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**Opera singer
Montserrat Caballe
dies in Barcelona:
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Sanchez under pressure to call an early election

Madrid.— Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez faces growing pressure from within his Socialist Party to call an early election, before scandals besetting his four-month-old minority government undermine a surge in voter support. Riding high in the polls, Sanchez aims to serve a full term to mid-2020 as he focuses on approving next year's budget and countering renewed independence moves in the Catalonia region.

But last week his science minister was forced to deny media reports he cheated on his taxes, days after a recording emerged

of the justice minister using a homophobic slur.

Two other ministers have already been pushed out, one over a report she plagiarised her university degree, and a second over a 10-year-old tax fine. Both denied wrongdoing.

"This was not in the script," a top party official said on condition of anonymity. "There is no consensus in the party on what we should do."

The official and a second Socialist party source said some of its senior members, fearful the scandals are beginning to alienate voters, were lobbying Sanchez to go to the polls now.

Spain scraps 'sun tax' in measures to cool electricity prices

SPAIN took measures yesterday aimed at reducing electricity bills which are among the highest in Europe and are often criticised for reducing business competitiveness and consumer's purchasing power.

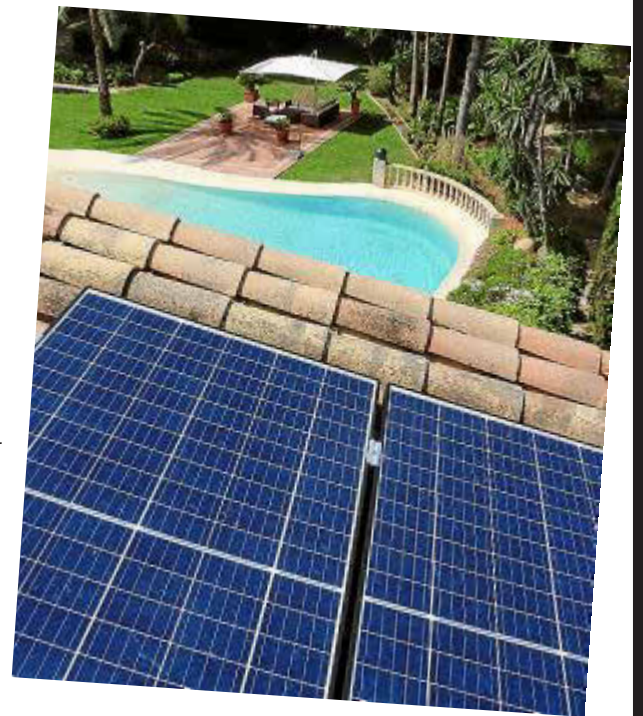
The government will scrap a controversial levy on solar power affecting households and small businesses, Energy and Environment Minister Teresa Ribera said, making it easier for consumers to erect panels for their own use.

"This country is finally freeing itself from the great absurdity, scorned by most international observers, that is the 'sun tax'," Ribera told a news conference.

"A key figure showing Spain's delay in this area is that a country so rich in sunlight has only 1,000 installations of this kind compared with more than one million in Germany," she added.

The toll applied to a system known as "auto-consumption", using installations with more than 10 kilowatts of capacity that were connected to the national grid. Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez brought environment and energy together into a ministry when he toppled his conservative predecessor in June, to underline his government's commitment to environmental sustainability.

Spanish consumers pay the sixth-highest electricity prices in the European Union, according to Eurostat.



In the throes of an economic crisis in 2013, the previous conservative government cut subsidies for renewable energy in a bid to tackle a 28 billion euro (\$32 billion) debt, known as a tariff deficit, built up by years of regulation which kept prices below costs.

Included in the reform was the 'sun tax', which put consumers off taking advantage of a plunge in the price of solar panels that has made them an attractive energy source in other countries.