

Strong Storms Kill At Least 8 People in U.S. South



Roman Brown moves part of a wall out of his way as he looks for a friend's medicine in their destroyed home along Seely Drive outside of Hamilton, Miss. on April 14, 2019.

WASHINGTON (AP) - Powerful storms swept across the South after unleashing suspected tornadoes and flooding that killed at least eight people, injured dozens and flattened much of a Texas town. Three children were among the dead.

Nearly 90,000 customers were without electricity in Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Georgia as of midday Sunday, according to www.poweroutage.us as the severe weather left a trail of destruction.

Two children were killed on a back road in East Texas when a pine tree fell

onto the car in which they were riding in a severe thunderstorm Saturday near Pollok, about 150 miles (241 kilometers) southeast of Dallas.

The tree "flattened the car like a pancake," said Capt. Alton Lenderman of the Angelina County Sheriff's Office. The children, ages 8 and 3, were dead at the scene, while both parents, who were in the front seat, escaped injury, he said.

At least one person was killed and about two dozen others were injured after a suspected tornado struck the Caddo Mounds State Historic Site in

East Texas during a Native American cultural event in Alto, about 130 miles (209 kilometers) southeast of Dallas. Cherokee County Judge Chris Davis said the fatality that was reported was of a woman who died of her critical injuries.

In neighboring Houston County, the sheriff's office said one person was killed in Weches, 6 miles southwest of Caddo Mound.

There was widespread damage in Alto, a town of about 1,200, and the school district canceled classes until its buildings can be deemed safe.

A tornado flattened much of the south side of Franklin, Texas, overturning mobile homes and damaging other residences, said Robertson County Sheriff Gerald Yezak. Franklin is about 125 miles (200 kilometers) south of Dallas.

The weather service said preliminary information showed an EF-3 tornado touched down with winds of 140 mph (225.3 kph).

It destroyed 55 homes, a church, four businesses, a duplex, and part of the local housing authority building, authorities said. Two people were hospitalized for injuries that were not thought to be life-threatening, while others were treated at the scene, Yezak said. Some people had to be extricated from damaged dwellings.

Heavy rains and storms raked Mississippi into the night Saturday as the storms moved east.

Climate Change Protesters Block Roads in London



Climate change activists demonstrate on Waterloo Bridge during an Extinction Rebellion protest in London, Britain April 15, 2019.

LONDON (Reuters) - Thousands of environmental activists paralyzed parts of central London on Monday by blocking Marble Arch, Oxford Circus and Waterloo Bridge in a bid to force the government to do more to tackle climate change.

Under sunny skies, activists sang songs or held signs that read "There is no Planet B" and "Extinction is forever" at some of the capital's most iconic locations. Roadblocks will continue night and day at each site and the demonstrators say the protests could last at least a week.

The protests are being led by the British climate group Extinction Rebellion and will involve

demonstrations in 33 countries around the world over the coming days.

"I realized that signing petitions and writing letters was not going to be enough. Real action is needed," said Diana McCann, 66, a retired wine trader from south London, holding a banner in the middle of a traffic-free road. "It's like a world war. We have to go on to a war footing."

Extinction Rebellion, which generated headlines with a protest in the House of Commons earlier this month, has warned its members that some of them could be arrested for taking part in non-violent civil disobedience.

The group is demanding the

government declare a climate and ecological emergency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025 and create a citizen's assembly of members of the public to lead on decisions to address climate change.

At the Shell building near the River Thames, two protesters scaled up scaffolding writing 'Shell Knows!' in red paint on the front of the building and three protesters glued their hands to the revolving doors at the entrance.

Activists said they smashed the glass of a revolving door and caused more than 6,000 pounds (\$7,900) worth of damage. At least one person was arrested by police for criminal damage.

At Oxford Circus, protesters unveiled a pink boat that says "TELL THE TRUTH" and on Waterloo Bridge demonstrators brought trees, hanging baskets and skate ramps.

The protest had a festive atmosphere, with many families in attendance, and a low police presence.

Extinction Rebellion wrote to Prime Minister Theresa May on Monday outlining their demands and asking for face-to-face talks, warning that they will escalate their disruptive actions over the coming weeks unless the government acts.

"Make no mistake, people are already dying," the letter states. "In the majority world, indigenous communities are now on the brink of extinction. This crisis is only going to get worse ... Prime minister, you cannot ignore this crisis any longer. We must act now."

Finland's SDP Wins Election Against Far-Right Party

HELSINKI (AFP) - Finns can expect a broad, ineffective coalition government for the next four years as the Social Democrats, who narrowly won weekend elections, focus on keeping the surging anti-immigration populists out, analysts said.

The polls were closely watched to see how the nationalists would do ahead of European Parliament elections in May when many believe they and the eurosceptic camp as a whole could make significant inroads.

As Finland's politics digested Sunday's vote, the big question on Monday was what role the far-right anti-immigration Finns Party, which more than doubled its seats in parliament under the leadership of headline nationalist Jussi Halla-aho, would play.

The Social Democrats came in as Finland's biggest party with 17.7 percent

of the votes, just ahead of the Finns Party on 17.5 percent.

Halla-aho told Finnish media on Monday he did not want to repeat the mistakes his party made in 2015 when it entered government and was forced to compromise on immigration and EU bailouts.

"We were flexible about the wrong things," he told Finland's biggest newspaper Helsingin Sanomat.

"I don't see it as possible that the Finns Party would take part in a government which doesn't clearly commit to reducing humanitarian migration," he added.

On the campaign trail, Halla-aho told supporters he wanted to see the refugee intake reduced to "almost zero". This would appear to clash directly with the Social Democratic Party's manifesto pledge to make it easier for refugees in Finland to be joined by family members

from their home countries.

Social Democrat leader Antti Rinne told reporters early on Monday that cooperation with the Finns Party "looks unlikely".

While Halla-aho said he would be interested in the post of interior minister, in charge of immigration, he was also upbeat in interviews at the prospect of being in opposition.

He told reporters that the huge increase to his party's parliamentary seat-count - from 17 to 39, just one shy of the Social Democrats - would give his party sway over any future discussion on immigration, whether or not it was a member of the government.

Political analyst Sini Korpinen told AFP that, in a bid to keep the nationalists in opposition, a coalition between the leftist Social Democrats and the centre-right National Coalition appeared almost a certainty.

Sudanese Protesters Confront Troops in Capital



A Sudanese demonstrator gestures while riding atop a military truck near Defense Ministry in Khartoum, April 12, 2019.

KHARTOUM, April 15 (Reuters) - Sudanese protesters moved to block an attempt on Monday to break up a sit-in outside the Defense Ministry, where demonstrators have been pushing for a quick transition to civilian rule after President Omar al-Bashir was ousted, a Reuters witness said.

Troops had gathered on three sides of the sit-in and tractors were preparing to remove stone and metal barriers, but protesters joined hands and formed rings around the sit-in area to prevent them.

The protesters, numbering about 5,000 with more arriving, chanted "Freedom, freedom" and "Revolution, revolution", and appealed to the army to protect them.

Some drummed and waved national flags as they mingled in the street, while others took shelter from the sun under parasols and makeshift tents.

Earlier, Sudan's main protest group, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), issued an urgent call for people to join the sit-in and foil any attempt to disperse it.

"We hope that everyone will head immediately to the areas of the sit-in to protect your revolution and your accomplishments," the SPA said.

It said there were continuing attempts to disband the sit-in.

The sit-in outside the compound, which also includes the intelligence headquarters

and the presidential residence, began on April 6, after more than three months of protests triggered by a deepening economic crisis.

On Thursday, Sudan's army announced that it had removed and detained Bashir after three decades in power and was setting up a transitional military council to run the country.

Since then the head of the military council and of Sudan's powerful National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) have both been replaced, as protesters have continued to call for change.

The SPA has demanded the immediate handover of power to a civilian transitional government as well as the prosecution of former officials.

On Monday the military council said it was restructuring the joint forces command, appointing a new chief of staff for the army and a deputy.

Britain's ambassador to Sudan, Irfan Siddiqi, said he had met the deputy head of the transitional military council, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, and had "asked for clarity on whereabouts of former President Bashir and other senior former regime figures".

When the military announced Bashir's ousting, they said he had been arrested and was being kept at a "safe place". Sudanese sources told Reuters that Bashir was at a presidential residence under "heavy guard".

EU Approves Copyright Rules Targeting Google, Facebook



A 3D plastic representation of the Facebook logo is seen in front of displayed cables in this illustration in Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina May 13, 2015.

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Google will have to pay publishers for news snippets and Facebook filter out protected content under new copyright rules aimed at ensuring fair compensation for the European Union's \$1 trillion creative industries.

EU governments on Monday backed the move launched by the European Commission two years ago to protect Europe's creative industries, which employ 11.7 million people in the bloc.

"When it comes to completing Europe's digital single market, the copyright reform is the missing piece of the puzzle," the Commission's president Jean-Claude Juncker said in a statement.

Under the new rules, Google and other online platforms will have to sign licensing agreements with musicians, performers, authors, news publishers and journalists to use their work.

The European Parliament gave a green light last month to a proposal that has pitted Europe's creative industry against tech companies, internet activists and consumer groups.

Wikipedia blacked out several European sites in protest last month, while the change was opposed by Finland, Italy, Luxembourg,

the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden.

But 19 countries, including France and Germany, endorsed the revamp, while Belgium, Estonia and Slovenia abstained.

Under the new regime Google-owned YouTube, Facebook's Instagram and other sharing platforms will have to install filters to prevent users from uploading copyrighted materials.

Google said the new rules would hurt Europe's creative and digital economies, while critics said it would hit cash-strapped smaller companies rather than the tech giants.

Poland said the overhaul was a step backwards as the filter requirement may lay the foundation for censorship.

EU lawmaker for the European Pirate Party Julia Reda, who had campaigned against the reforms, said critics could take their case to court but it would be slow and difficult and that the best thing would be to monitor fair implementation.

The European Magazine Media Association, the European Newspaper Publishers' Association, the European Publishers Council, News Media Europe and independent music labels lobbying group Impala welcomed the move.

EU countries have two years to transpose the copyright directive into national laws.



QUITO (AFP) -- Ecuadoran President Lenin Moreno defended his decision to overturn Julian Assange's asylum status, claiming in an interview with the Guardian newspaper that the WikiLeaks founder had tried to set up a "center for spying" in Ecuador's London embassy. The WikiLeaks founder is in custody in London awaiting sentencing for breaching his British bail conditions in 2012 by seeking refuge in the Ecuadoran embassy to avoid continuing to resist any bid to extradite him to the United States. "We are absolutely happy to answer those queries if and when they come up," Jennifer Robinson told Sky News television about the rape claims. Assange was arrested at the embassy last week after Ecuador gave him up, and is now also fighting a U.S. extradition warrant relating to the release by WikiLeaks of a huge cache of official documents.

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) -- Toppled Malaysian leader Najib Razak returned to court for the second day of his high-profile corruption trial Monday, with the former premier accused of plundering large sums from scandal-hit state fund IMDB. The ex-prime minister and his cronies are accused of stealing billions of dollars from IMDB and spending it on everything from high-end real estate to artworks and a luxury yacht. The allegations played a large part in prompting voters to oust his corruption-plagued coalition, which had been in power for six decades, at historic elections last year. The ex-leader's highly-anticipated trial began on April 3, with Najib denying seven charges related to the theft of 42 million ringgit (\$10.2 million) from SRC International, a former IMDB unit. It is just a fraction of the money Najib is accused of stealing - he has also been charged in a separate case over the alleged transfer of \$681 million to his bank account.

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) -- South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Monday he's ready for a fourth summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to help salvage faltering nuclear negotiations between the North and the United States. Moon's comments came after Kim issued his harshest criticism yet of South Korea's diplomatic role last week, accusing Seoul of acting like an "overstepping mediator" and demanding that it diverge from Washington to support the North's position more strongly. Moon met Kim three times last year and also brokered nuclear talks between North Korea and the U.S. following tensions created by the North's nuclear and missile tests and the exchange of war threats by Kim and President Donald Trump. But there are fears in Seoul that the hopeful developments of 2018 could be undone because of the mismatched demands between Washington and Pyongyang over sanctions relief and disarmament, which have derailed a high-stakes Trump-Kim meeting and prolonged a stalemate in negotiations.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- India's election commission on Monday banned firebrand Hindu nationalist Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath from campaigning for three days to stop him stoking hatred between religious communities in a divisive election that will end next month. The saffron-clad Adityanath, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party, had been warned this month about his campaign speeches, the election commission said in its order. The commission said Adityanath had spoken about a "green virus" in a speech last week, apparently referring to Muslim voters who he said were being wooed by opposition parties. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been playing to its nationalist base and painting its rivals as soft on terrorism and eager to appease Muslims, who make up about 14 percent of India's 1.3 billion population.

HONG KONG (Reuters) -- Chinese authorities seized 7.48 tonnes of smuggled ivory tusks last month, the biggest haul in recent years, as Beijing steps up a campaign against illegal wildlife trafficking. The seizures came during an operation against an international criminal gang "that has long been specializing in smuggling ivory," the customs administration said on Monday. China, the world's largest importer and end user of elephant tusks, banned ivory sales in the country in 2017. Demand for ivory from Asian countries such as China and Vietnam, where it is turned into jewelry and ornaments, has led to a surge in poaching across Africa. Since January, China has seized 8.48 tonnes of ivory and ivory products and more than 500 tonnes of endangered species, the customs administration said.

TOKYO (AP) -- The operator of the tsunami-wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant began removing fuel Monday from a cooling pool at one of three reactors that melted down in the 2011 disaster, a milestone in what will be a decades-long process to decommission the facility. Tokyo Electric Power Co. said workers started removing the first of 566 used and unused fuel units stored in the pool at Unit 3. The fuel units in the pool located high up in reactor buildings are intact despite the disaster, but the pools are not enclosed, so removing the units to safer ground is crucial to avoid disaster in case of another major earthquake similar to the one that caused the 2011 tsunami. TEPCO says the removal at Unit 3 will take two years, followed by the two other reactors, where about 1,000 fuel units remain in the storage pools. Removing fuel units from the cooling pools comes ahead of the real challenge of removing melted fuel from inside the reactors, but details of how that might be done are still largely unknown.