

Ukraine Forces, Pro-Russian Rebels Begin Pullout



Servicemen of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic walk to board a truck near the settlement of Petrovskoye on November 9, 2019.

PETRIVSKE, Ukraine (Dispatches) -- Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian rebels began withdrawing from a village in the disputed Donbass region on Saturday, one of a series of measures that could pave the way for a summit between Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany.

Fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian fighters in the eastern region has killed more than 13,000 since 2014, with both sides accusing each other of violating a ceasefire that was agreed in the Belarus capital Minsk

in 2015.

Relations between Ukraine and Russia collapsed following the Crimean peninsula's decision in 2014 to join Russia, which prompted Western sanctions.

But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensk won a landslide election victory in April promising to end the simmering conflict and Kiev has said its troop withdrawal from the village of Petrivske would mean it had fulfilled all necessary conditions it needs to for a peace summit to take place.

Moscow has blamed Kiev for delaying the four-way summit.

"I hope that we will not see any new attempts by Kiev to disrupt the implementation of the agreements on the withdrawal of forces," Borys Gryzlov, Russia's envoy to a working group on the conflict, said.

"I hope that the process of disengagement in Petrivske will be successfully completed in the near future," he was quoted by Interfax news as saying.

Zelensky secured a landmark prisoner swap with Russia in September but his plan to grant a special status to the Donbass region as part of the peace effort has sparked some protests. Zelensky has said he would "never betray Ukraine".

Ukraine says after the Crimea annexation Russia engineered quasi-separatist uprisings across a belt of eastern Ukraine that escalated into a full-scale conflict, something Moscow denies.

Two so-called People's Republics, unrecognized by either Kiev or Moscow, have formed in the Donetsk and Luhansk industrial regions of eastern Ukraine, known as Donbass.

Lula Calls for Protests After Release From Prison



Former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva delivers a speech after being released from prison, in Curitiba, Brazil November 8, 2019.

BRASILIA/CURITIBA, Brazil (Reuters) -- Brazil's leftist former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva left prison on Friday after a judge ordered his release, startling financial markets and reigniting both ends of the political spectrum with calls for demonstrations in coming days.

As he walked out of the jail that held him for 19 months on a bribery conviction, Lula raised a defiant fist in the air to the cheers of a crowd of supporters from his Workers Party who waved red flags and held "Free Lula" banners.

His release is expected to further polarize a country that elected far-right President Jair Bolsonaro last

year in a vote that Lula said on Friday was "robbed" from his Workers Party, which governed the country from 2002 to 2016.

A charismatic speaker and formidable campaigner, Lula is ineligible under Brazil's Clean Record law to seek elected office until 2025. While he can otherwise engage in politics, his release from prison is pending appeals that may continue winding through the courts for years.

In his first speech to supporters outside his jail in the southern city of Curitiba, Lula vowed to fight to establish his innocence, accusing "rotten" police, prosecutors and judges of "working to criminalize the left."

He called for a rally on Saturday at

the metalworkers union on the outskirts of Sao Paulo where he got his political start, pledging to follow that up with a national tour.

In a sign of the fault lines stretching across Latin America, Argentina's left-wing President-elect Alberto Fernandez was quick to celebrate Lula's release on Friday and criticize his "persecution" by Brazilian courts.

The federal judge's order freeing Lula followed a Supreme Court ruling late on Thursday ending the mandatory imprisonment of convicted criminals after they lose their first appeal.

The politically charged ruling is expected to free scores of high-profile convicts in the so-called "Car Wash" corruption investigation, including Lula, as the former president is known, who had been behind bars for a bribery conviction.

Lula was imprisoned in 2018 for eight years and 10 months after being found guilty of taking bribes from engineering firms in return for public contracts. He has maintained his innocence and said the case against him was politically motivated.

While Lula had fought to overturn the sentence, many urged the Supreme Court to overturn a prior ruling that convicts, including the former president, must do prison time before exhausting their appeals. On Thursday, the top court voted 6-5 that the precedent was in fact unconstitutional.

Bushfires Kill Three, Displace Thousands in Australia

MELBOURNE (AFP) -- Catastrophic bushfires in eastern Australia have killed at least three people and forced thousands from their homes, with the death toll expected to rise as firefighters struggle towards hard-to-reach communities.

In the normally picturesque coastal town of Forster -- one among dozens hit along the eastern seaboard -- vast plumes of smoke shot out from multiple blazes as water bombers swooped in overhead.

And in Bobin, around 60 kilometers (35 miles) north of Forster, the whole town was scorched with some fires soaring 10 meters (30 feet) along the tree canopy.

Some homes were completely burned to the ground in the small rural town, and in one just a fireplace could be seen among the smoldering rubble.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that, if needed, the military could be called on to help some 1,300 firefighters who are tackling around 100 separate blazes.

Several people are still unaccounted for and 30 more have been injured -- mostly firefighters working for hours on end in smoky, smoldering scrubland and blazing forests of towering eucalyptus.

A body was found in a burnt-out building near the east-

coast town of Taree, police said, while another victim was found in a car and a woman died despite medics trying for several hours to save her.

As hot and windy weather eased slightly on Saturday, the number of most serious fires fell to just a handful from an unprecedented 17 on Friday.

But within an area spanning almost 1,000 kilometers (600 miles), schools were burned and at least 150 homes were destroyed, while authorities were forced to evacuate detention centers and old people's homes.

New South Wales's rural fire service said an emergency warning was in place for four fires among the dozens raging across the state.

Bushfires are common in Australia and a vast corps of firefighters had already been tackling sporadic blazes for months in the lead-up to the southern hemisphere summer. But this was a dramatic start to what scientists predict will be a tough fire season -- with climate change and weather cycles contributing to the dangerous combination of strong winds, high temperatures and dry conditions.

Meanwhile, New South Wales premier Gladys Berejiklian warned that next week's weather forecast "could mean we're not through the worst of it".

Divisions Rife as Germany Marks Fall of Berlin Wall



German Chancellor Angela Merkel lights a candle marking the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall at the Wall memorial on Bernauer Strasse in Berlin, November 9, 2019.

BERLIN (AFP) -- Germany on Saturday marked 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall that ushered in the end of communism and national reunification, as the Western alliance that helped secure those achievements is riddled with divisions.

Two days before the date that brought epochal change, French President Emmanuel Macron dropped a bombshell, declaring that trans-Atlantic partnership NATO was suffering from "brain death" and that Europe itself was "on the brink."

Chancellor Angela Merkel responded with uncharacteristic sharpness, saying Thursday "I don't think that such sweeping judgments are necessary," and the ensuing storm over NATO laid bare the growing differences among traditional allies.

The bad tempered prelude to the festivities stood in sharp contrast to celebrations five years ago, when former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and ex-Polish leader and freedom icon Lech Walesa were present.

This time, leaders of former Cold War powers will be absent, as U.S. President Donald Trump's "America First" policy, Britain's Brexit struggles and Russia's resurgence put a strain on ties.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit ended Friday while Macron is only planning a flying visit Sunday, leaving the actual anniversary on Saturday with-

out globally prominent figures.

Carrying a similar message, the EU's incoming chief, Ursula von der Leyen, noted that the euphoric optimism over liberal democracy and freedom that characterized Nov. 9, 1989, has dissipated.

"Today, we have to admit that our complacency was naive," von der Leyen said.

Gorbachev, whose decision not to send the Soviet Army to prop up the East German regime was seen as crucial to preserving peace during the Cold War, told Spiegel magazine in an interview that there is "no nostalgia" for that period of division.

But "we have to admit that after the end of the Cold War new leaders failed to create a modern security architecture, especially in Europe."

"As a result, new lines of divisions have emerged, and NATO's eastward expansion ... shifted these lines to the Russian border."

Beyond the cracks surfacing in the global arena, a new chasm is opening up within Germany itself with the far-right gaining a strong foothold in the former communist states.

Underlining the problem herself, Merkel said those who earlier thought the differences between the former communist East Germany and capitalist West Germany could be ironed out now see "that it would take half a century or more."

North Korea Warns U.S.: 'Window of Opportunity Closing'



U.S. President Donald Trump shakes hands with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as they meet at the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas, in Panmunjom, South Korea, June 30, 2019.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- A North Korean diplomat said the window of opportunity for progress in dialogue with the United States was getting smaller, adding that Pyongyang expects reciprocal steps from Washington by the end of the year.

"We've given the United States quite a lot of time and we're waiting for an answer by the end of this year, of some kind of result. ... But I must say that the window of opportunity closes every day," said Jo Chol Su, the head of the North Korean foreign ministry's North American department.

Jo, who spoke at the Moscow Nonproliferation Conference, said Pyongyang was ready to hold talks with the United States if there was the prospect of progress, but was not interested in dialogue that would yield no results, Russia's Interfax news agency reported.

"Should there be a constructive element, constructive signals, we are always ready to meet any moment; but if a meeting is again just for talking, if we cannot expect tangible results, then we are not interested in just talking."

Jo also said that sanctions imposed on North Korea were "an unacceptable insult" and must be lifted.

The U.S. State Department did not immediately respond to requests for com-

ment on Jo's remarks. Washington has been looking to resume stalled talks with North Korea, but a State Department spokeswoman said it had no meetings to announce.

U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un agreed in June to reopen denuclearization talks that stalled after a failed summit in Vietnam in February, but these have gone nowhere.

North Korea and U.S. officials met for the first time since that decision in Stockholm last month, but the meeting broke down with North Korea's envoy saying the U.S. side had failed to show flexibility.

North Korea has been seeking a lifting of punishing sanctions, but the United States has insisted Kim must dismantle his nuclear weapons program first.

Earlier this year, Kim set a year-end deadline for Washington to take a new approach, raising concerns that North Korea could return to nuclear bomb and long-range missile testing suspended since 2017.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that Mark Lambert, the director of the office of Korean affairs at the U.S. State Department who has been attending the Moscow conference, met briefly with Jo at a reception there on Thursday.

The State Department did not respond when asked about this report.

News in Brief

LA PAZ (Reuters) -- The government of Bolivian President Evo Morales denounced what it called a coup by violent groups on Saturday, as some police forces carried out acts of "mutiny" in support of opposition protests amid a weeks-long standoff over a disputed election. Morales, Latin America's longest-standing leader, won the election on Oct. 20 but the vote count had been inexplicably halted for nearly a day, sparking allegations of fraud and leading to protests, strikes and road blocks. "Sisters and brothers, our democracy is at risk due to the coup d'etat that violent groups have launched that undermine the constitutional order," Morales tweeted in the early hours of Saturday. "We denounce this attempt against the rule of law before the international community." The foreign ministry also said in a statement on Saturday that a coup was "in process" by radical civic groups, adding some police officers had "abandoned their constitutional role of ensuring the security of society and state institutions".

OUAGADOUGOU (Reuters) - A mine worker shot during an ambush on a mining convoy in Burkina Faso said he was one of only three survivors from a bus with up to 80 people aboard, suggesting the death toll may be much higher than officially reported. Abel Kabore, 35, described the attackers, some speaking a foreign language - raking three buses with bullets after a security vehicle escorting the convoy hit a landmine. The first two buses were able to escape, he said. "The three buses which were shot ... there were so many dead. It was over 100. We were on the ground. We saw everything," he said quietly at a hospital in the capital Ouagadougou. Of the people on his bus, "only 3 of us survived."

KARTARPUR, Pakistan (Reuters) -- Contacts between India and Pakistan are "zero", Pakistan's foreign minister said, even as a border crossing opened on Saturday for Indian pilgrims to visit a Sikh temple in one of the most significant acts of cooperation in decades by the old rivals. The border crossing pact between the neighbors allows visa-free access from India to the Pakistani town of Kartarpur, home to a temple marking the site where the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, died. Hundreds of Indians including members of the opposition Congress Party crossed the border for opening ceremony, though there was no representation from India's ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. Prime Minister Narendra Modi held his own ceremony over the border in India. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said in a statement the border crossing pact was a "testimony of our commitment towards peace of the region".

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Facebook says it is deleting the name of the person who has been identified in conservative circles as the whistleblower who triggered a congressional impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump's actions. The company said that mention of the potential whistleblower's name violates Facebook's "coordinating harm policy," which prohibits material that could identify a "witness, informant, or activist." Facebook says it is removing mentions of the alleged whistleblower's name and will revisit this decision if the name is widely published in the media or used by public figures in debate. The policy is not new. Facebook says it has been applying it to the whistleblower case and removing the person's name for a few days. On Twitter, though, the alleged whistleblower's name was circulating widely on Friday. The company does not have a policy against identifying whistleblowers by name and is not removing the posts.

BUSAN, South Korea (AP) -- A notorious South Korean facility that kidnapped, abused and enslaved children and the disabled for a generation was also shipping children overseas for adoption, part of a massive profit-seeking enterprise that thrived by exploiting those trapped within its walls, The Associated Press has found. The AP, which previously exposed a government cover-up at Brothers Home and a far greater level of abuse than earlier known, has now found that the facility was part of an orphanage pipeline feeding the demand of private adoption agencies. Relying on government documents obtained from officials, lawmakers or from freedom of information requests, the AP uncovered direct evidence that 19 children were adopted out of Brothers and sent abroad, as well as indirect evidence showing at least 51 more such adoptions. The adoptions AP found took place between 1979 and 1986.

PARIS (AP) -- A French woman in her early 60s claims she was violently raped at age 18 by Oscar-winning filmmaker Roman Polanski, a fugitive from the U.S. for more than four decades since pleading guilty to a sex offense with a minor, a French newspaper reported Friday. Le Parisien said the woman, Valentine Monnier, alleges she was raped in 1975 at Polanski's chalet in Gstaad, Switzerland, when she was 18. The paper quoted Polanski's lawyer, Herve Temime, as saying that the 86-year-old Polanski "firmly contests" the allegation. The attorney could not be immediately reached by The Associated Press. Temime "deplored" in his response to the newspaper that the claim is being made public shortly before Polanski's latest film, "J'Accuse" (An Officer and a Spy) is being released in France. Monnier told Le Parisien that it was the film that triggered her decision to go public, saying that "rape is a time bomb."