



**LA JONQUERA, Spain (Reuters)** - French riot police were dispersing on Tuesday morning hundreds of Catalan pro-independence demonstrators who had been blocking a major road link that connects the Spanish region with France for nearly 24 hours. Police on the French side of the border at La Jonquera were seen pushing protesters to the Spanish side, removing debris from the AP-7 highway, a major route from France to southern Spain that was blocked in both directions. Trucks and other traffic had been diverted to another smaller road as protesters installed concrete barriers on the highway and set up a stage to hold concerts. Catalonia has been rocked by mass protests since long prison sentences were handed down in mid-October to nine separatist leaders who spearheaded a failed independence bid in 2017. Asked what Catalan police should do with the protesters sent back over the border from France, Catalan government leader Quim Torra said there was no reason for charges to be brought.

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**WASHINGTON (AP)** - President Donald Trump says he'll be releasing the transcript of his April telephone conversation with Ukraine's new leader "before week's end."

Trump's promise to release an account of his first conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky comes a day before House impeachment investigators begin public hearings. House Democrats leading the impeachment inquiry are focused on a July 25 phone call in which Trump asks Zelensky to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden's family. Trump tweets Tuesday the April call is "more important." Trump had suggested he would release the April transcript Tuesday. Trump has kept up a steady stream of tweets about what he calls the impeachment "witch hunt." Among his events this week is a high-profile meeting with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday, the day impeachment hearings open.

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**DHAKA (Reuters)** - Rescuers in Bangladesh were struggling on Tuesday to pull passengers from mangled wreckage after a head-on collision of two trains killed at least 16 people and injured more than 40, officials said. A train heading for the southern port city of Chittagong and one bound for Dhaka collided at around 3 a.m. (2100 GMT) in Brahmanbaria, about 100 km (60 miles) east of the capital, crumpling three compartments of the southbound train. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed shock and sorrow at the injuries and loss of lives, urging officials and the public to provide support for the victims. It was not immediately clear how the two trains came to be on the same track, and the government has ordered an investigation. "One of the trains might have violated the signal, leading to the tragedy," one police official, Shayamal Kanti Das, told reporters. Railway accidents in Bangladesh happen relatively frequently, many at unsupervised crossings, and also because of the poor condition of tracks.

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**MADRID (Reuters)** - Spain's Socialist acting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and the leader of far-left Unidas Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, signed a preliminary agreement on Tuesday aiming to form what they called a "progressive" coalition government. However, the combination of their seats is not enough on its own to secure a majority in parliament and they will still need to seek support from other parties for such a government to be confirmed.

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**HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP)** - More than 200 elephants have died amid a severe drought, Zimbabwe's parks agency said on Tuesday, and a mass relocation of animals is planned to ease congestion. Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority spokesman Tinasho Farawa said at least 200 elephants have died in vast Hwange National Park alone since October and other parks are affected. Animals including giraffe, buffalo and impala are also dying, he said, and the situation can improve only after rains return. "Almost every animal is being affected," he said. "Of course, elephants are easily noticed during patrols or game drives, but some bird species are seriously affected because they can only breed in certain tree heights and those trees are being knocked down by elephants." Many animals are straying from Zimbabwe's parks into nearby communities in search of food and water. The parks agency has said 33 people have died from conflict with animals this year alone.

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**WASHINGTON (Reuters)** - The 2016 Trump election campaign was keen to keep abreast of the release of emails potentially damaging to Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, reaching all the way to Trump, the Republican's former deputy campaign chairman testified in court on Tuesday. Rick Gates, testifying in the criminal trial of President Donald Trump's longtime political adviser Roger Stone, said he witnessed a call with Trump and Stone related to WikiLeaks website in July 2016. WikiLeaks disclosed numerous stolen emails in the months before the election that damaged Clinton. Although Gates acknowledged he could not hear the contents of the call, he said that within 30 seconds or so of Trump hanging up with Stone, Trump said that more information would be coming from WikiLeaks.

## Raging Bushfires Hit Sydney Suburbs



A supplied image obtained on March 2, 2019, shows smoke rising from the bushfire burning in Victoria's east, Australia.

**SYDNEY (AFP)** - Bushfires raging across eastern Australia singed Sydney's suburbs on Tuesday, with firefighters scrambling planes and helicopters to douse a built-up neighborhood with water and red retardant.

Experts have described the conditions as the worst on record, as spring temperatures climbed toward 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) and winds topped 80 kilometers (50 miles) per hour across a zone which has been plagued by persistent drought.

Although the bushfire season is in its infancy, scientists predict it to be one of Australia's toughest ever, with climate change and unfavorable weather cycles helping create a tinderbox of strong winds, low humidity and high temperatures.

Twin blazes in the north shore suburb of Turramurra -- around 15 kilometers (nine miles) from the centre of Australia's largest city -- tore through a eucalypt forest park and sparked spot fires in homes, before eventually being brought under control.

As night fell, authorities said they were bringing another "clearly suspicious" blaze in a national park in the city's southern suburbs under control.

Throughout the day, more than 300 bushfires burned up and down Australia's east coast, fanned by gale-force winds, scorch-

ing temperatures and tinder-dry bushland that has brought some of the most dangerous conditions the country has seen.

In Turramurra, gardens smoldered, thick smoke hung heavy in the air and cars, houses and roads were caked in raspberry-red retardant as if hit by a giant paintball.

From early morning thousands of firefighters spread out across New South Wales in anticipation of what they called "off the scale" fire risk and "catastrophic" conditions.

They were unable to prevent several bushfires from breaching containment lines and trapping residents who had not already evacuated.

New South Wales Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said so far only a dozen buildings had been damaged Tuesday and a handful non-life-threatening injuries were reported, but the crisis was far from over.

Even before unfavorable weather hit, days of fires had killed three people and destroyed at least 150 homes.

"The conditions are expected to get worse," Fitzsimmons said, warning residents in adjacent areas to stay alert.

Up to 600 schools were closed, as well as many national parks, a total fire ban was introduced for the affected area and Rally Australia -- due to be held in Coffs Harbor at the weekend -- was cancelled.

## Massive Strike Planned as Chile Protests Rage on



A man stands among burning barricade during a protest against Chile's government in Valparaiso, Chile November 12, 2019.

**SANTIAGO (Reuters)** - State workers in Chile promised to launch a massive, nationwide walk-off early on Tuesday, a sign protesters were not yet satisfied following the government's decision to rewrite the country's heavily critiqued dictatorship-era constitution.

The new round of rallies and strikes over inequality and social injustices follow almost a month of unrest in Chile.

The demonstrations have sometimes devolved into arson, riots and looting, leaving at least 20 dead and wreaking billions of dollars of damage to public infrastructure and private businesses. Santiago's public transport system has been hobbled.

Truck drivers and protesters set up barricades Tuesday on at least two major highways connecting the capital Santiago with outlying cities and ports, prompting huge back-ups on key regional arteries.

The road blockages kept the Valparaiso-based upper and lower chambers of congress to suspend activities for the day.

Lawmakers said the move was "unprecedented" with one, Marcelo Diaz, a socialist, telling local TV: "Today more than ever congress needs to be making an effort to work at an accelerated pace because the people are demanding that we find concrete solutions."

In downtown Santiago, the streets were unusually quiet as buses scaled back service and many people refrained from commuting to work in anticipation of protests.

Schools and businesses throughout the capital of 6 million people were largely closed, and construction workers scrambled to board up shops and restaurants in anticipation of continued riots.

Valentina Donosa, 21, a university student who funds her education by selling bread on the street, said she was not in favor of the vandalism but that something significant had to change.

"I am in favor of the movement and of making a noise because to be honest, if you go to protest outside the Moneda (presidential palace) with white doves, nothing happens," she said.

President Sebastian Pinera's center-right administration said on Tuesday Chile's Congress should begin the process of writing a new constitution to replace the current one which dates back to the 1973-1990 dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

Many protesters said it was not enough, saying a referendum vote, not Congress, should determine the steps forward in redrafting the country's 1980 Constitution.

## EU Agrees to Build Weapons Independently of U.S.



French Defense Minister Florence Parly leaves the Elysee Palace following a cabinet meeting in Paris, October 21, 2019.

**BRUSSELS (Reuters)** - European Union governments gave the green light on Tuesday for 13 new defense projects in a step to develop more firepower independently of the United States.

Under plans agreed by EU defense ministers in Brussels, work will begin on a new patrol vessel, an electronic jamming weapon for aircraft and technology to track ballistic missiles.

The projects took months to negotiate but French President Emmanuel Macron underlined the desire for deeper EU defense collaboration last week when he said the U.S.-led NATO defense alliance was dying.

Some 47 joint EU defense projects are now in the works following the signing of a pact by France, Germany and 23 other EU governments in late 2017 to fund, develop and deploy armed forces following Britain's decision to quit the bloc.

Any new weapons on land, at sea or in the air and cyberspace can be put at NATO's disposal, but U.S. President Donald Trump's questioning of the alliance's significance has added impetus to European defense efforts.

Macron has expressed doubt about NATO's security maxim that an attack on one ally is an attack on all. But many European allies reject his portrayal of NATO, which will hold a

summit in London on Dec. 4, as brain dead.

Although 22 EU countries are in NATO, the bloc hopes to launch a multi-billion-euro weapons fund from 2021 requiring EU member states to work together on designing and building new tanks, ships and technology.

"We do not invest enough (in defense) and that investment is not efficient enough," French Defense Minister Florence Parly told France Inter radio on Monday, citing 20 different types of combat aircraft in the EU, compared to six in the United States.

European defense planning, operations and weapons development foresee France taking a big role in 60% of the 47 projects, often with Germany, Italy and Spain.

Under the latest projects, France will head plans to better track ballistic missiles in space, and develop an electronic jamming weapon with Spain and Sweden for European combat aircraft to overcome enemy air defenses.

With Italy, France will develop a prototype for a new class of military ship, to be known as a European Patrol Corvette.

France, Portugal, Spain and Sweden also aim to deliver a new anti-submarine system to protect sea lanes and communication. France is already leading work on new European helicopters.

## Corbyn Says Party Platforms Hit by Cyber Attacks



British opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn says the party is looking into who might have been behind the cyber attack.

**LONDON (Reuters/AP)** - British opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said on Tuesday a large-scale cyber attack on his party's digital platforms just weeks before a national election had made him nervous about the rest of the campaign.

"If this is a sign of things to come in this election, I feel very nervous about it all because a cyber attack against a political party in an election is suspicious and something one is very worried about," he said when asked by a reporter about the attack during a campaign event.

Corbyn said the party was look-

ing into who might have been behind the attack.

Hillary Clinton said she's "dumbfounded" that the UK government has failed to release a report on alleged Russian influence in British politics before the country holds a national election next month.

The former U.S. presidential candidate told British media that the public needs to know what is in the report by Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee before British voters go to the polls on Dec. 12.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government has said it needs more time to review the security

implications of the report before it is released. Critics allege the report is being withheld until after the election because it is embarrassing to Johnson's Conservative Party, which is trying to win a majority and push through Johnson's Brexit plan to take Britain out of the European Union.

"I'm dumbfounded that this government won't release the report ... because every person who votes in this country deserves to see that report before your election happens," Clinton told the BBC on Tuesday. "There is no doubt ... that Russia in particular is determined to try to shape the politics of Western democracies, not to our benefit but to theirs."

Former Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into the 2016 U.S. presidential election found that Russia interfered in the vote in a "sweeping and systemic" fashion. U.S. President Donald Trump, who won office in that vote, has dismissed the Mueller report's conclusions, but the investigation put Russia into the crosshairs of a debate on the integrity of elections worldwide.

"I am, as a great admirer of Britain, concerned, because I can't make sense of what is happening," Clinton told the Guardian.

## Chemical Attack Leaves 51 Children Injured in China

**BEIJING (AFP)** - More than 50 people, mostly children, were injured by a man who broke into a kindergarten in southwest China and sprayed them with corrosive liquid, local authorities said Tuesday.

The suspect, a 23-year-old surnamed Kong, entered the kindergarten by climbing a wall before spraying victims with sodium hydroxide, said local authorities in Kaiyuan city, Yunnan province.

The attack took place on Monday at 3:35 pm (0735 GMT), authorities said on their Twitter-like Weibo account.

Some 51 children and three teachers were admitted to hospital for treatment, two with "severe symptoms".

Police arrested Kong less than an hour after the attack.

"Because his parents divorced during his childhood, the lack of family warmth resulted in psychological distortion," said local authorities, adding that Zhang's work and life were unsatisfactory as well.

All this created a "pessimistic mentality and thoughts about retaliating against society", they said.

Sodium hydroxide, which is used to make products in-

cluding soaps and explosives, is very corrosive and can cause irritation to the eyes, skin and mucous membranes, as well as eye and skin burns, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The level of harm depends upon the dose and duration of exposure, it said.

There are no school shootings in China because of strict gun control laws, but there has been a spate of attacks, usually with knives, in recent years.

Violent attacks targeting schoolchildren are not uncommon in China, which has seen a slew of deadly incidents over the past few years -- usually involving knives.

In April last year, a 28-year-old man killed nine middle-school students as they were returning home in one of the country's deadliest knife attacks in recent years.

The killer, who said he had been bullied when he attended the school in northern China's Shaanxi province, was executed in September last year.

Later in 2018, a knife-wielding woman injured 14 children at a kindergarten in Sichuan province.

The 39-year-old assailant slashed students while they were returning to the classroom after morning exercises.