



BARCELONA (AFP) -- Prosecutors in Catalonia ordered police Tuesday to seize ballot boxes, election flyers or any item that could be used in a banned independence referendum called by the Spanish region's separatist executive.

The chiefs of the Guardia Civil and National Police forces, and of the Mossos d'Esquadra -- a regional squad controlled by the Catalan government -- were called to the prosecutor's office in Barcelona.

They were then ordered to take action against authorities, civil servants or individuals "to avoid offences being committed," prosecutors said in a statement after the meeting.

Under Spanish law, prosecutors have the power to give instructions to judicial police forces in investigating offences, as do judges.

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BRUSSELS (Reuters) -- Eastern European Union states must drop their resistance and accept their share of refugees who arrived in the bloc, officials and diplomats said on Tuesday after a court ruled they must abide by the quota.

The EU's highest court ruled last week that member states must take in a share of refugees who reach Europe, dismissing complaints by Slovakia and Hungary and reigniting an east-west row that has shaken the bloc's cohesion.

Brussels and other capitals hope member states will respect the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling.

Poland and Hungary are opposed to accepting anybody, their reluctance shared by ex-communist peers Slovakia and the Czech Republic, who have, however, accepted a handful of people under a 2015 EU scheme designed to move 160,000 from Italy and Greece.

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GENEVA, Switzerland (AFP) -- More than half the world's refugee children - some 3.5 million altogether - do not attend school, the UN refugee agency said Tuesday, urging greater and steadier funding for their education.

"Some 3.5 million didn't get a single day" of school last year from among the 6.4 million children aged between five and 17 who were under the care of the UNHCR last year, the agency said in a report.

It was only a slight improvement over the previous year, when the figure was 3.7 million, said the report titled "Left Behind: Refugee Education in Crisis."

"The education of these young refugees is crucial to the peaceful and sustainable development of the places that have welcomed them, and to the future prosperity of their own countries," UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi said in the report.

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ROME (AFP) -- At least eight people died in flooding after violent rains lashed the Tuscan city of Livorno over the weekend, Italian rescue services said Tuesday.

The body of a 67-year-old man, who had been reported missing since Sunday, was found Tuesday, while the body of a 34-year-old woman had been found the day before.

Heavy rainstorms swept across the country overnight from Saturday to Sunday, with Livorno bearing the brunt of the flooding.

Four people from the same family were found dead in a flooded house in the city Sunday, where 40 centimeters of rainfall in four hours transformed streets into rivers and washed away cars. A fifth body was later found in an area devastated by landslides, while a sixth was found in a nearby hilltop neighborhood.

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PHNOM PENH (Reuters) -- The U.S. ambassador to Cambodia rejected government accusations of interference as "inaccurate, misleading and baseless" Tuesday, and called for the immediate release of opposition leader Kem Sokha.

The government of Prime Minister Hun Sen has charged Kem Sokha with treason, accusing him of conspiring to take power with the help of the United States, which has become an increasing target of Hun Sen's rhetoric.

"On dozens of occasions over the past year, the United States has been subject to intentionally inaccurate, misleading and baseless accusations," Ambassador William Heidt said in a statement. "All of the accusations you have heard in recent weeks about the United States - every one of them - are false," he said.

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ATHENS (AFP) -- Emergency crews Tuesday scrambled to contain an oil spill near Athens after a tanker sank close to Salamis island over the weekend, the coastguard said.

The coastguard said an entire bay on the southeast of the island had been affected after the Agia Zoni II carrying 2.5 metric tons of fuel sank.

# North Korea Hits Back at UN Sanctions: U.S. Will Suffer Greatest Pain in Its History



This photo released by KCNA shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un during a military parade in Pyongyang in April.

NEW YORK (Dispatches) -- In supporting a watered-down version of North Korea sanctions, China and Russia had a stern warning for the U.S.: Don't try to overthrow Kim Jong Un's government.

The measures passed on Monday at the United Nations Security Council included reducing imports of refined petroleum products, banning textile exports and strengthening inspections of cargo ships suspected of having illegal materials. U.S. envoy Nikki Haley called them the "strongest measures ever imposed on North Korea" even though they ended up freezing demands for an oil embargo and freeze on Kim's assets.

More worrisome for China and Russia was Haley's remark that the U.S. would act alone if Kim's government didn't stop testing missiles and bombs. The UN representatives of both countries on Monday reiterated what they called "the four nos": No regime change, regime collapse, accelerated reunification or military deployment north of the 38th parallel dividing the Korean Peninsula.

"The Chinese side will never allow conflict or war on the peninsula," Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said in a statement on Tuesday.

China and Russia -- the biggest economic patrons of North Korea -- both share the view that North Korea won't

give up its nuclear weapons without security guarantees, and they don't see the point in fomenting a crisis on their borders that will benefit American strategic goals.

"Sanctions of any kind are useless and ineffective," Russian President Vladimir Putin told reporters earlier this month at a summit in Xiamen, China. "They'll eat grass, but they won't abandon their program unless they feel secure."

Russia and China were singled out at a U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing Tuesday on financing for North Korea's nuclear program.

U.S. officials said the new UN sanctions -- combined with earlier measures -- would cut North Korean exports by 90%, pinching the government's ability to get hard currency. The textile export ban alone would cost North Korea about \$726 million a year, the U.S. said.

North Korea Tuesday blasted "vicious" sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, threatening revenge against Washington, who it blamed for leading the charge.

"The forthcoming measures by DPRK (the Democratic Republic of Korea) will make the U.S. suffer the greatest pain it has ever experienced in its history," Pyongyang's ambassador in Geneva told the UN Conference on Disarmament in the first North Korean reaction to Monday's unanimous vote.

North Korea has said it will never give up its nuclear weapons unless the U.S. drops its "hostile" policies toward the regime. Kim has claimed the ability to fit a hydrogen bomb onto an intercontinental ballistic missile.

# Bangladesh Urges Myanmar to Take Back Refugees



Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visits a Rohingya refugee camp in the Cox's Bazar border district, Sept. 12, 2017.

DHAKA (Dispatches) -- Bangladesh's prime minister has urged Myanmar to take back an estimated 370,000 Rohingya refugees who have fled across the border in recent weeks in response to a violent crackdown by the Burmese military.

Before inspecting one of the dozens of crowded refugee camps that have sprung up in the past three weeks in southern Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina said no words were enough to express her condemnation of Myanmar.

"They should stop (the violence)," she told the BBC. "The Myanmar government should have handled this situation patiently and not allowed the army of the law enforcement agencies to attack the common people."

"What are the crimes of the women, children, the innocent people? They are not responsible," she said.

The UN Security Council will hold an urgent meeting on Wednesday to discuss what the organization's top human rights official has called a textbook example of ethnic cleansing.

By some estimates, Myanmar's latest military crackdown has killed more than 3,000 people, but others say the death toll could be twice this.

The UN said on Tuesday that 370,000

people, more than a third of the estimated Rohingya population in Myanmar, had spilled over the Bangladesh border to escape alleged extrajudicial killings and arson attacks by security forces.

Hasina said the Bangladeshi government would continue to support the Rohingya refugees, but that Myanmar needs to "take steps to take their nationals back."

Myanmar, which does not recognize the Rohingya as Burmese citizens, has been lobbying Beijing, one of its main trading partners, to block any possible UN Security Council resolution. A Chinese foreign affairs ministry spokesman said on Tuesday that the country supported what he called Myanmar's efforts to uphold peace and stability in Rakhine state.

India, another regional ally that has previously expressed strong support for Myanmar, hardened its position at the weekend, urging the country's leaders to handle the situation in Rakhine state "with restraint and maturity" and focus on the welfare of civilians.

Delhi nevertheless maintains it will press ahead with its own plans to deport an estimated 40,000 Rohingya who fled to India after earlier security crackdowns.

# Ex-Trump Aide Faces Angry Protests in Hong Kong



Activists take part in a protest against U.S. President Donald Trump and the visit of former White House strategist Steve Bannon ahead of his expected speech for an investment firm in Hong Kong on September 12, 2017.

HONG KONG (Dispatches) -- Activists gathered in central Hong Kong Tuesday to protest the visit of U.S. President Donald Trump's former top strategist Steve Bannon, chanting "Nazis are not welcome here!" as they donned cartoon Trump masks.

The protesters stood outside the harbor-front Grand Hyatt hotel in Hong Kong where the 63-year-old was due to speak at a closed-door investors' forum, holding a rooster-shaped cardboard cut-out capped with Trump's hairstyle and labeled "toxic nationalist."

Media were denied access to Bannon's speech, hosted by CLSA, a Hong Kong-based brokerage firm owned by China's CITIC Securities, China's biggest investment bank.

Another banner bearing Bannon's denounced racism and nationalism, with protesters accusing him of using divisive populist agendas to boost political support.

A pugnacious defender of populist and nationalist policies, Bannon was ousted

from office last month as the White House was left reeling over the president's response to a violent white supremacist rally.

He also championed trade protectionism and was seen as the driving force behind Trump's isolationist and anti-immigrant agenda.

"Racism and bigotry have no borders. We are here in solidarity with global citizens as well as U.S. citizens to condemn Donald Trump's administration and Steve Bannon's actions," said activist Avery Ng of the Hong Kong pro-democracy party League of Social Democrats.

Sally Tang of political organization Socialist Action questioned the sincerity of Bannon's populist agenda. "Bannon is inside with a lot of super-rich billionaires," she said.

Since being ousted from office Bannon has returned to the ultra-conservative news outlet Breitbart, which he headed before joining Trump's team. He has previously worked in Hong Kong and Shanghai.

# Catalans Rally to Demand Secession From Spain



Members of a human tower team form "castellers" (human tower) during a pro-independence demonstration, on September 11, 2017 in Barcelona.

BARCELONA, Spain (AFP) -- Thousands of Catalan separatists rallied to demand their region break away from Spain, in a show of strength three weeks ahead of an independence referendum banned by Madrid.

Draped in red, yellow and blue separatist flags -- with one banner reading "Goodbye Spain" -- they marched through central Barcelona in what many hope will be the last protest before independence.

"If there is huge mobilization, they can't do anything in Madrid," said Jordi Calatayud, a 21-year-old economics student of the Oct. 1 vote. "Catalan people will make independence

possible, if there are a lot of us, they can't stop us."

Some 400,000 people had signed up to join the demonstration in Barcelona, part of an escalating struggle between the wealthy northeastern province and the Spanish central government.

The protest coincides with Catalonia's national day, the "Diada," which marks the fall of Barcelona in the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714 and the region's subsequent loss of institutions and freedoms.

Since 2012 the holiday has been used by separatists to press for an independent state.

"There are 20 days left (until the referendum)

and the mobilization that prompted this process remains intact," Catalonia's pro-independence President Carles Puigdemont told reporters.

Those against independence complained that a day meant for all Catalans had been hijacked by the separatists -- and even more so this year ahead of the referendum.

"The theme of today's protest is 'Diada of the Yes,'" Ines Arrimadas, the leader in Catalonia of the anti-independence Ciudadanos party, said on Spanish television.

"That means that those of us who aren't in favor of independence cannot participate," she added.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, whose conservative government is fiercely against the vote, wished Catalonia "a good day," calling "for a Diada of freedom, cohabitation and respect for all Catalans."

Demonstrators will take the shape of a giant "X" by gathering on the Paseo de Gracia and Aragon avenues in central Barcelona to represent the mark Catalans will make on their ballots during the referendum.

If the "Yes" side wins the vote, Catalonia's regional government has vowed to declare independence within 48 hours and set about building a sovereign state.

With Spain's central government promising to block the referendum, the pro-independence camp is keen to show that it can rally its troops -- especially after participation in the "Diada" declined last year.

Rajoy's conservative government argues the vote violates the constitution, which states that only central authorities can call a referendum.

# UK Wants to Maintain Military Ties With EU

LONDON (Dispatches) -- Britain wants to have closer military cooperation with the European Union after Brexit than other countries outside the union, according to a document that sets out a vision of "a deep security partnership" aimed at nudging talks forward.

Stating that Britain is "unconditionally committed" to maintaining European security, the government said it wanted to contribute military assets to EU operations after it leaves, and may offer to continue exchanging classified information.

The pledges were detailed in the government's sixth "future partnership paper" -- part of efforts to counter criticism by EU officials that it is not prepared for negotiations to unravel more than 40 years of union.

Underlining that Britain has the largest military and development budgets in Europe, officials pressed what they consider to be one of their strongest

arguments -- that the government can offer military support to the EU.

"At a time of increased threats and international instability the UK remains unwavering in its commitment to uphold European security," Defense Secretary Michael Fallon said in a statement.

Britain has deployed troops in some Baltic states to Russia's detriment and has worked on joint military projects, such as the Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft.

Pro-Brexit supporters argued before the EU referendum last year that closer military cooperation between the bloc's member states was yet another sign of closer union, and on Tuesday the Veterans for Britain group said the paper was "a grave mistake."

Tuesday's paper was intended as a conversation-starter rather than a concrete negotiating position, setting out areas such as information and personnel exchanges where Britain could contribute to European security, subject

to negotiations.

Some British have suggested military cooperation with European nations could be used as leverage in talks that so far have moved only slowly, bogged down in arguments over the divorce bill.

But its usefulness as leverage to push talks forward could be limited by the acknowledgement in the paper that Britain also benefits from security and intelligence sharing.

EU officials say they cannot move on to discuss a future relationship until "sufficient progress" has been made on three priority areas -- the rights of expatriates, Britain's border with EU state Ireland and a financial settlement.

Without that movement, British officials say talks may become stalled, particularly on Northern Ireland, arguing that how to deal with the only land border with the EU depends on what kind of future customs deal the two sides will agree.