

# Thousands Flee Homes as California Wildfire Grows



A brush fire burns a car at the Apple Fire in Cherry Valley, Calif., Aug. 1, 2020.

**BEAUMONT, Calif. (AP) — A wildfire northwest of Palm Springs flared up Saturday, with evacuation orders for thousands of people as firefighters fought the blaze in triple-degree heat.**

An unspecified number of homes were in the path of the flames but were

not in imminent danger, CalFire captain Fernando Herrera told the Riverside Press-Enterprise.

The blaze, which began as two adjacent fires, was reported shortly before 5 p.m. Friday in Cherry Valley, an unincorporated area near the city of Beaumont in Riverside County.

Flames leapt along brushy ridge tops and came close to homes while some 375 firefighters attacked it from the ground and air, authorities said.

The blaze, dubbed the Apple Fire, doubled in size overnight and is over 6 square miles. About 7,800 people have been told to evacuate over 2,500 homes, according to fire officials. Hundreds of people in foothill neighborhoods north of Beaumont fell under mandatory evacuation orders.

One home has been destroyed. Herrera said firefighters were having difficulty assessing the damage because the charred ground was too hot to walk on.

The National Weather Service issued an excessive heat warning as Southern California found itself in the midst of a heat wave.

The mercury hit 105 degrees (41 Celsius) in Palm Springs by Saturday afternoon.

The weather service said "dangerously hot conditions" were expected to continue into evening because of high pressure over the region.

## WHO: Coronavirus Pandemic to Be Lengthy



A general view shows a protest near the Brandenburg Gate against the government's restrictions amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Berlin, August 1, 2020.

**JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — The UN health agency warned that the coronavirus pandemic would be lengthy and could lead to "response fatigue", as the case count in South Africa topped half a million.**

Six months after the World Health Organization declared a global emergency, the novel coronavirus has killed more than 680,000 people and infected more than 17.5 million, according to an AFP tally.

South Africa is by far the hardest hit country in Africa, accounting for more than half of diagnosed infections, although President Cyril Ramaphosa said the fatality rate is

lower than the global average.

Health authorities had been expecting a surge in cases after the gradual loosening of a strict lockdown that was imposed at the end of March.

Nigeria on Saturday also announced it would ease a lockdown in the commercial capital Lagos, allowing churches and mosques to reopen next week.

An emergency WHO committee reviewing the pandemic "highlighted the anticipated lengthy duration of this COVID-19 outbreak, noting the importance of sustained community, national, regional, and global response efforts".

"WHO continues to assess the

global risk level of COVID-19 to be very high," it said in its latest statement.

The agency also said the effects of the pandemic "will be felt for decades to come".

Mexico overtook Britain to become the third hardest hit country in virus deaths -- after Brazil and the United States -- with more than 46,600 fatal cases.

Although many Latin American countries have begun relaxing stay-at-home measures, the virus is still spreading quickly across much of the region, which has now recorded more than four million cases and almost 200,000 deaths.

Half of them are in Brazil, where President Jair Bolsonaro said he believes "nearly everyone" will catch the virus eventually, after himself recovering from it.

The U.S., the hardest-hit country in the world, has now tallied more than 4.6 million cases and 154,319 deaths.

The outlook was bleak in Asia as well, where India and the Philippines reported record increases in new daily infections.

"We are waging a losing battle against COVID-19, and we need to draw up a consolidated, definitive plan of action," said an open letter signed by 80 Filipino medical associations.

Japan's Okinawa declared a state of emergency after a record jump in cases on the islands -- many linked to U.S. military forces stationed there.

## Virus-Hit Florida Braces for Hurricane After Bahamas Hit

**ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — Isaias snapped trees and knocked out power as it blew through the Bahamas on Saturday and churned toward the Florida coast, threatening to complicate efforts to contain the coronavirus in places were cases are surging.**

Isaias weakened from a hurricane to a tropical storm Saturday afternoon, but was expected to regain hurricane strength overnight as it barrels toward Florida.

"We'll start seeing impacts tonight," Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis warned at a news conference. "Don't be fooled by the downgrade."

Isaias is piling another burden on communities already hard-hit by previous storms and the pandemic.

Florida authorities closed beaches, parks and virus testing sites, lashing signs to palm trees so they wouldn't blow away. The governor warned residents to expect power outages and asked to have a week's supply of water and food on hand. Officials wrestled with how to prepare shelters for people to seek refuge, if need be, while safely social distancing because of the virus.

Authorities in North Carolina ordered the evacuation of Ocracoke Island, which was slammed last year by Hurricane Dorian. Meanwhile, officials in the Bahamas opened shelters for people in Abaco island to help those who have been living in temporary structures since Dorian devastated the area, killing at least 70 people.

Isaias' maximum sustained winds dipped steadily Saturday and were near 70 mph (110 kph) around 11 p.m., hours after the U.S. National Hurricane Center downgraded its status. It said Isaias would regain hurricane strength by early Sunday.

By Saturday night, the storm was about 80 miles (130 kilometers) east-southeast of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. It was moving northwest at 9 mph (15 kph) and expected to be near Florida's southeast coast early Sunday, then tack near or along the state's Atlantic coast during the day.

Isaias is expected to remain a hurricane through Monday, then

slow weaken on its climb up the Atlantic seaboard. It's expected to move offshore of the coast of Georgia en route toward the mid-Atlantic states. Heavy rain, flooding and high winds could batter much of the East Coast during the week.

Despite the approaching storm, NASA says the return of two astronauts aboard a SpaceX capsule is still on track for Sunday afternoon. Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken are preparing to make the first splashdown return in 45 years, after two months docked at the International Space Station. They are aiming for the Gulf of Mexico just off the Florida Panhandle, and flight controllers are keeping close watch on the storm.

Isaias — pronounced ee-ah-EE-ahs — has already been destructive in the Caribbean. On Thursday, before it became a hurricane, it uprooted trees, destroyed crops and homes and caused widespread flooding and small landslides in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. One man died in the Dominican Republic. In Puerto Rico, the National Guard rescued at least 35 people from floodwaters that swept away one woman, whose body was recovered Saturday.

Concerns about the coronavirus and the vulnerability of people who are still recovering from Dorian were adding to storm worries.

Bahamian Prime Minister Hubert Minnis relaxed a coronavirus lockdown because of the storm, but imposed a 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew. He said supermarkets, pharmacies, gas stations and hardware stores would be open as long as weather permitted.

The Bahamas has reported more than 570 confirmed COVID-19 cases and at least 14 deaths. It recently barred travelers from the U.S. following a surge in cases after it reopened to international tourism.

Coronavirus cases have surged in Florida in recent weeks, and the added menace of a storm ratcheted up the anxiety. State-run virus testing sites are closing in areas where the storm might hit because the sites are outdoor tents, which could topple in high winds.

## Year on, India Lockdown Ruins Kashmir's Economy



A Kashmiri woman feeds pigeons at a street during restrictions after the scrapping of the special constitutional status for Kashmir by the government, in Srinagar, August 11, 2019.

**SRINAGAR, India (AP) — A year ago, Abdul Rashid was making a living by selling flowers to tourists in hundreds of ornate pinewood houseboats in Dal Lake in Srinagar, the main city in Indian-controlled Kashmir.**

When India suddenly scrapped disputed Kashmir's semi-autonomous status, followed by an unprecedented security clampdown, economic ruin ensued.

"It was not just a political change. It destroyed our livelihood," said Rashid, 60, who has now turned to growing vegetables to feed his family.

Days before the Aug. 5, 2019, decision by the central government in New Delhi, authorities asked hundreds of thousands of tourists, Hindu pilgrims and migrant workers to leave the territory, shutting its economy. Since then, tens of thousands of jobs have been lost.

The stunning Himalayan region has known little but conflict since 1947, when British rule of the subcontinent divided it between the newly created India and Pakistan.

After a series of political blunders, broken promises and a crackdown on dissent, Kashmiri separatists launched a full-blown armed revolt in 1989, seeking unification with Pakistan or complete independence. India dubbed the insurgency terrorism abetted by Pakistan, a charge Islamabad denies.

Hundreds of the colorful hand-carved houseboats, known as shikaras,

lie deserted, mostly anchored still on the desolate lake. Hotels are empty and there are hardly any tourists.

Some businesses had resumed with the partial lifting of the security and communication clampdown earlier this year. However, Indian authorities enforced another harsh lockdown in March to combat the coronavirus pandemic, further emaciating the local economy.

The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industries pegged the economic losses in the region at \$5.3 billion and about half a million jobs lost since August last year.

The 7-decade-old Hotel Standard in Srinagar had a staff of 30, according to its manager Khurshid Ahmed. Now there are just three. The only activity inside the once-bustling place is by the cleaning staff.

Muhammad Rajab, a taxi driver for 37 years, hasn't been hired even once since last August. "I parked my taxi at our stand few days before August 5 last year. It's still there along with 250 others," he said.

Tens of thousands of daily wage workers, like Rajab, have suffered the most.

Muhammad Lateef, a boatman, used to ferry tourists around the lake. He now sells cucumbers and cigarettes to locals along its banks.

"We've not earned a single penny for a year now," said Ghulam Qadir Ota, a houseboat owner. "All we have are these boats. We don't have any other means to earn."

## UK Mulls Coin to Commemorate Mahatma Gandhi



A portrait of Mahatma Gandhi is pictured as demonstrators march during a protest against the government's restrictions amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Berlin, August 1, 2020.

**LONDON (Reuters) — Britain is considering minting a coin to commemorate India's independence hero Mahatma Gandhi, amid growing interest in recognizing the contributions of people from the Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities.**

British Finance Minister Rishi Sunak asked the Royal Mint Advisory Committee (RMAC) in a letter to pursue recognition of individuals from those communities, the UK Treasury said in an emailed statement late on Saturday. "RMAC is currently considering a coin to commemorate Gandhi", the Treasury said.

Gandhi, who was born in 1869, advocated for non-violence throughout his life and played a key role in India's struggle for independence. His birthday, Oct. 2, is observed as the International Day of Non-Violence.

Often referred to as India's "father of the nation", he was assassinated by a Hindu radical on Jan. 30, 1948, just a few months after he led India to free-

dom from British rule.

As part of a global reassessment of history, colonialism and racism triggered by the death in May of a Black man, George Floyd, in the United States after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, some British institutions have begun re-examining their past.

Many organizations have taken initiatives to make investments to help the Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities and to support racial diversity. Floyd's death has led to global protests against racism, colonialism and police brutality.

In his letter to the RMAC, Sunak said members of the BAME communities have made a "profound contribution" and that the committee should consider recognizing it on the UK's coinage.

The RMAC is an independent committee made up of experts who recommend themes and designs for coins to Britain's finance minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

## News in Brief

**DOUALA (Reuters) — Suspected militants from Takfiri group Boko Haram killed at least 13 people and wounded eight others in a grenade attack in northern Cameroon on Sunday, a security source and a local official told Reuters. The unidentified assailants threw a grenade into a group of people inside a camp for displaced people in the commune of Mozogo near the Nigerian border in the Far North region, said mayor Medjeh Boukar. Boukar was informed by locals that 13 had died. A security official who confirmed the attack said that 2 wounded also died, bringing the toll to 15. Boko Haram has been fighting for a decade to carve out a Takfiri caliphate based in Nigeria. The violence, which has cost the lives of 30,000 people and displaced millions more, has frequently spilled over into neighboring Cameroon, Niger and Chad. In June last year, around 300 suspected Boko Haram militants swarmed onto an island on Lake Chad in Cameroon's far north and killed 24 people, including 16 Cameroonian soldiers stationed at military outposts.**

**CAIRO (Reuters) — Egypt said that part of a seismic survey planned by Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean potentially encroached on waters where Cairo claims exclusive rights. An advisory issued last month by Turkey for the survey overlaps with Egypt's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), constituting "a violation and an attack on Egypt's sovereign rights", the Egyptian foreign ministry said in a statement. It did not give details, but said the potential encroachment came under part eight of Turkey's advisory. Seismic surveys are part of preparatory work for potential hydrocarbons exploration. The announcement of the survey escalated tensions between Turkey on one side and Greece and Cyprus on the other, amid conflicting claims to offshore hydrocarbon resources. Turkey has since indicated it could pause exploration operations pending talks. Egypt is a regional rival of Turkey and has close relations with Greece and Cyprus.**

**NEW DELHI (Reuters) — Indian police raided rural hamlets and made arrests to break up a bootlegging cartel on Sunday, after 86 people died from consuming illegally-produced alcohol this week in the northwestern state of Punjab, officials said. Punjab police have so far arrested at least 25 people and conducted more than 100 raids across three districts, seizing hundreds of liters of liquor from villages and road-side eateries, the state's police chief Dinkar Gupta said on Saturday. A government official said some of the seized liquor was denatured spirit, which is typically used in the paint and hardware industry. Deaths from illegally-produced alcohol, known locally as "hooch" or "country liquor", are a regular occurrence in India, where many cannot afford branded spirits. Recent coronavirus-related lockdowns have also made it difficult for consumers to enjoy a regular tittle. On Friday, 10 men died in a southern Indian state after consuming sanitizer derived from alcohol, as local liquor shops were closed, police said.**

**BANGKOK (Reuters) — Thailand's prime minister has ordered a second autopsy be conducted after the death of a key witness in a deadly hit-and-run case linked to the heir to the Red Bull energy drink fortune, amid public anger that the charges were dropped. Jaruchart Mardthong, 40, died in what police said looked like a motorcycle accident on Thursday, amid public suspicion about the exact cause of his death. Results of an initial autopsy have not yet been released. Local media said his family had planned to cremate the body on Sunday. He was a key witness in the police investigation into Vorayuth "Boss" Yoovidhya, who was accused of killing a police officer in 2012, according to deputy government spokeswoman Traisulee Traisoranakul. Police said last week that all charges against Vorayuth had been dropped, stirring public anger about the country's entrenched culture of impunity for the rich and well-connected.**

**MOSCOW/MINSK (Reuters) — A dispute between Moscow and Minsk over the detention of more than 30 men who Belarus accused of being Russian mercenaries deepened, as the two sides contradicted each other about the group's plans. The arrests this week, shortly before an Aug. 9 presidential election in Belarus, could further strain relations between Minsk and its traditional ally Russia, which soured after the neighbors failed to agree on an oil supply contract for this year. Russia said on Thursday that the men, who it described as employees of a private security firm, had stayed in Belarus after missing their connecting flight to Istanbul. President Alexander Lukashenko cast doubt on this version. "There was no Istanbul... It's clear that the group has had another goals. It is the task of the investigation to find out about those goals", he said, according to state news agency Belta, after hearing reports from the heads of agency Beta, security and investigation committee.**

**HONG KONG (Reuters) — Seven Chinese health officials were due to arrive in Hong Kong on Sunday, the first members of a 60-person team that will carry out widespread testing for COVID-19 in the territory as the global financial hub races to halt a third wave of illness. China's National Health Commission on Saturday announced their scheduled arrival. Members of the team are from public hospitals in Guangdong province where a specialist team of six from Wuhan, where the novel coronavirus first appeared, will help prepare part of the AsiaWorld Expo convention centre as a facility for COVID-19 patients.**