

Countries must declare 'climate emergency'

Says UN chief as world leaders to present 'ambitious' goals at global climate summit

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World leaders should declare states of "climate emergency" in their countries to spur action to avoid catastrophic global warming, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in opening remarks to a climate summit yesterday.

More than 70 world leaders are due to address the one-day virtual gathering aimed at building momentum for much steeper cuts in planet-warming emissions on the fifth anniversary of the 2015 Paris climate accord.

"Can anybody still deny that we are facing a dramatic emergency?" Guterres said via video. "That is why today, I call on all leaders worldwide to declare a State of Climate Emergency in their countries until carbon neutrality is reached."

Guterres said that economic recovery packages launched in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic represented an opportunity to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon future - but warned this was not happening fast enough.

"So far, the members of the G20 are spending 50% more in their stimulus and rescue packages on sectors linked to fossil

fuel production and consumption, than on low-carbon energy," Guterres said.

"This is unacceptable. The trillions of dollars needed for Covid recovery is money that we are borrowing from future generations," he said. "We cannot use these resources to lock in policies that burden future generations with a mountain of debt on a broken planet."

China's President Xi Jinping and France's Emmanuel Macron are among the heads of state taking part, with speaking slots handed to leaders of countries that submitted the most ambitious plans.

But major economies including Australia, Brazil and South Africa are absent.

The 2015 Paris climate accord saw signatories commit to take action to limit temperature rises to "well below" 2.0 Celsius above pre-industrial levels and try to limit them to 1.5C.

More than 110 countries have committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

But the UN warned this week that under current commitments, the Earth is still on course for a "catastrophic temperature rise" of more than 3.0C this century.



People row their boats in the waters of Dal Lake with the backdrop of snow-covered mountains in Srinagar, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

GLOBAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Developing world must have a far stronger voice: Guterres

AFP, Oslo

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Friday urged a more coherent response to global crises, saying a "fragmented and chaotic" coronavirus response gave renewed urgency to his belief the Security Council needs reform.

"Unfortunately, governments have not mounted a joint response to this global threat... the response has been fragmented and chaotic, with countries, regions and even cities competing against each other for essential supplies and frontline workers," said Guterres.

"We cannot let the same thing happen for access to new Covid-19 vaccines, which must be a global public good."

The UN head said one means of achieving a more effective multilateral response was reforming the composition of and voting rights within the Security Council.

Addressing the Nobel Peace Prize Forum 2020: International Cooperation after Covid-19, Guterres said such a move would address "the inequalities at the foundations of the present global power relations" and benefit emerging nations.

"The nations that came out on top more than seven decades ago have refused to contemplate the necessary reforms. The composition and voting rights in the United Nations Security Council and the boards of the Bretton Woods (financial) system are a case in point," said Guterres.

"Many African countries did not even exist as independent states 75 years ago. They deserve their rightful place at the global table. The developing world more broadly must have a far stronger voice in global decision-making," Guterres concluded.

Talks near make-or-break moment

UK puts navy on standby to protect fishing as 'no-deal' Brexit looming

AFP, London

Britain yesterday readied armed Royal Navy ships to patrol its fishing waters if tempers flare after a "no-deal" Brexit as a make-or-break deadline approached for talks with the European Union.

Four 80-metre (260-feet) vessels have been placed on standby to guard British waters from EU trawlers in case the two sides decide to abandon efforts to secure a free-trade agreement today.

The development is part of increased contingency planning on both sides of the Channel, and evokes memories of the "Cod Wars" with Iceland over fishing rights in the North Atlantic in the 1960s and 70s.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said it is "very, very likely" the talks will fail, and Britain will revert to World Trade Organization (WTO) terms with its largest single trading partner.

European leaders have also been told the chances of a deal are slim with

both sides at loggerheads over rules to govern fair competition and fishing rights in British territorial waters.

Both sides have promised a decision today as to whether there is still time to close the gap in expectations before Britain leaves the EU single market at the end of the year.



Deal or no deal, Britain will leave the EU single market and customs union on the evening of December 31, more than four years after a landmark referendum on membership of the bloc.

Hardline Brexit-supporting Conservative MPs have sought assurances from Johnson that the navy should be deployed to protect British waters.

Lawmaker Daniel Kawczynski said

it would help "prevent illegal French fishing" when EU access ends.

Former Tory party chairman Chris Patten voiced concerns about a "runaway train of English exceptionalism" after headlines backing the military threat in the Daily Mail -- "We'll send in gunboats" -- and Daily Express -- "Gunships to guard our fish".

"Heaven knows where it is going to take us in the end," he said, calling Johnson, whose Brexit stance has boosted support for Scottish independence and distanced Northern Irish allies, "an English nationalist".

The Ministry of Defence confirmed it has conducted "extensive planning and preparation" for a range of post-Brexit scenarios from January 1, and has 14,000 personnel on standby to help with the transition.

WTO terms would mean tariffs and quotas, driving up prices for businesses and consumers, and the re-introduction of border checks for the first time in decades.



Demonstrators celebrate with green headscarves - the symbol of abortion rights activists - outside the Argentine Congress in Buenos Aires on Friday, after legislators passed a bill to legalize abortion.

PHOTO: AFP

Indian farmers to intensify protests defying PM's call

AGENCIES

Thousands of Indian farmers will take out a tractor rally to block the Delhi-Jaipur highway today, demonstrators protesting the centre's new agricultural laws said yesterday, vowing to intensify their agitation despite a fresh appeal from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Protesters will also hold a nationwide demonstration at all district offices tomorrow and hold a hunger strike from 8 am to 5 pm, they said.

Modi yesterday tried to assure farmers that reforms in the agrarian sector were aimed at helping them as thousands of farmers continued protests against three new laws to overhaul procurement and sale of produce.

"Reforms will help draw investment in agriculture and benefit farmers," he said at the annual meeting of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry in New Delhi.

"The aim of the all government reforms is to make farmers' prosperous," he said adding that private sector must help improve the country's agriculture sector.

But protesting farmers in northern states fear the new legislation will eventually dismantle India's regulated markets and stop the government from buying wheat and rice at guaranteed prices, leaving them at the mercy of private buyers.

At least 30 farmer unions are actively protesting against the new laws. Talks between leaders of the farmers' unions and government officials have failed to break the deadlock with the farmers demanding the complete rollback of the reforms. Farmer unions have said the new laws were introduced without consultation.

Last weekend, thousands of members of the Indian diaspora held rallies in London against the new laws while over 15 Indian opposition parties supported the protest.

One civilian killed in Kabul rocket attack

AFP, Kabul

A series of rockets struck Kabul yesterday, killing one person and wounding two, officials said, the second such attack to rock the Afghan capital in less than a month.

Violence has surged across Afghanistan in recent months despite the Taliban and the government engaging in peace talks since September 12 in Qatar.

"This morning, 10 rockets were fired from the Labe Jar neighbourhood of Kabul," interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian told reporters.

He said three rockets landed near Kabul airport and seven in residential areas, leaving one civilian dead and two wounded.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack so far.

EU flexes muscle against tech giants

AFP, Brussels

US tech giants such as Facebook and Google face unprecedented regulation in Europe, as the EU prepares to unveil landmark proposals that could change the face of life online.

The EU wants the Digital Services Act and its accompanying Digital Markets Act to set strict conditions for internet giants to do business in the bloc's 27 countries.

The biggest tech firms will be designated internet "gatekeepers", subject to specific regulation, in a proposal that will be unveiled by EU vice president Margrethe Vestager and commissioner Thierry Breton on Tuesday.

Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon and maybe a few others will almost certainly be slapped with the designation, which could be compared to big banks that are deemed "too big to fail" and subject to special oversight.

"We've come to a point where the power of digital businesses -- especially the biggest gatekeepers -- threaten our freedoms, our opportunities, even our democracy," said Vestager.

"So for the world's biggest gatekeepers, things are going to have

to change. They are going to have to take more responsibility."

France and the Netherlands have already come out in favour of Europe having all the tools it needs to rein in the gatekeepers, including the power to break them up.

Big Tech, unsurprisingly, is asking for moderation and wants companies to be judged not simply by their size.



For the past decade the EU has taken the lead worldwide in trying to grapple with the insurmountable power of big tech, slapping billions in antitrust fines against Google, but critics believe the method has done little to change its behaviour.

In the meantime, US authorities have taken up the call and are themselves reassessing the role of big tech, with several major antitrust cases putting Google under the gun in addition to a legal bid to strip Facebook of its Instagram and Whatsapp products.

The details of the proposal have

been carefully guarded by the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, even though a few details have leaked.

What is certain is that gatekeepers will face built-for-purpose dos and don'ts that may include a ban on companies prioritising their own services on their platforms or chasing away rivals by exploiting data inaccessible to others.

The Digital Services Act is expected to give the commission sharper teeth in pursuing social media platforms when they allow illegal content online, with the power to inflict fines, possibly through a newly created EU authority, instead of the voluntary system that exists now.

Tech giants will be especially vigilant to maintain their exemption from liability when it comes to illegal content on their platforms, a status they say preserves free speech since it prevents over-enforcement and creates fertile ground for the innovation that triggered the internet revolution.

The proposal may not go as far as reversing that exemption, but it will clearly increase the platform's responsibility by setting out clear rules and incentives for ad transparency and online information.



Pro-democracy media mogul Jimmy Lai Chee-ying, founder of Apple Daily, walks to a prison van to head to court, after being charged under the national security law, in Hong Kong, China, yesterday. The 73-year-old Lai struggled to walk as he was led to court in handcuffs and metal chain by two masked police officers.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Car hits multiple protesters in New York, causing injuries

A motorist struck about half a dozen people taking part in a protest in New York City on Friday, causing injuries but no deaths, police and eyewitnesses said. A spokesman for the New York Police Department told AFP that the vehicle hit "multiple" people in Manhattan's Murray Hill area at 4:08 pm (21:08 GMT). The spokesman added that the driver, a woman, had stayed at the scene and was in custody. The spokesman said it was "too early to tell" whether it was intentional or a traffic accident, and it is not yet known whether the driver will face charges. The demonstrators were protesting against the detention of immigrants by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.

US moves forward with \$1b Moroccan arms deal

President Donald Trump's administration moved forward with \$1 billion in sales of drones and precision-guided weapons to Morocco on Friday, sending a notice to Congress about the potential deals, according to sources familiar with the notification. The deal includes four MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones made by privately-held General Atomics, and Hellfire, Paveway and JDAM precision-guided munitions made by Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and Boeing, the sources said. News of the deal came as the White House announced an agreement brokered with US help for Morocco to normalize relations with Israel. Earlier this year the US offered stealthy F-35 jet fighters to the United Arab Emirates in a side deal to the US-brokered agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel to normalize relations.

Iran executes dissident journo



Iran has executed a once-exiled journalist over his online work that helped inspire nationwide economic protests in 2017, authorities have said. Iranian state media said Ruhollah Zam was hanged early on Saturday morning. In June, a court sentenced Zam to death, saying he had been convicted of "corruption on Earth" -- a charge often used in cases involving espionage or attempts to overthrow Iran's government. Iranian officials have accused the United States as well as Tehran's regional rival Saudi Arabia and government opponents living in exile of stoking the unrest, which began in late 2017 as regional protests over economic hardship spread nationwide. Zam, who was captured in 2019 after years in exile, has been accused of being in direct contact with foreign agents.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS