

NORTH AMERICA



Hurricane heading for Florida

Hurricane Dorian moved out over open waters after doing limited damage in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, though forecasters warned it was gaining strength and probably would grow into a dangerous storm while heading toward the northern Bahamas and Florida's east coast. The US National Hurricane Center said Dorian was expected to strengthen into a dangerous Category 3 hurricane.

UK



Anger over suspension 'phoney'

Outrage triggered by the Prime Minister's decision to suspend Parliament has been dismissed as "phoney" by Leader of the House of Commons Jacob Rees-Mogg. The leading Brexiteer and Boris Johnson ally also hit back at Commons Speaker John Bercow's intervention on the decision to prorogue Parliament, saying it was "not constitutional" for him to speak out in such a way.

AUSTRALIA



Yang 'grateful' to Australia

Yang Hengjun has appealed to Scott Morrison to "help me come home as soon as possible" after being charged with spying by China. The Chinese-Australian writer and democracy advocate released a message through his supporters after being visited in detention by embassy officials. "I am deeply indebted to the Australian embassy for coming to see me," Yang said.

NORTH AMERICA



Democrats set for next debate

Struggling Democratic presidential candidates are facing the bad news that they are not among the 10 who have qualified for the next debate, a predicament that is likely to spell doom for their campaigns. Hours ahead of a deadline to qualify, New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand announced she was dropping out of the race after spending at least \$4 million on advertising in recent months to qualify.

UK



Scottish Tory leader steps down

Ruth Davidson has quit as Scottish Conservative leader "with a heavy heart". She said leading the Tories in Holyrood – the job which she took on in November 2011 – had been the "privilege of my life". But as she formally resigned as leader, Davidson – who had campaigned for Remain in the 2016 European referendum – cited the "conflict" she had felt over Brexit.

NEW ZEALAND



PM launches school lunch trial

The government is rolling out a daily free lunch trial starting with 30 primary and intermediate schools from the beginning of next year. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced the programme at the launch of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy with Children's Minister Tracey Martin at Kaitao Intermediate School in Rotorua today. The intention is to extend it to 21,000 children in 120 schools by the beginning of 2021.

REST OF THE WORLD



Iran urges US to lift sanctions

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Iran's supreme leader will not meet President Donald Trump unless Washington halts its "economic terrorism" that has hurt ordinary Iranians. Zarif said the removal of US sanctions – which he described as a form of extortion, arm twisting and intimidation – could also help salvage the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, which the US unilaterally withdrew from last year.

EUROPE



'Dramatic' spike measles cases

The World Health Organization says there has been a "dramatic resurgence" of measles in Europe, with nearly 90,000 people sickened by the virus in the first half of 2019. In a report, the UN health agency said the number of measles cases from January to June was double the number reported for the same period in 2018. Measles is among the world's most infectious diseases and is spread mostly by coughing, sneezing and close personal contact.

AUSTRALIA



Trains separate kids and parents

Sydneysiders have been warned to "keep their 'littlies' close" after a number of children travelled solo on the city's new driverless trains when the automated doors closed, leaving their distraught parents stranded on the platform. There have been 10 incidents in which children were separated from their parents in the first three months of the Metro's operation – and the rail union fears they won't be the last.

REST OF THE WORLD



Duterte in China for talks with Xi

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has arrived in Beijing for a meeting with counterpart Xi Jinping in which the Southeast Asian leader is expected to discuss a ruling on the disputed South China Sea. The 2016 Hague arbitration mostly invalidated China's claim to almost the entire South China Sea and found it violated the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

EUROPE



Conte to become Italy's new PM

Ex-Italian premier Giuseppe Conte has accepted a fresh mandate to try to form a new government backed by the populist 5-Star Movement and the centre-left Democrats, aimed at blocking right-wing League leader Matteo Salvini's grab for power. Conte said after meeting with Italian president Sergio Mattarella that he would meet with the parties immediately in a bid to establish political stability as quickly as possible.

NEW ZEALAND



Road project 'suffocating wildlife'

Runoff from the huge Transmission Gully roading project in Wellington has contributed to sediment build-up suffocating wildlife in Porirua Harbour, a survey shows. Completed by Porirua City Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council, the survey of Te Awarua-o-Porirua Harbour paints a bleak picture of the health of the waterway north of Wellington. It shows sediment rates have more than doubled in the last five years.



Hurricane Dorian as it crosses over the US and British Virgin Islands. - AP

NORTH AMERICA

Hurricane Dorian heading for Florida

Hurricane Dorian moved out over open waters after doing limited damage in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, though forecasters warned it was gaining strength and probably would grow into a dangerous storm while heading toward the northern Bahamas and Florida's east coast.

The US National Hurricane Center said Dorian was expected to strengthen into a dangerous Category 3 hurricane as it stayed well to the east of the southeastern and central Bahamas over the next two days. The forecast called for the storm to pass near or over the northern Bahamas and close in on Florida over the weekend.

The storm was a Category 1 hurricane when it swirled through the islands of the northeastern Caribbean, causing power outages and flooding in places but doing no major damage.

"We're happy because there are no damages to report," said William Solís, the mayor of the small Puerto Rican island of Culebra. He said only one community lost power.

Dorian caused an islandwide blackout in St. Thomas and St. John in the US Virgin Islands, and scattered power outages in St. Croix, government spokesman Richard Motta said. In addition, the storm downed trees and at least one electric pole in St. Thomas, he said, adding that there were no reports of major flooding.

"We are grateful that it wasn't a stronger storm," he said.

There were no reports of serious damage in the British Virgin Islands, where Gov. Augustus Jaspert said crews were already clearing roads and inspecting infrastructure.

The US National Hurricane Center said Dorian's maximum sustained winds had increased to 85 mph (140 kph) as the storm moved northwest at 13 mph (20 kph).

Dennis Feltgen, a Hurricane Center meteorologist in Miami, said earlier that Dorian would strengthen and could hit anywhere from South Florida to South Carolina. ■



Democrats participate in a presidential primary debate in July. - AP

NORTH AMERICA

Democrat candidates set for next debate

Struggling Democratic presidential candidates are facing the bad news that they are not among the 10 who have qualified for the next debate, a predicament that is likely to spell doom for their campaigns.

Hours ahead of a deadline to qualify, New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand announced she was dropping out of the race after spending at least \$4 million on advertising in recent months to qualify.

Billionaire Tom Steyer, Montana Gov. Steve Bullock and self-help guru Marianne Williamson were also among those missing September's debate, as were Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet, Hawaii Rep. Tulsi Gabbard and a handful of others.

To appear on stage in Houston next month, they had to hit two per cent in at least four approved public opinion polls while securing 130,000 unique donors. Two new polls released this week affirmed that they were all below the threshold.

The question shifted from who would qualify for the following debate to who would stay in the race.

"Our rules have ended up less inclusive ... than even the Republicans," Bullock said, referring to the thresholds set by the Democratic National Committee. "It is what it is."

The 10 candidates who qualified for September's debate are Joe Biden, Cory Booker, Pete Buttigieg, Julián Castro, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, Beto O'Rourke, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Andrew Yang.

In a still-crowded Democratic field, not qualifying for the debate was expected to severely cripple a candidate's prospects. However, several have pledged to forge on in hopes of reaching the requirements in time for the next debate, in October.

Although earlier debates had lower thresholds, the DNC raised the stakes for the fall debates.

The DNC designed the requirements to bring order to an unwieldy field of more than 20 White House hopefuls, while elevating the role of online grassroots donors who are among the party's most fervent supporters. ■



- PA

UK

Outrage over parliament suspension 'phoney'

Outrage triggered by the Prime Minister's decision to suspend Parliament has been dismissed as "phoney" by Leader of the House of Commons Jacob Rees-Mogg.

The leading Brexiteer and Boris Johnson ally also hit back at Commons Speaker John Bercow's intervention on the decision to prorogue Parliament, saying it was "not constitutional" for him to speak out in such a way.

Rees-Mogg insisted the move was not intended to limit the time available for MPs to debate Brexit but will allow the Government to tackle other issues.

He said: "I think the outrage is phoney and it is created by people who don't want us to leave the European Union and are trying very hard to overturn the referendum result and don't want the benefits of leaving the European Union."

He added: "Parliament wasn't going to be sitting for most of this time anyway. This is completely constitutional and proper."

On Bercow's intervention, Rees-Mogg said: "It is not constitutional for the Speaker to express his opinion without the direction of the house."

"He has had no such direction and therefore his comments were in a private capacity. They can't be as Mr Speaker."

Rees-Mogg led the Government's defence of the prorogation as Labour and opposition parties vowed to press ahead with attempts to block a no-deal Brexit using legislation despite the decision to suspend Parliament for more than a month before the October 31 exit deadline.

Barry Gardiner, Labour's shadow international trade secretary, said: "It is going to be extremely difficult. That's why the government is disingenuous to say this is not about trying to stop us doing that."

"We will be seeking measures on Monday to try and have what is known as a Standing Order section 24 debate. We will seek to try and put through the appropriate legislation in this constrained timetable that the Government has now put before us. ■



Former Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson. - PA

UK

Scottish Tory leader Davidson steps down

Ruth Davidson has quit as Scottish Conservative leader "with a heavy heart".

She said leading the Tories in Holyrood – the job which she took on in November 2011 – had been the "privilege of my life".

But as she formally resigned as leader, Davidson – who had campaigned for Remain in the 2016 European referendum – cited the "conflict" she had felt over Brexit.

She also said that "work has always come first" over the past eight years, but the arrival of her son Finn last October meant she now wants to make a "different choice".

With elections looming, she said the prospect of "spending hundreds of hours away from my home and family now fills me with dread".

And she added: "That is no way to lead."

She said: "I fear that having tried to be a good leader over the years, I have proved a poor daughter, sister, partner and friend. The party and my work has always come first, often at the expense of commitments to loved ones."

"The arrival of my son means I now make a different choice."

Davidson clashed with Boris Johnson during the Brexit referendum, and her resignation came just a day after the Prime Minister announced he will temporarily suspend Parliament in the run-up to the UK's EU departure date of October 31.

But she stressed it was "both professional and personal" changes that had prompted her decision to quit. ■



Chinese-Australian writer Yang Hengjun. - AP

AUSTRALIA

Detained writer Yang 'grateful' to Australia

Yang Hengjun has appealed to Scott Morrison to "help me come home as soon as possible" after being charged with spying by China.

The Chinese-Australian writer and democracy advocate released a message through his supporters after being visited in detention by embassy officials.

"I am deeply indebted to the Australian embassy for coming to see me," Yang said.

He said a Chinese state security investigation officer told him Australia was "small" and would not care about him.

"He said Australia was dependent on China for its trade and economy, and Canberra wouldn't help me, let alone rescue me," Yang said.

"He said Australia wouldn't help because I am not white.

"This is nonsense. He was wrong. I am extremely grateful to the Australian prime minister, foreign minister and members of parliament, the embassy team, and the ambassador for their help."

Morrison said China's suggestions Yang was a spy were absolutely untrue.

The prime minister also denies Australia was interfering in his case.

China has warned Australia to respect its sovereignty and butt out of the case, but Morrison says the government is concerned about Yang.

"We make no apologies for standing up for one of our citizens," he said.

"There's their own justice process that they'll follow in China and that's appropriate, but these suggestions that he's acted for a spy for Australia are absolutely untrue."

Morrison says he respects China's sovereignty.

"But we do expect Australians, indeed all citizens, to have their human rights appropriately looked after."

Foreign Minister Marise Payne has reminded China it must comply with international laws banning torture, inhumane treatment and arbitrary detention. ■



Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. - AAP

NEW ZEALAND

Ardern launches free school lunch trial

The government is rolling out a daily free lunch trial starting with 30 primary and intermediate schools from the beginning of next year.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced the programme at the launch of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy with Children's Minister Tracey Martin at Kaitao Intermediate School in Rotorua today.

The intention is to extend it to 21,000 children in 120 schools by the beginning of 2021.

Kaitao Intermediate School will be one of the first schools to get the initiative.

Ardern said the issue is simple – New Zealanders don't want kids to go hungry.

"I can hand on heart tell you that the thing that started me wanting to get into politics in the first place was you, tamariki," she said.

She said fixing all the contributors to child poverty will take time but one thing the government can do straight away is make sure children get at least one decent meal a day.

More than 10,000 New Zealanders helped develop the plan, 6000 of them were children, and Ardern says they were the ones to point out that going to school hungry was a barrier to their learning.

"That is a pure and simple issue. Do we want our kids to go hungry? The obvious answer is no. That's why the government is rolling this school lunch programme out to the kids in New Zealand who need our support the most," Ardern said.

"Children themselves told us during the consultation on the strategy that going to school hungry was a barrier to their learning. That was heart-breaking to hear and this prototype starts to ensure children are fed and have the best chance to succeed.

"Fixing all the things that cause child poverty will take time but one thing we can do straight away is make sure kids get at least one decent meal a day. ■



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. - AP

REST OF THE WORLD

Iran: Lifting sanctions will help salvage deal

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Iran's supreme leader will not meet President Donald Trump unless Washington halts its "economic terrorism" that has hurt ordinary Iranians.

Zarif said the removal of US sanctions – which he described as a form of extortion, arm twisting and intimidation – could also help salvage the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, which the US unilaterally withdrew from last year.

He said Tehran has the right to reduce its compliance under the nuclear pact after the US left, but it can return to full implementation if the US fulfils its commitment and returns to the table.

"We are prepared to leave (the pact) because we have nothing to lose," he said. But Tehran also believes that the only way to avoid a "nuclear holocaust" is to destroy all nuclear weapons, he said.

"We say that if you (the US) come back to your commitments, you fulfill your commitments and the commitments are to normalize economic relations with Iran, we will revert back to full implementation and that is still on the table," he added.

In recent months, Tehran has announced that it would cross limits imposed by the multinational pact on the size and potency of its nuclear stockpile.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani backed off from possible talks with Trump, just a day after the US president said the two could meet on their nuclear impasse after a surprise intervention by French President Emmanuel Macron during the G7 summit this week.

His U-turn can be seen as a result of pressure from hard-liners in the Iranian establishment who oppose taking a softer tone toward the West. Iran has increased its uranium enrichment activities after the US pullout from the nuclear deal.

It has also lost billions of dollars in business deals allowed by the accord as the US re-imposed and escalated sanctions. ■



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. - AP

REST OF THE WORLD

Philippines' Duterte in China for talks with Xi

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has arrived in Beijing for a meeting with counterpart Xi Jinping in which the Southeast Asian leader is expected to discuss a ruling on the disputed South China Sea.

The 2016 Hague arbitration mostly invalidated China's claim to almost the entire South China Sea and found it violated the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The row over the waters – a major global shipping route thought to be rich in oil and gas reserves – has for years marred China's relationship with the Philippines and other neighboring countries with territorial claims over the disputed area, where Beijing has transformed a string of disputed reefs into missile-protected island bases.

Duterte has largely avoided the subject in favor of seeking warmer ties with Beijing. Philippine nationalists and left-wing groups have criticized the president for not immediately demanding Chinese compliance with the arbitration ruling, which came the same year Duterte took office.

The Philippine leader briefly mentioned the issue to Xi on the sidelines of an April conference for China's Belt and Road global infrastructure initiative. Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo indicated Duterte would raise the matter in a more direct way during this visit.

China refused to participate in the arbitration case initiated by Duterte's predecessor, Benigno Aquino III, and has ignored the ruling. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said last week the country's stance has not changed.

Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana asked Beijing this month to explain the activities of Chinese research vessels and warships in what the Philippines claims as its waters, and accused China of "bullying".

Lorenzana said China did not ask for permission to send several warships through the Sibutu Strait at the southern tip of the Philippine archipelago on four occasions between February and July. He said two Chinese research ships had also been operating in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. ■



- AP

EUROPE

'Dramatic' measles spike in Europe

The World Health Organization says there has been a "dramatic resurgence" of measles in Europe, with nearly 90,000 people sickened by the virus in the first half of 2019.

In a report, the UN health agency said the number of measles cases from January to June was double the number reported for the same period in 2018. Measles is among the world's most infectious diseases and is spread mostly by coughing, sneezing and close personal contact.

Although numerous European countries have introduced stronger vaccination policies, stubborn pockets of vaccine refusal have fueled epidemics across the continent.

Last month, the German government proposed making measles immunization mandatory for children and employees at kindergartens and schools. There have been more than 400 cases of measles in Germany this year.

With more than 84,000 cases, Ukraine accounted for the vast majority of measles in Europe, followed by Kazakhstan and Georgia. In February, Ukraine's health ministry said eight people had died of measles.

An expert WHO committee said four countries – Albania, the Czech Republic, Greece and the UK – had lost their status as having eliminated measles. Measles is preventable with two doses of the vaccine, but there is no effective treatment once people are infected.

"If high immunization coverage is not achieved and sustained in every community, both children and adults will suffer unnecessarily and some will tragically die," said Dr Guenter Pfaff, chair of a WHO expert committee on measles in Europe.

In some developed countries, measles vaccination rates dropped sharply following the publication of a flawed study in the late 1990s that linked the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine to autism. Health officials have struggled to debunk misperceptions about the vaccine's safety ever since. ■



Giuseppe Conte delivers his speech after a meeting with President Sergio Mattarella at Rome's Quirinale presidential palace. - AP

EUROPE

Conte to become Italy's new prime minister

Ex-Italian premier Giuseppe Conte has accepted a fresh mandate to try to form a new government backed by the populist 5-Star Movement and the centre-left Democrats, aimed at blocking right-wing League leader Matteo Salvini's grab for power.

Conte said after meeting with Italian president Sergio Mattarella that he would meet with the parties immediately in a bid to establish political stability as quickly as possible after the crisis triggered by Salvini's power play that collapsed the 14-month-old populist government.

"This is a very delicate phase for the country," said Conte, who was forced to resign on August 8 after Salvini pulled support for his government.

"We need to exit political uncertainty as quickly as possible."

Salvini's move created political instability that once again focused investor attention on Italy, raising borrowing costs on its stubbornly high debt.

Italy also faces a critical fall deadline for drafting a budget for the European Union, with the looming prospect of raising the value-added tax to cover shortfalls.

The populist 5-Star Movement and Democrats have banded together in an unlikely alliance together to thwart Salvini's bungled attempt to grab power when he unexpectedly withdrew support for the foundering League-5-Star government to seek early elections.

The new alliance appears to forestall elections – for now.

But even if Conte manages to form a government, wins the support of Mattarella and a vote of confidence in parliament, political analysts warn it is unlikely to last.

The Democratic Party refused to even consider talks with the 5-Stars after the inconclusive March 2018 national elections eventually led to the coalition with the League, and the two parties have long traded barbed insults. ■



A driverless train in Sydney. - AAP

AUSTRALIA

Trains separating children and parents

Sydneysiders have been warned to “keep their ‘littlies’ close” after a number of children travelled solo on the city’s new driverless trains when the automated doors closed, leaving their distraught parents stranded on the platform.

There have been 10 incidents in which children were separated from their parents in the first three months of the Metro’s operation – and the rail union fears they won’t be the last.

A two-year-old boy last week was left to ride without his mother for more than 10 minutes after they were separated while boarding at Macquarie University.

Transport Minister Andrew Constance is “concerned” about the incidents and wants parents to take more care when catching the driverless trains.

“I remind everyone that the doors on Metro trains are automatic and people should move onboard quickly, and parents and carers should keep their littlies close – hold their hands and pay attention,” the minister said.

Constance said he was “naturally concerned” about children being separated from their parents or carers, but noted there’d been more than 5.3 million passenger journeys on the Metro since it opened in late May.

Metro staff assisted the children and parents in all 10 incidents and they were quickly reunited, a spokeswoman said.

The automated doors of Metro carriages stay open for about 30 seconds at each platform.

When the doors begin to close, lights flash, there’s a beeping sound and an announcement is made.

A spokeswoman for the minister said the announcement was louder than elsewhere on the NSW trains network.

Each Metro train has 18 entrances across six carriages.

Rail, Tram and Bus Union NSW secretary Alex Claassens says the incidents are to be expected, given there aren’t enough staff to ensure passenger safety. ■



Porirua Harbour. - 123RF

NEW ZEALAND

Road project likely suffocating wildlife

Runoff from the huge Transmission Gully roading project in Wellington has contributed to sediment build-up suffocating wildlife in Porirua Harbour, a survey shows.

Runoff from the huge Transmission Gully roading project in Wellington has contributed to sediment build-up suffocating wildlife in Porirua Harbour, a survey shows.

It shows sediment rates have more than doubled in the last five years.

Scientist Megan Oliver from the regional council said long-term patterns of silt build-up were becoming clear.

She said the average silt build-up rate over the last 10 years was 4mm per year for Pauatahanui and 3.6mm for Onepoto.

This is about three-times the normal rate, she said.

Oliver said the increasing sludge was smothering wildlife such as fish and invertebrates and destroying biodiversity.

“When we have a big rainfall event and a whole slug of sediment enters the harbour it basically ... smothers everything ... it chokes them.”

The nearby giant Transmission Gully highway construction project – a major new arterial route into the capital – was likely contributing to silt entering the waterway, she said.

But she said it was just one of a number of culprits, such as urban development, forestry harvest, run-off from rural pasture and erosion of stream banks.

The harbour has some of the last remaining seagrasses in the Wellington region – which is crucial as it provides a habitat for baby fish, Oliver said.

“It also provides lots of food and a habitat for lots of other organisms.”

Naomi Solomon from Ngāti Toa Rangatira said the harbour was a hugely significant place for iwi.

She said the sediment build-up was awful and the way development was managed in the area needed a shakeup. ■