

Drought in England, fires rage in France as heatwave persists

UK declares drought in parts of England amid heatwave as Firefighters from across Europe help France with monster fire

● Europe hit by successive heatwaves

Reuters | Paris

Firefighters from across Europe came to France's rescue yesterday to battle a massive wildfire, while fire also raged in Portugal and parts of England faced a severe drought, as successive heatwaves renewed the focus on climate change risks.

Much of Europe has faced weeks of baking temperatures that have also depleted water levels of the Rhine River in Germany and seen the source of Britain's River Thames dry up further downstream than in previous years.

High temperatures and a worsening drought brought a high risk of new fires breaking out in Gironde, in southwestern France, local officials said, even after an overnight reprieve held in check the wildfire that has been burning for days, scorched thousands of hectares and displaced 10,000 people.

Firefighters from Germany, Romania, Greece and beyond were on the ground to help



An aerial view shows a wildfire burning as firefighters work to extinguish it

France battle the fire in the region - home to Bordeaux wine - as well as on other fronts, including in Brittany in the northwest. "It doesn't matter the country, we are firefighters and we are there to help," said chief Romanian firefighter Cristian Buhianu, in Gironde.

French commandant Stephanie Martin welcomed their support in an area that already battled a massive fire for weeks last month. "Our firefighters are tired after one month of fighting. It is really good support for us, so

we can also focus on the other operation," she said.

But while an expected end of France's third heatwave on Sunday could bring some relief, the fire has already left much destruction in its wake, including over 7,400 hectares (18,286 acres) of forest burnt to the ground - equivalent to the size of a major French city such as Nice.

What firefighters called a "monster fire" also destroyed houses, including the ancestral home of the family of 19-year old student Juliette Pilain, from

“The day is likely to be complicated since temperatures continue to increase and humidity continues to drop, so obviously we remain vigilant and mobilised

SENIOR LOCAL OFFICIAL ROMAN LEAUSTIC

Belin-Beliet, in the heart of Gironde.

"It is complicated to process this news. It's a house that's been in the family for years, it's especially painful for my grandparents," Pilain told Reuters.

"We had all the furniture of my great-grandparents there, books and encyclopaedia belonging to my great grandmother ... we cried a lot but then thought it is just material damage and we are all still here."

Portugal fires, UK drought

In central Portugal, a huge wildfire raged into its seventh day, with 1,600 firefighters backed by 13 waterbombing aircraft, including one sent from Spain, combating the blaze that has destroyed about 15% of the

BETTER YOU KNOW
Ongoing wildfires in France have unleashed nearly 1 million metric tonnes of carbon from June to August. That is roughly equal to the yearly carbon dioxide emissions from 790,000 cars

Serra da Estrela national park.

After starting in the Covilha area on Saturday, the fire has spread to several neighbouring councils, burning around 15,000 hectares overall.

Meanwhile, water levels on the river Rhine in Germany have fallen again, with some vessels no longer able to sail, shipping operators and brokers said.

Further north, in Britain, the heatwave was also hitting hard, with the government formally declaring parts of southern, central and eastern England in

drought after a prolonged period of hot and dry weather.

England suffered its driest July since 1935, with only 35% of the average rainfall for the month, and parts of England and Wales were now in the middle of a four-day "extreme heat" alert.

"All water companies have reassured us that essential supplies are still safe, and we have made it clear it is their duty to maintain those supplies," Water Minister Steve Double said, following a meeting of the National Drought Group.

The companies will now begin enacting pre-agreed drought plans to help protect supplies, and the government said members of the public and businesses in drought-affected areas were urged to use water wisely.

Earlier yesterday, Yorkshire water announced a hosepipe ban would begin on Aug. 26, forbidding customers from using hoses to water gardens, wash cars or fill up paddling pools.

Across France as well, there are restrictions on water use, and water police has been handing out fines. Local media have reported that outdoor jacuzzis were vandalised in the tourist Vosges area, as some tensions over water rose.

Kenya election commission says vote tally moving too slowly



Various political parties delegates are seen at the IEBC National Tallying centre at the Bomas of Kenya, in Nairobi

Reuters | Nairobi

Without providing any proof, the secretary-general of Kenya's governing party has said there was election rigging, fuelling public anxiety yesterday as media outlets significantly slowed down their unofficial tallies from Tuesday's tight vote.

Only the electoral commission is authorised to declare a winner, but the tallies done by media were seen as a bulwark against the kind of rigging allegations that have previously sparked violence.

While Kenya is East Africa's richest and most stable nation it also has a history of violent elections disputes. More than 1,200 people were killed after the 2007 elections and more than 100 after the 2017 elections.

The race is to succeed President Uhuru Kenyatta, who

“The agents in this exercise cannot proceed in the manner in which we are proceeding as if we are doing a forensic audit

ELECTION COMMISSION CHAIRMAN WAFULA CHEBUKATI

must step down after serving the maximum two five-year terms. Leading contenders are former political prisoner and veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga and Deputy President William Ruto. Kenyatta has fallen out with Ruto and endorsed Odinga.

Media tallies, which had nearly stopped by yesterday morning, showed Odinga and Ruto neck and neck, just under the 50% mark they needed to win. Less than a percent was divided between two other marginal candidates.

Gang violence leaves 11 dead in Mexican border city

AP | Mexico City

A gang riot inside a border prison that left two inmates dead quickly spread to the streets of Ciudad Juarez where alleged gang members killed nine more people, including four employees of a radio station, security officials said yesterday.

The surge in violence recalled a far more deadly period in Juarez more than a decade earlier. Mexico's powerful drug cartels commonly use local gangs to defend their territory and carry out their vendettas.

The federal government's security un-



Bullet holes are seen in the windows of a pizzeria

dersecretary, Ricardo Mejía Berdeja, said the violence started inside the state prison

after 1 p.m. Thursday, when member of the Mexicles gang attacked members of the rival Chapos.

Two inmates were killed and 20 injured.

Then suspected gang members outside the prison began burning businesses and shooting up Ciudad Juarez.

"They attacked the civilian, innocent population like a sort of revenge," President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said. "It wasn't just the clash between two groups, but it got to the point in which they began to shoot civilians, innocent people. That is the most unfortunate thing in this affair."

US, Indonesia, Australia hold drills amid China concerns

AFP | Baturaja

Soldiers from the US, Indonesia and Australia joined a live-fire drill yesterday, part of annual joint combat exercises on Sumatra island amid growing Chinese maritime activity in the Indo-Pacific region.

A total of more than 5,000 personnel from the US, Indonesia, Australia, Japan and Singapore are participating in this year's Super Garuda Shield exercises, making them the largest since they began in 2009.

The expanded drills are seen by China as a threat. Chinese state media have accused the US of building an Indo-Pacific alliance similar to NATO to limit China's growing military and diplomatic influence in the region.

The United Kingdom, Canada, France, India, Malaysia, South Korea, New Zealand,



US and Indonesian during the joint military exercises in Baturaja, Indonesia

Papua New Guinea and East Timor also sent observers to the exercises, which began early this month.

The US Indo-Pacific commander, Adm. John C. Aquilino, said the 14 nations involved in the training are signaling their

stronger ties as China grows increasingly assertive in claiming virtually the entire South China Sea and holds exercises threatening self-ruled Taiwan.

"The destabilizing actions by the People's Republic of China as it applied to the threatening

“The destabilizing actions by the People's Republic of China as it applied to the threatening activities and actions against Taiwan is exactly what we are trying to avoid

US INDO-PACIFIC COMMANDER, ADM. JOHN C. AQUILINO

activities and actions against Taiwan is exactly what we are trying to avoid," he said at a joint news conference with Indonesian military chief Gen. Andika Perkasa in Baturaja, a coastal town in South Sumatra province.

"We'll continue to help deliver a free and open Indo-Pacific and be ready when we need to respond to any contingency," Aquilino said.