



TOKYO (AP) — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visits Moscow on Thursday to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin and pursue talks on joint economic projects aimed at a possible breakthrough in their decades-old island dispute.

Japanese officials said North Korea is also likely to be discussed given the timing of Abe's trip, though the leaders' approaches remain different.

Japan recently held talks with key allies the U.S., South Korea and Australia, agreeing that China and Russia are crucial in pressuring North Korea to end its nuclear and missile programs. While China is seen as more cooperative, U.S.-Russia ties have deteriorated over Syria.

KIEV (AFP) - The presidents of Ukraine and Belarus toured Wednesday the site of the Chernobyl plant to mark 31 years since the "unhealing wound" of the world's worst civil nuclear accident spewed radiation across Europe.

The station's fourth reactor in the north of former Soviet Ukraine exploded in 1986 after a safety test went horribly wrong at 1:23 am on April 26.

Around 30 people were killed on site and several thousand more are feared to have died in the years that followed from radiation poisoning across Ukraine as well as its northern neighbor Belarus and Russia to the east.

PARIS (AP) — French police have arrested 10 people in an investigation of suspected suppliers of weapons to one of the attackers who killed 17 people at Charlie Hebdo magazine and a kosher store in January 2015, the Paris prosecutors' office said Wednesday.

Separately, police have also arrested four people in an anti-terror probe in the town of Trappes west of Paris, the prosecutors' office said. It said those arrests were unrelated to the weapons probe, but gave no additional details.

Arrests in the weapons investigation started Monday, with more on Tuesday and Wednesday morning, the prosecutors' office said.

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - European Union states granted asylum to more than twice as many people in 2016 as they did in 2015, mostly to people fleeing war in Syria and Iraq, the bloc's statistics office Eurostat said on Wednesday.

Just over 700,000 refugees were granted asylum in 2016 compared to about 330,000 in 2015, it said. Germany granted asylum to 445,000 refugees in 2016, three times more than it did in 2015, distantly followed by Sweden, Italy and France.

While the European border agency Frontex reported a drop in the number of refugees and migrants arriving in the EU from 2015 to 2016, the increase in the number of people being granted asylum may at least partly reflect lengthy procedures.

Hungarian Opposition Struggles to Build on Anti-Orban Sentiment



Activists Gulyas and Varga hold hands in victory as they speak to a rally against the rule of Hungary's populist right-wing Prime Minister Orban in Budapest.

BUDAPEST (Reuters) - Anti-government protesters have filled Budapest's streets in recent weeks, but divisions within the opposition and weak support outside the capital mean they are unlikely to herald a serious threat to Prime Minister Viktor Orban in next year's election.

Triggered by a law targeting an international school founded by liberal U.S. financier George Soros, the rallies have galvanized broader public anger against Orban's ambition to create an "illiberal democracy".

They accuse Orban of engineering a crackdown on civil dissent, eroding democratic values and spreading hostility towards the European Union while cozying up to Russia.

But the protesters, mostly young and urban, have found little in common with opposition politicians jostling for position ahead of next year's election and

struggling to shake off the perception of incompetence and corruption.

Orban's Fidesz has a lead in opinion polls, with its 30-percent support dwarfing its closest rivals, the Socialists and the radical nationalist Jobbik, both at about 10 percent. The rest of the opposition is fragmented between several small parties.

Emerging market investors expect the political status quo to hold since Hungary is economically stable and the protests have not posed a risk to Orban's grip on power.

Orban and his Fidesz party also seem relaxed, with the prime minister saying he feels bemused at the rallies.

The lack of interest in protests among the 80 percent of Hungarians who live outside the capital also makes it unlikely they would have much of an impact. The largest rally drew about a thousand people in Szeged, and that only once.

China Talking With European Space Agency About Moon Outpost



FILE - The moon rises over a logo for AVIC or Aviation Industry Corp in Beijing, China.

BEIJING (AP) — Representatives of China and the European Space Agency are discussing potential collaboration on a human outpost on the moon and other possible joint endeavors, according to a spokesman for the European agency and Chinese media reports.

The secretary general for China's space agency, Tian Yulong, first disclosed the talks about the envisioned lunar base in Chinese state media. They were confirmed Wednesday by Pal Hvistendahl, a spokesman for the European Space Agency, or ESA.

The director general of the 22-member ESA, Johann-Dietrich Woerner, has described its proposed "Moon Village" as a potential international launching pad for future missions to Mars and a chance to develop space tourism or even lunar mining.

China arrived relatively late to space travel but has ramped up its program since its first manned spaceflight in

2003, more than 42 years after a Soviet cosmonaut became the first to reach orbit.

Last week the China National Space Administration launched an unmanned spacecraft on a mission to dock with its currently unoccupied space station. It plans to launch a mission to collect samples from the moon by the end of this year and next year conduct the first mission to the moon's far side and bring back mineral samples.

The ESA hopes to conduct a mission analysis on samples brought back by this year's Chinese mission, known as Chang'e 5, and also have a European flying on the Chinese space station at some future date, Hvistendahl said. Neither prospect has been finalized.

China was excluded from the International Space Station mainly due to U.S. legislation barring such cooperation and concerns over the Chinese space program's strong military connections.

France's Le Pen Upstages Rival Macron With Stop at Factory



French centrist presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron, speaks to journalists after a visit at the Raymond Poincare hospital in Garches, outside Paris, France.

AMIENS (AP) — Far-right French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen upstaged her centrist opponent Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday by making a surprise campaign stop to a home appliance factory that's the latest hot-button symbol of French job losses to plants overseas.

As Macron was meeting with union leaders from the Whirlpool plant in northern France, Le Pen popped up outside the factory itself, amid its workers in bright-yellow hazard vests, and declared herself the candidate of France's workers.

The wily campaign maneuver, which French television news channel BFM broadcast live, had

the immediate effect of stealing Macron's thunder. As Le Pen took selfies with people outside the threatened plant, he was shown in a closed-door meeting with union leaders in the town of Amiens, dressed in a suit and tie.

The contrasting images — on-the-spot action vs. a more formulaic approach — spoke to Le Pen's political smarts.

Le Pen, 48, is fighting her second presidential campaign after coming in third in 2012 while Macron, a 39-year-old former investment banker and economy minister, is fighting his first, having never held elected office.

Even before Le Pen's impromptu appearance, Macron's intervention in the Whirlpool factory's future, in a region where Le Pen got the most votes, was fraught with risk. The pro-EU centrist had to tread a fine line between defending his program to tackle France's chronic unemployment without falling into the trap of making campaign promises that, if he wins, he could struggle to keep.

The factory in Amiens, where the production of dryers is due to stop this year and shift to Poland, joins a list of threatened plants that have become symbolic of job losses in French presidential campaigns.

In the 2012 presidential race, Socialist Francois Hollande traveled to a closure-threatened steel plant in eastern France's rust belt in a similar pursuit of blue-collar votes. Union leaders later felt betrayed when the Hayange plant's blast furnaces were mothballed in a deal that President Hollande's government struck with steel giant ArcelorMittal.

Le Pen has vowed to keep the Amiens plant open if elected, come what may.

Needing millions more votes to beat Macron in France's May 7 presidential runoff, she has been hammering hard her claims that more French jobs would be lost overseas under Macron's more economically liberal program.

Zambian Court Upholds Opposition Leader Treason Charge

LUSAKA (AFP) - A Zambian court on Wednesday refused a request to drop treason charges against main opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema after he allegedly blocked the president's motorcade earlier this month.

Hichilema, 54, was arrested two weeks ago for allegedly obstructing President Edgar Lungu's official limousine as both men travelled to a traditional event in Zambia's Western province.

He is accused of endangering Lungu's life when Hichilema's own convoy allegedly refused to give way to the presidential motorcade in the high-speed incident on a main road on April 8.

Hichilema's lawyers had asked the court to throw out the treason charges, saying they were baseless.

But magistrate Greenwell Malumani said he did not have the power to dismiss the charges, which can only be handled by the High Court.

Hichilema also pleaded not guilty to one charge of disobeying an order to give way to the presidential motorcade and another of using insulting language.



Main Zambian opposition party United Party for National Development presidential candidate Hakainde Hichilema delivers a speech during a last presidential campaign rally.

The magistrate remanded him in custody as suspects charged with treason are not eligible for bail in Zambia.

Hichilema, a wealthy self-made businessman, has been in custody since police raided his Lusaka home on April 11.

His trial on the two lesser charges is scheduled to begin on May 10.

Hichilema made a fifth bid for the Zambian presidency last year and has sought to challenge the legality of the most recent election which he narrowly lost to Lungu.

That campaign was marked by clashes between supporters of Lungu's Patriotic Front (PF) party and Hichilema's United Party for National Development (UPND).

South African Court Rules Against Nuclear Deal

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — A South African court has ruled that the government plans to increase the country's reliance on nuclear power with help from Russia and other countries are unlawful.

The ruling Wednesday by the Western Cape High Court followed

arguments by non-governmental groups that the public had not been sufficiently consulted about the plans and that South Africa could not afford more nuclear facilities.

Critics have been concerned that the nuclear deals could be vulnerable to graft at a time when

President Jacob Zuma faces calls to resign because of scandals and the recent dismissal of a finance minister who was seen as a bulwark against corruption.

South Africa currently has two nuclear reactors that generate about 5 percent of the country's electricity.