



Sydney gets 'blueprint for freedom' as virus cases fall

## Thailand to cut quarantine for vaccinated tourists

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LOS LLANOS DE ARIDANE: The Cumbre Vieja volcano resumes its activity after a short period of inactivity in Los Llanos de Aridane on the Canary island of La Palma yesterday. — AFP

# Canaries volcano spews ash

## Residents confined to their homes over fears of toxic gases

**LOS LLANOS DE ARIDANE:** A volcano yesterday began again spewing out ash after a brief lull in the Canary Islands, where coastal residents are confined to their homes over fears of toxic gases when the lava hits the sea. La Cumbre Vieja, which straddles a southern ridge in La Palma in the Atlantic archipelago, erupted on September 19, spewing out rivers of lava which have slowly crept towards the sea. But yesterday morning, the lava and ash flow had stopped, and the week-long rumble of the eruption faded to silence, before resuming its activity several hours later, an AFP correspondent at the scene said.

Smoke had continued to emerge from the top during the lull. "In the last hours, the volcanic tremor has almost disappeared, as well as the explosive strombolian activity," tweeted Involcan volcanology institute, using the scientific term for a mix of explosions and lava flow. "Volcanic activity in La Palma has reduced significantly in the last few hours," Madrid's Institute of Geosciences tweeted. "We must be very vigilant about how it evolves because the scenario can change quickly."

Several hours later, the volcano started pumping out ash again.

### Fits and starts

Speaking to AFP after the resumption, Involcan spokesman David Calvo said it was "just ash, for



### Spain reopens airport shut by volcano

the time being". La Cumbre Vieja had been switching between "explosive episodes and lulls for quite a while," he added. Even so, its activity had "decreased with respect to previous days".

Overnight, the inhabitants of several coastal areas were ordered to stay at home to avoid harm from the release of toxic gases when the lava finally reaches the sea, a process which has been much slower than expected.

Experts say the entry of lava into the seawater will send clouds of toxic gas into the air, causing explosions and a fragmentation of the molten rock like gunshots. "When the lava, with a temperature of over 1,000 degrees Celsius (1,832 degrees Fahrenheit) meets the sea... a thermal shock is produced that generates plumes of water vapor charged with hydrochloric acid," Involcan said.

These plumes "also contain tiny particles of volcanic glass," it said. "Inhalation or contact with acid gases and liquids can irritate the skin, eyes and respiratory tract, and may cause breathing difficulties, especially in people with pre-existing respiratory diseases." But Involcan said the vapors were only dangerous to those in the immediate area, with the authorities setting up a two-kilometer exclusion zone to head off curious onlookers.

### Spain reopens airport

Meanwhile, the airport on the Canary island of La Palma reopened on Sunday after a 24-hour closure because of ash emanating from the Cumbre Vieja volcano, operators said. A clean-up operation was carried out overnight, the airport management company AENA tweeted, adding that flights have resumed with the "prior agreement" of air traffic control authorities. The Cumbre Vieja volcano came to life a week ago and has intermittently spewed out lava and ash.

On Friday, a large cloud of thick, black ash forced several airlines to cancel flights. Then on Saturday AENA announced the full closure of the airport. New evacuations were also ordered as large explosions and new openings were reported at the volcano on Friday. So far, more than 6,200 people have been evacuated. According to the European Union's Copernicus Earth Observation Program, lava has so far destroyed 461 buildings - 41 more in the past 24 hours - and covered more than 212 hectares (523 acres) of land. — AFP

## Policewoman's serial murder trial grips South Africa

**JOHANNESBURG:** The trial of a policewoman accused of murdering five relatives and a boyfriend to cash in on insurance claims has captivated South Africa, struck by her brass in the face of blood-curdling allegations. Eyebrows raised in defiance, Nomia Rosemary Ndlovu, 46, sat nonchalantly in the dock of a Johannesburg court yesterday, hair pinned into two lopsided buns.

A formerly respected cop, she has puzzled South Africans with her frivolous court behavior, pulling faces and throwing peace signs at cameras. Prosecutors have compiled a chilling litany of evidence against her. Between 2012 and 2017, they say, her cousin, sister, boyfriend, niece, nephew and another relative were found dead - bludgeoned, strangled or shot. Ndlovu is the main suspect behind their murders, accused of taking out life and funeral insurance in the victims' names and claiming the money after their death.

Her trial has kept South Africans glued to their television screens since it kicked off in mid-September. Ndlovu walked confidently into the courtroom yesterday in shiny black heels and a green dress, grey shawl wrapped around her shoulders. She denies any wrongdoing. "I am not the person who took out my (murdered) sister's insurance policies," she said in Tsonga through a translator, crunching up her nose as the prosecutor pushed on with the cross-examination.



JOHANNESBURG: Nomia Rosemary Ndlovu reacts at the South Gauteng high Court in Johannesburg yesterday. —AFP

### 'Caught red-handed'

Twitter has been abuzz with screenshots of Ndlovu's blase expressions and thickly painted eyebrows twisted into odd shapes. Initially relishing the media attention, she turned aggressive last week and hurled potato chips at photographers, prompting police to leg-shackle her. She has teased up several times in court, particularly at the mention of her late boyfriend. The trial has been adjourned on two occasions after she complained of dizziness and chest pains. "It's not your typical South African raping and killing serial murderer," forensic psychologist Gerard Labuschagne told AFP via telephone. "It's a woman, she's a cop, and (almost) all her victims were family members."

Investigators allege Ndlovu made around 1.4 million rand (\$93,000) from her bloody deeds. She has been charged with several counts of murder, conspira-

cy and fraud. The affidavit contains hair-raising details of her alleged modus operandi. While hitmen are suspected to have carried out most of the dirty work, Ndlovu is said to have personally taken care of her sister Audrey: poisoning her tea before strangling her.

She was caught red-handed in 2018, when one of her hitmen tipped off the police after she hatched a plan to burn down the house of another sister, prosecutors said.

The fire would have torched the woman and her five children, including a five-month-old baby, knocked out by sleeping pills, their mouths stuffed with socks to avoid screaming. It proved too horrific even for a professional killer. Days earlier, a different hitman faltered at the sight of Ndlovu's elderly mother. He renounced the job, asked the frail lady for a cup of water, and left the house. —AFP

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