

UK Arrests Over 1,000 Climate Change Protesters



A climate change activist is detained during the London protest.

LONDON (Reuters/AFP) - The number of environmental campaigners arrested during eight days of direct action in London topped 1,000 on Monday, police said, adding that Waterloo Bridge, one of the sites blockaded by the protests, had re-opened to traffic.

Climate group Extinction Rebellion has targeted sites in central London, such as Oxford Circus and Parliament Square, in a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience with the aim of stopping what it calls a global climate crisis.

Police said 1,065 people had been arrested in connection with the protests, and they had charged 53 with offences including obstructing the highway.

Oxford Circus and Parliament Square were re-opened to traffic on Sunday, they said, while Waterloo Bridge was cleared overnight.

Police had appealed to activists to move to Marble Arch, where they are allowing protests to continue.

Swedish teenage environmental activist Greta Thunberg addressed crowds at Marble Arch on Sunday, urging them to never give up their campaign to save the planet.

The protesters said they were prepared to call a halt if the British government will discuss their demands.

"Humanity is standing at a crossroads," Thunberg said.

Organizers said they were willing to switch tactics from disruption to dialogue next week -- if the government enters talks.

"We are prepared to pause, should the government come to the negotiating table,"

Extinction Rebellion spokesman James Fox told AFP.

Extinction Rebellion was established last year in Britain by academics and has become one of the world's fastest-growing environmental movements.

Campaigners want governments to declare a climate and ecological emergency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2025, halt biodiversity loss and be led by new "citizens' assemblies on climate and ecological justice.

Police said they had managed to clear the protesters from Parliament Square and the Oxford Circus and Piccadilly Circus junctions.

Those charged range in age from 19 to 77. They hail from around England and Wales, with one person from France charged.

The charges are for various offences including breaching public order laws, obstructing a highway and obstructing police.

Calling for an end to the protests, London Mayor Sadiq Khan said more than 9,000 police officers had been responding to the demonstrations, which had left the force as a whole overstretched.

"This is now taking a real toll on our city... this is counter-productive to the cause," he said.

In the blazing sunshine on Waterloo Bridge, police lifted protesters and carried them off to waiting police vans.

"I'm genuinely terrified. I think about it all the time. I'm so scared for the world. I feel like there is going to be calamity in my lifetime," student Amber Gray told AFP.

New Ukraine President Vows to Improve Russia Ties



Ukrainian comedian and presidential candidate Volodymyr Zelensky reacts after the announcement of the first exit poll results in the second round of Ukraine's presidential election at his campaign headquarters in Kiev on April 21, 2019.

MOSCOW (Reuters/AFP) - The Kremlin said on Monday that it was too early to speak about possible cooperation with Ukrainian President-elect Volodymyr Zelensky, but added that Moscow respected the choice of the Ukrainian people.

Ukraine has entered uncharted political waters after near final results show Zelensky, a comedian, winning Sunday's presidential election by a landslide, dramatically upending the political status quo in the ex-Soviet republic.

Zelensky, whose only previous political role was playing the president in a TV show, trounced incumbent Petro Poroshenko in a stinging rebuke to the establishment fueled by anger over war and social injustice.

Ukrainians looked to the future with hope and anxiety after the performer took 73 percent of the vote, according to nearly complete official results.

The star of the sitcom "Servant of the People", now in its third season, has vowed to stick to the pro-European course set out by his predecessor. But he has also said he will try to improve ties with arch-enemy Russia.

On the streets of Kiev, many praised honest elections and a peaceful transfer of power after popular uprisings of 2004 and 2014.

"People showed that they want change," 28-year-old Karina told AFP.

"We had the most honest polls in

the history of Ukraine," she added, praising Poroshenko for conceding defeat soon after exit polls were published.

Zelensky -- who at 41 will be Ukraine's youngest ever president -- presented a vague manifesto and one of his campaign slogans was, "No promises. No apologies."

He shunned traditional campaign rallies, instead performing comedy gigs, and implied he would use the same unorthodox style to run the country of 45 million dependent on international aid.

It remained unclear Monday who would fill top positions, including the role of prime minister.

U.S. President Donald Trump and French leader Emmanuel Macron called the political novice to congratulate him on his landslide win.

Outgoing Poroshenko said he stood ready to help his successor, despite a bitter campaign.

Russia -- which Kiev and the West accuse of fuelling a smoldering separatist conflict in Ukraine's industrial east -- said it saw an opportunity with the new leader.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said there was "a chance" to improve ties.

"What's needed for this? Honesty. And a pragmatic and responsible approach," Medvedev wrote on Facebook. There was no immediate comment from President Vladimir Putin.

As Japan Rings in New Era: Tins of Air at \$10



The can filled with "the air of Heisei" costs 1,080 yen (U.S.\$9.60).

TOKYO (AFP) - With just days until Japan ushers in a new era with the crowning of a new emperor, one entrepreneurial company is cashing in by selling cans containing "the air of the outgoing era" -- a breeze at \$10.

The can filled with "the air of Heisei" -- the 30-year reign of current Emperor Akihito -- hit the shelves on Monday at the ambitious price of 1,080 yen (\$9.60), with producers hoping to sell as many as 1,000 units.

"Air is free of charge but we hope people will enjoy breathing the fresh air of Heisei after the new era comes, or just keep it as a memento," company president Minoru Inamoto told AFP.

The cans have been produced in the central Japanese village of Henari, which is written using the same characters as those used for "Heisei", he said, adding that the cans can be snapped up at a roadside station in the village and online.

They contain nothing but "the air of the current era" and a five-yen coin, often considered a lucky charm.

Firms around Japan are scrambling to produce memorabilia from the outgoing era before the country enters the "Reiwa" era on May 1 when new emperor Naruhito ascends the Chrysanthemum Throne.

Oval gold coins engraved with Heisei are selling like hot cakes at Tokyo department stores, while confectionery makers are bringing back blockbuster sweets popular during the Heisei era.

Henari is seeing an influx of visitors and merchants there are selling everything from chocolate to polo shirts and alcohol bearing the name.

Businesses targeting the new era are also picking up, launching Reiwa-labeled goods such as stickers, smartphone covers, t-shirts, pins and commemorative bottles of the Japanese tippie sake.



MANILA (Reuters) - A magnitude 6.3 earthquake has struck the Philippines main island of Luzon and several people have been killed in collapsed buildings, media reports. The quake struck 60 km (37 miles) northwest of the capital, Manila, at a depth of 40 km (25 miles), the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) said. The governor of Pampanga province told a radio station that several people had been killed. Media reported some structures had collapsed and the Clark International Airport, a former U.S. military base, had suffered some damage and had closed. Tall buildings swayed in Manila's main business district and some people evacuated their offices. The Philippines is on the seismically active Pacific "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe shaped band of volcanoes and fault lines circling the edges of the Pacific Ocean.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday sued to block a subpoena issued by the Democratic chairman of the U.S. House Oversight Committee that sought information about his personal and business finances. The subpoena sought eight years of documents from Trump and several of his businesses, lawyers for Trump and the Trump Organization said in a court filing. Elijah Cummings, the House Oversight Committee chairman, issued the subpoena to the president's accountant after Trump's former lawyer testified that Trump had inflated assets. "Chairman Cummings' subpoena is invalid and unenforceable because it has no legitimate legislative purpose," the lawyers wrote. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment, and the U.S. House Oversight Committee did not immediately have a response.

PARIS (AP) - Dozens of public housing advocates protested outside the gutted Notre Dame in Paris to demand that France's poorest be remembered after donors pledged \$1 billion to rebuild the cathedral and its destroyed roof. Around 50 people from a French homeless association gathered Monday with placards reading "1 billion in 24 hours." They chanted slogans directed at Bernard Arnault, the CEO of luxury group LVMH, who last week pledged 200 million euros (\$226 million). Some chanted "Notre Dame needs a roof, we need a roof too!" Paris police monitored the peaceful protest but didn't intervene. In addition to Arnault's pledge, another billionaire, Francois Pinault, and his son pledged 100 million euros for the reconstruction effort from their company, which owns the Christie's auction house and is the main shareholder for Gucci.

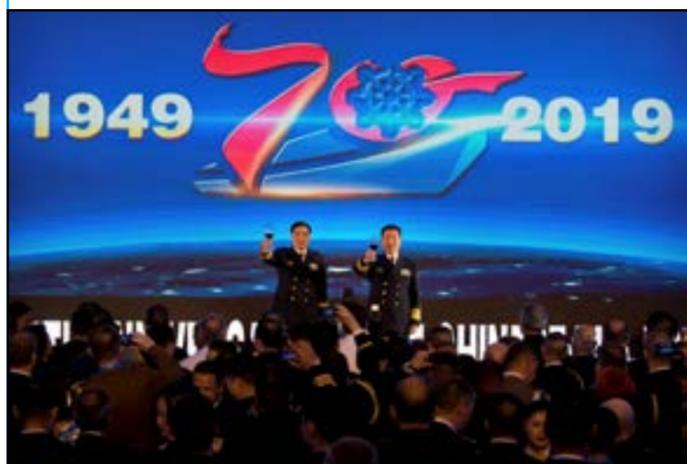
MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia's President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un are on track to meet by the end of April, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Monday. Last week the Kremlin said that Kim Jong Un would travel to Russia this month, announcing the first Russia-North Korea summit since Kim came to power in 2011.

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ruling bloc suffered two rare losses in by-elections in an apparent warning from voters not to get complacent ahead of a national election for parliament's upper house later this year. The defeats in a lower house by-election in Osaka, western Japan, and another on the southern island of Okinawa - host to the bulk of U.S. military in the country - were the first such losses since Abe returned to office in December 2012, except for one uncontested poll. "Each individual (ruling) Liberal Democratic Party member must take the results to heart and buckle down," Abe told reporters on Monday morning. The defeats in the Sunday polls come after Japan's Olympics minister, Yoshitaka Sakurada, resigned a year before the Tokyo Games for remarks that offended people affected by the massive earthquake and tsunami that triggered nuclear meltdowns in 2011. A vice transport minister also quit over a separate gaffe.

SKOPJE (Reuters) - Macedonia's pro-Western candidate, Stevo Pendarovski, and his main rival Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova emerged tied in the first round of presidential vote dominated by deep divisions over a change of the country's name to North Macedonia under a deal with Greece. The change, which Greece demanded to end what it called an implied territorial claim on its northern province also called Macedonia, resolves a decades-old dispute and opens the door to Macedonian membership of NATO and the European Union. But the accord continues to divide Macedonians and has eclipsed all other issues during campaigning for Sunday's election, in which about 1.8 million voters were able to choose among three candidates. Results on the State Election Commission website based on 98 percent of the votes counted showed Pendarovski got 42.7 of the votes, while Siljanovska-Davkova had 42.5 percent of the votes. The two will face a run-off on May 5, reflecting differences over the deal pushed through by the pro-Western government of Prime Minister Zoran Zaev. Blerim Reka, candidate of the second largest Albanian party came third with 10.4 percent of the votes.

BERLIN (AP) - Swiss police said two incendiary devices have been thrown at the Turkish consulate general in Zurich and that three men have been arrested. Zurich police say officers patrolling the area noticed the incident, in which a hedge outside the building caught fire, shortly before 3 a.m. Monday. They were able to extinguish the blaze immediately. They arrested three men aged 17, 18 and 19 who tried to flee the scene when they saw police arrive. Police appealed for witnesses who may have noticed any suspicious activity to come forward.

China Calls for Tranquility Ahead of Revealing Warships



Chinese navy personnel attend an event celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in Qingdao, China, April 22, 2019.

QINGDAO, China (Reuters) - China's navy wants maritime "tranquility and good order", its chief said on Monday, ahead of a parade to mark its 70th anniversary at which the military is expected to display new warships including nuclear submarines and destroyers.

President Xi Jinping is overseeing a sweeping plan to refurbish the People's Liberation Army (PLA) by developing everything from stealth jets to aircraft carriers as China ramps up its presence in the South China Sea and around self-ruled Taiwan, which has rattled nerves in the region.

The navy has been a key beneficiary of the

modernization plan, with China looking to project power far from its shores and protect its trading routes and citizens overseas.

Last month, Beijing unveiled a target of 7.5 percent rise in defense spending for this year, a slower rate than last year but still outpacing its economic growth target.

Tuesday's parade in the waters off the eastern city of Qingdao will feature 32 vessels and 39 aircraft, some of which will not have been unveiled before, as well as warships from 13 foreign countries including India, Australia and Vietnam.

Speaking at a reception in Qingdao, navy chief Shen Jinlong said China was looking to promote trust and cooperation this week in its interactions with foreign navies and

delegations.

"China's navy is willing to, together with other navies, tackle maritime security challenges and maintain maritime peace, tranquility and good order, stay committed to maritime security and development and actively provide more public goods for world maritime security," Shen, who is close to Xi, said.

"The PLA navy is willing to be your close, friendly and equal partner for mutual support, development and win-win cooperation and remain united and act resolutely with all of you to safeguard world peace and stability," he added.

"Let us contribute more to an ocean of lasting peace common security and prosperity, an ocean that is open and inclusive."

Military officers accompanying reporters in Qingdao have been at pains to point out China has no hostile intent with the naval parade and it is not a show of force but a sign of a genuine desire for global maritime cooperation.

China has not said which new equipment it may reveal, but state media has run several glowing reports in recent days about a second and as-yet unnamed aircraft carrier, domestically built and undergoing sea trials.

The Liaoning, its first carrier, was bought second-hand from Ukraine in 1998 and refitted in China.

While Chinese navy ships have participated in international anti-piracy patrols off Somalia's coast since late 2008, its ships' last naval battles were with the Vietnamese in the South China Sea, in 1974 and 1988, though these were relatively minor skirmishes.

Sudan Junta Losing Temper as Protests Continue

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sudan's ruling Transitional Military Council (TMC) warned on Monday against protesters blocking roads and limiting the movement of citizens as protests continued after president Omar al-Bashir was forced from power.

The TMC also said it was unacceptable that some young people were exercising the role of the police and security services, in violation of the law, a reference to youths who have been searching protesters taking part in a sit-in outside the Defense Ministry.

The TMC and the opposition have traded threats since Sunday, with the Sudanese Professionals' Association (SPA), the main organizer of the protests, saying it would suspend talks with the Council.

"We have decided to opt for escalation with the military council, not to recognize its legitimacy and to continue the sit-in

and escalate the protests on the streets," Mohamed al-Amin Abdel-Aziz of the SPA told crowds outside the Defense Ministry on Sunday.

The protesters have kept up the sit-in outside the Ministry since Bashir was removed by the military on April 11 and have demonstrated in large numbers in recent days, pressing for a rapid handover to civilian rule.

TMC head Abdel Fattah al-Burhan told state TV on Sunday that the formation of a joint military-civilian council, one of the activists' demands, was being considered.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates said on Sunday they had agreed to send Sudan \$3 billion worth of aid, throwing a lifeline to the country's new military leaders.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have ties with Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, through their participation in the

kingdom's protracted war on Yemen.

The two countries have expressed support for measures taken by the Transitional Military Council following Bashir's ouster.

Last week, Burhan praised Sudan's distinguished relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the official SUNA news agency reported.

Burhan met with a joint delegation from Riyadh and Abu Dhabi last week, and received a verbal message from their leaders.

Analysts warn that both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi are striving to influence the transition process by backing the military council.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE had cultivated close ties with Bashir prior to his ouster and were reportedly exhorting him to forge relations with the occupying regime of Israel.