

# California Wildfire to Burn for Rest of Month



Firefighter Joe Smith retrieves supplies while battling the Ranch Fire, part of the Mendocino Complex Fire, burning along High Valley Rd near Clearlake Oaks, California, on August 5, 2018.

LAKEPORT, Calif./LISBON (Dispatches) -- California's biggest wildfire on record was expected to burn for the rest of the month, fire officials said Tuesday, as hot and windy conditions challenged thousands of fire crews battling eight major blazes burning out of control across the state.

The Mendocino Complex grew to span over 117,000 hectares - approximately the size of Los Angeles - by Tuesday morning, with barely a third of it contained since two wildfires merged at the southern tip of the Mendocino National Forest, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) said.

Meanwhile, Europe's scorching heat wave has killed nine people in a week in Spain, health authorities

said, as stifling temperatures kindled wildfires in the country and neighboring Portugal where a ferocious blaze encircled a resort town.

The Mendocino Complex fire north of San Francisco has been less destructive to property than some of the other wildfires in the state because it is mostly raging in remote areas. But officials say it threatens 11,300 buildings and some new evacuations were ordered over the weekend as the flames spread.

Hotter weather attributed to climate change is drying out vegetation, creating more intense fires that spread quickly from rural areas to city subdivisions, climate and fire experts say. But they also blame cities and towns that are expanding housing into previously

undeveloped areas.

Over 14,000 firefighters are battling more than a dozen major blazes throughout California, state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokesman Scott McLean said. "I can remember a couple of years ago when we saw 10 to 12,000 firefighters in the states of California, Oregon and Washington and never the 14,000 we see now," he said.

In Europe, weeks of nonstop sunshine and near-record temperatures have caused droughts and seen tinder-dry forests consumed by wildfires from the Mediterranean to the Arctic Circle, in what many fear could be the region's new normal in an era of climate change.

The devastating effects of the heat wave were visible from space, according to images of swaths of arid landscape taken by the German astronaut Alexander Gerst from the International Space Station.

"After several weeks of night flying, I was able to take the first day pictures of central Europe and Germany. The sight is shocking. Everything that should be green is parched and brown," Gerst said on Twitter.

While the deadly hot spell is expected to ease in parts of Western Europe in the coming days, firefighters in Spain and Portugal struggled to contain wildfires that have swept southern areas.

In the southern Portuguese holiday region, residents and tourists have been evacuated from around an Algarve resort town as fire crews struggled to extinguish wildfires that have raged for days leaving 30 people injured, one seriously.

# First Muslim Woman Wins U.S. Congress Ticket



In this Nov. 6, 2008 photo in Lansing, Mich., Rashida Tlaib, D-Detroit, is shown in front of the Michigan Capitol after her election as the first Muslim woman to serve in the state House.

DETROIT, United States (Middle East Eye) -- Rashida Tlaib, a Palestinian American and former Michigan state representative, won the Democratic nomination for Congress in a Detroit-based district on Tuesday.

With no Republican candidate in the race, Tlaib will almost certainly become the first Muslim woman in Congress after the general election takes place in November.

The safe Democratic seat had been held by veteran lawmaker John Conyers since 1965. He resigned earlier this year after sexual harassment allegations against him.

"She's not your typical politician," Tlaib supporter Isra Daraiseh said of the soon-to-be congresswoman. "She says what she means and she does what she says."

Daraiseh also called Tlaib a role model because of her dedication and "authenticity".

The mother-of-two ran a progressive anti-establishment campaign with a focus on environmental protections and opposing tax cuts for big corporations and she has not shielded away from the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Dozens of Tlaib's supporters gathered at a Detroit venue on Tuesday, erupting in frantic cheers with each update on the results that showed their candidate in the lead, as if their favorite football team had scored a goal. As soon as the DJ played the Arabic folk

song, My blood is Palestinian, Tlaib's Arab and non-Arab supporters formed a dabke ring with a Palestinian flag waving behind them.

Community organizer Nada al-Hanooti described Tlaib's victory as "revolutionary" for Detroit and Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. "I think it is a step in the right direction," al-Hanooti told MEE. "Detroit is really suffering, and I have seen firsthand what Rashida is doing with her constituents."

Tlaib, the oldest of 14 children, told MEE back in March that while growing up in Detroit, she saw parallels between the civil rights movement in the U.S. and the Palestinians' struggle for justice.

"I have been very clear to everyone who has asked about this issue that I see everything through a human rights lens," Tlaib said.

Although the Detroit area is home to large Arab and Muslim communities, they were not a major constituency in Tlaib's district. Her supporters say that proves that she won based on her policy proposals and track record in government.

Khaled Beydoun, law professor and author of, American Islamophobia, said Tlaib's election as the first Muslim woman to Congress is a "landmark moment".

# UN Urges Myanmar to Speed Rohingya Return



A view of the Kutupalong Rohingya refugee camp, Bangladesh, Monday, June 2, 2018.

GENEVA (Reuters) -- United Nations aid agencies called on Myanmar Wednesday to improve conditions in Rakhine state for the safe return of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh and provide a clear pathway to citizenship for those eligible.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UN Development Programme (UNDP)

said in a joint statement that they needed full access to Rakhine state and were still awaiting permission for international staff to be based in the town of Maungdaw following requests made on June 14.

There was no immediate response from the Myanmar authorities to a Reuters request for comment.

The United Nations signed an outline deal with Myanmar in

early June aimed at eventually allowing hundreds of thousands of Rohingya in Bangladesh to return safely and by choice. But the secret agreement, seen by Reuters, offers no explicit guarantees of citizenship or freedom of movement throughout the country.

The UN agencies said that substantial progress was urgently needed in three key areas: "granting effective access in Rakhine State; ensuring freedom of movement for all communities; and addressing the root causes of the crisis."

More than 700,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar's western Rakhine state after a military crackdown that started in August last year.

The Rohingya, who regard themselves as native to Rakhine state, are widely considered as interlopers by Myanmar's Buddhist majority and are denied citizenship.

The UN said that Rohingya remaining in Rakhine are under local orders that severely restrict their freedom of movement, preventing them from reaching jobs, school and health care, and called for these to be lifted.

# Malaysia Shuts Down Saudi-Backed Center

KUALA LUMPUR (Middle East Eye) -- Malaysia's newly elected government has shut down a Saudi-backed anti-terrorism centre set up under former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak.

The immediate closure of the King Salman Centre for International Peace (KSCIP) comes after local parliamentarians questioned the suitability of Saudi Arabia funding a deradicalization centre, citing fears of possible retaliation from the Daesh group.

The center was set up following a state visit to Malaysia by Saudi King Salman last year, described at the time as aiming "to combat

terrorist threats and the spread of propaganda and ideologies bandied about by the extremists and the terrorists".

Muhammad Sabu, Malaysia's minister of defense, announced the centre's closure on Monday in Malaysia's parliament, and said the Ministry of Defense would resume control of the centre.

In a press conference in Kuala Lumpur, Najib - who suffered a surprise defeat in May's election after being embroiled in a huge multi-billion dollar corruption scandal - said the centre's closure would offend the Persian Gulf kingdom. "It's not something we planned.

It was planned by the Saudi government, by King Salman himself. That's why it was named after him," Najib told reporters on Tuesday.

"They chose Malaysia, compared to many other nations. So we are rejecting help from Saudi, a nation that has a very good relationship with Malaysia."

Commentators, however, have described the move as an opportunity for the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition, elected in May, to distance itself from previous government initiatives, including Saudi-backed projects linked to the former prime minister.

# Ex-PM Najib Charged With Money-Laundering



Saudi Arabia was embroiled in the IMDB controversy after it gave former prime minister Najib Razak \$681 million.

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) -- Malaysia's former prime minister Najib Razak was hit with new charges Wednesday linked to a multi-billion-dollar financial scandal that contributed to his shock election defeat in May.

Appearing at a court in Kuala Lumpur, Najib was charged with three counts of money-laundering over claims he pocketed 42 million ringgit (\$10.3 million) from a former unit of scandal-hit sovereign wealth fund IMDB.

These are in addition to the charges he faced last month after he was first arrested - three for criminal breach of trust and a separate count that he abused his position to take the money.

The 65-year-old, who is free on bail, has denied all the charges.

Malaysia's new government is probing allegations that billions of dollars were looted from IMDB, which was set up and overseen by Najib, in an audacious fraud that spanned the globe.

Allegations of massive corruption were a major factor behind the electoral earthquake in May that toppled Najib's long-ruling coalition and ushered in a reformist alliance headed by his 93-year-old former mentor Mahathir Mohamad.

In a packed courtroom, the three new charges were read out to Najib. Asked if he understood them, Najib - dressed in a dark blue suit and looking tired - said he did.

His case was transferred to another court, where he entered not guilty pleas, meaning he will stand trial. Trial dates will be fixed

on Friday, the judge said.

As he left court, a handful of supporters shouted "long live Najib" while his lawyer Muhammad Shafee Abdullah said the toppled leader believed the case was driven by politics.

"I am confident of a fair trial for my client, but my client thinks this is a political prosecution," he told reporters.

Najib is facing a long time behind bars if found guilty - the money-laundering charges carry maximum jail terms of 15 years each, while the other four charges carry sentences of 20 years each.

The money-laundering charges allege 42 million ringgit stemming from illegal activities was transferred to Najib's bank accounts between December 2014 and February 2015.

All the charges relate to fund transfers from SRC International, an energy company that was originally a subsidiary of IMDB.

The sums involved are just a fraction of the \$681 million that was mysteriously transferred to Najib's personal bank accounts several years ago, sparking uproar in Malaysia.

The then attorney general - who had ties to Najib's party - cleared the leader of wrongdoing, and said that the money had been a donation from the Saudi royal family.

Najib, who has consistently denied any wrongdoing, and his allies are accused of plundering billions of dollars from IMDB to buy everything from U.S. real estate to artworks.



RIYADH (Reuters) -- Saudi Arabia said Wednesday it had stopped all medical treatment programs in Canada and was working on the transfer of all Saudi patients from hospitals there, in an escalating row after Ottawa urged it to free rights activists. Saudi Arabia froze new trade and investment with Canada and expelled the Canadian ambassador this week, pushing Canada to seek help from the United Arab Emirates and Britain to try to defuse the dispute. Since rising to power in 2015, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman has courted Western allies to support his reform plans, offering billions of dollars of arms sales and promising to fight radicalism in the kingdom. Hundreds of billions of dollars of investments were discussed during his trips to the United States and Europe. The dispute with Canada has shed light on scores of political and rights activists arrested in Saudi Arabia over the last two years. State news agency SPA said Riyadh had stopped sending patients to Canadian hospitals and "is coordinating for the transfer of all Saudi patients from Canadian hospitals ... according to directives by the leadership."

BANGSAL, Indonesia (AP) -- Aid began reaching isolated areas of the Indonesian island struggling after a powerful earthquake that killed at least 131 people, while rescuers Wednesday doubled down on efforts to find the dead, pulling another body from the rubble. Volunteers and rescue personnel were erecting more temporary shelters for the tens of thousands of people left homeless on Lombok by the magnitude 7.0 quake on Sunday evening. Water, food and medical supplies were being distributed from trucks. The military said five planes carrying food, medicine, blankets, field tents and water tankers left Jakarta for the island early Wednesday. A woman's body was recovered from the rubble of a collapsed mosque on Wednesday morning in Bangsal district in the north of the island. The national disaster agency's spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said the death toll had risen to 131 from 105 announced Tuesday. He told a news conference that there are reports of other deaths but they still need to be verified. The toll is expected to increase, he said. Nearly 2,500 people have been hospitalized with serious injuries and more than 156,000 people are displaced due to the extensive damage to thousands of homes.

LONDON (Guardian) -- Pressure on Boris Johnson over his controversial remarks about women in burqas is mounting across the Conservative party a day after the former foreign secretary was rebuked by Theresa May. A Conservative peer said Johnson should have the whip withdrawn, while a cabinet member called on him to retract his words and use language more carefully, as the row started by the man seen as a possible party leader continued into a third day. The prime minister criticized Johnson over his claim that Muslim women in burqas resemble letterboxes and bank robbers, urging him to apologize after he defied an order to do so by Tory chiefs. She said she agreed with the Conservative party chairman, Brandon Lewis, that Johnson should say sorry for his remarks, which she acknowledged had caused offence in the Muslim community. May urged people to be "very careful" about the language they used to discuss sensitive issues such as women wearing the burqa, but stopped short of saying Johnson's comments were Islamophobic or that he should lose the Tory whip, meaning he would no longer represent the party in parliament.

BERLIN (AP) -- Germany says it has reached an agreement with Spain for that country to take back previously registered migrants who show up at the German border, a first step toward implementing a deal to defuse a domestic political dispute over migration. Interior Ministry spokeswoman Eleonore Petermann said Wednesday that, under the agreement taking effect Saturday, migrants picked up at German border controls who previously registered in Spain will be returned there within 48 hours. She said Spain didn't ask for anything in return. Petermann said talks with Greece and Italy, which have been bigger sources of migration to Germany, are ongoing. In June, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer threatened to turn back previously registered migrants unilaterally at the German-Austrian border. Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted Germany must reach agreements with other countries.

KINSHASA (Reuters) -- Democratic Republic of Congo President Joseph Kabila will not stand in December's presidential election, a spokesman said Wednesday, announcing that former interior minister Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary would be the ruling coalition's candidate. The announcement puts an end to years of speculation about whether Kabila would defy term limits to run for a third term.

NAIROBI/ADDIS ABABA (Reuters) -- Authorities have shut off Internet access in eastern Ethiopia amid an outbreak of violence there, residents said Wednesday, a sign of the challenges facing reformist Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in containing ethnic tensions in parts of the country. The residents, one speaking from Oromia region and the other from the city of Harar, said the connection had been down for three days - the first time access has been cut off since parliament lifted a state of emergency in June. Violence broke out on Saturday in Jijiga, the capital of Ethiopia's Somali region, with mobs looting properties owned by ethnic minorities. Security officials shot dead four people, a witness told Reuters. The government said unrest had been stoked by regional officials.