

Prize launched to solve planet's biggest problems

AFP, London

Britain's Prince William yesterday launched a "prestigious" environmental prize aimed at turning "pessimism into optimism" by rewarding innovative solutions to the planet's biggest problems.

The Earthshot Prize will present five £1 million (\$1.3-million, 1.1-million-euro) awards each year for the next 10 years, to "incentivise change and help to repair our planet," said his office in London.

The jury will include a host of high-profile global figures, including Queen Rania of Jordan, Australian actress Cate Blanchett, British naturalist David Attenborough and the Colombian singer Shakira.

Kensington Palace described it as the "most prestigious global environment prize in history" and said it was inspired by US president John F. Kennedy's "Moonshot" project in the 1960s to put a man on the moon.

"We need to find solutions to be able to live our lives and enjoy our lives and not feel guilty and bad about some of the things we do," the prince, who is second in line to the throne, told BBC Radio 4 in an interview aired Thursday.

"That ultimately has to change, because I also worry from a mental health point of view, the anxiety and the worry that many of these younger generations are going to have."

He said he hopes the prize will "galvanise and bring together the best minds, the best possible solutions, to fixing and tackling some of the world's greatest environmental challenges".

"The next 10 years are a critical decade for change. Time is of the essence, which is why we believe that this very ambitious global prize is the only way forward."

The project is centred around five "simple but ambitious" aims to be met by 2030: "protect and restore nature", "clean our air", "revive our oceans", "build a waste-free world", and "fix our climate".

The prize is supported by a coalition of individuals, organisations and businesses with the winners to be announced each year at a ceremony in a different city around the globe, starting with London in 2021.

Prizes can be awarded to individuals or teams, whether they be scientists, activists, economists, governments, business leaders or even countries.

"The Earthshot Prize aims to turn the current pessimism surrounding environmental issues into optimism that we can rise to the biggest challenges of our time," said the palace.

"But the Prize is about much more than awarding achievement -- it is a decade of action to... inspire people all over the world to work together to repair the planet."



Protesters throw rocks towards security personnel on the last day of a three-day nationwide strike against a new law which critics fear favours investors at the expense of labour right and the environment, in Tangerang, Indonesia, yesterday. Hundreds of people were arrested in Jakarta yesterday as tens of thousands protested across Indonesia against the controversial law.

PHOTO: AFP

US ELECTION 2020 24 DAYS TO GO

'Blessing from God'

Trump says on his Covid infection as he readies for campaign

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump has declared his Covid-19 illness a "blessing from God," as he got back to work in the Oval Office despite warnings that his return could put others at risk.

Trump has worked hard since he checked out of the hospital on Monday -- including a made-for-television return to the White House -- to cast his illness as a personal triumph.

"I think this is a blessing from God that I caught it," Trump said in a video, referring to the virus which has killed over 210,000 people in the United States.

But Democrat Joe Biden, who leads Trump in the latest polls ahead of the November 3 vote, attacked the president's downplaying of the risk.

"I think it's a tragedy that the president deals with Covid like it is



something not to worry about when over 210,000 people (in the US) have died," Biden told reporters.

Trump, confined to the White House where he is being treated, yesterday said he does not believe he is contagious and is feeling good enough to resume campaign rallies as he tries to boost his flagging reelection bid.

"I'm back because I'm a perfect physical specimen," Trump told Fox Business Network's Maria Bartiromo

in his first interview since it was revealed nearly a week ago that he had tested positive for the coronavirus.

Trump's contention he was no longer contagious was not yet backed up by solid evidence from his doctors. The White House has refused to say when his last negative test for the virus was and, as a result, it is unclear how long he has been positive.

The Republican president is under pressure to actively campaign again to try to inject new energy into his reelection bid as he faces a deficit in opinion polls in battleground states with Election Day now less than four weeks away.

"I'm feeling good, really good," said Trump, who spent three nights being treated at a military hospital outside Washington until his discharge on Monday. Trump said he had stopped taking "most therapeutics" for the virus but was still on steroids.

Trump calls Kamala Harris a 'monster'

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday called Kamala Harris, who is making US history as the first Black woman vice presidential candidate, a "monster."

Trump, far behind in the contest for the White House on November 3 and doing especially badly in polling of women voters, used the word twice, calling the Democrat "this monster."

Speaking to Fox Business News for almost an hour in his first interview since falling sick with the coronavirus, Trump said Vice President Mike Pence "destroyed" Harris in their debate Wednesday in Utah.

"Everything she says is a lie," Trump said. Harris, who is also the first person of Indian descent to be on a White House ticket, spent most of her debate attacking Trump for presiding over what she said was "the greatest failure of any presidential administration in the history of our country" over Covid-19.

In the Fox interview, Trump once more branded Biden, who is leading handily in almost every significant opinion poll around the country, "not mentally capable." "Everybody knows that," Trump claimed, predicting "Biden won't be president for two months."

Trump, who for months has slurred Biden as senile and previously called Harris "nasty," also revived one of his darkest claims as a politician -- that illegal Latin American immigrants equate to serious criminals. Democrats "want to have thousands of people that are murderers, rapists, just pour into our country. They could be very sick people," he said.



NEWS IN BRIEF

EU parliament demands tougher climate targets

The European Parliament has called for the EU to step up its targets for cutting greenhouse emissions in response to climate change. Lawmakers voted late Wednesday to press the bloc to slash emissions by at least 60 percent by 2030 -- a bigger cut than currently proposed by the European Commission, the EU executive. MEPs also demanded an interim target be set for 2040 to ensure the bloc meets its plan to be climate neutral by 2050. The calls form part of parliament's negotiating platform for talks with member states to agree the final form of the EU climate law, which will be binding. Ambitious climate goals are backed by big EU powers including France and Germany, as well as many major businesses, but face resistance from eastern member states still dependent on coal for energy. EU leaders will try to agree on a common position at a summit in Brussels next week.

NZ PM Ardern poised for big win in election: poll

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's party is projected to be one seat short of a being able to govern alone, and has a double-digit lead over its rival, with just over a week to the general election, an opinion poll showed yesterday. The closely watched 1News-Colmar Brunton poll showed support for Ardern's Labour party, which is seeking a second term in office, at 47%, unchanged from the last poll on Sept. 28. This means Labour, which is campaigning on its record of bringing the coronavirus pandemic under control within New Zealand's borders, would have 60 seats in parliament, one short of the 61 seats needed to form a government. Support for its coalition partner the Green Party was at 6%, which would give it eight seats. New Zealand heads to the polls on Oct 17 and advance voting began on Saturday.

Kuwait's crown prince pledges commitment to democracy

Kuwait's new Crown Prince Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah took the oath of office in parliament yesterday, pledging the Gulf Arab state's commitment to democracy and peace and calling on Kuwaitis to shun divisions. The assembly unanimously endorsed the octogenarian Sheikh Meshal for the role in what has been a smooth succession that retained power firmly within the ruling family's oldest ranks following last week's death of Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad. New ruler Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad, 83, assumed power last Wednesday in the US-allied OPEC member state as it faces a liquidity crunch caused by low oil prices and the Covid-19 pandemic against the backdrop of continued tensions between larger neighbours Saudi Arabia and Iran.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Protesters raise their fists during a demonstration after the release on bail of former police officer, Derek Chauvin, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Wednesday. The police officer charged with killing George Floyd, the African American whose death sparked a mass protest movement, was released from a Minnesota jail on October 7 on \$1 million bail.

PHOTO: AFP

Ready to 'play hardball'

Say France, Germany as they push sanctions against Russia

REUTERS, Paris

The EU must stand up to Russia when it violates international norms, France and Germany's foreign ministers said on Thursday, adding that a decision to push sanctions over the poisoning of a Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny did not end dialogue.

France and Germany said on Wednesday they would propose European Union sanctions against Russian individuals after receiving no credible answers from Moscow over the use of a nerve agent on Navalny.

Several Western governments have said Russia, which has denied accusations by Navalny that it was involved in poisoning him in August, must help in investigations or face consequences.

"Dialogue is not an excuse for playing for time. We must be very clear: dialogue with Russia does not mean doing it a favour," France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told a security conference in Bratislava.

"It does not mean abandoning our ambition to build a peaceful continent. On the contrary, it means defending this ambition by asserting

firmness ... and getting ready to play hardball whenever necessary."

Speaking at the same conference, Le Drian's German counterpart Heiko Maas echoed those comments. We need to be able to play hardball but at the same time we must never let dialogue be stopped, Maas said, according to a translation into English. "We need Russia to solve the conflicts in Syria, in Libya, in Ukraine."

EU foreign ministers are expected to give their political support for sanctions on Monday, but they are not expected to be approved immediately as legal texts must be prepared and cleared by experts from the 27 EU states.

The decision and speed with which Europe's two main powers agreed to push ahead with sanctions suggested a hardening of the bloc's diplomacy towards Moscow, which said on Wednesday that it no longer considered "business as usual" to be possible with Berlin and Paris.

French President Emmanuel Macron has tried to reduce distrust between Russia and the West since coming to power in 2017, hoping to enlist Russian help in solving the world's most intractable crises.

NAVALNY POISONING

'GET LOST'

Taiwan reacts as China tells Indian media not to call it a country

REUTERS, New Delhi

China was accused by Taiwan of trying to impose censorship in India after its embassy in New Delhi advised journalists to observe the "one-China" principle after newspapers carried advertisements for Taiwan's national day.

China's hackles were raised on Wednesday by advertisements placed in leading Indian newspapers by Taiwan's government to mark the democratic, Chinese-claimed island's national day tomorrow.

The advertisement carried a photograph of President Tsai Ing-wen and hailed India, a fellow democracy, as a natural partner of Taiwan.

China, which claims Taiwan and regards it as a wayward province, made its displeasure evident in an e-mail sent by its embassy on Wednesday night to journalists in India, including Reuters.

"Regarding the so-called forthcoming 'National Day of Taiwan', the Chinese Embassy in India would like to remind our media friends that there is only one China in the world. ... We hope Indian media can stick to Indian government's position on Taiwan question and do not violate the 'One China' principle," the embassy said.

"In particular, Taiwan shall not be referred to as a 'country (nation)' or 'Republic of China' or the leader of China's Taiwan region as 'President', so as not to send the wrong signals to the general public."

Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu scoffed at Beijing's advice to Indian media. "India is the largest democracy on Earth with a vibrant press & freedom-loving people. But it looks like communist #China is hoping to march into the subcontinent by imposing censorship. #Taiwan's Indian friends will have one reply: GET LOST!" he said in a tweet.

New Delhi has no formal diplomatic relations with Taipei, but both sides have close business and cultural ties.

AFGHAN TROOPS WITHDRAWAL

Trump announces 'Christmas' plan

REUTERS, Washington

All US troops in Afghanistan should be "home by Christmas," President Donald Trump said on Wednesday, just hours after his national security adviser said Washington would reduce its forces in Afghanistan to 2,500 by early next year.

Trump and other officials have said the United States will go down to between 4,000 and 5,000 troops in Afghanistan around November. Beyond that, officials have said that a reduction will depend on conditions in Afghanistan.

On Twitter, Trump said: "We should have the small remaining number of our BRAVE Men and Women serving in Afghanistan home by Christmas!"

It was unclear whether Trump was giving an order or verbalizing a long-held aspiration.

Trump has made walking away from "ridiculous endless wars" the cornerstone of his foreign policy, even though thousands of troops remain in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

The Taliban welcomed Trump's comments saying it will help peace talks being held in Doha, Qatar.



A woman stands in front of a destroyed house after a late Wednesday shelling in the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region's main city of Stepanakert yesterday, during the ongoing fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region.

PHOTO: AFP