

World set for 3C warming despite pandemic, pledges

AFP, Paris

Earth remains on course to warm more than 3 degrees Celsius by the century's end despite a dip in greenhouse gas emissions due to the pandemic and pledges to curb pollution, the UN said yesterday.

In its annual assessment of emissions levels, the UN's Environment Programme found that 2020's 7-percent fall in carbon pollution would have "negligible impact" on warming without a broad and rapid shift away from fossil fuels.

The Emissions Gap report analyses the gulf between action required under the Paris climate deal and emissions cuts currently planned by countries.

With just over 1C of warming since pre-industrial times, Earth is already experiencing stronger and more frequent droughts, wildfires and superstorms rendered deadlier by rising seas.

"The year 2020 is on course to be one of the warmest on record, while wildfires, storms and droughts continue to wreak havoc," said UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen.

UNEP said last year that emissions must fall 7.6 percent annually through 2030 in order to keep the more ambitious Paris temperature goal of 1.5C in play.

While 2020 is likely to see emissions fall broadly in line with that figure, it took an unprecedented slowdown in industry, travel and manufacturing to achieve.

Experts fear that a rebound in carbon emissions is nearly inevitable in 2021; last week the UN said that countries planned to increase fossil fuel production by 2 percent each year this decade.

Yesterday's assessment found that

emissions in 2019 -- a year scientists still hope will represent a peak in annual carbon pollution -- stood at 59.1 gigatonnes of CO2 equivalent. This represents a 2.6 percent increase compared with 2018, largely driven by an increase in forest fires, UNEP said.

UNEP said a green recovery from Covid-19 would see emissions hit 44 GT in 2030 compared with a predicted 59 GT,



giving humanity a 66 percent change of holding temperature rises under 2C.

It said reduced travel, industrial activity and electrical generation due to the pandemic would see emissions fall 7 percent compared with last year. But that would only translate to a 0.01C reduction of global warming by 2050.

This would need widespread switches to renewable energy, direct support for zero-emission technology and infrastructure, reducing fossil fuel subsidies, no new coal plants and widespread reforestation, it said.

The report also laid bare the vast inequality when it comes to carbon pollution: the wealthiest 1 percent account for more than twice the combined emissions of the poorest 50 percent.



A woman stands in flooded St. Mark's Square during high tide as the flood barriers known as Mose failed to prevent flooding, in Venice, Italy, yesterday. Residents -- long accustomed to perennial "acqua alta" or high water events -- pulled on their rubber boots once more to deal with flooding that reached a high of 1.37 metres (4.5 feet) above sea level in the afternoon.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Fears of chaotic Brexit rise

Hope for a deal low as Johnson heads for last supper in Brussels

REUTERS, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson arrived in Brussels yesterday for talks with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in a push to secure a trade deal and avoid a turbulent breakup in three weeks.

With growing fears of a chaotic no-deal finale to the five-year Brexit crisis when the United Kingdom finally leaves the European Union's orbit on Dec. 31, the 1800 GMT meeting over dinner is cast as a chance to unlock the stalled trade talks.

A British government source said a deal may not be possible, as did EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier.

The main sticking points have been over fishing rights in British waters, ensuring fair competition for companies on either side, and ways to solve future disputes.

"There is still the chance of an agreement," German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Europe's most powerful leader, told German parliament. "One thing is clear: the integrity of the (EU's)



internal market must be preserved."

"If there are conditions from the British side which we cannot accept, we are prepared to go down a road which is without an exit agreement," she said.

Michael Gove, a senior minister in Johnson's government dealing with Brexit issues, told Times Radio the EU would have to compromise if it wanted a deal.

Britain formally left the EU in January, but has since been in a transition period during which it remains in the EU single market and customs union, meaning that rules on trade, travel and

business have stayed the same.

That all ends on Dec. 31, and if by then there is no agreement to protect around \$1 trillion in annual trade from tariffs and quotas, businesses on both sides would be hit.

Failure to agree a deal would snarl borders, shock financial markets and sow chaos through supply chains across Europe and beyond as the world faces the economic cost of Covid-19.

Johnson portrays Brexit as a chance to give Britain an independent and more agile economy. The EU's biggest powers fear London wants the best of both worlds - preferential access to EU markets but with the advantage to set its own rules.

That, they say, would undermine the post-World War Two project which aimed to bind the ruined nations of Europe - and particularly Germany and France - into a global trading power.

Britain said on Tuesday it had clinched a deal with the EU over how to manage the Ireland-Northern Ireland border, and would now drop clauses in draft domestic legislation that would have breached a Brexit withdrawal agreement signed in January.

Do aliens exist?

Israel's ex-space boss says 'yes'

NDTV ONLINE

Aliens are real and US President Donald Trump knows about it, Israel's former space security chief has made an unprecedented claim in an interview, stressing they're keeping their existence a secret as "humanity is not ready for them".

Haim Eshed, 87, in an interview to Israel's Yediot Aharonot newspaper, spoke extensively about the extraterrestrial life, and also elaborated about "an agreement" between the US government and a "Galactic Federation" of aliens. Eshed has headed Israel's space security programme for nearly three decades, say reports.

There is an agreement between the US government and the aliens as they wish to research and understand "the fabric of the universe", the Jerusalem Post, another daily, quoted him as saying, citing the original interview published in Hebrew. This cooperation apparently includes a secret underground base on Mars.

Donald Trump stopped short of revealing their existence because the Galactic Federation insisted "humanity is not ready yet", Mr Eshed is believed to have told the daily. The aliens insisted humans need to "evolve and reach a stage where we will... understand what space and spaceships are".



US judge orders partial release of Khashoggi murder files

AFP, New York

A New York judge on Tuesday ordered US intelligence agencies to acknowledge they possess a tape recording of the 2018 murder of Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Khashoggi, in a ruling hailed by rights activists.

The judge also instructed the Central Intelligence Agency and Office of the Director of National Intelligence to explain why they are withholding the tape and a CIA report on the gruesome killing.

Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist, was suffocated and dismembered inside the kingdom's Istanbul consulate after going inside to get documents for his marriage to his Turkish fiancée.

The October 2, 2018 murder sparked an international outcry and tarnished the reputation of oil-rich Saudi Arabia and its powerful crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman.

The CIA concluded that the young royal had been responsible for the killing. President Donald Trump later said he protected Prince Salman from Congress, boasting "I saved his ass," according to a book by veteran journalist Bob Woodward.

The judge ordered the US government Tuesday to produce within two weeks a "Vaughn index" describing the documents it is withholding and providing legal justification for their non-disclosure.

NEWS IN BRIEF



'Sabre-toothed tiger' skeleton sells for more than \$84,000

A nearly 40-million-year-old skeleton belonging to what is popularly called a sabre-toothed tiger has sold for \$84,350, a year after its discovery on a US ranch. The skeleton, about 120 centimetres (nearly four feet) long, was snapped up by a private collector in just one minute at an auction in Geneva on Tuesday. The original bones are those of a Hoplophoneus -- not technically cats, they are an extinct genus of the Nimravidae family and once stalked the plains of North America. Such extinct predatory mammals are commonly known as sabre-toothed tigers.

Singapore 'cruise to nowhere' cut short after virus case

A "cruise to nowhere" off Singapore was cut short yesterday after a passenger tested positive for the coronavirus, officials said, a blow to efforts to revive the hard-hit industry. Early yesterday morning the holiday calm was shattered by an announcement the cruise was being cut short after an 83-year-old passenger had tested positive. The vessel had 1,680 guests and 1,148 crew on board, and arrived early morning in the city-state after turning back on day three of a four-day cruise, the Straits Times newspaper reported. The Singapore tourism board added that all on-board leisure activities were halted and passengers were asked to stay in their cabins.

Yoko Ono urges gun control on Lennon's death anniversary

John Lennon's widow Yoko Ono on Tuesday marked the 40th anniversary of the legendary musician's shock murder with a call for gun control. "The death of a loved one is a hollowing experience," tweeted the 87-year-old artist, who still lives in the Dakota building in Manhattan outside of which her husband was shot four decades ago. Ono, who witnessed her husband's murder at close range, also tweeted an image of the former Beatle's shattered and bloodied spectacles, which included the words: "Over 1,436,000 people have been killed by guns in the U.S.A. since John Lennon was shot and killed on December 8, 1980." In her tweet, Ono included a number of hashtags including #guncontrol now and #end gun violence.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

8 percent of Amazon forest lost in 18 yrs

AFP, Sao Paulo

Deforestation in the Amazon destroyed an area bigger than Spain from 2000 to 2018, wiping out eight percent of the world's largest rainforest, according to a study released Tuesday.

The Amazon plays a vital role in curbing climate change, but destruction of the rainforest has only accelerated in recent years, found the study by the Amazon Geo-Referenced Socio-Environmental Information Network (RAISG).

Since the turn of the millennium, 513,016 square kilometers of the rainforest have been lost, according to the updated Amazon atlas produced by the organization, a consortium of groups from across the region.

"The Amazon is far more threatened than it was eight years ago," RAISG said in a statement.

The consortium found that after making gains against deforestation early in the century, the Amazon region has again slipped into a worrying cycle of destruction.

Deforestation hit a high of 49,240 square kilometers of forest loss in 2003 -- a record for this century --



then eased to a low of 17,674 square kilometers in 2010, the report said.

But the destruction has since surged to startling levels.

"Deforestation has accelerated since 2012. The annual area lost tripled from 2015 to 2018," the study found.

"In 2018 alone, 31,269 square kilometers of forest were destroyed across the Amazon region, the worst annual deforestation since 2003."

The destruction is fueled by logging, farming, ranching, mining and infrastructure projects on formerly pristine forest land.

The report comes as world leaders prepare for a virtual summit this weekend aimed at breathing new life into the 2015 Paris climate accord, whose goals on slowing the warming of the planet are currently set to be missed.

Forests such as the Amazon play a vital role in controlling climate

change because they absorb carbon from the atmosphere.

However, when their trees die or burn, they release carbon back into the environment.

The Amazon stretches across eight South American countries -- Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Suriname and Guyana -- and the territory of French Guiana.

Brazil, which holds most of the Amazon -- about 62 percent -- is also responsible for the worst deforestation, the study found: 425,051 square kilometers from 2000 to 2018.

The destruction in Brazil has only accelerated since far-right President Jair Bolsonaro took office in 2019.

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon surged to a 12-year high of 11,088 square kilometers from August 2019 to July 2020, according to government figures.

That was a 9.5-percent increase from the previous year, when deforestation also hit a more than decade-long high.

Deforestation is also surging in Bolivia and Colombia, RAISG found. Bolivia lost 27 percent of its Amazon forest cover to fires from 2000 to 2018, it said.

Hunger beats Covid fears in Philippines

AFP, Manila

Daniel Auminto lost his job and then his home when the coronavirus pandemic sent the Philippines into lockdown. Now he and his family live on the street, relying on food handouts to survive.

Charities are struggling to meet the ever-growing demand for food as millions of families go hungry across the country.

"I've never seen hunger at this level before," said Jomar Fleras, executive director of Rise Against Hunger in the Philippines, which works with more than 40 partners to feed the poor.

"If you go out there everybody will tell you that they're more afraid of dying from hunger than dying from Covid. They don't care about Covid anymore."

Nearly one-third of families -- or 7.6 million households -- did not have enough food to eat at least once in the previous three months, according to pollster Social Weather Stations September survey.

Among them were 2.2 million families experiencing "severe hunger"



-- the highest ever.

The numbers have been going up since May, two months after the country went into a severe lockdown -- reversing a downward trend since 2012.

Virus curbs have been eased in recent months to allow more businesses to operate as the government seeks to revive the economy, which is expected to shrink up to 9.5 percent this year.

Auminto, 41, spent years sleeping on the streets and eking out a meagre living by selling trash for recycling. His fortunes changed in 2019 when he found stable work as a building painter.

That gave him enough money to rent a room in Manila, which he shared with his wife and their two-year-old daughter,

buy food and even save a little towards their dream of opening a small store.

Then Covid-19 hit.

"We lost our home, my job. We even lost our clothes which were stolen from us," said Auminto as he sat in a park where the family sleeps on a flattened cardboard box at night.

Every day they join long queues of mostly homeless people to receive a free meal from an outdoor food pantry.

Hunger was already a major problem in the Philippines before the pandemic struck. About 59 million people were "moderately or severely food insecure" between 2017 and 2019 -- the highest in Southeast Asia -- the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization said in a report.

The impact of the virus on hunger has been exacerbated by a series of typhoons which destroyed tens of thousands of homes.

Auminto said it was "painful" to have lost everything and be back on the street where he says the police treat them "like animals". "They should understand our situation, not treat us like pigs," he said. "We're already living like pigs."

UN: Record 80m displaced globally

AFP, Geneva

Despite calls for ceasefires and compassion amid the Covid-19 pandemic, violence and persecution have continued to force people from their homes, with record numbers now displaced, the UN said yesterday.

By the end of 2019, 79.5 million people were living uprooted and displaced, including nearly 30 million refugees -- more than one percent of the world's population. And the UN refugee agency said preliminary figures showed more people had been forced to flee in 2020, pushing the number past 80 million.

"We are now surpassing another bleak milestone that will continue to grow unless world leaders stop wars," UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi said in a statement.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called in March for a global ceasefire while the world fights the pandemic, which has now killed more than 1.5 million people. But while some factions heeded the call, UNHCR said preliminary figures through the first half of 2020 showed that violence in Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Somalia and Yemen drove fresh displacement.

Africa's central Sahel region also saw significant new displacement due to brutal violence, including rape and executions, UNHCR said.

The UN agency pointed out that instead of calming conflict, the coronavirus crisis had "disrupted every aspect of human life and severely worsened existing challenges for the forcibly displaced and stateless".