

Pro-Independence Party Heads for Win in Scotland



First Minister and SNP party leader Nicola Sturgeon celebrates after retaining her seat for Glasgow Southside at the count for the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in Glasgow, Scotland, Friday May 7, 2021.

LONDON (AP) — Counting resumed Saturday in Scotland's parliamentary election with the governing Scottish National Party very close to securing a majority that would see it make a push for another independence referendum.

With 49 constituencies counted, the SNP had won 40 seats and is clearly on course to win its fourth straight term in office. However, given the country's electoral system, which also allocates some seats by a form of proportional representation, it may fall short of the 65 seats it would need

in the Edinburgh-based parliament to have a majority.

Ballots also continue to be counted in the Welsh parliamentary election and a swath of local elections in England. But it's the Scottish election that could have the biggest UK-wide implications as it could fast-track another referendum on its future within the UK.

Were the SNP to win a majority, its leader, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, would argue that she has a mandate to call another referendum. Were the party to fall short, British Prime

Minister Boris Johnson, who has the ultimate power to allow a referendum, could argue that she didn't. On Saturday, he wrote in the Daily Telegraph newspaper that another referendum would be "irresponsible and reckless" in the "current context" as Britain emerges from the coronavirus crisis.

Speaking after winning her seat in Glasgow on Friday, Sturgeon said her immediate priority would be to deal with the pandemic and "then when the time is right to offer this country the choice of a better future."

Scotland has been part of the UK since 1707 and the issue of Scottish independence appeared settled when Scottish voters rejected secession by 55%-45% in a 2014 referendum. But the UK-wide decision in 2016 to leave the European Union ran against the wishes of most Scots — 62% voted in favor of staying within the bloc while most voters in England and Wales wanted to leave. That gave the Scottish nationalist cause fresh legs.

Scotland's deputy first minister, John Swinney, said that the party would still have the right to call an election if it fell short but enough other pro-independence members were elected, such as from the Scottish Greens.

"I'm very confident that will be the case," he told the BBC.

Lula Lays Ground to Oust Bolsonaro in Brazil Election



Brazil's former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva gestures as he speaks during a news conference in Sao Bernardo do Campo near Sao Paulo, Brazil March 10, 2021.

BRASILIA (Reuters) — Brazil's leftist former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is back in the political mix, laying the groundwork in Brasilia this week to challenge far-right President Jair Bolsonaro in next year's election.

The popular former union leader has not said whether he will run for president in October 2022, but opinion polls show he may have a strong shot at defeating Bolsonaro after the Supreme Court threw out his graft convictions.

With his political rights restored, Lula spent this week in the capital Brasilia meeting allies and former foes in the first steps towards building a coalition against Bolsonaro, whose unorthodox presidency has been criticized at home and

abroad for mishandling the coronavirus pandemic and weakening environmental protection of the Amazon rainforest.

Aides and interlocutors said Lula is looking first to forge state-level alliances, starting with the governor's race in Rio de Janeiro, which is Bolsonaro's political base and the cradle of the former army captain's right-wing movement.

The opposition leader in the lower chamber of Congress, Alessandro Molon of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), said Lula showed he was open to backing candidates from other parties on state tickets to form a broad alliance in Rio.

For example, Lula met with Marcelo Freixo, a potential candidate for Rio governor from the Social-

ism and Liberty Party (PSoL), to the left of Lula's Workers Party (PT).

Lula also met former House Speaker Rodrigo Maia, of the center-right Democrats party (DEM), which backed the 2016 impeachment of Lula's hand-picked successor, Dilma Rousseff.

Maia has emerged as a vocal Bolsonaro critic and is expected to join an opposition coalition in his home state of Rio.

Lula's most crucial meeting in Brasilia may have been with Gilberto Kassab, whose center-right Social Democratic Party (PSD) backed both Rousseff's 2014 reelection and her 2016 impeachment, which ended 13 years of PT rule.

Kassab's party supports Bolsonaro and has a minister in the Cabinet, but may back away from the president as criticism mounts over his playing down the pandemic, which slowed an economic recovery and hurt his popularity.

"Lula is back in the game and he is bridge building for now, trying to draw politicians who worked with him when he was in office," said Creomar de Souza of Dharma Search political risk consultancy in Brasilia.

Two people in Kassab's party have taken prominent roles in a Senate inquiry of the Bolsonaro government's approach to the pandemic. The virus has killed more than 415,000 Brazilians, second only to the United States with about 580,000 deaths.

China Calls on Countries to Shun UN Event on Xinjiang

BEIJING (Dispatches) — China has hit out at a virtual UN event sponsored by a group of Western states to discuss Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, calling on UN member states not to attend it.

"It is a politically-motivated event. We request your mission NOT to participate in this anti-China event," said a note sent by China's UN mission to other United Nations offices of member states.

Beijing also said organizers of the upcoming event, including the U.S., Britain, Germany, Canada, Australia and several other European governments, often resort to "human rights issues as a political tool to interfere in China's internal affairs like Xinjiang, to create division and turbulence and disrupt China's development."

"They are obsessed with provoking confrontation with China," the note added, emphasizing that "the provocative event can only lead to more confrontation."

According to the report, permanent UN representatives of the U.S., Britain and Germany are scheduled to address the virtual event on Wednesday, along with the executive direc-

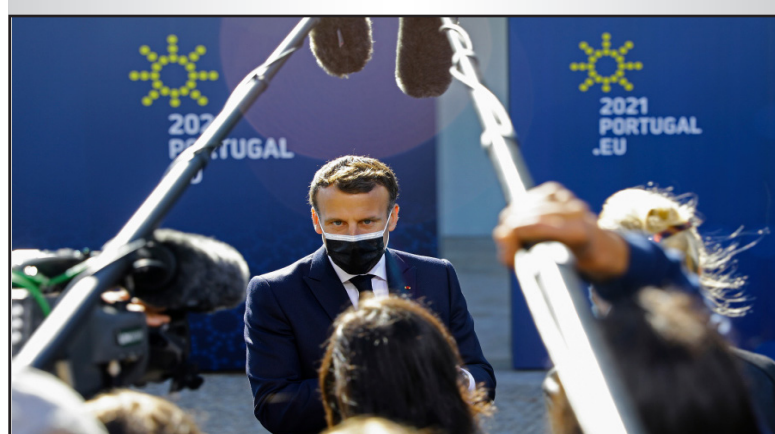
tor of the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the secretary general of the UK-based Amnesty International — widely suspected of being publicity instruments of their hosting governments to issue reports on human rights violations across the globe, particularly in countries not in tune with "Western values".

The aim of the event, as claimed in the invitation sent out by its sponsors, is to "discuss how the UN system, member states and civil society can support and advocate for the human rights of members of ethnic Turkic communities in Xinjiang."

While Western governments and rights groups have accused authorities in Xinjiang of detaining and torturing Uyghur Muslims in camps, they have been the top sources and promoters of Islamophobia, racism and discrimination against non-White and non-Western migrant communities.

China has firmly denied Western allegations about abusing Uyghurs Muslims in "slave labor" camps, insisting that the camps serve as vocational training centers to combat religious extremism.

U.S., EU Bicker on Vaccine Patents as COVID Rages



French President Emmanuel Macron speaks with the media as he arrives for an EU summit at the Crystal Palace in Porto, Portugal, May 8, 2021.

PORTO, Portugal (Dispatches) — European Union leaders cranked up their criticism of the U.S. call to waive COVID-19 vaccine patents Saturday, arguing the move would bring no short or midterm relief. They instead urged Washington to lift export restrictions if it wants to have a global impact on the pandemic.

"We don't think, in the short term, that it's the magic bullet," said EU Council President Charles Michel on the second day of an EU summit in Portugal. French President Emmanuel Macron insisted that giving any priority to discussing intellectual property rights now "is a false debate."

Instead, they joined previous EU calls for U.S. President Joe Biden to start boosting U.S. vaccine exports to contain the global COVID-19 crisis, insisting it was the most urgent need.

"We encourage all the partners to facilitate the export of (vaccine) doses," said Michel.

France added its weight. "I'm very clearly urging the U.S. to put an end to the ban on exports of vaccines and on components of vaccines that are preventing them being produced," Macron said. Hundreds of compo-

nents can go into a vaccine.

He mentioned the Curevac company, saying it could not produce a vaccine in Europe because components are blocked in the United States.

The U.S. has kept a tight lid on exports of American-made vaccines so it can inoculate its own population first. The UK has acted similarly.

"First of all, you must open up," said Macron in a call to the United States. "First of all, the Anglo Saxons must stop their bans on exports."

Pope Francis came out in support of waiving the intellectual property rights. In a speech to a global fundraising concert to promote fair access to vaccines, the pope said the world was infected with the "virus of individualism."

"A variant of this virus is closed nationalism, which prevents, for example, an internationalism of vaccines," he said in the pre-recorded video message.

"Another variant is when we put the laws of the market or of intellectual market or intellectual property over the laws of love and the health of humanity," he added, recalling the heavy death toll the coronavirus had inflicted on the world.

Institute: India to Have 1 Million COVID Deaths by Aug.



A woman mourns after her husband died due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outside a mortuary of a COVID-19 hospital in Ahmedabad, India, May 8, 2021.

CHENNAI (Reuters) — India on Saturday reported its highest ever single-day COVID-19 death toll, as cases continued to rise and states imposed stricter lockdowns.

India's health ministry reported 4,187 fatalities over the past 24 hours, taking the overall death toll close to 240,000. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation estimates that India will see 1 million COVID deaths by August.

Cases rose by 401,078 on Saturday, bringing the total since the start of the pandemic to 21.9 million.

Medical experts say the real numbers of COVID-19 cases and fatalities are likely to be far higher than official tallies.

Tamil Nadu, known for its automobile manufacturing including BMW, Daimler, Hyundai, Ford, Nissan and Renault, said it would move from a partial to a full lockdown on Monday, shutting public transport and state-run alcohol retailers.

Neighboring Karnataka state extended a total shutdown late on Friday. The state capital Bengaluru is a major tech hub, home to major offices of companies including Google, Amazon and Cisco.

India is yet to impose a national lockdown as it did during its first wave last year, but around half of all its states have imposed a total shutdown. The rest are under a partial shutdown.

India's drug regulator on Friday approved for emergency use a new drug called 2-deoxy-D-glucose after clinical trials showed it aided the recovery of hospitalized patients and reduced depen-

dence on supplemental oxygen.

The drug was jointly developed by India's state-run Defense Research and Development Organization and Hyderabad-based Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd.

Though it is the world's biggest vaccine maker, India is struggling to produce and distribute enough doses to stem the wave of COVID-19.

The country has administered over 167 million vaccine doses but its rate of inoculation has fallen in recent days and only around 2% of its 1.4 billion people have received the two doses needed to be fully immunized.

While cases in the country's northern and western areas have borne the brunt of the pandemic, southern states including Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have seen infections surge.

The second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in India has brought the health-care system to the brink of collapse, with patients dying due to lack of oxygen or access to hospital beds.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been criticized for his handling of the oxygen shortage, though the government says it is doing all it can.

Medical journal Lancet said in an editorial on Saturday Prime Minister Modi's attempts to stifle criticism were "inexcusable."

"India must now restructure its response while the crisis rages. The success of that effort will depend on .. implementing a public health response that has science at its heart."

News in Brief

LONDON (AP) — Passengers facing significant travel disruption Saturday in Britain as a number of high-speed trains were taken out of service to undergo precautionary checks for cracks. Network Rail, which runs the nation's tracks, said cracks were discovered on several Hitachi 800 trains. The trains are used by several train operators, including Great Western Railway, which serves passengers between London and the west of England and south Wales, and London North Eastern Railway, which connects links Edinburgh and London. It was unclear specifically where the cracks were found and whether the inspections will also interfere with train services on Sunday. High-speed train services between cities were affected, but suburban rail routes were still running. Hitachi Rail has apologized for the disruption caused. Manuel Cortes, general secretary of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, said the trains "must not be allowed back into service until we are 100% certain these trains are safe." He said passengers should not be charged extra in the future to cover the cost of any needed repairs.

MALE (Reuters) — Former Maldives president Mohamed Nasheed is conscious after life-saving surgery, his family said on Saturday, as police made two arrests in connection with a blast they said was being treated as a terror attack. Nasheed, the president of the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party and the current parliament speaker, was critically injured after a bomb exploded as he left his family home in the capital Male on Thursday. Police on Saturday said they had made two arrests in connection with the blast, without giving further details. "I'm good," Nasheed said after coming off life support, according to a tweet by his sister Nashida Sattar. Nasheed, the Maldives' first democratically-elected president, is an outspoken critic of takfiri extremism in the Sunni Muslim island archipelago, and has been instrumental in investigating graft allegations against opposition leaders. Nasheed was deposed and exiled in what he called a coup in 2012, while in 2015, former President Abdulla Yameen escaped unharmed after an explosion on his speedboat.

SHANGHAI (Reuters) — Remnants of China's largest rocket launched last week are expected to plunge back through the atmosphere late Saturday or early Sunday, a U.S. federally funded space-focused research and development center said. China's foreign ministry said on Friday that most debris from the rocket will be burned up on re-entry and is highly unlikely to cause any harm, after the U.S. military said that what it called an uncontrolled re-entry was being tracked by U.S. Space Command. In a tweet sent on Friday evening in the United States, the Aerospace Corporation said that the latest prediction for the re-entry of the Long March 5B rocket body by its Center for Orbital Reach and Debris Studies (CORDS) was for eight hours on either side of 0419 GMT on Sunday. CORDS' latest "informed prediction" of the rocket body's re-entry location was given near the North Island of New Zealand, but it noted that re-entry was possible anywhere along paths covering large swathes of the globe. The Long March 5B — comprising one core stage and four boosters — lifted off from China's Hainan island on April 29 with the unmanned Tianhe module, which contains what will become living quarters on a permanent Chinese space station.

RIO DE JANEIRO (Reuters) — The death toll from a police raid on a drug gang in a poor Rio de Janeiro neighborhood on Thursday has risen to 28, civil police said, the deadliest operation ever carried out by the security forces in the Brazilian city. The bodies of three more victims removed from the favela on Friday were men with links to organized crime, according to police. Twenty-four other people and a police officer also died in the operation in the northern Rio neighborhood of Jacarezinho. "Intelligence confirmed that the dead were drug dealers. They fired at officers, to kill. They had orders to confront," Civil Police chief Allan Turnowski told reporters. The United Nations human rights office on Friday called for an independent investigation into the operation. UN human rights spokesman Rupert Colville said the police deployed a "disproportionate and unnecessary" use of force.

BERLIN (AP) — Leaders of Germany's Greens on Saturday slammed the mayor of Tuebingen, a member of their own party, for using a racist slur in a social media post about a black soccer player. Boris Palmer, who has regularly irked fellow members of the center-left party with his comments about migrants and minorities, had used the racist term in reference to former Germany player Dennis Aogo. "The comments by Boris Palmer are racist and repulsive," Annalena Baerbock, the Green's candidate for chancellor, wrote on Twitter. She said Palmer's repeated "provocations, which exclude and hurt people," meant he had lost the party's support and it would now discuss consequences "including expulsion proceedings." Palmer was elected to a second eight-year term as mayor in 2014 and remains a popular figure in Tuebingen, a university town in southwest Germany. Aogo was earlier this week embroiled in a racism row with former Germany goalkeeper Jens Lehmann.