

'Once in a Lifetime' Hurricane Begins Lashing Carolinas



Residents wade through deep floodwater to retrieve belongings from the Trent Court public housing apartments after the Neuse River went over its banks during Hurricane Florence September 13, 2018 in New Bern, United States.

WILMINGTON, United States (AFP) — Hurricane Florence battered the Carolinas early Friday with howling winds, life-threatening storm surges and torrential rains as it edged closer to the coast in what officials warned is a "once in a lifetime" event. Reports said coastal streets in North Carolina were flooded and winds bent trees to the ground as the storm, which has been downgraded to Category 1 and is weakened and slower moving than in recent days, prepared to make landfall at some point on Friday.

More than 150,000 customers in North Carolina were reported to be without power as the outer band of the storm approached. Footage from U.S. TV outlets showed raging waters hitting piers and jetties, and rushing across coastal roads in seaside communities. The National Hurricane Center in Miami reported "life-threatening storm surge and hurricane-force winds" along the North Carolina coast. In a display of the early effects of the storm, one flood gauge on the Neuse

River in New Bern, North Carolina, showed 10 feet (three meters) of flooding, the NHC said. With winds picking up along the coastline earlier Thursday, federal and state officials had issued final appeals to residents to get out of the path of the "once in a lifetime" weather system. "This storm will bring destruction," North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper said. "Catastrophic effects will be felt." In Wilmington, a steady rain began to fall as gusts of winds intensified, causing trees to sway and stoplights to flicker. Some areas could receive as much as 40 inches (one meter) of rain, forecasters said. "This rainfall will produce catastrophic flash flooding and prolonged significant river flooding," the NHC said. A tornado watch was also in effect for parts of North Carolina. Brock Long, the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), warned the danger was not only along the coast: "Inland flooding kills a lot of people, unfortunately, and that's what we're about to see," he said. About 1.7 million people in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia are under voluntary or mandatory evacuation orders and millions of others live in areas likely to be affected by the storm. A state of emergency has been declared in five coastal states — North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Maryland and Virginia.

North Korea Warns U.S. With Russia, China Support



Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon of South Korea, left, with his North Korean counterpart Ri Son-gwon at the opening ceremony for a joint liaison office in Kaesong, North Korea on Sept. 14, 2018.

BEIJING (Dispatches) — China said on Friday it has sternly protested to the U.S. for imposing sanctions on a tech firm which Washington accuses of moving illicit funding to North Korea. Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said China resolutely opposes unilateral sanctions and long-armed jurisdiction, adding that Beijing had lodged stern representations with Washington. The U.S. on Thursday imposed sanctions on China-based Yanbian Silverstar Network Technology Co, its North Korean chief executive Jo Song Hwa, and a Russian-based sister company, Volasys Silver Star,

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the sanctions were intended to stop the flow of "illicit revenue" to North Korea from overseas information technology workers allegedly disguising their true identities. "China had already lodged stern representations with the U.S. side about this, and urges the U.S. side to stop these wrong actions," Shuang said. The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has maintained sanctions pressure on Pyongyang despite his meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in June at a summit in Singapore. North Korea's Foreign Ministry on Friday

denounced a "smear campaign," warning that it could undermine the implementation of an agreement between Trump and Kim. "The U.S. farce of prosecution is none other than a vicious slander and another smear campaign full of falsehood and fabrication designed to undermine the DPRK," the ministry said, referring to the country's official name. It urged the U.S. to "seriously ponder over the negative consequences of circulating falsehoods and inciting antagonism against the DPRK that may affect the implementation of the joint statement adopted at the DPRK-U.S. summit." Washington has also accused Russia of violating UN sanctions on North Korea by granting work permits to North Korean laborers despite Russia's denial of any such actions. U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki on Thursday accused Moscow of seeking to cover up breaches of UN sanctions on Pyongyang by pushing for changes to a report on alleged sanctions violations. The report was submitted to the Security Council's North Korea sanctions committee last month, claiming that Pyongyang had not stopped its nuclear and missile programs and was violating UN sanctions on exports. The U.S. administration alleged that Russia had pressured the independent sanctions monitors to amend the report. Moscow has called on the UN to consider easing sanctions on North Korea in response to its opening up dialogue with the United States and halting missile tests.

France Admits Systematic Colonial Torture in Algeria

PARIS (AFP) — France acknowledged on Thursday that it instigated a "system" that facilitated torture during Algeria's independence war, a landmark admission about a conflict that remains hugely sensitive six decades on. Emmanuel Macron - the first president born after the conflict - went further than any of his predecessors in recognizing the scale of abuses by French troops during the 1954-62 war. He made the announcement as part of an admission that the French state was responsible for the torture and death of mathematician Maurice Audin, a French Communist pro-independence activist who disappeared in Algiers in 1957. Visiting Audin's widow, Macron also announced that France would open up its archives on the thousands of civilians and soldiers who went missing during the war, both French and Algerian. In a statement, the presidency said the special powers given to the army in Algeria "laid the ground for some terrible

acts, including torture". During the bloody war, which claimed some 1.5 million Algerian lives and ended 130 years of colonial rule, French forces cracked down on independence fighters and sympathizers, with a French general later admitting to the use of torture. Independence fighters also mistreated prisoners during a complex conflict characterized by guerrilla warfare, which left deep scars in the national psyche. France censored wartime newspapers, books and films that claimed it was using torture, and atrocities by its troops have remained a largely taboo subject. But on Thursday, the government declared, "There can be no liberty, equality and fraternity without the search for truth." Previous presidents of the left and right had taken cautious steps to acknowledge French wrongdoing in Algeria, without openly apologizing. In 1998, Jacques Chirac acknowledged the massacre of civilians in the town of Setif in 1945, and in 2012 Francois

Hollande recognized the "suffering" caused by the colonization. But by acknowledging that France instituted a system that facilitated torture, and deciding to open the archives, Macron broke new ground, historian Patrick Garcia told AFP. "Beyond the symbolic case of Maurice Audin there is a much bigger and important gesture," he told AFP, calling it a "milestone". But he stressed that what Macron had announced was "a policy of recognition, not of repentance". "It's not about beating ourselves up about it, it's about recognizing what took place." Macron had sparked controversy on the campaign trail last year by declaring that France's colonization of Algeria was a "crime against humanity". He later walked back the comments, calling for "neither denial nor repentance" over France's colonial history and adding: "We cannot remain trapped in the past".

Maduro Visits China to Give 'Big Push' to Investments



Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro walks with his wife Cilia Flores upon their arrival at the airport in Beijing, China September 13, 2018.

BEIJING (AFP) — Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro hailed China as a "big sister" as he prepared to meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping Friday, hoping to broker economic deals for his crisis-hit country. Maduro declared after landing in Beijing overnight that he came with "great expectations" to further deepen strategic ties with Venezuela's key creditor. The leftist leader said his visit would give a "big push" to energy investments, trade and the "successful financial relationship" between the two countries. China has loaned some \$50 billion to OPEC member Venezuela in the past decade, with Caracas repaying debt with oil shipments. The socialist-led Latin American country still owes \$20 billion to Beijing. Maduro may return home with a new \$5 billion loan and a six-month extension to the grace period to service its debt, according to Venezuelan consultancy Ecoanalitica. "China is our big sister. I will be very happy when I meet with our brother Xi Jinping on Friday," said Maduro, who last visited China in March 2017. He will be in China until Sunday. "Recently, the Venezuelan government has actively promoted economic and financial reform with a good social response,"

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a regular press conference on Thursday. "I think a stable Venezuelan development is in the interest of all parties," Geng said. The trip to China is Maduro's first outside the country since he was allegedly targeted by exploding drones at a military parade in Caracas August 4. Vice President Delcy Rodriguez visited Beijing before Maduro's arrival and met with Chinese officials from the China Development Bank and China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC). Maduro's government has massively devalued the national currency as part of a raft of measures intended to halt the economy's free-fall into hyperinflation. The International Monetary Fund projects Venezuela's inflation rate will reach 1,000,000 percent by the end of the year. Hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans have fled the country, most of them into neighboring Latin American countries. Venezuela's crude oil production fell in August to 1,448,000 barrels per day, the lowest level in three decades excluding a strike in the sector between December 2002 and February 2003, according to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

China Says Training, Not Mistreating, Uighurs



Turkic-speaking Muslim Uighurs make up eight million of Xinjiang's 19 million population in China.

GENEVA (Reuters) — China is not mistreating Muslims in Xinjiang province but is putting some people through training courses to avoid extremism spreading, unlike Europe, which had failed to deal with the problem, a Chinese official told reporters Thursday. Reports of mass detentions of ethnic Uighurs and other ethnic Muslims in China's far western region have sparked a growing international outcry. "It is not mistreatment," said Li Xiaojun, director for publicity at the Bureau of Human Rights Affairs of the State Council Information Office. "What China is doing is to establish professional training centers, educational centers." "If you do not say it's the best way, maybe it's the necessary way to deal with religious extremism, because the West has failed in doing so, in dealing with religious extremism," Li told reporters on the sidelines of the UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva. "Look at Belgium, look at Paris, look at some other European countries. You have failed." China frequently comes under fire for its human rights policies. Wednesday, it was accused by UN chief Antonio Guterres of reprisals against activists, including the

alleged torture of a human rights lawyer. Critics say its surveillance in Xinjiang approaches martial law conditions. "As to surveillance, China is learning from the UK," Li said. "Your per capita CCTV is much higher than that for China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region." Europe's top rights court ruled Thursday that the UK had violated privacy with a "Big Brother" electronic surveillance program. Li said the Xinjiang education centers were not "detention centers or re-education camps," which he dismissed as "the trademark product of eastern European countries," an apparent reference to Soviet Gulag detention camps during the Cold War. "To put it straight, it's like vocational training ... like your children go to vocational-training schools to get better skills and better jobs after graduation." "But these kind of training and education centers only accept people for a short period of time — some people five days, some seven days, 10 days, one month, two months." He rejected the idea of having a UN expert visit the region, saying there was no need. He said the poorest people in remote areas were most susceptible to radicalization, and that mosques were being used to that effect. Islam was a good thing in China's view, but extremists were the common foes of mankind, he further said.



LONDON (Reuters) — Thousands of British prison officers walked out of their jobs on Friday, gathering outside jails to protest against what their union called unprecedented levels of violence and the failure of the government to make prisons safe. The government called on them to return to work, describing the protest as unlawful and the Prisons Officers' Association (POA) union said it had been threatened with court action. The state of prisons in Britain has made headlines in recent years. Inspectors warned on Thursday that inmates of Bedford jail in central England did not follow rules and were using drugs. Last month, the government took over the running of another prison for similar reasons. Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said officers should return to their duty stations in line with their obligations to the law and the prison service. "These prison officers are putting their fellow staff and inmates at risk," he said in a statement.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) — Russia is ready to consider a request by British investigators to come and interrogate the two men accused of poisoning a former spy, the Kremlin said Friday. Britain charged Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov last week with trying to kill double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, with the Soviet-designed nerve agent Novichok. The Skripals survived the March 4 attack in Salisbury, but a local resident later died after apparently having contact with the poison. Petrov and Boshirov appeared Thursday on the state-funded RT channel, saying they visited Salisbury as tourists and had nothing to do with the poisoning. They denied the British claim that they were Russian military intelligence officers, saying they work in the nutritional supplements business. President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said Friday that Russian authorities will consider Britain's request to interrogate them if it comes. He added that Britain has stonewalled repeated Russian offers to conduct a joint inquiry. He said that "from the very beginning, Russia has emphasized its desire to cooperate to clarify the circumstances of what happened in Salisbury and track down the culprits," but "the British side has strongly rejected such cooperation."

SEOUL (AFP) — South Korea launched its first ever missile-capable attack submarine on Friday, despite a recent diplomatic thaw with the nuclear-armed North. The \$700 million, 3,000-tonne Dosan Ahn Chang-ho submarine is capable of firing both cruise and ballistic missiles and the first of three planned diesel-electric boats to go into service in the next five years. It represented a "leap forward in the country's" defense industry, President Moon Jae-in told a launch ceremony at the Daewoo shipyard where it was designed and built. "Peace through power is the unwavering security strategy of this government." Moon will head to Pyongyang next week for a third summit with the North's leader Kim Jong Un, as U.S.-led efforts to persuade Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons have stalled. "We have set off on a grand journey toward the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula," Moon said. "But peace is not given gratuitously," he added.

KUALA LAMPUR (AP) — Malaysia's prime minister-in-waiting Anwar Ibrahim said on Friday that it was time for him to return as a lawmaker, but reiterated his full support for the government led by his former foe-turned-ally Mahathir Mohamad. Anwar and Mahathir put aside their 20-year-old political feud to help their alliance win a historic national vote in May that led to the first change of power since independence from Britain in 1957. Anwar, who was convicted in 2015 for sodomy, could not take part in the elections but their four-party alliance had agreed that Mahathir would be prime minister and hand over the reins to Anwar. Anwar, 70, was freed and pardoned by the king shortly after the polls. "The understanding ... is that immediately after the pardon, I should enter the race," Anwar told The Associated Press on Friday. "I waited four months and I think it is also important for me to start connecting" with lawmakers and focus on parliamentary reforms. Mahathir "will continue leading the nation, I will give full support," he added.

MADRID (AP) — Spanish Prime Minister Pablo Sanchez published his doctoral thesis online Friday to deflect any doubts over its existence and refute allegations of plagiarism raised by media and the political opposition. A day earlier Sanchez, a Socialist, wrote on Facebook that he considered the plagiarism allegations a "personal attack" by opposition parties in the absence of a "solid political project." He also threatened to take legal action against ABC newspaper and other media that published stories arguing that passages of his "Spain's Economic Diplomacy, 2010-2012" dissertation had been copied from other researchers' works. Doctored or exaggerated resumes have backfired in Spanish politics in the past, but academic misdeeds uncovered by the media have led to political turmoil and a string of high-profile resignations in recent months.

TOKYO (Reuters) — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Friday repeated Japan's stance that a row over islands seized by Russian troops in the final days of World War II must be settled before a peace treaty can be signed to formally end hostilities between their countries. President Vladimir Putin appeared to catch Abe off guard when he said at a regional forum in Vladivostok on Wednesday that the two countries should sign a peace treaty by the end of this year - without preconditions.