

Biden tours wildfire ravaged areas during California trip

DPA
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

GAZING down from Marine One, President Joe Biden surveyed miles of scorched earth slicing through dense green forests, the scars left by one of the worst wildfires to threaten California.

Firefighters were able to protect the area around Lake Tahoe, but not before the Caldor fire decimated the small town of Grizzly Flats and destroyed hundreds of homes.

"These fires are blinking code red for our nation," the president said at a Sacramento airport after his aerial tour. "They're gaining frequency and ferocity. And we know what we need to do." Biden approved a federal disaster declaration for the area Sunday,

and officials warned that toxic waste runoff and sediment from the fire could threaten the watershed around Lake Tahoe.

The president's trip to California reflects not only political imperatives - he's campaigning for Governor Gavin Newsom, who is trying to fend off a recall campaign on Tuesday - but also his administration's increasing focus on wildfires.

Biden has participated in regular briefings on the issue, and he's pushing for more spending on infrastructure to mitigate climate change, which scientists say is intensifying forest fires.

"I have not seen this much attention on what I would call good forest management and wildland management as



US President Joe Biden with California governor Gavin Newsom (right) in Mather, California on Tuesday. (AFP)

I have with this administration," Cal Fire Director Thom Porter said. "In my 30-year career in this, I haven't seen any

attention like this." Newsom, who greeted Biden after he landed on Air Force One and accompanied him for a brief-

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ing on wildfires, praised his commitment with an implicit swipe at former president Donald Trump.

"We're not sparring partners," Newsom. "We're working partners." Before arriving in Sacramento, Biden stopped in Boise, Idaho, where he became the first president to visit the National Interagency Fire Center since it was founded five decades ago.

"You know the time of the year when the air fills with smoke and the sky turns a little orange," he said in Boise.

"But that time of year is getting earlier every year." There have been an estimated 44,000 wildfires this year, with 5.4 million acres [2.2 million hectares] burned nationwide. Biden said people on the East Coast struggle to comprehend the scale of the destruction, which rivals the size of New Jersey.

"It's just unfathomable," he said. "They don't full understand how big the West is." Biden said climate change will continue to worsen wildfires and other natural disasters.

"We can't continue to try to ignore reality," Biden said. "The reality is, we have a global warming problem." He added, "It's not going to get any better than it is today. It only can get worse." More than 2 million acres have burned in Califor-

nia so far this year, which puts the state roughly on pace to equal last year's fire season, the worst on record.

Dry vegetation, hot temperatures and the potential for high winds have raised concerns that the fall could bring even more devastating blazes to California. The state budget allocates 1.5 billion dollars for wildfire prevention work that includes clearing brush and forest management.

In a meeting with Biden and other governors in late July, Newsom said the state needed more federal support to increase the number of firefighters and improve its fleet of aircraft. The governor implored Biden to direct the US Forest Service to more aggressively suppress fires on federal lands.

British govt's winter COVID plan welcomed as 'sensible'

PA MEDIA/DPA
LONDON

THE Government's plans to control the spread of coronavirus in the coming months have been welcomed as "sensible and proportionate." Health leaders have warned they expect autumn and winter to be busier than ever for the NHS and staffing levels and burn-out remain a "critical concern" for many trusts.

There must be a "pragmatic approach" on measures such as the wearing of face masks should cases rise in the months ahead, NHS Providers said.

The membership organization for NHS hospital, mental health, community and ambulance services said plans outlined by Health Secretary Sajid Javid will be broadly welcomed.

Saffron Cordery, deputy chief executive of NHS Providers, said: "The situation in the NHS is far from 'normal' and we expect this autumn and winter to be busier than ever for the health service.

"That's why, alongside the ongoing vaccination and testing and tracing programmes, trust leaders will broadly welcome the Government's plan to keep a wider range of Covid-19 measures under close review.

"A pragmatic approach towards measures such as mask mandates and increased public caution is vital if cases spike in the coming months, putting the NHS under unsustainable pressure.

"The array of challenges facing the NHS as we head into autumn and winter is daunting.

"Trusts are grappling with record waiting lists across hospital, mental health and community services. Bed capacity is lower because of continuing enhanced infection control measures.

"Staffing levels and burn-out continue to be a critical concern for many trusts." She



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson in London on Tuesday. (AFP)

Boris Johnson's mother dies aged 79

LONDON British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is mourning the loss of his mother after she died aged 79.

Charlotte Johnson Wahl, a painter, died "suddenly and peacefully" at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, on Monday according to a death notice in The Times.

Mr Johnson once described his mother as the "supreme authority" in the family and credited her with instilling in him the equal value of every human life.

The notice in the Times says she was a "Painter.

Mother of Alexander, Rachel, Leo, and Joseph; grandmother of Ludovic, Lara, Charlotte, Milo, Oliver, Cassia, Theodore, Rose, Lula, William, Ruby Noor, Stephanie and Wilfred." Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer was among the first politicians to offer his condolences.

"I'm very sorry to learn of the Prime Minister's loss. My condolences to him and his family," he tweeted.

Tory MP Conor Burns said: "So sad to hear of the death of Boris Johnson's Mum.

Thoughts and prayers are with him and the whole of the

Johnson clan." Fellow Conservative Angela Richardson added: "Sad news for the PM tonight as well as the rest of the Johnson family. Thoughts with them all." The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) stressed that workforce shortages remain a problem, insisting that health and care staff are not an "inexhaustible resource." RCN general secretary and chief executive Pat Cullen said: "These measures will be key to getting us through the knife-edge winter we all fear.

"But nursing staff will be concerned at issues not referenced today.

"With more Covid-19 vaccinations to deliver as well as the flu programme, the shortages in the nursing workforce will be increasingly exposed. Neglecting to mention these issues does not mean they will go away.

"The Covid-19 and flu vaccination programme is absolutely part of the package to support those staff and minimise the winter pressures they are facing and any measures which reduce the severity and impact of either illness will be supported."

NHS warns

Saffron Cordery, deputy chief executive of NHS Providers, said: "The situation in the NHS is far from 'normal' and we expect this autumn and winter to be busier than ever for the health service"

months remains very difficult to predict - the plan recognises this uncertainty and therefore that contingency measures may, or may not, be needed.

"The overarching aim is to continue the return to normal activities while keeping them as safe as possible, with more emphasis on voluntary interventions.

"The number of people in hospital with Covid-19 continues to grow - albeit slowly - and light-touch interventions instigated now are the most effective way of ensuring - as we all hope - that more drastic interventions are not needed later on." The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) stressed that workforce shortages remain a problem, insisting that health and care staff are not an "inexhaustible resource." RCN general secretary and chief executive Pat Cullen said: "These measures will be key to getting us through the knife-edge winter we all fear.

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Macron wants curbs on police power

DPA
PARIS

FOLLOWING recurring reports of excessive police violence in France, President Emmanuel Macron has announced stronger checks on the powers of police officers.

A supervisory body is to be created at parliamentary level, Macron said in Roubaix on Tuesday. In addition, internal police investigations should be made public in the future. Instead of a general suspicion, there should be transparency, he added.

By the end of next year, all police officers are to be

equipped with body cameras for filming sensitive operations. This would promote de-escalation and serve possible later investigations, Macron said.

A nationwide anti-discrimination platform launched in February had already received 7,564 complaints, but only 4 percent concerned the police, he said. After analysing the situation of the French police, Macron outlined a comprehensive police reform in Roubaix. Less bureaucracy and more efficient processes, better equipment and training, and twice as many officers on the streets within 10 years were some of the key recommendations.

EU-wide survey finds respect for Merkel, fears for the future

DPA
BERLIN

A new report based on survey carried out across 12 EU states suggests Germany's outgoing chancellor, Angela Merkel, is held in high regard, and that there would have been more conflict in the world if she had not been in office.

The survey, which was conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), suggests that well over a third of Europeans favour more German leadership within the EU.

Thirty-six per cent of those



German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Tirana on Tuesday. (AFP)

questioned said that they trust Germany on economic and financial policy, and 35 per cent said they trusted Germany to stand up for human rights.

Germans themselves, however, appear to have reservations about their role within the EU, and were found to be pessimistic about Germany and its status in the world. The ECFR found that more than half, or 52 per cent, of Germans now think that their country's "golden age" is behind it.

Across Europe, Germany's credibility as a potential geopolitical leader is low: Only about one fifth of citizens across the polled member states believe Germany can lead the EU in its relations with Russia.

Putin critic Khodorkovsky warns of election rigging in Russia

DPA
MOSCOW

SHORTLY before parliamentary elections in Russia, outspoken critic of the Kremlin Mikhail Khodorkovsky has warned about the possibility of results being falsified.

Neither opposition members nor independent observers would be allowed, both of which would be needed to make the September 17-19 vote a real election, said Khodorkovsky, who lives in exile in Britain.

How the population really feels about the power apparatus will not become clear "because the results of the vote

will be falsified," the politician and former oil executive told radio station Ekho Moskvy (Echo of Moscow) on Monday.

The scientific director of the independent polling institute Levada Centre, Lev Gudkov, complained that no opinion poll results have been allowed to be published.

Khodorkovsky said he himself would not vote "because it is pointless." The 58-year-old served many years in prison camps as an opponent of President Vladimir Putin. The Kremlin leader "spits" on the Duma election, he said, adding that he did not care who won because parliament no longer had any power.

News in brief

World should not link humanitarian aid to politics, says Taliban

ISLAMABAD The Taliban government in Afghanistan on Tuesday thanked the international community for pledging over a billion dollars in humanitarian aid to the suffering population.

But while speaking in a press conference in Kabul, the militant group's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said that such humanitarian aid should not be linked to political issues.

Muttaqi said that the Taliban government promises that the aid would reach the "deserving and poor Afghans." A United Nations-hosted international aid conference for Afghanistan in Geneva raised more than 1.2 billion dollars on Monday.

The sum includes emergency aid for the suffering population as well as development aid and support for neighbouring countries taking in refugees, UN emergency relief coordinator Martin Griffiths said.

In the press conference, Muttaqi asked the international community to re-engage with the Afghans in various sectors, including education and health.

The Taliban on Monday called on the international community to cooperate with them in order to help the people of Afghanistan, as food and medicine were scarce in the war-torn country. (DPA)

Biden to address UN General Assembly for first time as president

WASHINGTON Joe Biden will address the United Nations General Assembly in New York next week for first time as US president.

Biden will travel to New York on Tuesday next week to speak at the assembly's General Debate, the White House said Monday.

Biden's predecessor, Republican Donald Trump, was a harsh critic of the United Nations and advocated the US increasingly going it alone.

Biden, on the other hand, has relied increasingly on multilateralism and working together with other countries.

The Democrat has been in office since January 20.

Leaders from more than 80 countries are expected to speak in person in New York, in contrast to 2020, when the General Assembly was largely conducted in a virtual format.

The coronavirus pandemic, including the issue of vaccinations, and climate change are among the key topics expected to be discussed at this year's General Assembly. (DPA)

Children full of anxiety over environment, says international study

LONDON The majority of young people are filled with anxiety over climate change, a study which quizzed thousands of youngsters from around the world suggests.

A study based on surveys of 10,000 children and young people found more than three quarters (77 percent) thought the future was frightening and nearly six in 10 said they were very or extremely worried about climate change.

More than half said they had felt afraid, sad, anxious, powerless, helpless and/or guilty, and almost half (45 percent) said their concerns negatively affected their daily life.

Young people also feel governments are failing them, betraying future generations, lying about the impacts of actions taken on climate change and dismissing people's distress about the issue, the findings suggest.

Less than a third (31 percent) think governments are doing enough to avoid catastrophe, and almost two fifths (39 percent) say they are even hesitant to have children, although the figure ranges quite widely between different countries. (DPA)