



**KARACHI (Reuters)** – Pakistani opposition leader Shah Mehmood Qureshi was detained on Saturday, his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party said, just hours after he said it would challenge any delay to the country's election in the courts. Party spokesman Zulfi Bukhari told Reuters the specific reason for the detention of Qureshi, twice Pakistan's foreign minister, was not immediately clear. The caretaker information minister did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Bukhari condemned the arrest on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, saying he was "arrested for doing a press conference and re-affirming PTI stance against all tyranny and pre-poll rigging that is going on currently in Pakistan." PTI party chairman Imran Khan is currently jailed for three years after being convicted on graft charges and is barred from contesting any election for five years. He denies any wrongdoing. Khan won the last election in 2018 and became prime minister until he was ousted in a no-confidence vote in 2022. The election is meant to be held within 90 days of parliament being dissolved last week, by November, but uncertainty looms over the date as the nation grapples with constitutional, political and economic crises.

**STOCKHOLM (Anadolu)** – The Swedish government will review the Public Order Act because of repeated attacks on the Qur'an, according to media reports. Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, along with partners of the coalition, Ebba Busch, the leader of Christian Democrats and Johan Pehrson, the leader of the Liberal Party, wrote an article for the Dagens Nyheter newspaper where they noted that the law will be reviewed without changing the Constitution and stressed the importance of police taking into account national security while considering applications for gatherings and demonstrations. The government will investigate ways to change rules and prevent attacks on the Muslim holy book, it said. Recent months have seen repeated acts of Qur'an burning and desecration by Islamophobic figures or groups, especially in northern European and Nordic countries.

**BEIJING (Dispatches)** – China has censured the United States on the grounds that it is engaged in more biohazardous laboratory tests for military applications than any other country across the globe. "We all know that America is the most active country in the field of biomilitary which raises serious questions for other countries regarding Washington's true intentions," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said. The Chinese official made the remarks in response to a recent review by the Pentagon of countries posing a biological threat to the world. In the Biodefense Posture Review, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) listed China as the key long-term threat to the world, allegedly due to its development of biological weapons. Americans, Wang said, often fabricate reports on the so-called threats "to deter and suppress other countries" and to protect the "hegemonic interests" of the United States. In contrast to the United States, China supports the international community in reviewing how the U.S. is complying with the Biological Weapons Convention, Wang said.

**ATHENS (Anadolu)** – A major wildfire that broke out near Greece's northeastern town of Alexandroupolis is raging and threatening nearby settlements, state news agency ANNA said on Saturday. The fire broke out in the early hours, with dozens of firefighters, assisted by fire engines and aircraft, engaged in efforts to put out the blaze. Some sections of the Egnatia Odos, a major motorway that links northeastern Greece to the northwestern part of the country, were temporarily closed as a precautionary measure.

**CAMP DAVID (Reuters)** – U.S. President Joe Biden and the leaders of South Korea and Japan have agreed at Camp David to deepen military and economic cooperation. The Biden administration held the summit with the leaders of the main U.S. allies in Asia, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, in a bid to project unity in the face of China's growing power and "nuclear threats" from North Korea. In a summit statement the three countries committed to consult promptly with each other during crises and to coordinate responses to regional challenges, provocations and threats affecting common interests. They also agreed to hold military training exercises annually and to share real-time information on North Korean missile launches by the end of 2023. The countries promised to hold trilateral summits annually.

**KAMPALA (Anadolu)** – UNICEF in the Congo says that there have been at least 31,342 suspected or confirmed cholera cases in the country with 230 deaths in the first seven months of 2023 – many of them children. It said the worst affected province, North Kivu, has seen more than 21,400 confirmed or suspected cases, including more than 8,000 children younger than 5. "The size of the cholera outbreak and the devastation it threatens should ring alarm bells," said Shameza Abdulla, UNICEF DRC Senior Emergency Coordinator. "If urgent action is not taken within the next months, there is a significant risk that the disease will spread to parts of the country that have not been affected for many years." He said there is also the danger it will continue to spread in displacement sites where systems are already overwhelmed and the population, especially children, is highly vulnerable to illness and potentially death. In 2017, cholera spread across Congo, including the capital, Kinshasa, leading to almost 55,000 cases and more than 1,100 deaths.

## ECOWAS Delegation in Niamey Sheikh Zakzaky: France, U.S. Seeking to Stoke Tension Between Niger, Nigeria



Nigeriens gather near a French airbase in the capital Niamey on August 11, 2023.

**NIAMEY (Dispatches)** – A delegation from the West African bloc ECOWAS arrived in Niger on Saturday for talks with the military officers who seized power in a July 26 coup.

The plane carrying the delegation arrived in Niamey a day after the bloc's military chiefs said they were ready to intervene to reinstate ousted President Mohamed Bazoum.

Niger's governing military council confirmed the arrival of the ECOWAS representatives, headed by former Nigerian leader Abdulsalami Abubakar.

Sources close to ECOWAS and Bazoum said the delegation should seek diplomatic mediation with the junta leaders who have taken power in Niger.

A previous ECOWAS delegation led by Abubakar earlier this month tried and failed to meet Bazoum and the coup leader, General Abdourahmane Tiani.

A source close to the latest delegation said it would send "a message of firmness" to the army officers and meet Bazoum.

ECOWAS had earlier threatened that a task force was ready to be deployed in Niger; adding that a "peaceful solution" would continue to be sought.

The defense chiefs of the 15-member said on Friday that they are ready to act whenever an order is given.

"We are ready to go anytime the order is given," ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security Abdel-Fatau Musah said during the closing ceremony. "The D-Day is also decided, which we are

not going to disclose."

Nigeria's leading Islamic scholar Sheikh Ibrahim al-Zakzaky has warned that the U.S. and France intend to stoke sedition in African countries following the recent coup in Niger.

"It is clear that this is not our war; it is a war [waged by] America and France," said the prominent Shia scholar on Saturday while addressing Islamic Seminary students in Abuja, further insisting that Washington and Paris may attempt to spark a crisis between Nigeria and Niger.

The Nigerian cleric went on to point out that although Niger has closed its airspace, French aircrafts still pass through, noting that they also maintain "terrorist" camps across the country that are the source of attacks waged by the Boko Haram Daesh-linked terrorists.

"That's where they come from, to launch attacks and ferret away mineral resources (gold) to be subsequently shared among them (the stakeholders)," he further emphasized.

Zakzaky also expressed concerns about the potential employment of such terrorists to wage assaults against Abuja and make it look like Niamey is responsible and vice versa.

"Therefore, any military action on the borders of the two countries, be assured that it is the handiwork of France and America, not Nigeria, and not Niger," he underlined.

The Muslim leader further insisted that the two colonialist powers could trigger a 'tribal' conflict within Niger, just like they have already done in Sudan, among various ethnic groups there.

## Lavrov: West Needs Continual Reminder of Risks of Nuclear War

**MOSCOW (Reuters)** – Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov says that possession of nuclear weapons protects Russia from security threats and that Moscow continually reminded the West of the risk of a nuclear conflict.

Lavrov's comments are the latest reference by Russian officials to their country's nuclear weapons arsenal, a rhetoric of military escalation by Moscow that has gained tempo and frequency since Russian forces launched an attack on Ukraine last year.

Last month, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said Moscow would have to use a nuclear weapon if Ukraine's counteroffensive against Russian troops was a success.

"The possession of nuclear arms is today the only possible response to some of the significant external threats to the security of our country," Lavrov said in an interview for the state-owned magazine, The International Affairs, published early on Saturday on the foreign ministry website.

Lavrov said that the United States and NATO military alliance members risk ending up in "a situation of direct armed confrontation of nucle-

ar powers".

"We believe such a development should be prevented. That's why we have to remind about the existence of high military and political risks and send sobering signals to our opponents," Lavrov said.

NATO members and the U.S. are Ukraine's staunchest supporters and the largest providers of military aid in its war against Russia.

U.S. President Joe Biden has called a threat of Russia using tactical nuclear weapons "real". NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said this week that the Western military alliance has not detected any changes to Russia's nuclear force stance, and therefore, NATO did not need to reciprocate in its nuclear posture.

On Thursday, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest allies, warned that he would use the nuclear weapons that Russia had deployed in his country if faced with external aggression.

"There can be only one threat – aggression against our country starts from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, we will respond instantly with everything we have," Lukashenko said in an interview.

## Seven Killed, 90 Wounded in Russian Missile Strike on Ukraine's Chernihiv



Firefighters walk next to the Taras Shevchenko Chernihiv Regional Academic Music and Drama Theater damaged by a Russian attack in Chernihiv, Ukraine, Saturday, Aug. 19, 2023.

**CHERNIHIV (Reuters)** – Seven people including a 6-year-old child were killed and 90 wounded when a Russian missile struck a central square in the historic northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv, the interior ministry said on Saturday.

People had been on their way to church to celebrate a holiday gathering when the strike took place, the ministry said, adding 12 of the wounded were children and 10 were police officers.

"A Russian missile hit right in the center of the city, in our Chernihiv.

A square, the polytechnic university, a theater," President Volodymyr Zelensky, who was on a working visit to Sweden, posted on Telegram.

"An ordinary Saturday, which Russia turned into a day of pain and loss," he added.

A short video accompanying Zelensky's post showed debris scattered across a square in front of the regional drama theater, where parked cars were heavily damaged. The video also briefly showed a body slouched inside a car.

Chernihiv is a city of leafy boulevards and centuries-old churches about 145 km (90 miles) north of the capital Kyiv. The interior ministry said the roof of the drama theater had been destroyed in the strike.

Russia has attacked Ukrainian cities far from the front line with missiles and drones as part of the attack it launched in February last year.

Kyiv's air force said early on Saturday the Ukrainian military had shot down 15 out of 17 drones launched by Moscow in an overnight strike.

## Canada Declares State of Emergency Amid Wildfires, Thousands Evacuated

**KELOWNA (Reuters)** – Thousands of British Columbia (B.C.) residents were on high evacuation alert on Saturday after rapidly intensifying wildfires forced the Canadian province to declare a state of emergency, while some sections of a key transit route between the Pacific coast and the rest of western Canada were partially closed.

The western province of B.C. has experienced strong winds and dry lightning in the past 36 hours due to a cold mass of air interacting with hot air built-up in the sultry summer. That intensified existing forest fires and ignited new ones.

By Friday, an out-of-control fire in southern B.C. grew more than one hundredfold in 24 hours and forced more than 2,400 properties to be evacuated. The fire was centered around Kelowna, a city some 300 kilometers (180 miles) east of Vancouver, with a population of about 150,000.

As conditions continued to deteriorate quickly through Friday evening, Premier Daniel Eby declared a province-wide state of emergency to access temporary authoritative powers to tackle fire-related risks.

"This is an historic wildfire season for British Columbia," Eby told a briefing.

The fires moved so rapidly on Friday that more people under evacuation order went from 4,500 to 15,000 in an hour, while another 20,000 were under evacuation alert. The province currently accounts for over a third of Canada's 1,062 active fires.

"The state of emergency declaration ... communicates to people across the province the serious-



Smoke rises during the wildfire in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada on Aug. 17, 2023.

ness of the deteriorating situation," Eby said. "(It) enables a number of legal tools for us to issue specific orders and to ensure that resources are available."

The flames have already destroyed several structures in West Kelowna and authorities have been warning that the province could potentially face the worst couple of days of the fire season this year.

The TransCanada highway was closed near Chase, around 400 km northeast of Vancouver, and between Hope, 150 km east of Vancouver, and the village of Lytton. However, the government's Drive B.C. said detours were available.

TransCanada is the main east-west artery used by thousands of motorists and road freight heading to Port of Vancouver, the country's busiest.

Some 5,000 customers are also without electricity in interior B.C. due to the fires, the main utility said. Forest fires are not uncommon in

Canada, but the spread of blazes and disruption underscore the severity of its worst wildfire season yet.

The fires have drained local resources and drawn in federal government assistance as well as support from 13 countries. At least four firefighters have died in the line of duty.

About 140,000 square km (54,054 square miles) of land, roughly the size of New York state, have already burnt, and government officials project the fire season could stretch into autumn due to widespread drought-like conditions in Canada.

The escalation in B.C. comes as the northern Canadian city of Yellowknife evacuated most of its roughly 20,000 residents due to a large approaching blaze.

People left their homes and property behind on Thursday and Friday to seek refuge in neighboring provinces due to the threat of the creeping fire cutting off land exits and potentially doing worse harm.

## China Stages War Games in 'Stern Warning' to Taiwan

**BEIJING (AFP)** – China held air and sea drills around Taiwan on Saturday, in what it said was a "stern warning" after the island's vice president visited the United States.

William Lai -- the frontrunner in Taiwan's presidential election next year and a vocal opponent of Beijing's claims to the island -- returned Friday from a trip to Paraguay, during which he stopped in New York and San Francisco.

China has reacted angrily to the U.S. stops, and on Saturday reiterated that Lai was a "troublemaker" while vowing to take "resolute measures... to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity".

The People's Liberation Army "launched joint air and sea patrols and military exercises of the navy and air force around the island of Taiwan" on Saturday, military spokesperson Shi Yi said, according to state media outlet Xinhua.

Taiwan said 42 warplanes had entered its air defence zone since 9:00 am (0100 GMT), and eight Chinese vessels took part in the exercises.

Twenty-six of the warplanes involved crossed the Taiwan Strait median line, the island's ministry of defence said in a statement.

Xinhua said the drills were carried out "in the waters and airspace to the north and southwest of Taiwan Island" to test the PLA's ability "to seize control of air and sea spaces" and fight "in real combat conditions".

They were also intended to serve as "a stern warning to the collusion of 'Taiwan independence' separatists with foreign elements and their provocations", it added.

A social media video published by the PLA on Saturday showed soldiers in fatigues sprinting through a military facility and fighter jets soaring above clouds, set to action-movie-style music.

China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has pledged to take it one day, by force if necessary.

China has sovereignty over Taipei, and under the internationally-recognized "one-China" policy, nearly all countries recognize that sovereignty, meaning that they would not establish diplomatic contact with its secessionist government.

The U.S., too, professes adherence to the principle, but in violation of its own stated policy and in an attempt to irritate Beijing, Washington courts the secessionist government in Taipei, supports its anti-China position, and supplies it with massive amounts of armaments.

China describes Taiwan as the most sensitive and important issue in its relations with the U.S., and the topic remains a constant source of friction between Beijing and Washington.

Last August, China deployed warships, missiles, and fighter jets around Taiwan in its largest show of force in years, following a trip to the island by then U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.