

World News Roundup



Chihuahua state police officers man a checkpoint in Janos, Chihuahua state, northern Mexico on Nov 5. Drug cartel gunmen ambushed three SUVs along a dirt road, slaughtering six children and three women, all US citizens living in northern Mexico, in a grisly attack that left one vehicle a burned-out, bullet-riddled hulk, authorities said Tuesday. (AP)

Nine Americans killed in Mexican ambush

Gunmen killed nine women and children in the bloodiest attack on Americans in Mexico for years, prompting US President Donald Trump to offer to help the neighboring country wipe out drug cartels believed to be behind the ambush.

The nine people killed in Monday's daytime attack at the border of Chihuahua and Sonora states belonged to the Mexican-

American LeBaron, Langford, Miller and Johnson families, members of breakaway Mormon communities that settled in northern Mexico's hills and plains decades ago.

A video posted on social media showed the charred and smoking remains of a vehicle riddled with bullet holes that was apparently carrying some of the victims on a dirt road when the attack occurred.

"This is for the record," says a male voice speaking English in an American accent, off camera, choking with emotion.

"Nita and four of my grandchildren are burnt and shot up," the man says, apparently referring to Rhonita LeBaron, one of the three women who died in the attack.

Reuters could not independently verify the video.

A relative, Julian LeBaron, called the incident a massacre and said some family members were burned alive.

In a text message to Reuters he wrote that four boys, two girls and three women were killed.

Several children who fled the attack were lost for hours in the countryside before being found, he said. (RTRS)

Britain

Campaign starts

UK minister forced out in blow for PM

LONDON, Nov 6, (RTRS): British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's minister for Wales Alun Cairns resigned on Wednesday, the first official day of the general election campaign, after being accused of lying about his knowledge of an aide who allegedly sabotaged a rape trial.

Cairns had been under pressure to resign after insisting last week he was unaware of evidence given by his former aide which led to the collapse of a trial in April last year.

However, the BBC reported this week that Cairns was emailed about the matter in August 2018 and later endorsed the aide as a candidate for the devolved Welsh assembly four months later.

Rival political parties had been calling for Cairns to quit. The Labour Party's shadow minister for Wales, Christina Rees, said Cairns had been caught "brazenly lying".



Johnson

Threatened

The row had threatened to derail the Conservative campaign in Wales which contains key seats that Johnson would need to win to secure a parliamentary majority.

Cairns sent a letter to Johnson saying he was confident he would be cleared by any investigation but was stepping down because of the sensitivity of the allegations.

"This is a very sensitive matter and in the light of continued speculation, I write to tender my resignation as Secretary of State," Cairns said in a letter to Johnson.

Johnson thanked Cairns for his work as minister.

The Conservative campaign had already started badly before Cairns' resignation.

On Tuesday, minister Jacob Rees-Mogg was forced to apologise for implying that victims of the blaze at London's Grenfell Tower, which killed 71 people, should have used common sense to ignore firefighters' instructions to stay in the burning building until help arrived.

On Wednesday, the party was accused of putting out a doctored video clip of a television interview with a senior Labour politician.

Johnson kicks off his election campaign on Wednesday vowing to "get Brexit done" in contrast to his main rival, whom he compared to Soviet leader Josef Stalin who sent millions to their deaths in labour camps.

Britons will go to the polls on Dec 12 after parliament agreed to an early election last week, seeking to end three years of deep disagreement over Brexit that has sapped investors' faith in the stability of the world's fifth largest economy and damaged Britain's international standing.

The outcome of the vote is hard to predict, with the immediate question of Britain's exit from the European Union (EU) scrambling voters' traditional loyalties and giving smaller rivals a chance to challenge the two biggest parties, Johnson's Conservatives and the left-of-centre Labour Party.

While Johnson is keen to frame the vote as a means to resolve Brexit, domestic issues such as the future of the much cherished state-run National Health Service will also be key.

Election

"I don't want an election. No prime minister wants an early election, especially not in December," Johnson wrote in an article for the Daily Telegraph newspaper.

"But as things stand we simply have no choice – because it is only by getting Brexit done in the next few weeks that we can focus on all the priorities of the British people."

After paying a formal visit to Queen Elizabeth, Johnson will return to his Downing Street residence to announce the election. He will launch his party's campaign at a rally later in the day.

Polls show Johnson's Conservatives are well ahead of Labour, but polling analysts caution that sentiment is unusually volatile. Surveys suggested his predecessor Theresa May had a huge lead going into a snap election in 2017, only to see her parliamentary majority wiped out.

The Conservatives' campaign has already got off to a bad start after minister Jacob Rees-Mogg apologised on Tuesday for suggesting victims of the blaze at London's Grenfell Tower, which killed 71 people, should have used common sense to ignore firefighters' instructions to stay in the burning building.

On Wednesday, the party was then accused of putting out a doctored video clip of a television interview with a senior Labour politician.

Privacy

'Misinformation on rise'

Facebook says will 'widen' encryption feature access

LISBON, Nov 6, (Agencies): Facebook will outline on Wednesday an expanded test of encryption on its Messenger platform, moving ahead with a controversial plan for enhanced security that regulators and government officials warn will aid criminals.

Executives told Reuters they will also detail safety measures, including stepped-up advisories for recipients of unwanted content.

The moves, which will be more fully described by company executives at a Lisbon tech conference, follow complaints by top law enforcement officials in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia that Facebook's intention to encrypt messaging on all its platforms would put child sex predators and pornographers beyond detection.

Facebook messaging privacy chief Jay Sullivan and other executives said the company, supported by civil rights groups and many technology experts, will continue to work toward the changeover, while more carefully scrutinizing the data that it does collect.

Sullivan plans to call attention to a little-publicized option for end-to-end encryption that already exists on Messenger, hoping that increased usage will give the company more data to craft additional safety measures before it makes private chats the default setting.

"This is a good test bed for us," Sullivan said. "It's part of the overarching direction."

Around the same time as the talk on Wednesday, the company will post more on its pages for users about how Secret Conversations function. The feature has been available since 2016 but is not easily discoverable by users and takes extra clicks to activate.

The company is also considering banning the use of Messenger accounts not linked to regular Facebook profiles. The vast majority of Messenger accounts are associated with Facebook profiles, but a greater proportion of stand-alone accounts are used for crime and unwelcome communications, executives said.

Requiring a link to Facebook would reduce the privacy protections of those Messenger users but give the company more information it could use to warn or block troublesome accounts or report suspected crimes to police.

The enhanced safety measures the company plans include sending reminders to users to report unwanted contacts and inviting recipients of unwanted content to send plain-text versions of the chats to Facebook to ban senders or potentially report them to police.

Facebook might also send more prompts to users reached by people with no shared friends or who have had many messages or friend requests rejected.

Facebook, whose CEO is Mark Zuckerberg, had previously said it wanted to ease user reporting of misconduct as it gradually moves toward more encryption, but it has given few details.

Also:

SAN FRANCISCO: An advocacy group tracking misinformation says it has found an increase in fake political news shared on Facebook ahead of the 2020 presidential elections.

The group, Avaaz, said Wednesday that it found that viral misinformation is still being spread on the social network despite measures Facebook has put in place since the 2016 elections. The researchers tracked the 100 most widely shared false news stories between Jan. 1 and Oct. 1 this year. The stories they tracked had all been fact-checked and debunked by Facebook's third-party fact-checking partners, which include The Associated Press.



Virginia Gov Ralph Northam speaks to supporters at a Democratic Party event in Richmond, Va on Nov 5. All seats in the Virginia House of Delegates and state Senate are up for election. (AP)



Abe



Moon

Asia

Meeting 'encouraging sign': A senior US official said Wednesday an unexpected meeting this week between the leaders of South Korea and Japan was an "encouraging sign" that the Asian US allies are on track to improve a relationship strained by deep disagreements over trade and history.

David Stilwell, US assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific, spoke while visiting South Korea weeks before the expiration of a military intelligence-sharing agreement between Seoul and Tokyo. The Trump administration been pressuring its allies to keep the deal, which symbolizes the countries' trilateral security cooperation with Washington in face of the North Korean nuclear threat and China's growing influence.

On Monday, South Korean President Moon Jae-in initiated an 11-minute meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the sidelines of a regional forum in Thailand, the latest step taken by Seoul to deescalate the feud with the deadline on the military agreement approaching.

"President Moon and Prime Minister Abe had the opportunity to talk and that's an encouraging sign as we watched the relationship improve," Stilwell told reporters after a meeting with South Korean Prime Minister Kang Kyung-hwa.

Seoul's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that during her talks with Stilwell and Keith Krach, US undersecretary of state for economic growth, energy and the environment, Kang explained South Korean efforts to find "rational solutions" through dialogue over the issues with Japan. (AP)

Rainsy vows to return: Self-exiled Cambodian opposition party founder Sam Rainsy said on Wednesday he will return on Saturday to face arrest amid a crackdown at home on members of his banned party and Malaysia's detention of two party activists trying to return.

The former finance minister has vowed to return to lead demonstrations against the one-party rule of longtime Prime Minister Hun Sen, whom he called "a brutal dictator".

His return could be thwarted by Thailand, whose prime minister said he would not be allowed entry en route to Cambodia.

Politics

Kentucky too close to call

Dems flip Virginia

WASHINGTON, Nov 6, (AP): Democrats took full control of the Virginia legislature for the first time in more than two decades while the race for governor in deeply Republican Kentucky was too close to call despite a last-minute boost from President Donald Trump.

In Kentucky, Democratic challenger Andy Beshear held a narrow lead and declared victory in the governor's race over Republican incumbent Matt Bevin on Tuesday, though Bevin had not conceded. And in Virginia, Democrats flipped control of the state Senate and House, gaining outright control of state government in a state that is often a battleground for the White House. "I'm here to officially declare today, Nov 5, 2019, that Virginia is officially blue," Democratic Gov Ralph Northam told a crowd of supporters in Richmond.

A year before the presidential election, the results offered warning signs for both parties. Voters in suburban swaths of Kentucky and Virginia sided with Democrats, a trend that would complicate Trump's path to reelection if it holds. And the Democrats who made gains on Tuesday did so by largely avoiding positions such as "Medicare for All" that have animated the party's left flank in the Democratic presidential primary.

Democratic pickups in Virginia occurred in Washington, DC, and

Richmond suburbs that already had trended in the party's direction in recent years. In Kentucky, Beshear gained considerable ground on Bevin in Kentucky's suburban Cincinnati, Ohio, counties that had helped propel the Republican to office four years ago. Other statewide GOP candidates in Kentucky won by comfortable margins. But the dip at the top of the ticket still offered another example in the Trump era of suburban voters' willingness to abandon established Republican loyalties – even with the president making a personal appeal on behalf of a GOP standard-bearer.

Trump's 2020 campaign manager tried to find a positive frame for the results in a state Trump won by 30 percentage points in 2016.

"The president just about dragged Gov Matt Bevin across the finish line, helping him run stronger than expected in what turned into a very close race at the end," Brad Parscale said.

Trump may depend on Mississippi, where he also campaigned in the final stretch before Election Day, for something to crow about. With Republican Gov Phil Bryant term-limited, GOP nominee Tate Reeves defeated Democrat Jim Hood to extend the GOP's 20-year hold on the state's top office. But even that contest could finish with a single-digit margin in a state Trump won by 28 percentage points three years ago.

"For those of you who know me, this may just be the last time you will see me alive as a free man," Sam Rainsy said in a video message posted on Twitter.

Hun Sen has accused the opposition of fomenting a coup, and his government has arrested at least 48 activists with Sam Rainsy's banned opposition party this year. The party's last leader remains under house arrest on treason charges.

Sam Rainsy fled to France four years ago following a conviction for criminal defamation. He also faces a five-year prison sentence in a separate case.

He denies wrongdoing and says the charges were politically motivated.

Sam Rainsy on Wednesday tweeted a photo of his airline ticket from Paris to Bangkok, from where he would travel to Thailand's border crossing with Cambodia. Hun Sen has ordered airlines not to allow him to board flights into Phnom Penh. (RTRS)

15 killed in south Thailand: Suspected separatist insurgents stormed a security checkpoint in Thailand's Muslim-majority south and killed at least 15 people, including a police officer and many village defence volunteers, security officials said on Wednesday.

It was the worst single attack in years in a restive region where a long-running Muslim insurgency has killed thousands of people in a fight against central government rule in overwhelmingly Buddhist Thailand. The attackers, in the province of Yala, also used explosives and scattered nails on roads to delay pursuers late on Tuesday night.

"This is likely the work of the insurgents," Colonel Pramote Prom-in, a military regional security spokesman, told Reuters. "This is one of the biggest attacks in recent times." (RTRS)

Britain's Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson (center), on the election campaign trail in North London on Nov 6. Britain's three major national political parties wooed weary voters on Tuesday, all promising an end to Brexit wrangling if they win next month's national election – but offering starkly different visions of how to achieve that. (AP)

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