Minoru Kihara at their Foreign and Defense Ministerial (2+2) Meeting at Iikura Guest House in Tokyo, Japan yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS