

Three UK Ministers Back Brexit Delay to Stop No Deal



Greg Clark, Amber Rudd and David Gauke, respectively secretary of state for business, secretary of state for work and pensions and secretary of state for justice, vowed on Saturday to defy Prime Minister Theresa May.

LONDON (Reuters) - Three British cabinet ministers have publicly indicated they will back plans to delay Brexit if lawmakers vote down Prime Minister Theresa May's plan for a new deal with the European Union, writing a column in a national newspaper on Saturday.

Business minister Greg Clark, work and pensions minister Amber Rudd, and justice minister David Gauke signaled in a Daily Mail column that they will side with rebels and opposition parties next week to stop Britain leaving without a divorce deal on March 29 if necessary, adding their weight to calls for May to rule out a no-deal departure.

May is struggling against the clock to get a deal with Brussels on Britain's exit from the world's largest trading bloc that will pass parliamentary muster. She will meet European Council President Donald Tusk on the sidelines of an EU-League of Arab States summit on Sunday, but EU diplomats are not expecting any imminent breakthrough.

In the column headlined "If we don't get a deal next week we must delay Brexit", Clark, Rudd and Gauke wrote that a no-deal exit was a risk to business, security and British territorial unity, and accused some parliament colleagues of complacency.

"Far from Brexit resulting in a newly independent United Kingdom stepping boldly into the wider world, crashing out on March 29 would see us poorer, less secure and potentially splitting up," they said, referring to the threat of a new bid for Scottish independence.

"Our economy will be damaged severely both in the short and the long term. Costs will increase, businesses that rely on just-in-time supply chains will be severely disrupted and investment will be discouraged," they wrote.

The ministers called on members of the European Research Group, formed by Conservative pro-Brexit lawmakers, to back the government's deal in parliament or risk seeing Brexit delayed.

Both May's Conservatives and the main opposition Labor Party are formally committed to delivering Brexit. In recent days Labor has appeared to soften its stance on a second referendum, although May has ruled such an option out.

Lawmakers from both parties, however, are deeply split over how or even whether Britain will leave, and no majority has so far emerged in parliament for any comprehensive Brexit strategy.

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Sudan Opposition Rejects Bashir's State of Emergency



Sudanese demonstrators run from a teargas canister fired by riot police officers during a protest in January.

KHARTOUM (AFP) - Sudan's main opposition party on Saturday dismissed President Omar al-Bashir's declaration of a state of emergency, saying protesters would keep up their campaign until his three-decade rule was ended.

On Friday, Bashir imposed a nationwide state of emergency and dissolved the federal and provincial governments in a bid to quell two months of almost daily demonstrations that have rocked his iron-fisted regime.

"Dissolving the government and imposing a state of emergency is nothing but a repetition of this regime's failures," the opposition National Umma Party said in a statement.

"Nothing will satisfy the people who are taking to the streets except the overthrow of this regime."

The National Umma Party, whose leader Sadiq al-Mahdi was Sudan's elected prime minister when Bashir seized power in a coup in 1989, has thrown its weight behind the protests.

The party has signed up to a

"Document for Freedom and Change" also signed by the Communist Party and the political wings of several rebels groups in Sudan's outlying regions.

The text sets out a vision for a post-Bashir future with a reformed justice system and a raft of measures to halt Sudan's precipitous economic decline, which has been the driving force behind the protests.

A government decision to triple the price of bread was the immediate trigger for the first demonstration in the farming town of Atbara on December 19 and the protests swiftly mushroomed as they struck a chord with the large numbers of Sudanese who have seen their purchasing power plummet in recent years.

The protest campaign has been led by the Sudanese Professionals Association, an umbrella group of teachers, doctors and engineers, who have been among the worst hit.

Officials say 31 people have died in protest-related violence so far. Human Rights Watch says at least 51 people have been killed.

Indian Minister Vows All Options Against Pakistan



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays tribute as he walks next to the coffins with the remains of killed soldiers at Palam airport in New Delhi.

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - An Indian minister has called Pakistan as a "rogue state," saying New Delhi will use all options to overpower Islamabad as tensions flare over a deadly terrorist attack in the disputed region of Kashmir last week.

"We have to act in a manner that this battle has to be decisively won by us because Pakistan is not willing to give up its traditional role in our neighborhood as a rogue state," Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said.

At least 44 Indian paramilitary personnel were killed and dozens more wounded after a bomber

to do with the bombing and called for dialogue with India to ease tensions.

He said the Indian government had leveled allegations against Pakistan "without any evidence" and expressed Islamabad's readiness to cooperate with New Delhi in investigating the bombing.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Friday wrote a letter to the United Nations Security Council, accusing India of threatening regional security.

"It is with a sense of urgency that I draw your attention to the deteriorating security situation in our region resulting from Indian belligerence and threats of use of force against Pakistan," the letter said.

"The situation poses a threat to international peace and security," Qureshi said in the letter addressed to UN Security Council president Anatolio Ndong Mba.

Kashmir has been split between India and Pakistan since partition in 1947. Both countries claim all of Kashmir and have fought three wars over the territory.

Indian troops are in constant clashes with armed groups seeking Kashmir's independence or its merger with Pakistan.

India regularly accuses Pakistan of arming and training militants and allowing them across the restive frontier in an attempt to launch attacks. Pakistan strongly denies the allegation.

rammed an explosive-laden car into a military convoy in Kashmir on February 14.

The Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), one of several armed outfits fighting Indian rule over Kashmir, took responsibility for the bombing.

Jaitley accused Pakistan of not acting against perpetrators despite the militant group's admission of responsibility for the attack.

On Friday, Pakistan's army said Islamabad had no intention to initiate war but it would respond to any attack by India with "full force."

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan has said Islamabad had nothing

Catholic Nun: This Storm Will Not Pass



Pope Francis attends the four-day meeting on the global sexual abuse crisis, at the Vatican February 23, 2019.

VATICAN CITY (Reuters) - A Catholic nun told bishops on Saturday to acknowledge the church's hypocrisy in its handling of the sexual abuse crisis, and a cardinal admitted case files had been destroyed.

Sister Veronica Openibo, a Nigerian who has worked in Africa, Europe and the United States, spoke with a soft voice but had a strong message for the prelates sitting before her, telling them: "This storm will not pass."

She delivered her talk at the start of the penultimate day of a Vatican summit of some 200 senior Church officials convened by Pope Francis to confront what he has called the scourge of sexual abuse by the clergy.

"We proclaim the Ten Commandments and parade ourselves as being the custodians of moral standards and values and good behavior in society. Hypocrites at times? Yes! Why did we keep silent for so long?" she said.

"How could the clerical Church have kept silent, covering these atrocities? The silence, the carrying of the secrets in the hearts of the perpetrators, the length of the abuses and the constant transfers of perpetrators are unimaginable," she said.

She spoke of her shock when she

watched the 2015 Oscar-winning film Spotlight, which uncovered how Church leaders in Boston moved predator priests from parish to parish instead of defrocking them or turning them over to civil authorities.

"At the present time, we are in a state of crisis and shame. We have seriously clouded the grace of the Christ-mission," Openibo said.

"We must acknowledge that our mediocrity, hypocrisy and complacency have brought us to this disgraceful and scandalous place we find ourselves as a Church. We pause to pray, Lord have mercy on us!" she said.

She said Church leaders must shed their habit of hiding events for fear of making a mistake.

German Cardinal Reinhard Marx called for more "traceability and transparency" in dealing with the issue, such as limiting pontifical secrecy in cases of abuse handled by the Vatican, releasing more statistics and publishing judicial procedures.

"Files that could have documented the terrible deeds and named those responsible were destroyed, or not even created. Instead of the perpetrators, the victims were regulated and silence imposed on them," Marx, a leading progressive, said.

At Least 84 Dead After Drinking Toxic Liquor in India

GUWAHATI, India (Reuters) - At least 84 people have died from drinking toxic bootleg liquor in the northeastern Indian state of Assam, and around 200 others have been hospitalized, a state government minister said on Saturday.

The deaths come less than two weeks after more than 100 people died from drinking tainted alcohol in two northern Indian states, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

Police have arrested twelve people in connection with making bootleg alcohol in Assam, a practice local politicians say is rampant in the area's tea estates, where poorly-paid laborers usually get drunk after a tough day's work in the plantations.

"Every 10 minutes we are getting reports of casualties from different places. So far about 200 people are in hospital with many of them critical," Assam Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told Reuters via telephone.

"Doctors from nearby districts and other medical colleges have been rushed in to deal with the crisis," said Sarma, after visiting patients at Jorhat, located some 300 kilometers east of the state's financial hub, Guwahati.

Deaths from illegally produced alcohol, known locally as hooch or country liquor, are common in India.

The death tolls from the two recent incidents, however, are believed to be the deadliest since a similar case killed 172 in West Bengal in 2011.

Dilip Rajbnonsi, a doctor at the government hospital in Golaghat, located some 40 kilometers southwest of Jorhat said the deaths were due to "spurious country liquor".

A number of women are among the

casualties. Many of those that drank the liquor were tea plantation workers who had just received their weekly wages, according to another state government official.

"I asked some of the patients why they consume liquor almost everyday and they said after a hard day's work in the plantations they drink to relieve stress and tiredness," health minister Sarma said.

Mrinal Saikia, a local lawmaker from the Bharatiya Janata Party - which is in control of the federal and Assam state governments - said alcohol, often laced with cattle feed and battery acid, is being supplied "in gallons" to tea plantation workers.

"This is a big business in areas surrounding tea gardens where people set up illegal distilleries to make country liquor," he said.



HANOI (Reuters) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un set off by train for Vietnam on Saturday, for his second summit with U.S. President Donald Trump next week, Russia's TASS news agency reported. The report came hours after Vietnam announced that Kim would make an official visit in "coming days", as the Southeast Asian country prepares to host the summit with Trump on Wednesday and Thursday. No details of the leaders' travel arrangements, or for the summit, have been officially released. Trump and Kim will meet in the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi, eight months after their historic summit in Singapore in June - the first between a sitting U.S. president and a North Korean leader - at which they pledged to work toward the complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. But progress has been scant since then. The Trump administration has pressed North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program, which threatens the United States, before it can expect any concessions. North Korea wants an easing of punishing U.S.-led sanctions, security guarantees and a formal end of the 1950-1953 Korean War, which ended in a truce, not a treaty.

ABUJA (AFP) - Nigerians voted for a new president on Saturday after a week-long delay that has raised political tempers, sparked conspiracy claims and stoked fears of violence. Some 120,000 polling stations opened from 0700 GMT, although there were delays in the delivery of some materials and deployment of staff. Results are expected from early next week, with the winner gaining control of Africa's most populous nation and leading oil producer for four years. President Muhammadu Buhari was one of the first to vote, and emerged from the polling booth in his home town of Daura, in the northwest state of Katsina, to say he was confident of victory. "So far, so good," he told reporters. "I will congratulate myself. I'm going to be the winner." His main challenger, Atiku Abubakar, 72, said he was impressed by the turnout after voting in Yola, in the northeastern state of Adamawa. Shortly before polls opened, one soldier was killed and 20 others injured as Boko Haram fighters tried to infiltrate the northeastern city of Maiduguri. Security sources and residents said multiple explosions were heard as the Takfiri militants peppered the city with mortar fire but were repelled.

WASHINGTON (AP) - Democrats controlling the House have teed up a vote next week to block President Donald Trump from using a national emergency declaration to fund a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, accelerating a showdown in Congress that could divide Republicans and lead to Trump's first veto. The Democrats introduced a resolution Friday to block Trump's declaration, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the House would vote on the measure Tuesday. It is sure to pass, and the GOP-run Senate may adopt it as well. Trump quickly promised a veto. "Will I veto it? 100 percent," Trump told reporters at the White House. Any Trump veto would likely be sustained, but the upcoming battle will test Republican support for the president's move, which even some of his allies view as a stretch - and a slap at lawmakers' control over the power of the federal purse.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump said on Friday he was nominating Kelly Craft, currently the U.S. ambassador to Canada, to replace Nikki Haley as his envoy to the United Nations after a four-month search. Craft, a top Republican donor from Kentucky, rose this week as a serious contender for the post based on a recommendation by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a fellow Kentuckian. Craft will not hold a Cabinet-level position, as Haley did, a senior White House official said, after Trump decided to downgrade the post. Regardless, she will need to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Craft "extremely well-qualified" and an "outstanding advocate for America's national security and economic interests in Canada." Craft met with Trump, Pompeo and national security adviser John Bolton in the Oval Office on Friday, a source familiar with the situation told Reuters.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - A fire at an airshow in India destroyed three hundred cars on Saturday, a senior fire official said, the latest accident to mar the government-run event. The most likely cause was a "dry grass fire aided by heavy winds," said M.N. Reddi, a fire official in the southern city of Bengaluru where the show is taking place. There were no reports of casualties, he added in a tweet. Footage from Reuters partner ANI showed rows of burnt-out cars and huge flames and plumes of black smoke. The Aero India show, run by the country's defense ministry, aims to become one of the world's premier aerospace events, but has been troubled by accidents this year. On Tuesday, two Indian Air Force planes collided in mid-air while rehearsing an aerobatic show, killing one pilot and injuring two others. A spokesman for India's defense ministry did not respond to a request for comment.