

France's 'yellow vests' stage fresh protests



Yellow vests (Gilet jaune) protesters help a comrade who was showered by a water cannon as they clash with police

Paris, France

Protesters skirmished with police in Paris and other cities yesterday as thousands turned out for new rallies against French President Emmanuel Macron, with dozens arrested as officials vowed a crackdown on the violence that has marred the demonstrations since November.

The "yellow vest" marches began calmly amid a heavy police deployment of some 80,000 officers nationwide, with protesters singing the "Marseillaise" national anthem and holding signs including "Insecurity is not a job".

But scores of protesters later clashed with riot police after arriving at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, prompting volleys of tear gas and water cannon as security forces prevented them from reaching the Champs-Élysées.

Nearly 60 people had been arrested in the capital, police said, alongside dozens more elsewhere including the central city of Bourges, the site of another major rally.

The interior ministry said there were 32,000 protesters nationwide as of 2:00 pm (1300 GMT), including 8,000 in Paris. That was above the 26,000 counted at the same time last week.

Macedonia PM urges Greek MPs to ratify name deal



Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev delivers a speech to lawmakers at the parliament in Skopje

Skopje, Macedonia

Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev yesterday called on Greece to end their nations' decades-long dispute by ratifying the deal to rename his country "The Republic of

North Macedonia".

Macedonian lawmakers voted through the agreement late on Friday and it now needs backing from the Greek parliament to come into effect.

"Our parliament found the strength but it wasn't easy. But I am convinced that the Greek parliament will also find the strength to make the decision," Zaev told a press conference in Skopje.

During the vote, 81 of the Macedonian parliament's 120 MPs backed the name change, securing the required two-thirds majority to push it through.

Zaev, who came to power in May 2017, is now looking to his Greek counterpart Alexis Tsipras to uphold his end of the deal, which the pair brokered last year.

"Within 10 days... if we see everything is in order, we will vote," Tsipras said on Friday evening.

Government shutdown becomes longest in US

● Shutdown entered a record 22nd day

● Trump remains steadfast in his demand for \$5.7 billion to build a Mexico border wall

● 800,000 federal employees did not receive paychecks Friday

AFP | Washington, United States

The partial US government shutdown entered a record 22nd day yesterday, as President Donald Trump remains steadfast in his demand for \$5.7 billion to build a Mexico border wall and Democrats in Congress determined to refuse the funds.

The impasse has paralyzed Washington, with the president retaliating by refusing to sign off on budgets for swaths of government departments unrelated to the dispute.

As a result 800,000 federal employees -- workers as diverse as FBI agents, air traffic controllers and museum staff -- did not receive paychecks Friday.

The shutdown became the longest on record at midnight Friday (0500 GMT Saturday), when it overtook the 21-day stretch in 1995-1996, under president Bill Clinton.

Trump on Friday however backed off a series of previous threats to end the deadlock by



US Vice President Mike Pence (2L) listens while Democratic US Representative Nancy Pelosi (L), US President Donald Trump (2R) and Democratic Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer argue about the impending government shutdown during a meeting at the White House in Washington, DC.



"If they can't do it... I will declare a national emergency. I have the absolute right

DONALD TRUMP

declaring a national emergency and attempting to secure the funds without congressional approval.

"I'm not going to do it so fast," he said at a White House meeting.

Trump described an emergency declaration as the "easy way out" and said Congress had to step up to the responsibility of approving the \$5.7 billion.

"If they can't do it... I will declare a national emergency. I have the absolute right," he said.

Until now, Trump had suggested numerous times that he was getting closer to taking the

controversial decision.

Only minutes earlier, powerful Republican ally Senator Lindsey Graham tweeted after talks with Trump: "Mr. President, Declare a national emergency NOW."

But Trump himself acknowledged in the White House meeting that an attempt to claim emergency powers would likely end up in legal battles going all the way to the Supreme Court.

Opponents say that a unilateral presidential move would be constitutional overreach and set a dangerous precedent in similar controversies.

US vet cancels project to raise money for border wall

Washington, United States

An Iraq war veteran canceled his plan to crowdsource \$1 billion to help President Donald Trump build a wall on the Mexico border after raising only \$20 million and drawing questions about his online activities.

Triple-amputee veteran Brian Kolfage launched a GoFundMe account in December, quickly piling up donations as Trump



Brian Kolfage

was unable to get Congress to fund the wall -- leading to a now three-week-old partial shutdown of the government.

But donations slowed and Kolfage said the group had concluded that the government won't be able to make use of them in the foreseeable future.

In addition, Kolfage was put on the defensive late Thursday by a BuzzFeed News article that raised questions about his use

of funds from a previous GoFundMe campaign, and alleged he ran an operation to fabricate fake news against liberal groups and politicians in order to generate traffic and profits from advertising.

Kolfage said on his GoFundMe page that he will refund donations or, if donors agree, will put them toward a new company that will build sections of the wall itself on private property along the frontier.

Zimbabwe to re-introduce local currency within a year: minister

Harare, Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe will re-introduce a local currency "in less than 12 months", after using the US dollar and regional currencies since a hyperinflation crisis a decade ago, the finance minister said in an interview published yesterday.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who took over from long-time ruler Robert Mugabe and won a disputed election in July, has pledged to revive the economy and mend fences with former allies in the west after years of international isolation.

"On the issue of raising enough foreign currency to introduce the new currency, we

are on our way already, give us months not years," state-owned *Herald* newspaper quoted Finance Minister Mtshiseliso Moyo as saying.

Asked for a timeline for the currency reform, the minister said it would be in "less than 12 months".

The southern African nation's economy has been in a downturn for more than a decade with shortages of cash, high unemployment and the government struggling to pay its workers.

The country was thrown into panic after Moyo introduced a two percent tax on all electronic transactions as part of new measures to increase revenue.



Public transport drivers complain about having to pay for fuel in US dollars at a fuel station



Zimbabwe adopted a basket of foreign currencies in 2009 after hyperinflation, which saw some businesses increasing prices several times a day, rendered the local Zimbabwe dollar unusable.

Shortages of basic commodities resurfaced and prices shot up - and in some cases more than doubled within weeks.

The shortages hit pharmacies with some running out of essential drugs for chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension and accepting payment only in foreign currency.

Motorists spend hours in long queues waiting to buy fuel. Doctors in state hospitals went on strike for more than a month in December saying the price hikes had eroded their earnings and teachers announced a strike this week demanding to be paid in US dollars.