UN Chief Slams Threat From U.S. Pro-Russian Georgescu Surges to Lead in Romania Vote **Supply of Landmines to Ukraine**



Calin Georgescu, who ran as an independent candidate for president,

is pictured in Bucharest, Romania, Oct. 1, 2024.

BUCHAREST (AFP) -- Far-right candidate Calin Georgescu surged unexpectedly in Romania's presidential election, pulling ahead of the pro-European prime minister with more than 98 percent of votes counted Monday and looking all but certain to advance

Exit polls had initially showed centerleft Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu with a comfortable lead and put a center-right candidate in second, suggesting the farright would be shut out of the run-off next

But with 98.66 percent of ballots counted, the pro-Russian Georgescu was leading with 22.59 percent to Ciolacu's 19.55 percent in the race to take over from President Klaus Iohannis in the largely ceremonial post.

In the absence of an outright winner in the first round -- scoring more than 50 percent -- the top two candidates go through to a second round on December

Whatever the outcome, "the far right is by far the big winner of this election", political scientist Cristian Pirvulescu told

Another nationalist candidate, George Simion, is currently running fourth, putting the far-right on track to take about a third of the vote.

The result would be a political earthquake in the country of 19 million, a NATO member which has so far resisted nationalist posturing, setting itself apart from Hungary and Slovakia.

Ciolacu's Social Democrat party has shaped Romania's politics for more than three decades, and as he voted Sunday he promised stability and a "decent" standard of living.

But with concerns mounting over inflation and the war in neighboring Ukraine, the far-right appeared to be gaining ground ahead of the vote.

Georgescu surged in recent days with a viral TikTok campaign calling for an end to aid for Ukraine. He has also sounded a skeptical note on Romania's NATO membership.

"Tonight, the Romanian people cried out for peace. And they shouted very loudly, extremely loudly", he said.

Simion had also tapped into voter anger over inflation while promising more affordable housing.

Looking for a new election breakthrough for European far-right parties, he had warned of possible "fraud" and "foreign interference" when voting.

The stakes are high for Romania, which has a 650-kilometre (400-mile) border with Ukraine and has become more important since Russia invaded its neighbor

The Black Sea nation now plays a "vital strategic role" for NATO -- as it is a base for more than 5,000 soldiers -- and the transit of Ukrainian grain, the New Strategy Center think tank said.

Islamabad in Lockdown as **Pro-Khan Rally Nears**

sonnel mines by some of the Parties

to the Convention, as well as some

Parties falling behind in their com-

mitments to destroy these weap-

He called on the 164 signatories --

which include Ukraine but not Rus-

sia or the United States -- to "meet

their obligations and ensure compli-

Guterres' remarks were delivered

Washington's announcement last

week that it would send anti-person-

nel landmines to Kviv was imme-

by UN Under-Secretary General Ar-

ons," he said in the statement.

ance to the Convention".

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Cambodia was left one of the most heavily bombed and mined

countries in the world after three decades of civil war.

SIEM REAP, Cambodia (AFP)

-- The UN Secretary-General on

Monday slammed the "renewed

threat" of anti-personnel land-

mines, days after the United States

said it would supply the weapons

to Ukrainian forces battling Rus-

In remarks sent to a conference in

Cambodia to review progress on the

Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty,

UN chief Antonio Guterres hailed

the work of clearing and destroying

"But the threat remains. This in-

cludes the renewed use of anti-per-

landmines across the world.

Pakistani Rangers in riot gear stand guard alongside a road to prevent an anti-government rally in Islamabad, Nov. 25, 2024.

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) -- A march by hundreds of supporters to demand the release of jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan reached the fringes of Pakistan's capital of Islamabad on Monday, his party and officials said, amid reports of violence elsewhere.

Authorities have enforced a security lockdown for the last two days to block the protesters, whom Khan has called on to march on parliament for a sit-in demonstration, while highways into the city have been barricaded.

The government has used shipping containers to block major roads and streets in Islamabad, most of them patrolled by large contingents of police and paramilitary personnel in riot

Officials and witnesses said all public transport between cities and terminals has also been shut down in the eastern province of Punjab to keep away the protesters, led by members of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

"We wouldn't let them storm the capital," said provincial Information Minister Uzma Bukhari, adding that about 80 of Khan's supporters had

Several police officials were injured in clashes and rioting at some places in the province, she told a news con-

The capital added an extra layer of security ahead of a visit by the president of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, set to arrive on Monday.

Khan's party accused the government of using violent tactics to block the protesters, saying it had arrested hundreds of workers and leaders.

diately criticized by human rights

The outgoing U.S. administration

is aiming to give Ukraine an upper

hand before President-elect Donald

Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Any transfer of mines to Ukraine

"will leave a deadly legacy for

Ukrainian civilians for generations

to come," said Tamar Gabelnick, di-

rector of the International Campaign

"ICBL calls on the United States

to reverse its plans to transfer anti-

personnel mines to Ukraine, and on

the Ukrainian government to honor

its obligations under international

law and reject this deadly gift," she

The conference is being held in

Cambodia, which was left one of

the most heavily bombed and mined

countries in the world after three de-

The ICBL said on Wednesday

that at least 5,757 people had been

casualties of landmines and ex-

plosive remnants of war across the

world last year, 1,983 of whom were

Civilians made up 84 percent of all

recorded casualties, it said.

cades of civil war from the 1960s.

said in a statement sent to AFP.

to Ban Landmines (ICBL).

Zelensky called the mines "very im-

portant" to halting Russian attacks.

Trump enters office.

"They are even firing live bullets," one of Khan's aides, Shaukat Yousafzai, told broadcaster Geo News TV.

Gatherings of any sort in Islamabad have been banned, police said in a statement. Authorities closed all schools in Islamabad and the adjacent garrison city of Rawalpindi, while the internet and WhatsApp messaging services also slowed.

The protest march, which Khan has described as the "final call", is one of many his party had held to seek his release since he was jailed in August last year. The party's most recent protest in Islamabad, early in October, turned violent.

Khan's third wife, Bushra Bibi, and a key aide, Ali Amin Gandapur, who is the chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, are leading a rally that arrived just outside Islamabad on Sunday night, his party said.

Voted out of power by parliament in 2022 after falling out with Pakistan's powerful military, Khan faces charges ranging from corruption to instigation of violence, all of which he and his party deny.

The military has an outsized role in politics, and mostly decides who will rule the South Asian nation of 241

Le Pen Threatens to Topple French **Government Amid Standoff**



Le Pen is putting Barnier's government in an increasingly precarious position.

PARIS (AFP) -- French far-right figurehead Marine Le Pen on Monday threatened to back a no confidence motion that could topple the government of Prime Minister Michel Barnier in a standoff over the budget, saying after talks both sides were entrenched in their positions.

Months of political tensions since rightwinger Barnier became prime minister at the helm of a minority government appointed by President Emmanuel Macron in the wake of this summer's elections are coming to a head over the budget which has yet to be approved by parliament.

The opposition on all sides of the spectrum have denounced the budget, prompting Barnier to consider brandishing the weapon of article 49.3 of the constitution which allows a government to force through legislation without a vote in parliament.

However, that could prompt Le Pen's far right National Rally (RN) to team up in an unholy alliance with the left-wing bloc

in parliament and find enough numbers to topple the government in a confidence vote. Le Pen entered the Matignon residence of the French premier for the breakfast meeting and was to be followed later in the afternoon by hard left France Unbowed (LFI)

parliamentary party leader Mathilde Panot

as Barnier seeks to hear voices across the

"My position has not changed. No more, it seems, than that (the position) of the prime minister has changed," Le Pen after meeting Barnier, describing him as "at the same time courteous but also entrenched in his

Asked if the RN would back a no confidence motion, she replied: "Of course."

Further complicating the situation is the constitutional rule in France that there must be a one year gap between legislative elections, meaning that Macron cannot call polls until the summer to resolve the crisis.

"Michel Barnier is creating the conditions for a vote of no confidence," RN deputy leader Sebastien Chenu said on Sunday.

Government spokeswoman Maud Bregeon had warned in an interview published in the Le Parisien daily that France risked a "Greek-style situation" if the government was brought down, referring to Greece's 2007-2008 financial crisis.

The issue comes at a critical time for three-time presidential candidate Le Pen, who fancies having her best ever crack at the Elysee in polls due in 2027.

Le Pen, 56, and other RN defendants are currently on trial accused of creating fake jobs at the EU parliament which they deny. If convicted, she could receive a jail sentence and a ban from public office which would disqualify her from the presidential polls.

MOSCOW (AP) -- The Russian military have captured a British national fighting alongside Ukrainian troops in Russia's partially occupied Kursk region, state news agency Tass reported Monday, citing unidentified sources in law enforcement. The man was identified by Tass and other media as James Scott Rhys Anderson. Tass quoted him as saying that he had served as a signalman in the British army for four years and then joined the International Legion of Ukraine, formed early on in Russia's nearly 3-year-old war against its neighbor. In Ukraine, Anderson reportedly served as an instructor for Ukrainian troops and was deployed to the Kursk region against his will. Tass published a video of the man saying in English that he doesn't want to be "here." The International Legion for Defense of Ukraine was created at the request of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky shortly after Russia's full-scale "operation" in February 2022. The Legion is a unit of Ukraine's Ground

Forces that consists mostly of foreign volunteers.

Apart from the Legion, Ukraine recruits foreigners

to other units of its army, filling squads, companies,

or even battalions.

BEIJING (Reuters) -- China and the European Union are partners rather than adversaries, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Monday, calling on the two sides to think from each other's perspective and seek cooperation. Wang made the remarks in a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister of Luxembourg Xavier Bettel in Beijing, the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement. "In the face of rising unilateralism and protectionism, we hope that the EU will stay true to its original aspiration and maintain strategic independence. China is willing to make joint efforts with Luxembourg to promote the sustained and sound development of China-EU relations," Wang said.

NIAMEY, Niger (AFP) -- Niger said it could no longer work with the European Union's ambassador and had requested a replacement "as soon as possible" after the bloc recalled its envoy over a row surrounding the disbursement of emergency aid. Niger's military rulers on Friday accused EU ambassador Salvador Pinto da Franca of distributing 1.3 million euros (\$1.36 million) in aid for flood victims to non-governmental organizations without first informing the authorities. The EU expressed its "profound disagreement" with the accusations on Saturday and recalled its ambassador for consultations in Brussels. Niger's foreign ministry fired back Sunday, saying it had warned da Franca in October over "unauthorized operations" it claimed had nonetheless continued. "In view of this stubbornness... the Government has come to the conclusion that collaboration with the European Union Ambassador, Mr Salvador Pinto da Franca, is no longer possible, and has therefore officially requested his recall and replacement as soon as possible," the statement said.

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- While fighting between criminal groups in Haiti decreased during 2024, attacks on civilians have risen, including an expanded use of "horrific sexual abuse," according to a new report by Human Rights Watch. "Criminal groups have often used sexual violence to instill fear in rival territories," the New York-based group says. "The rule of law in Haiti is so broken that members of criminal groups rape girls or women without fearing any consequences," according to HRW researcher Nathalye Cotrino. HRW said it conducted scores of in-person and remote interviews with survivors of sexual abuse in the impoverished Caribbean nation, as well as with officials and rights and humanitarian workers. It said that from January to October of this year, "nearly 4,000 girls and women reported sexual violence, including gang rape." And it cited UN research showing cases involving children were up 1,000 percent from the 2023 period. "The bandits don't care about their age," one aid worker said. "They rape because they have the power. Sometimes they do it for days or weeks," leaving some survivors pregnant or injured without access to care.

MONTEVIDEO (Reuters) -- Center-left opposition candidate Yamandu Orsi secured victory in Uruguay's presidential election, official results showed, with 99% of votes tallied, in a secondround race that pollsters expected to be closely

Yamandu Orsi, the pre-election favorite by a few points, secured a small but comfortable margin of 49.81% of the vote to conservative Alvaro Delgado's 45.90%, official results showed. Orsi, a 57-year-old former mayor of Canelones - which has lured in firms such as a Google - has said he would avoid raising taxes that could scare off business and instead focus on attracting investors, spurring growth and skilling workers. His victory was celebrated by the regional Organization of American States and fellow Latin American nations across the political aisle. Both Delgado and Uruguay's president, fellow National Party member Luis Lacalle Pou, conceded the election, swiftly congratulating Orsi and offering to help with the transition after results signaled a victory for the center-left.

DHAKA (AFP) -- Japanese officials in Bangladesh are preparing the bodies of 23 soldiers who died during World War II to return them home after more than 80 years, exhumation teams said Monday. The bodies were exhumed from Bangladesh's Maynamati war cemetery, near Comilla, where more than 700 people from multiple nations killed during the war were buried. "Japanese soldiers were treated at the Maynamati field hospital, before succumbing to their injuries," said Hillol Sattar, Bangladesh country manager for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which runs the cemetery.

Plastic Treaty Talks Begin Amid Wide Divisions

BUSAN/BAKU (Reuters) -- As delegates from 175 countries gathered in Busan, South Korea on Monday for the fifth round of talks aimed at securing an international treaty to curb plastic pollution, lingering divisions cast doubts on whether a final agreement was in sight.

South Korea is hosting the fifth and ostensibly final UN Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5) meeting this week, after the previous round of talks in Ottawa in April ended without a path forward on capping plastic production.

Instead, talks will be focused on chemicals of concern and other measures after petrochemical-producing nations such as Saudi Arabia and China strongly opposed efforts to target plastic production, over the protests of countries that bear the brunt of plastic pollution.

The divisions plaguing the plastics

treaty talks echo conflicts that have long stalled UN efforts to curb global warming, with the most recent climate summit, COP29, having just ended with an agreement poorer

nations assailed as inadequate. INC Chair Luis Vayas Valdivieso told reporters on Monday he was confident this week's negotiations would yield a treaty or a text lead-

"Without significant intervention the amount of plastic entering the environment annually by 2040 is expected to nearly double compared to 2022," Valdivieso said at the opening session in Busan on Monday.

"It is about humanity rising to meet an existential challenge," he said, noting that microplastics have been found in human organs.

The United States raised eyebrows in August when it said it would back plastic production caps in the treaty,

putting it in alignment with the EU, Kenya, Peru and other countries in the High Ambition Coalition.

The election of Donald Trump as president, however, has raised questions about that position, as during his first presidency he shunned multilateral agreements and any commitments to slow or stop U.S. oil and petrochemical production.

The U.S. delegation did not answer questions on whether it would reverse its new position to support plastic production caps. Inger Andersen, executive director

of the UN Environment Program. on Monday urged delegates divided over curbing plastic products and chemicals and a financing mechanism to deal with plastic waste to remember that the 2022 U.N. Environment Assembly resolution called for "sustainable production and consumption of plastics taking a lifecycle approach".