Pompeo ends 4th N Korea trip

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has wrapped up his fourth visit to North Korea after meeting Kim Jong Un to seek elusive progress in efforts to persuade him to give up his nuclear weapons. Pompeo tweeted on his arrival in Seoul that he had met with Kim and that they “continue to make progress on agreements made at Singapore Summit.” He said, “Thanks for hosting me and my team.”

Hardliners soften Brexit stance

Hardline Tory Brexiteers have signalled they are prepared to soften their stance on EU withdrawal in order to kill off Theresa May’s Chequers proposals. Prominent anti-EU campaigners like Tory former leader Iain Duncan Smith and Jacob Rees-Mogg told the Sunday Telegraph they are ready to compromise in order to achieve a Canada-style free trade deal with Brussels.

Shorten unveils election policies

Bill Shorten has unveiled Labor’s election manifesto in a five-point policy agenda, drawing the battlelines for the next federal poll. In a major speech which smacked of an election campaign launch, Shorten told party faithful about Labor’s “fair go action plan”. The plan includes improving schools and hospitals, standing up for workers, easing pressure on family budgets and ensuring a strong economy.

Tropical storm likely to form

A disturbance off the Central American coast is likely to grow into a tropical storm that could bring heavy rains and flooding to parts of Mexico, Cuba and then the US Gulf coast, the US National Hurricane Center said. Forecasters said Tropical Storm Michael is likely to form this weekend and could reach the Gulf coast by later this week. A tropical storm warning was in effect for the western tip of Cuba.

May to voters: Abandon Corbyn

Theresa May has made a direct appeal for Labour voters to abandon Jeremy Corbyn and switch to her “moderate” Tory party. The Prime Minister insisted the Tories have a “patriotic” programme, including a new emphasis on house building, as she tried to claim the middle ground of politics. The PM said: “I want voters who may previously have thought of themselves as Labour supporters to look at my Government afresh.

Iceland learns from NZ

The Nordic island’s population sits around 330,000 people. But visitor numbers to Iceland jumped from 500,000 to 2.2 million between 2008 and 2017. Icelandic Minister of Tourism, Industry and Innovation Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir met government officials in Wellington last week, before quick stops in Queenstown, Rotorua and Auckland.
Thousands still feared missing

Indonesia’s disaster agency says the death toll from the earthquake and tsunami that struck Sulawesi island has risen to 1763. Agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho says an estimated 5000 people from Petobo and Balaroa – two villages where homes were sucked into a sinkhole during the September 28 earthquake – remained unaccounted for. “If they are not found as of October 11, they will be declared missing,” he said.

Interpool asks for China’s help

Interpol said it has made a formal request to China for information about the agency’s missing president, a senior Chinese security official who seemingly vanished while on a trip home. The Lyon-based international police agency said it used law enforcement channels to submit its request to China about the status of Meng Hongwei.

Wildfire rages in Portugal

Over 700 firefighters battled a wildfire in a national park west of Lisbon that forced Portuguese authorities to evacuate about 350 people. The fire that broke out overnight in the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park that covers hilly terrain near the Atlantic coast injured 17 firefighters and one civilian, Andre Fernandes of Portugal’s civil protection agency said.

Latvian poll results come in

An opposition party catering for Latvia’s large ethnic Russian minority is poised to win the Baltic nation’s parliamentary election. The Harmony Party is expected to face difficulties in forming a coalition government. Voters in Latvia, which is a member of the European Union and Nato, chose from more than 1400 candidates and 16 parties to fill the country’s 100-seat parliament.

Labor bullish on GST guarantee

Labor is confident the government will be forced to legislate a guarantee no state or territory will be worse off under new GST carve-up arrangements. The opposition’s finance spokesman Jim Chalmers said his party would lobby crossbench senators to support tacking on a guarantee to legislation putting a 75-cent floor in payments to states.
Tropical storm likely to form near Gulf coast

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Forecasts said Tropical Storm Michael is likely to form this weekend and could reach the Gulf coast by later this week. A tropical storm warning was in effect for the western tip of Cuba, while a tropical storm watch has been called for the resort region of the Yucatan Peninsula from Tulum to Cabo Catoche.

Forecasters said they don’t project the storm to reach hurricane force, but it could bring 3 to 7 inches (7.5 to 17.5 centimeters) of rain to western Cuba and 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 centimeters) over the Yucatan Peninsula and Belize.

The storm was centered about 155 miles (250 kilometers) south of Cozumel, Mexico, and was heading north at 6 mph (9 kph), with maximum sustained winds of 30 mph (45 kph).

Meanwhile, in the Pacific, Category 3 Hurricane Sergio was 1,125 miles (1,810 kilometers) west-southwest of the southern tip of the Baja California Peninsula and taking its 125 mph (205 kph) winds further out to sea.

But forecasters said they expect it to make a U-turn early next week and head back toward the Baja California Peninsula while growing weaker.

Pompeo ends fourth North Korea trip

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Pompeo tweeted on his arrival in Seoul that he had met with Kim and that they “continue to make progress on agreements made at Singapore Summit.”

He said, “Thanks for hosting me and my team.”

Pompeo had flown to Pyongyang from Tokyo after talks there with Japan’s prime minister during which he pledged the Trump administration would coordinate and unify its strategy for denuclearization with allies. Japan has been wary of the initiative but South Korea has embraced it.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, left, with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. - AP

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, left, with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. - AP
UK

Tory hardliners soften their Brexit stance

Hardline Tory Brexiteers have signalled they are prepared to soften their stance on EU withdrawal in order to kill off Theresa May's Chequers proposals.

Prominent anti-EU campaigners like Tory former leader iain Duncan Smith and Jacob Rees-Mogg told the Sunday Telegraph they are ready to compromise in order to achieve a Canada-style free trade deal with Brussels.

Such a move would see them back proposals allowing EU officials to be stationed at UK ports after Brexit, and support the Government enforcing EU rules on goods exported to the bloc from UK firms, the newspaper said.

The proposed compromise came as fellow leading Tory Brexiteer Sir Bernard Jenkin said he was not threatening to bring down the Government if May forced through a Brexit deal on the back of Labour votes in the Commons.

The comments followed a report in the Sunday Times that a group of Tory MPs was prepared to vote against the Government on the October 29 Budget unless Mrs May toughened her stance with Brussels.

The newspaper said Bernard told Tory MPs: “Make no mistake a soft/non Brexit pushed by the Conservative establishment but put through with Labour support will look like we are abandoning our supporters and remove any sense of obligation among Conservative-Brexit supporting MPs to continue to support the Government.”

Bernard acknowledged he had sent the message, but said it had been misinterpreted.

He said: “I don’t know of any Conservative MP who has any intention of voting against the Government in the Budget. “That is not what the message said.”

Bernard drew fire last month when he accused the chief executive of Jaguar Land Rover, Professor Dr Ralf Speth, of “making it up” after he warned of the “horrifying” impact a no deal Brexit would have on the car giant.

UK

May urges voters to abandon Corbyn

Theresa May has made a direct appeal for Labour voters to abandon Jeremy Corbyn and switch to her “moderate” Tory party.

The Prime Minister insisted the Tories have a “patriotic” programme, including a new emphasis on house building, as she tried to claim the middle ground of politics.

The PM said: “I want voters who may previously have thought of themselves as Labour supporters to look at my Government afresh. “They will find a decent, moderate and patriotic programme that is worthy of their support,” she said.

May said that in an era where traditional political allegiances count for less, the Tories now have a responsibility “on our shoulders” to offer a home to millions of former Labour voters who are uneasy about the party’s leftward direction under Corbyn.

The PM used the article to again claim that the end of austerity “is in sight”.

Responding to May’s pitch, Labour Party chairman Ian Lavery said: “With the government about to impose some of their most brutal cuts yet on working people, Theresa May’s claim that austerity is over is a con.

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“Theresa May has made a direct appeal for Labour voters to abandon Jeremy Corbyn and switch to her “moderate” Tory party.
Shorten unveils Labor’s election policies

Bill Shorten has unveiled Labor’s election manifesto in a five-point policy agenda, drawing the battlelines for the next federal poll.

In a major speech which smacked of an election campaign launch, Shorten told party faithful about Labor’s “fair go action plan”.

The plan includes improving schools and hospitals, standing up for workers, easing pressure on family budgets, ensuring a strong economy and investing in cleaner and cheaper energy.

“We want to hand on a better deal to the next generation than the one we received. It’s in the Australian DNA, and it’s in Labor DNA,” Shorten said.

Shorten’s speech came after he last week revealed a $1.75 billion preschool policy which would extend subsidised early childhood education to three-year-olds.

“It’s as profound as raising the school leaving age,” he said.

Shorten claimed dysfunction within the Liberal Party, who dumped Malcolm Turnbull as prime minister in August and replaced him with Scott Morrison, had increased pressure on Labor.

“The narcissistic self-obsession we’ve seen from the Liberals and the Nationals actually creates a bigger challenge for us on the Labor side,” Shorten said.

He said Labor now faced the task of restoring Australians’ faith in democracy and politics.

“Let’s make the next election a contest about a fair go for every Australian and their family, regardless of their gender, their postcode or their wealth,” Shorten said.

However, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Shorten would pay for spending promises through hiking taxes.

“I will tell you what Bill Shorten’s five-point plan is – more tax, more tax, more tax, more tax, more tax,” Morrison said.

“More tax doesn’t grow the economy. All it means is more tax dragging the economy down taking more of what Australians earn.”

Iceland learns tourism lessons from NZ

The Nordic island’s population sits around 330,000 people. But visitor numbers to Iceland jumped from 500,000 to 2.2 million between 2008 and 2017.

Icelandic Minister of Tourism, Industry and Innovation Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir met government officials in Wellington last week, before quick stops in Queenstown, Rotorua and Auckland.

Travelling around New Zealand, Ms Þórdís said a lot of the rugged landscape reminded her of home.

That was part of the reason she visited – both countries experienced rapid tourism growth as visitors sought natural beauty.

“We’re facing a lot of the same challenges, and in some matters (New Zealand) is ahead of us,” Þórdís said.

Particularly she said managing popular tourist sites and safety were areas the country excelled at and Iceland wanted to learn from.

“We’ve had room for everyone, but we have certain sites where it’s nearing its capacity.”

That’s where managing sites better and having information available would come in, she said.

“You could have 1000 people per day in a certain site and you could ruin it, but you could also have 3500 people per day at a site and not ruin it.”

In Iceland, the seasons played a big role in the number of tourists certain areas could sustainably handle, she said.

“Growth isn’t always good and growth isn’t always the end point that we want to reach.”

But through better management and education, Þórdís hoped the visitor numbers could be kept in check and prevented from ballooning outside of the nation’s control.

“Most tourists want to behave correctly, but sometimes they don’t really know what is allowed and what is not.”

New Zealand was one of the countries Iceland looked to for tourism best practice, she said.
Interpol asks for China’s help

Interpol said it has made a formal request to China for information about the agency’s missing president, a senior Chinese security official who seemingly vanished while on a trip home.

The Lyon-based international police agency said it used law enforcement channels to submit its request to China about the status of Meng Hongwei. Its statement said the agency “looks forward to an official response from China’s authorities to address concerns over the president’s well-being.”

China, in the midst of a weeklong holiday, has yet to comment on the 64-year-old security official’s disappearance. Calls and faxed questions to the foreign and public security ministries went unanswered.

Meng's wife says she hasn't heard from him since he left the French city of Lyon at the end of September. France has launched its own investigation. French authorities say he boarded a plane and arrived in China but his subsequent whereabouts are unknown.

In addition to his Interpol post, Meng is also a vice minister for public security in China.

Previously, Interpol had said that reports about Meng’s disappearance were “a matter for the relevant authorities in both France and China.”

The South China Morning Post, a Hong Kong newspaper, has suggested that Meng may have been the latest target of an ongoing campaign against corruption in China.

His duties in China would have put him in close proximity to former leaders, some who fell afoul of President Xi Jinping’s sweeping anti-corruption campaign. Meng likely dealt extensively with former security chief Zhou Yongkang, who is now serving a life sentence for corruption.

Meng is the first person from China to serve as Interpol’s president, a post that is largely symbolic but powerful in status. Because Interpol’s secretary general is responsible for the day-to-day running of the agency’s operations, Meng’s absence may have little operational effect.
EUROPE

Firefighters battle wildfire in Portugal

Over 700 firefighters battled a wildfire in a national park west of Lisbon that forced Portuguese authorities to evacuate about 350 people.

The fire that broke out overnight in the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park that covers hilly terrain near the Atlantic coast injured 17 firefighters and one civilian, Andre Fernandes of Portugal’s civil protection agency said.

Fernandes added that 300 people were evacuated from a campsite while another 47 were removed from their homes in the wooded area as a precaution.

Firefighters on the ground were being supported by 225 vehicles and six aerial fire-fighting units as they tried to put out the blaze. Planes swooped low to dump water on plumes of smoke rising from densely wooded hills 40 kilometers (25 miles) west of the capital.

Fernandes said firefighters were combating the fire on two fronts, and their efforts were being helped by a decrease in the winds that had previously fanned the flames.

“The first hours of the fire were very, very difficult,” Fernandes said.

Resident Francisco Reymao said that “it was very windy, so the fire front came all the way down with an astonishing speed.”

“The firefighters could only watch during the night because it was impossible to control the fire,” Reymao added. “Our luck was the start of the day when the aircraft were able to stop this ... it would have been a tragedy here in Charneca.”

Wildfires routinely blacken large areas of forest every year in Portugal. Last year they also killed 106 people in what was by far the country’s deadliest fire season on record.

That was a wake-up call for authorities, who had been slow to react to demographic changes. This year the Portuguese government enacted a raft of preventive measures to reduce fire deaths, like employing goats to munch flammable undergrowth along key roads.

EUROPE

Russian minority party tops Latvian poll

An opposition party catering for Latvia’s large ethnic Russian minority is poised to win the Baltic nation’s parliamentary election.

The Harmony Party is expected to face difficulties in forming a coalition government.

Voters in Latvia, which is a member of the European Union and Nato, chose from more than 1400 candidates and 16 parties to fill the country’s 100-seat parliament.

With more than 95 per cent of the votes counted, preliminary results from Latvia’s electoral committee showed the left-wing Harmony party was leading with 20 per cent support.

The populist KPV party and the anti-corruption New Conservative Party were in second and third place with 14.1 per cent and 13.6 per cent of the votes respectively.

Prime Minister Maris Kucinskis’ centrist Union of Greens and Farmers was in the sixth place with 10 per cent support.
PM: Opera House is ‘a big billboard’

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has described the Sydney Opera House as a “big billboard” and says he’d happily advertise events on the Harbour Bridge too.

Morrison’s comments came after NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian ordered Opera House management to allow Racing NSW to advertise the upcoming Everest Cup horse race on the sails of the iconic venue.

“This is one of the biggest events of the year why not put it on the biggest billboard Sydney has,” the prime minister said.

“These events generate massive economic opportunities for the state and the city.

“I’d put the Bathurst 1000 (car race) on the Harbour Bridge if I thought it was going to get more people there.”

The PM said promoting the Everest Cup on the Opera House was “just common sense”.

“I don’t know why people are getting so precious about it,” he said.

“Frankly I thought it was a bit of a no-brainer.”

Premier Gladys Berejiklian denied she caved into bullying from broadcaster Alan Jones when she intervened to allow the horse racing advertising to be projected onto the sails.

Jones harassed Opera House chief executive Louise Herron who’d ruled against allowing words or branding to be projected onto the venue because “it’s not a billboard”.

Within hours the premier had intervened to ensure Racing NSW could promote the barrier draw for the Everest Cup using the Opera House.

“There’ll be no logos or names – the only words on there are the words on the trophy itself,” Berejiklian said.

“That is consistent with what’s happened in the past – whether it’s other sporting events or opportunities or other artistic expressions.”

The Liberal leader said her intervention followed “weeks and weeks of negotiation.”

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Labor bullish on GST guarantee

Labor is confident the government will be forced to legislate a guarantee no state or territory will be worse off under new GST carve-up arrangements.

The opposition’s finance spokesman Jim Chalmers said his party would lobby crossbench senators to support tacking on a guarantee to legislation putting a 75-cent floor in payments to states.

“If Scott Morrison is fair dinkum about this commitment that states won’t be worse off, he should be prepared to legislate it,” Chalmers said.

But he said it was premature to consider the entire proposal could fall over if Labor plays hard ball on enshrining the guarantee in law.

“We are confident that our view will prevail as it has prevailed in the past,” Chalmers said.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg is continuing to reject the need for a legislated guarantee, saying such a move would create parallel systems.

“They’re wanting us to run an old set of books based on the current system and a new set of books which is based on a new system with the floor,” he said.

He accused Labor of playing politics on the GST, insisting all states and territories will be better off with the federal government injecting an extra $1 billion a year into the funding pool.

Legislation for the GST changes, including a 75-cent floor in payments is expected to be introduced when parliament resumes in mid-October.

The plan was hatched to protect Western Australia’s share, which crashed to less than 30 cents in the dollar after the mining boom.

Chalmers said states were nervous Prime Minister Scott Morrison would cut funding if there was no safeguards in new laws.