

Winds fuel California wildfire

Flames from the Thomas fire burn in the hills after a week of devastating wildfires

Los Angeles

Strong winds that have powered the third-largest wildfire in California's history were expected yesterday to further fuel a blaze that has burned 267,500 acres.

Nearly 8,500 firefighters are battling the so-called Thomas Fire in Southern California, which began Dec. 4 and has destroyed more than 1,000 structures and threatened 18,000 more, including homes in the wealthy town of Montecito just outside the coastal city of Santa Barbara.

While the winds were expected to ease yesterday near Santa Barbara, northeast wind gusts up to 55 mph were forecast through yesterday for parts of Ventura and Los Angeles counties, National Weather Service forecasters said.

The blaze, centred less than 100 miles (160 km) northwest of downtown Los Angeles,

has forced evacuations that turned neighbourhoods into ghost towns and filled the air with smoke.

The fire is now 40 per cent contained despite hot Santa Ana winds that have powered its expansion, at times sending embers far ahead of its main flank.

Firefighters were employing more than 970 fire engines and 34 helicopters to battle the blaze.

"It is a beast," Santa Barbara County Fire Department Division Chief Martin Johnson told a news conference on Saturday. "But we will kill it."

Five of 20 most destructive fires in recorded history ravaged the state in 2017, according to Cal Fire.

The Thomas fire, the seventh-most destructive in state history, forced many schools to close for days, shut roads and drove hundreds of thousands from their homes.

It was also responsible for poor air quality throughout Southern California.

On Saturday, evacuation orders were issued for parts of Santa Barbara County as high winds whipped the fire through bone-dry terrain.

In Montecito on Saturday, smoke billowing from nearby canyons and pushed by the high winds choked the air, hindering aircraft from dropping flame retardant, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services said. An evacuation order for the city of Ventura was lifted on Saturday morning.

Cal Fire engineer Cory Iverson, 32, died on Thursday while battling the flames near the Ventura County community of Fillmore. The blaze's first fatality, he died of smoke inhalation and burns, the Ventura County Medical Examiner's office said. (Reuters)

Cake for 'joyful' pope on his 81st birthday

Vatican City

Pope Francis celebrated his 81st birthday yesterday with a hero cake and a message urging the world -- and children in particular -- to join in the holiday mood and be joyful.

The Argentine pontiff thanked the crowds gathered in Saint Peter's Square for the Angelus prayer as they sang happy birthday, and was expected to slice into his birthday cake after lunch.

It sports a picture of the pope carrying the world on his



Pope Francis' birthday cake

shoulders, designed by Italian graffiti artist MauPal.

The artist -- whose real name is Mauro Pallotta -- famously depicted Francis as Superman in 2014 and has since begun

supporting Vatican charitable projects by selling T-shirts bearing the flying pope.

The pear and cinnamon delight shows Francis in his white cassock, holding up with one hand the world, which is divided in two but stitched back together -- a symbol of the pope's unifying force, Rome pastry maker Hedera said.

Francis's birthday this year falls on Gaudete Sunday, which the church marks as a moment of particular joy as celebrations for the birth of Jesus Christ approach. (AFP)

#PollToday



Do you think UN Security Council draft resolution would render Donald Trump's Jerusalem recognition 'null and void'?

Yes No Cant Say



"I said I am for (same) sex marriage if that is the trend of the modern times. If that will add to your happiness, I am for it."

Rodrigo Duterte
Philippine President

Rest in sight

Eleven police killed in attacks in Afghanistan



At least 11 Afghan policemen were killed when Taliban fighters attacked two checkpoints in the volatile southern province of Helmand.

Australia charges 'North Korean agent'

Australian police had arrested a man accused of working on the black market to sell missile components and coal on behalf of North Korea, the first charges ever brought in Australia over the sale of weapons of mass destruction.

Chile votes in tight presidential run-off

Chileans voted in a presidential run-off election but the outcome of ex-President Sebastian Pinera's comeback bid is far from certain after an unexpected surge from the left.

Clashes sparked as India army kills driver

Hundreds of Kashmiris clashed with Indian police in the northern part of Indian-occupied Kashmir after Indian soldiers killed a civilian driver who was mistaken for a "rebel".

For more, catch us online at:

www.newsofbahrain.com

[/nobonline](https://www.facebook.com/nobonline)

[/newsofbahrain](https://www.twitter.com/newsofbahrain)

Two rookie astronauts, cosmonaut blast off to ISS



The launch of Soyuz MS-07

Baikonur

A three-man space crew featuring American and Japanese rookie astronauts as well as an experienced Russian cosmonaut blasted off on Sunday for a six-month mission at the International Space Station.

Scott Tingle of NASA, Anton Shkaplerov of Roscosmos and Norishige Kanaï of the Japan Aerospace

Exploration Agency powered into the sky in a Soyuz MS-07 spacecraft from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan at 1:21 pm (0721 GMT), according to footage aired by the Russian space agency.

While most flights to the ISS now take around six hours, the trio are taking the more circuitous two-day route due to the lab's position at the time of launch. (AFP)

Slow-moving storm kills over 30 Philippines

Manila

Officials say more than 30 people have been killed mostly due to landslides set off by a slow-moving storm in the central Philippines.

Sofronio Dacillo Jr., a disaster-response officer, told The Associated Press yesterday that 26 villagers died in landslides in different areas in the island province of Biliran, where the weather has improved after Tropical Storm Kai-Tak passed.

Officials and police say at

least seven other people died in landslides and floods in four central areas due to Kai-tak, which has weakened into a tropical depression while still drenching provinces.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council says it's still trying to confirm the reported deaths caused by the storm, which forced more than 89,000 people to flee to emergency shelters and stranded thousands of holiday travellers. (AP)

World's steepest funicular rail opens in Switzerland



The Schwyz-Stoos funicular in the Alpine resort of Stoos.

Zurich

The world's steepest funicular railway has opened to the public in Switzerland.

Specially constructed cylindrical carriages have been used to ensure that passengers can stay upright.

The floors tilt, adjusting to the slope as the funicular

climbs 110m (360ft) over a distance of 100m at the steepest point.

The railway runs from the town of Schwyz up to the car-free Alpine village of Stoos.

The Stoos Bahn took 14 years to build - two years longer than scheduled - at a cost of 52m Swiss francs (£40m; \$53m). (BBC)