



Khan's party begins coalition talks as rivals plan protests

CBS titan Leslie Moonves accused of sexual misconduct

Page 8

Page 9



REDDING, California: Burned out properties are seen near the Lake Keswick Estates area during the Carr fire in Redding, California. — AFP

California fire tornado kills 2 firefighters

Thousands flee monster wildfire that destroyed 500 structures

REDDING, California: A fast-growing northern California wildfire killed a second firefighter on Friday after high winds drove it into the city of Redding, prompting mass evacuations, destroying 500 structures and threatening thousands of other dwellings and businesses, officials said. Flames raging in California's scenic Shasta-Trinity area erupted into a firestorm that jumped across the Sacramento River and swept into the western side of Redding, home to about 90,000 people, forcing residents to flee.

Firefighters and police "went into life-safety mode," hustling door to door to usher civilians out of harm's way, said Scott McLean, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire). Streets in the Western town were all but deserted, with thick, sickly-brown smoke filling the air, and plumes of smoke rising to the west. Gale-force winds on Thursday night created a fire "tornado" said CalFire Director Ken Pimlott.

"This fire was whipped up into a whirlwind of activity, uprooting trees, moving vehicles, moving parts of roadways,"

Pimlott told a news briefing. Such highly erratic, storm-like wildfires have grown commonplace in the state, Pimlott said. "These are extreme conditions, this is how fires are in California," he said. "We need to take heed and evacuate, evacuate, evacuate."

California has had its worst start to the fire season in a decade, with 289,727 acres burned through Friday morning, according to National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) data. Governor Jerry Brown requested emergency federal assistance to prevent an "imminent catastrophe" as Shasta County tried to find supplies and water for 30,000 evacuated residents and care for horses and cattle rescued from ranches and farms. CalFire reported 500 structures destroyed by the blaze.

Curtain of smoke

The fire had scorched 48,300 acres by Friday and was just 3 percent contained as ground crews, helicopters and airplanes battled the flames for a fifth day. High temperatures and low

humidity were expected for the next seven to ten days, said Pimlott. "This fire is a long way from done," he said. The blaze was one of nearly 90 large fires burning nationally, most of them in the West. One of those prompted the closure of much of California's Yosemite National Park.

Wildfires have blackened an estimated 4.15 million acres in the United States this year. That was well above average for the same period over the past 10 years but down from 5.27 million acres in the first seven months of 2017, NIFC reported. The blaze in Redding, about 150 miles north of Sacramento, on Thursday killed a bulldozer operator working with fire teams to clear brush around the fire. A member of the Redding Fire Department was also reported killed on Friday. A Redding hospital said it had treated eight people, including three firefighters.

Thousands of buildings imperiled

Rob Wright, 61, and his wife stayed to fight off flames with a

high-powered water hose. "We were fortunate enough that the wind changed hours ago, and it is pushing the fire back," said Wright on Friday. "We are just waiting it out ... crossing our fingers and hoping for the best." Video and images posted on social media showed flames engulfing structures, as an orange glow lit up the sky. A Red Cross employee told local ABC affiliate KRCR-TV some 500 people took shelter in an evacuation center at Shasta College. Motels were filled to capacity and livestock owners were told to take their animals to the town's rodeo ground. The Carr Fire, the name given to the Redding blaze, was one of three fierce blazes threatening large populated areas.

Cal Fire said the Cranston Fire, about 110 miles east of Los Angeles had blackened 12,300 acres and was 16 percent contained. The Ferguson Fire near Yosemite, which has charred 46,675 acres, was 29 percent contained. A 32-year-old man was charged with setting the Cranston fire, along with eight other blazes, and faces a potential life sentence if convicted of the charges. — Reuters

Three dead in attack on Afghan midwife training centre

KABUL: An hours-long militant attack on a midwife training centre in eastern Afghanistan yesterday killed at least three people and wounded seven, police said, as the latest assault in the country was brought to an end by security forces. Nearly 70 people, including students and teachers, were inside the centre in Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province, at the time of the attack. Nangarhar police chief Ghulam Sanyee Stanikzai said three people—two guards and a driver—were killed and seven others wounded.

Provincial governor spokesman Attaullah Khogyani put the casualty toll slightly higher at three dead and eight wounded. Afghan officials often give conflicting tolls in the aftermath of an attack. Some of the people inside the centre escaped while others were taken hostage by the gunmen. "They were freed by the police during the operation," Stanikzai said. One attacker was wearing a suicide vest and blew himself up, while the other was killed by security forces, Khogyani said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the latest attack, but most of the recent assaults in the city have been carried out by the Islamic State group, which has a stronghold in Nangarhar.

The Taliban denied involvement in a WhatsApp message sent to reporters. Provincial health department spokesman Inamullah Miakhil said 48 women from remote districts of the province were enrolled in the



JALALABAD: Afghan security forces carry the body of a victim from the site of an attack in Jalalabad. — AFP

two-year midwifery course. The training facility, which is near the centre of Jalalabad in an area where several international organizations and consulates have offices, is funded by the Ministry of Public Health. "We don't know why the midwife centre came under attack," Miakhil said, adding all NGOs and government bodies in Jalalabad were at risk.

A witness in a nearby department said he heard several explosions and then saw three gunmen enter the street where the midwife centre is located. Some of the security forces earlier appeared to dismantle improvised explosive devices apparently planted in the street by the militants, a witness said. Jalalabad has been the scene of several attacks in recent months that have killed dozens, as US and Afghan forces continue offensive operations

against IS and Taliban militants. Government buildings are a common target for insurgents, including hospitals and medical facilities. It is not known why the gunmen targeted the midwife training centre. Midwives have been attacked in the past for providing reproductive health services to women, though such attacks appear to be rare.

Islamist groups—and many ordinary Afghans—also oppose women working outside the home. While thousands of women have been trained as midwives since the 2001 US-led invasion, Afghanistan still has one of the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the world. The last major attack in Jalalabad happened on July 11 when gunmen raided an education department compound in the city, sparking an hours-long battle with security forces. — Agencies

US cardinal steps down amid sex abuse scandal

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis yesterday accepted the resignation of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, one of the US Catholic Church's most prominent figures who has been at the centre of a widening sexual abuse scandal. McCarrick, 88, the former archbishop of Washington, DC, is the first cardinal in living memory to lose his red hat and title. Other cardinals who have been disciplined in sexual abuse scandals kept their membership in the College of Cardinals and their honorific "your eminence".

The allegations against McCarrick, which first surfaced publicly last month, came with Francis facing an image crisis on a second front, in Chile, where a growing abuse scandal has enveloped the Church in the Latin American country. A Vatican statement said the pope ordered McCarrick's suspension from the exercise of any public ministry. This means he remains a priest but will be allowed to say Mass only in private.

Francis also ordered McCarrick to go into seclusion "for a life of prayer and penance until the accusations made against him are examined in a regular canonical trial". McCarrick's sudden fall from grace stunned the American Church because he was a widely respected leader for decades and a confidant of popes and presidents. Last month, American Church officials said allegations that he sexually abused a 16-year-old boy almost 50 years ago were credible and

substantiated. Since then, another minor has come forward with allegations that McCarrick abused him when he was 11 years old, and several men have come forward to allege that McCarrick forced them to sleep with him at a beach house in New Jersey when they were adult seminarians studying for the priesthood.

McCarrick has said that he had "absolutely no recollection" of the alleged abuse of the teenager 50 years ago but has not commented on the other allegations. The New York Times reported last week that two dioceses in New Jersey, where McCarrick served as bishop before being promoted to Washington in 2000, had reached financial settlements in 2005 and 2007 with men who said they were abused by McCarrick as adults decades ago. Some US Catholics have said the Vatican should send an inspector to the United States to determine who in the US Church hierarchy knew of the alleged incidents and why McCarrick's rise was not impeded.

Last Tuesday, Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston said he was "deeply troubled" by the McCarrick case, saying it and others pointed to "a major gap" in Church policy on sexual conduct and sexual abuse by bishops or other top officials. In 2013, Cardinal Keith O'Brien of Scotland recused himself from participating in the conclave that elected Francis after he was caught up in a sexual abuse scandal involving seminarians. He later renounced rights and privileges of being a cardinal but kept his red hat and title until his death earlier this year. The last person to resign from the College of Cardinals is believed to be French theologian Louis Billot, who left over a disagreement with Pope Pius XI in 1927, according to the US newspaper, National Catholic Reporter. — Reuters