



Ecuador Goes to Polls



An Ecuador election official carries an electoral kit to be delivered to different polling places by the army, in Quito, Ecuador.

QUITO (Dispatches) - Ecuadorians are voting in the first round of elections to choose a new president. Left-wing incumbent Rafael Correa is standing down after leading the country for a decade. His former vice-president Lenin Moreno is expected to lead Sunday's vote, but is facing a strong challenge from conservative

Guillermo Lasso, who has vowed to cut spending and taxes. Candidates need to win 40% of the vote to avoid a second round run-off. Polls suggest it will be a tight election, with no candidate likely to garner enough votes to win the first round. But a third of voters until recently were undecided amid low-energy campaigning as

the charismatic Correa prepares to retire from politics. Polling places opened without incident Sunday morning. The outcome will be watched closely in Latin America, where conservative leaders in Argentina, Brazil and Peru have assumed power in the past 18 months after the end of a commodities boom that boosted leftists like Correa.

Libyan General Raps Europe, U.S. for Backing Terror



Libyan General Khalifa Haftar (file photo by AFP)

TRIPOLI (Press TV)-Libyan General Khalifa Haftar has accused several European countries and the United States of supporting terrorist groups in Libya by secretly providing them with weapons and training. In an interview aired on the Egyptian ON LIVE radio channel on Saturday, Haftar described France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and the United States as "partners" to the terrorists in Libya. He said those countries had to reconsider their positions. The Libyan general also said Turkey used to back terrorists but "we sent back in coffins the terrorists that Turkey had dispatched" to Libya. Turkey will pay dearly for the

harm it did to the Libyan nation, he said, without elaborating further. Haftar was an ally of Libya's long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi but joined the Libyan revolution against Gaddafi in 2011. Libya has been dominated by violence since a NATO military intervention that followed the 2011 uprising and that led to the overthrow and death of Gaddafi. Rival governments were set up in Tripoli and eastern Libya back in 2014. General Haftar is linked to the government based in the east, in the port city of Tobruk, and has refused to profess allegiance to the United Nations (UN)-recognized government in Tripoli. His forces have been fighting militias loyal to the Tripoli government since 2014.

MOGADISHU (Press TV)-At least 18 people have lost their lives and more than two dozen others have been wounded in a car bomb explosion in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, officials and witnesses say. Ahmed Abdulle Afrax, the mayor of Wadajir, the district in the city of Mogadishu that was bombed, said that the deadly incident took place on Sunday when an explosive-laden car exploded near a busy market in the capital city. No group or individual has so far claimed responsibility for the attack, but the al-Shabab Takfiri militant group has been blamed for such attacks in the past.

HARARE (AFP) - Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, who turns 93 on Tuesday, says he has no "acceptable" successor in place. Mugabe, who has kept an iron grip on power since Zimbabwe declared independence in 1980, has repeatedly denied reports of health problems, fuelled in part by frequent trips to Dubai and Singapore. He once quipped that he would rule until he turned 100. But Mugabe, long known for his fiery speeches, has appeared unusually subdued in recent public appearances, speaking slowly and keeping his addresses short.

Italy's Renzi Triggers Party Leadership Contest

ROME (AFP) - Italy's ex-prime minister Matteo Renzi resigned as head of the centre-left Democratic Party (PD) on Sunday, kicking off a leadership battle as the country's ruling party grapples with the threat of a schism. Renzi, who stepped down in January after losing a key referendum, said he would run to win back his post as party secretary, which would put him in pole position to become prime minister once more should the PD win approaching national elections.



Italy's former prime minister Matteo Renzi faces a fierce showdown with his rivals.

The showdown with his many enemies looked set to be fierce; rebels on the far-left have been threatening to split off, with a potential fallout for the government and PD Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni. Renzi pointed the finger squarely at the rebels, accusing them of having attacked him at every turn during his premiership and of trying to blackmail him into quitting as party head as the only way to prevent the threatened split.

The congress to elect the new PD party secretary will be held in June. Renzi had been calling for an early general election, but all thoughts of going to the national polls have now been put on hold. Gentiloni's government hopes to carry on until the natural end of the legislature early next year. The 42-year old called for the party to "move forwards united,"

saying he and the others in the majority asked "with our hearts in our hands" for the rebels to stay. But former PD leader Pier Luigi Bersani, who still has core support among traditional PD party voters, dismissed his appeal. Bersani blamed Renzi for "putting up a wall" and feared the run-up to the congress the minority's concerns would "not be open to discussion".

Swedes Scratch Heads at Trump's Suggestion of Major Incident



President Donald Trump smiles as he prepares to speak at his "Make America Great Again Rally" at Orlando-Melbourne International Airport in Melbourne, Fla.,

HELSINKI (AP) — Swedes have been scratching their heads and ridiculing President Donald Trump's remarks that suggested a major incident had happened in the Scandinavian country. During a rally in Florida on Saturday, Trump said "look what's happening last night in Sweden" as he alluded to past terror attacks in Europe. It wasn't clear what he was referring to and there were no high-profile situations reported in Sweden on Friday night. The comment prompted a barrage of social media reaction on Sunday, with hundreds of tweets, and a local newspaper published a list of events that happened on Friday that appeared to have no connections to any terror-like activity. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman

Catarina Axelsson said that the government wasn't aware of any "terror-linked major incidents." Sweden's Security Police said it had no reason to change the terror threat level. "Nothing has occurred which would cause us to raise that level," agency spokesman Karl Melin said. Former Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt tweeted, "Sweden? Terror attack? What has he been smoking? Questions abound." The Aftonbladet tabloid addressed Trump in an article Sunday, "This happened in Sweden Friday night, Mr President," and listed in English some events that had happened in Sweden, including a man being treated for severe burns, an avalanche warning and police chasing a drunken driver.

COLOMBO (AP) — At least 11 people were killed and 24 others rescued Sunday after the boat they were traveling in capsized off of Sri Lanka's southwestern coast, police said. The boat was among 19 that took part in a religious festival procession from the fishing town of Beruwala, around 60 kilometers (37 miles) south of the capital, Colombo, said police spokesman Priyantha Jayakody. The tragedy occurred when the boats were returning from the festival. KUALALUMPUR (Dispatches) — Investigators are looking for four North Korean men who flew out of Malaysia the same day Kim Jong Nam, the North Korean ruler's outcast half brother, apparently was poisoned at an airport in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian police said Sunday. Since Kim's death last week, authorities have been trying to piece together details of what appeared to be an assassination. Malaysian police have so far arrested four people carrying IDs from North Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam. Malaysia's deputy national police chief, Noor Rashid Ibrahim, said four other North Korean suspects were on the run. The men arrived in Malaysia on different days beginning Jan. 31 and flew out of the country last Monday, when Kim died, Noor Rashid said.

Thousands Protest in Georgia to Back Opposition TV Station

TBILISI (AP) — Thousands of Georgians have rallied in the capital in support of the country's opposition-minded television station that they suspect is about to be transferred to a more government-friendly owner. Rustavi-2 is Georgia's most popular TV station and the Sunday

demonstration on Tbilisi's main avenue attracted people from a wide political spectrum. Some carried signs calling for the imprisonment of Bidzina Ivanishvili, the billionaire founder of the ruling Georgian Dream coalition. Rustavi-2 has changed hands in murky deals several times.

The current controversy stems from a case filed by a former owner, Kibar Khalvashi, who is seeking to regain control. The Supreme Court is expected to rule on the case soon. Station supporters claim the court is under government pressure to transfer it from the current owners.