

## Comparative photos of Mount Everest 'confirm ice loss'

BBC ONLINE

Photos taken by a mountaineer on Everest from the same spot where similar pictures were taken in 1921 have revealed an "alarming" ice loss.

The Asia Society (AS) arranged for the pictures to be taken in exactly the same place where British climber George Mallory took photos in 1921.

"The photographs reveal a startling truth: the ice of the Himalaya is disappearing," an AS statement said.

"They reveal an alarming loss in ice mass over an 89-year period."

**SHRUNKEN AND WITHERED**

The photos taken by Mallory from the north face of Everest reveal a powerful, white, S-shaped sweep of ice. The 1921 image is in the foreground. Experts say that the evidence is incontrovertible.

Images taken from the same spot in 2010 by mountaineer David Breashears show that the main Rongbuk Glacier is shrunken and withered.

"Returning to the exact same vantage points, Breashears has meticulously recreated their shots, pixel for pixel," the AS statement said.

"The photographs illustrate the severity of the loss of ice mass among the glaciers surrounding Mount Everest."

The AS says that the findings are "vitaly important" because the Himalaya is home to the world's largest sub-polar ice reserves.

"The melt waters of these high altitude gla-

ciers supply crucial seasonal flows to the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Salween, Irrawaddy, Mekong, Yangtze and Yellow rivers, which hundreds of millions of people downstream depend on for their livelihoods," the statement said.

"If the present rate of melting continues, many of these glaciers will be severely diminished by the middle of this century."

Mr Breashears retraced the steps of the 1921 British Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition Team, using photos taken then by surveyor and photographer Maj Edward Wheeler and amateur photographer George Mallory, who later died attempting to reach the Everest summit in 1924.

"The melt rate in this region of central and eastern Himalaya is extreme and is devastating," Mr Breashears told an AS meeting in New York on Wednesday.

He has not only followed in the footsteps of Mallory but also those of Italian photographer Vittorio Sella, whose work spanned the 19th and 20th Centuries.

The result is a then-and-now series of photographs from Tibet, Nepal and near K2 in Pakistan—all of which show glaciers in retreat.

"If this isn't evidence of the glaciers in serious decline, I don't know what is," Mr Breashears told the AFP news agency.

The issue of melting glaciers in the Himalaya is controversial following a recent claim in a UN report by an Indian glaciologist - who later said that he had been misquoted - that they could all disappear by 2035.



Experts say comparing the 1921 photo (left) with the photo of 2010 proves that the ice mass is disappearing.

PHOTO: AFP

## US urges quick end to Thai state of emergency

AFP, Bangkok

A senior US envoy urged Thailand yesterday to lift a state of emergency imposed in parts of the country since April in response to mass street protests "as soon as possible".

William Burns, the State Department's number three, questioned whether the country could resolve its political problems while freedom of expression is restricted.

But, in remarks to reporters and university students, he stressed Thailand should find its own way out of the crisis, reiterating US calls for a peaceful, democratic solution and "genuine reconciliation and tolerance."

Ninety people, mostly civilians, were killed and nearly 1,900 were injured in violence sparked by the anti-government Red Shirts' two-month-long rally, which ended with a bloody army crackdown in May.

The emergency powers -- enabling authorities to detain suspects without charge for up to 30 days and close anti-government media -- were extended last week for three more months in Bangkok and 18 other provinces.

Burns questioned how the country could "build confidence in its economy" with violence on the streets, or solve its political rifts if "rights are restricted".

He said that to retain these powers indefinitely was "not healthy for a democratic system".

"Clearly the US hopes that the state of emergency ... can be lifted as soon as possible," he said.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has set out a five-point reconciliation plan, which the US Congress has said should form the basis of efforts by all parties in Thailand to resolve their differences.

## Russia swelters amid drownings and drought

AFP, Moscow

Russians sweltered yesterday in the hottest weather since the Stalin era as droughts caused crop devastation across the country and hundreds drowned in bathing accidents often influenced by alcohol.

Yesterday was expected to break a record in Moscow, topping 33 degrees Celsius, the highest temperature that day since 1938, according to the state weather centre.

At the weekend, the temperature was forecast by the state weather centre to hit 37 degrees in central Russia.

An emergency drought situation has been declared in 19 of Russia's 83 regions with crops dying on an estimated 9.6 million hectares of fields.

The drought-struck areas were suffering "colossal destruction," Agriculture Minister Yelena Skrynnik said Tuesday at a meeting with President Dmitry Medvedev.

The coldest place on earth in winter, Oymyakon in the Sakha region, was forecast to

swelter at 32 degrees centigrade yesterday, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported.

In Moscow, people paddled in fountains to escape the heat and bought record amounts of ice cream.

"Sales of fruit lollies have gone up 10 times," the general director of the Union of Ice Cream Makers, Valery Elkhov, told the RIA Novosti news agency, with Muscovites gobbling 250 tons of ice cream per day.

Commuters in Moscow metro sizzled with temperatures inside some stations topping 29 degrees.

The Kremlin cancelled a weekly ceremonial performance by mounted troops from the presidential regiment, due to fears that the troops and horses would suffer in the heat.

Customers have flocked to buy air conditioners and fans to beat the heat in airless concrete office blocks and apartment buildings.

"The yearly stock of air conditioning systems and

fans has already sold out, and we had to order extra," said Nadezhda Kiselyova, a spokeswoman for electronics chain M-Video.

"Over the past four weeks of unusual heat, the sales have been 10 times higher than last year's figures."

Gennady Onishchenko, the head of the state health and safety watchdog, called for Russians to take longer lunchbreaks to evade the midday sun.

"Given the heat, work could be carried out earlier or later while during the hottest hours of the day we can institute a prolonged pause," Onishchenko was quoted by state mouthpiece Rossiyskaya Gazeta as saying on Tuesday.

July could be a record-breaking month for Moscow, with the average temperature more than six degrees Celsius above the norm so far, according to the state weather centre.

The last records were set in 1972 when temperatures soared over 30 degrees for 13 days.

## ICC order to free Congo warlord

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

The International Criminal Court has ordered the release of a Congo militia leader from its custody, saying it had no grounds for keeping him in The Hague was put on hold.

The court halted the trial of Thomas Lubanga, who had pleaded not guilty to charges of recruiting child soldiers, last week, saying that the prosecutor had refused to identify a key witness.

"An accused cannot be held in preventative custody on a speculative basis, namely that at some stage in the future the proceedings may be resurrected," the court said on Thursday.

Disclosure of material by the prosecution has been an issue in the Lubanga case for years, and disputes over evidence also delayed the start of the trial.

Lubanga is accused of enlisting and con-

scripting children aged under 15 for his Union of Congolese Patriots, to kill members of a rival tribe in the 1998-2003 war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

He has pleaded not guilty and described himself as a politician, not a warlord.

The court said that the release order would not be implemented immediately because an appeal can be filed within five days. The prosecution said it would appeal.

"We are confident that the protective measures required will be implemented very soon, and that the Appeals Chamber will clarify the legal issues at hand," the Office of the Prosecutor said in a statement.

Chances that Lubanga will be released in the short term are considered small because the court built a number of conditions into its ruling.



PHOTO: AFP

Bodies are strewn outside the Jameh mosque in the southeastern Iranian city of Zahedan. The attack came as people celebrated the birthday of Imam Hussein, grandson of Prophet Mohammed (SM), a day also set apart each year to honour the Revolutionary Guards.

## 27 killed in Iran Shiite mosque attack

AFP, Tehran

Iran was yesterday probing twin suicide bombings in a crowded Shiite mosque which killed 27 people and wounded hundreds in attacks claimed by a Sunni rebel group weeks after its leader was hanged.

Thursday's bombings, which left members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards among the dead and wounded, struck the Jamia mosque in Zahedan, a southeastern city ravaged by a fierce Sunni insurgency for almost a decade.

The bombers detonated their payloads as worshippers were celebrating the birthday of Imam Hussein, grandson of the Muslim Prophet Mohammed, on a day also annually observed as the Guards' Day.

The attack "has left 27 people martyred and 270 wounded," Health Minister Marziah Vahid Dastjerdi told the Mehr news agency, adding that 11 of the wounded were in critical conditions.

Deputy Interior Minister Ali Abdollahi said some of the dead and wounded included members of the Guards.

Ali Mohammad Azad, the governor general of Sistan-Baluchestan, the province of which Zahedan is the capital, said Iran was "investigating who was behind the attack" which was claimed by Rigi's group, Jundallah (Soldiers of God).

Jundallah's veteran leader Abdolmalek Rigi was hanged on June 20 after Iranian warplanes intercepted a flight from the United Arab Emirates to Kyrgyzstan and security forces seized him.

Zahedan has been repeatedly hit by attacks blamed on Jundallah, which has been fighting for nearly a decade to secure rights for ethnic Sunni Baluchis who form a significant proportion of the population in the province.

The group said Thursday's bombings were carried out by two of its members, Abdulbasit Rigi and Mohammad Rigi.

"In the first phase of the operation Abdulbasit Rigi blew himself up among tens of Guards," the group said in a statement.

"After intelligence, security service and military personnel surrounded the area, Mohammad Rigi blew himself up, sending to hell tens of others."

"This operation is in response to the non-stop atrocities in Baluchestan by the regime, which thought that through the martyrdom of Abdolmalek (Rigi) the fight will end," the statement added.

Zahedan MP Hossein Ali Shahriari told the Fars news agency that one of the bombers was a man dressed as a woman.

Tehran says the group receives backings from US and British intelligence services in its fight against Iran.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has condemned the bombings and called "for the perpetrators of this horrific attack to be held accountable for their actions."

The mosque at the time was crowded with worshippers, among them members of the Revolutionary Guards, an elite force formed shortly after the 1979 revolution to defend the purity of the country's Islamic system.

## Syria slammed on human rights

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

On the tenth anniversary of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's rise to power, a prominent human rights group has accused him of doing too little to change his country's long-running history of government oppression and abuse.

While Assad has used the US invasion of Iraq and the "chaos" surrounding his country in the Middle East to justify his tight control over the limited freedom of expression allowed in Syria, Human Rights Watch (HRW) says that "a review of Syria's record shows a consistent policy of repressing dissent regardless of international or regional developments".

Assad's state security forces have jailed at least 92 human rights activists and 25 bloggers and journalists in the past 10 years, according to a report released by the organisation yesterday.

## Australia PM 'set to call election'

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Australia's prime minister is poised to call a general election for the end of August, local media has reported.

According to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Julia Gillard will make the announcement today, three weeks after taking over from her predecessor Kevin Rudd.

"Labour sources have told the ABC Ms Gillard is expected to visit Governor-General Quentin Bryce in Canberra tomorrow morning to set an August 28 election date," the broadcaster reported on its website yesterday.

It added the prime minister will ask Bryce to dissolve parliament and issue writs that call for an election.

Gillard promised elections this year after taking over from Rudd, who was toppled less than three years into his first term as leader after support for him in the ruling Labour Party collapsed.

Her appointment was also reportedly executed to avoid electoral defeat, with opinion polls then showing that Labour was headed for only one term in power.

An election announcement will formally begin a six-week campaign, that has unofficially been under way since Gillard deposed Rudd on June 24.

## Lebanon arrests 3rd 'telecom spy'

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon has arrested a third person in a widening probe into a suspected network of Israeli spies employed in the country's telecom sector, a source close to the investigation said yesterday.

"The arrest was made late last night and the suspect is a former employee in Lebanon's telecommunications sector," the source told AFP.

He could not say whether the suspect was linked to two telecom employees arrested in the past month, who he said were suspected of being accomplices at the company Alfa, one of Lebanon's two mobile service providers. The high-profile arrest of Charbel Azzi, a technician at Alfa, last month sparked government concern over the security of Lebanon's telecom sector.

Azzi was charged on Tuesday with "entering enemy territory, collaborating with Israel and providing it with information." He faces the death penalty if convicted.

Tarek al-Rabaa, also an employee at Alfa, was arrested this week and is suspected of collaborating with Azzi, the source told AFP on Thursday.

## Zephyr solar plane flies 7 days non-stop

BBC ONLINE

The UK-built Zephyr solar-powered plane has smashed the endurance record for an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

The craft took off from the US Army's Yuma Proving Ground in Arizona at 1440 BST (0640 local time) last Friday and is still in the air.

Its non-stop operation, day and night, means it has now gone five times longer than the official mark recognised by the world air sports federation.

The plane has been developed by the defence and research company QinetiQ. Its project manager, Jon Saltmarsh, said Zephyr would be brought down once it had flown non-stop for a fortnight. "Zephyr is basically the first 'eternal aircraft'," he told BBC News.

The UAV has been under development for a number of years at QinetiQ.

Solar-powered high-altitude long-endurance (Hale) UAVs are expected to have a wide range of applications in the future.

The military will want to use them as reconnaissance and communications platforms. Civilian and scientific programmes will equip them with small payloads for Earth observation duties.

Their solar cells drive propellers during the day and top up their batteries to maintain the craft through the dark hours of night. An autopilot keeps them circling over the same spot.

The Zephyr flight is the second event of note this year in solar-powered aviation. Last month, Andre Borschberg became the first person to pilot a manned solar plane through the night.

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