

Hot Africa Air Brings Scorching Heat, Dust to Europe



Hay bales are collected on a wagon in a field in Wehrheim near Frankfurt, Germany.

MADRID (France 24) -- Hot air from Africa is bringing a new heatwave to Europe, prompting health warnings about Sahara Desert dust and exceptionally high temperatures that are forecast to peak at 47 degrees Celsius in some southern areas.

The torrid weather meant that public services were put on alert in Spain and Portugal. A hot air mass was moving northward from Africa, authorities said, warning that the mercury could peak at 47 degrees Celsius this weekend in the southern Portuguese town of Beja.

Portuguese authorities issued a nationwide health warning, including for dust from the Sahara Desert. Warnings were also issued for 40 of Spain's 50

provinces.

Italy issued red alerts -- the highest of three warning levels -- across the centre and north, indicating widespread health risks in cities including tourist magnets Rome, Florence and Venice.

Heatwaves have become common in Italy, and between 2005 and 2016 some 23,880 people died in 23 Italian cities of heat-related problems, a report by the region of Lazio found.

Forecasters expect Italy's heatwave to break over the weekend with powerful thunderstorms across much of the country.

In the eastern German state of Saxony-Anhalt, police warned people not to touch the grenades, mines and other weapons that have emerged from the mud on the banks of

the River Elbe since the heatwave caused a drastic reduction in the water level.

In just a few weeks, police have found 24 pieces of World War Two munitions -- dumped at the end of the conflict by Russian, Western and German forces -- near the water, compared with 12 in the whole of last year.

Up north in Sweden, the country's official tallest point is set to change amid record temperatures. Scientists said a glacier on Mount Kebne, the Scandinavian country's highest peak at 2,111 meters is melting and is no longer Sweden's tallest point.

Gunhild Rosqvist, a Stockholm University professor in geography, said the glacier lost four meters of snow in July alone as Sweden endured record temperatures that triggered dozens of wildfires, even in the Arctic Circle.

In eastern Europe, Poland endured unusually high temperatures up to 34 degrees, forcing its power plants to go into emergency mode to increase output due to the wide use of air conditioning and electric fans.

France's national weather service, Météo-France, published data on Thursday showing last month was the country's third-hottest July since 1900. The average temperature of 23.2 degrees Celsius was 2.5 degrees above normal.

Farmers across the continent were battling the effects of drought, so the European Union offered to speed up funds to help them cope. German farmers have already asked their government for 1 billion euros in financial aid to help cover losses from this year's poor harvest.

Mnangagwa Calls for Unity After Winning Election



Supporters of President Emmerson Mnangagwa celebrate his election victory in Harare.

HARARE (Dispatches) -- President Emmerson Mnangagwa called on Friday for Zimbabwe to unite behind him after he was declared winner of national elections, but the opposition leader questioned the outcome and demanded "proper and verified" results be released.

The election, the first since the army removed 94-year-old Robert Mugabe from office in November, passed off relatively smoothly on the day, raising hopes of a break from a history of disputed and violent polls.

But the deaths of six people during protests and opposition claims of vote rigging cast a shadow over the vote.

After three days of claims and counterclaims, 75-year-old Mnangagwa -- a former spy chief under Mugabe -- secured victory.

He polled 2.46 million votes against 2.15 million for 40-year-old opposition leader Nelson Chamisa, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) announced in the early hours of Friday morning.

"This is a new beginning. Let us

join hands, in peace, unity and love, and together build a new Zimbabwe for all," Mnangagwa said on Twitter.

Mnangagwa received 50.8% of the vote, just edging over the 50% mark needed to avoid a runoff.

"The immediate priorities for Mnangagwa and his government will be to continue on the path of restoring the economy and boosting exports, helped by international engagement," said Christopher Dielmann, economist at Exotix Capital.

"By many accounts, this imperfect election delivered sufficient transparency, especially in relation to past results in the country, that should allow reengagement to occur relatively smoothly."

Chamisa, who earlier accused the election commission of trying to rig the vote, said on Friday it should release "proper and verified" results.

The streets of the capital Harare were quiet early on Friday, with traffic thinner than usual.

The Herald newspaper hailed the election as reflecting the will of the majority and admonished the opposition.

"Unfortunately in Zimbabwe we have allowed to grow and flourish a culture of rabble-rousing and sham protests of alleged rigging whenever a party loses that this has become a default mode in the opposition," a Herald editorial said.

U.S. Accuses Russia of North Korea Sanctions-Busting

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- Russia is allowing thousands of fresh North Korean laborers into the country and granting new work permits in potential violation of UN sanctions, the Wall Street Journal reported Thursday.

Over 10,000 new North Korean workers have registered in Russia since September, the paper said, citing records from the Russian Interior Ministry.

UN sanctions are aimed at reducing cash flows to North Korea and putting pressure on Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons.

Labor Ministry records obtained by the Journal showed that a minimum of 700 new work permits have been issued to North Koreans in Russia this year, the paper said.

"It is estimated that North Korean laborers in Russia send between \$150-\$300 million annually to Pyongyang. Now is the time for Russia to take action: Moscow should immediately and fully implement all the UN sanctions that it has signed on to," a

U.S. State Department spokesperson told Reuters.

Russia's ambassador to North Korea said Friday Moscow had not violated UN sanctions and not brought in any new workers from the country, Interfax news agency reported.

Any new work permits that were issued to North Korean workers in Russia were for laborers already located in the country and working under old contracts, ambassador Alexander Matsegora was cited as saying by Interfax.

The labor prohibition is a part of a broader array of sanctions that are aimed at eliminating an important revenue stream for North Korea.

In a report released Thursday by the non-profit research organization C4ADS, the Journal said initial restrictions in China and Russia -- where around 80% of North Korean laborers are believed to work -- appear to have loosened.

"For a time, both Russia and China appeared to be expelling North Korean workers well before UN deadlines, but

more recent reporting suggests that North Korea may have again begun to dispatch labor to both countries," the report concluded.

A separate report released this week by the Seoul-based Asan Institute for Policy Studies said between 2015 and 2017 the Moscow-based Independent Petroleum Company (IPC) sold far more oil to North Korea than what was officially reported.

"The amount of oil IPC sold to North Korea between 2015 and 2017 could be worth as much \$238 million," the report estimated.

IPC was sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department in June 2017 over its trade with North Korea, and in December 2017 the UN imposed its strictest limits on North Korean imports to date.

In September last year, Reuters found that at least eight North Korean ships that left Russia with a cargo of fuel headed for their homeland despite declaring other destinations, a plot that U.S. officials say is often used to undermine sanctions.

Sweden to Buy U.S. Patriots Under Trump Pressure



In this file photo taken on July 18, 2006, anti-air Patriot missile batteries are seen deployed at the Stella Maris Base on Mount Carmel in Haifa.

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) -- The Swedish government says it will acquire the U.S.-made Patriot air defense missile system, calling it "reliable" and with "the ability to combat ballistic robots."

In Thursday's statement, the government said it was authorizing its military to acquire four Patriot firing units and an undisclosed number of missiles. The first delivery is expected in 2020.

Financial details were not disclosed, nor was a date for a signing of the deal but Swedish radio reported that the agreement with U.S. arms manufacturer Raytheon Co would be signed this week.

Non-NATO member Sweden has expressed concerns over a worsened security situation in the Baltic Sea region over the past few years, citing Russia's increased military operations.

Although it is not a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member, Sweden has close ties to the alliance and has been beefing up its armed forces after decades of neglect amid increased pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump.

Sweden, whose existing air defense system cannot shoot down ballistic

missiles, will buy four Patriot firing units and an undisclosed number of missiles, Swedish radio said.

"This system has been proven in action. ... There are a number of other countries that already have it, and we expect the first delivery in 2021," Swedish radio quoted Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist as saying.

Sweden began talks over the purchase, initially worth around 10 billion crowns (\$1.14 billion), last November.

The contract includes an option to buy up to 300 missiles, which would bring the final bill to around \$3 billion.

Among NATO members, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Poland have purchased Patriot so far, while neutral Switzerland has said it is considering Patriot among other systems.

Russia is wary of the West's military buildup near its borders. The Patriot deal with Sweden comes amid mounting concerns about the increase in Washington's weapons sales in Europe.

Trump has long been pushing America's allies in NATO to increase their military budget. He has even pledged to help smaller NATO countries to buy U.S. weapons.

Unlikely to Derail Cricket Star's Premiership Bid: Pakistan Parties Unite to Challenge Imran Khan



A man walks past an image of cricket star-turned-politician Imran Khan, chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), at a market in Islamabad, July 27, 2018.

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) -- Pakistan's two former dominant political parties said on Thursday they would join forces to field their own candidate for prime minister in parliament, challenging former cricket star Imran Khan, whose party won last week's general election.

The alliance with several other smaller parties appeared unlikely to derail Khan's election as prime minister, but it could leave him with a thin majority that could make enacting his agenda difficult.

Khan's party, which won 116 of the 272 elected seats in the National Assembly, is believed to have enough would-be coalition partners among smaller parties and independents to win a majority vote to form a government.

But the main rival parties, which on Thursday repeated accusations that the July 25 vote was rigged by the powerful military, vowed to vote together with several smaller parties

against Khan's election as prime minister in parliament.

"It is an alliance which is against the rigged elections, and where all the political parties were not provided a free and fair, level playing field," said Maryam Aurangzeb, speaking for the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) of jailed ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

The opposition alliance was not believed to have the numbers to block Khan's election.

The PML-N joined with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by the son of assassinated former premier Benazir Bhutto, and several smaller nationalist and religious parties in forming the opposition alliance, known as the All Parties Conference.

The PMN-L and PPP have traded power in Pakistan for most of its history in between periods of military rule after the army seized power, which itself accounts for nearly half of the 71 years since independence from Britain.



SINGAPORE (Reuters) -- The navies of China and Southeast Asia held their first maritime exercise this week, Singapore's defense ministry said on Friday, in an effort to widen cooperation as they negotiate a code of conduct on a disputed waterway. The "tabletop" simulated exercise in the city-state involved the navies of China and all 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ahead of the first maritime drill set to be held in waters in China in October. The bloc and China hailed progress on Thursday in a long, drawn-out process to negotiate a code of conduct in the disputed South China Sea, one of the world's busiest waterways, where China and some of the bloc's members have conflicting claims. The exercises come as more nations, many ASEAN members among them, are drawn into China's orbit as the United States finds it difficult to promote its policy of engaging Asia while promising to put "America First". The navy drills were carrying China's cooperation with Southeast Asia to a new level, its top government diplomat, Wang Yi, said on Thursday. "We will use these drills as a starting point to expand China and ASEAN's military communications and security cooperation, to together face security concerns and to protect the stability of the region," Wang told a news conference. China's navy also plans to join 26 countries in military exercises off Australia's north coast this month hosted by Canberra and involving the United States.

ROME (AFP) -- A Spanish NGO ship which rescued 87 migrants off the coast of Libya two days ago was still looking Friday to dock at a port, with Italy closed to them, the group Proactiva Open Arms said. The migrants, nearly all from Sudan including from Darfur, had spent 50 hours at sea on board an inflatable boat, without drinking water and many suffering burns from a mixture of fuel and salt water. Many of them jumped into the sea when the rescuers arrived Wednesday for fear of being taken back to Libya where migrants often suffer abuse, arbitrary detentions, extortion and violence. "Anywhere but not Italy," Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini has already warned via Twitter, repeating the new government's headline policy closing the country's ports to migrant rescue ships.

MOGADISHU (Dispatches) -- The U.S. military claims it has carried out an airstrike in Somalia that killed four members of the Al-Shabab extremist group. The U.S. Africa Command said this was the 19th such airstrike this year against the Somalia-based Al-Shabab, the deadliest extremist group in sub-Saharan Africa. The U.S. claims it has also carried out a number of drone strikes against a small presence of fighters linked to Daesh in northern Somalia. Friday's statement said the latest airstrike was carried out Thursday about 119 kilometers northwest of the capital, Mogadishu. Al-Shabab often targets the capital with deadly attacks. The U.S. said it assessed that no civilians were killed. Somali officials and residents at least twice in recent months have alleged that civilians were killed in airstrikes.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The death toll in violent protests in Nicaragua against the government of President Daniel Ortega stands at 317, a U.S.-based regional rights group said Thursday. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) said that the death toll since protests broke out on April 18 includes 21 police officers and 23 underage victims. According to Nicaraguan rights groups, more than 300 people have been killed and 2,000 wounded in more than three months of unrest against the Ortega administration. Ortega puts the toll at 195. The United States, the OAS and the Vatican are calling on Ortega -- in power since 2007 -- resign or agree to hold early elections. Ortega says the country would plunge into "anarchy" if he left power before the end of his mandate in early 2022.

ROME (Reuters) -- Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte summoned top ministers Friday to discuss next year's budget, as investors concerned about the government's spending plans sold Italian bonds and the national statistics bureau warned the economy would keep slowing. Ahead of the meeting, which began at around 11 a.m., Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini said the budget would include tax cuts and pensions reform. Both moves would be likely to increase Italy's large public debt, unless balanced by corresponding spending cuts, which the government has so far not detailed. "The 2019 budget will not include all planned measures immediately, but there will be the first steps towards a flat tax and a radical overhaul of the pensions system," Salvini, who leads the right-wing League, said in a TV interview. No news conference is scheduled to follow the meeting and no official announcement is expected. Salvini's remarks came as Italian government bonds were selling off for a second day on speculation over the budget.