

# 2013 marked by record weather extremes: WMO

AFP, Geneva

Sea levels this year posted a record high, making low-lying coastal populations ever more vulnerable to extreme weatherlike super-storm Haiyan, the UN said yesterday.

In an interim report on the planet's climate, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) also estimated that 2013 was on course to be one of the hottest since records began.

"Global sea level reached a new record high during March 2013," the WMO said in its report. At 3.2 mm per year, the current average rise is double the 20th-century trend of 1.6 millimetres per year, it said.

The WMO said that in 2012, concentrations of greenhouse gases hit a new high of 393.1 parts per million, a rise of 2.2 parts per million over the previous year and an increase of 41 percent since the start of the Industrial Revolution in 1750.

Emissions of greenhouse gases, chiefly carbon dioxide, are mainly caused by fossil-fuel burning to power industry, transport and farming. Experts warn that unless more is done to rein them in emissions, the world faces potentially devastating effects.

In addition to megastorms, expect impacts include species extinctions, water shortages, heatwaves or drought, crop die-offs, loss of land to the rising seas as glaciers and polar ice melt, and spreading disease.

The WMO report was released as negotiators met in Warsaw for a new round of talks on a UN climate accord.

## Iran sanctions would risk war: White House

AFP, Washington

The White House warned US lawmakers Tuesday that tightening sanctions on Iran could box America into a "march to war" and derail a diplomatic push to limit Tehran's atomic program.

The warning marked a significant toughening of President Barack Obama's stance towards Congress as he prepares to resume high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with Iran later this month.

"The American people do not want a march to war," White House spokesman Jay Carney told reporters.

Fresh from the talks, Secretary of State John Kerry were to head to Capitol Hill yesterday to make the case for continued diplomacy.

Key senators from both parties, some responding to Israel's denunciation of the proposed agreement, are proposing stiffer sanctions or may curtail Obama's power to ease current measures, which have crippled the Iranian economy.

But the White House warned that new sanctions could scupper the diplomatic process and leave little option but the use of military force against Tehran's nuclear program.

Carney said Americans "justifiably and understandably prefer a peaceful solution that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and this agreement, if it's achieved, has the potential to do that."

"The alternative is military action," Carney said.

Officials have warned further action at this stage by Congress would strengthen hardliners in Iran opposed to dialogue between new Iranian President Hassan Rohani's envoys and Washington.

## POLL DELAY Maldives ejected from C'wealth disciplinary panel

AFP, Male

The Commonwealth yesterday expelled the Maldives from its disciplinary panel which has begun investigating the political chaos in the country after repeated court interventions that scuttled elections, a diplomat said.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), which can recommend the expulsion of countries from the 53-member bloc, ejected the Indian Ocean islands during a meeting in the Sri Lankan capital yesterday.

"As long as Maldives remains on the agenda of CMAG, it can't be a member of this panel," the diplomat said after the Commonwealth issued a statement confirming that the Maldives was discussed on Wednesday.

The country faces a constitutional crisis after three presidential elections were cancelled, with Western and Indian diplomats increasingly vocal in their criticism of the regime of incumbent Mohamed Waheed.



Pro-government activists block a train carrying Britain's Channel 4 television crew who made an award-winning documentary on alleged warcrimes in Sri Lanka, on the railway tracks at the north-central town of Anuradhapura, yesterday. The television crew are in Sri Lanka ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2013 which is being boycotted by the prime ministers of India, Canada and Mauritius over alleged rights abuses by Sri Lanka.

PHOTO: AFP

## PROPOSED 20,000 SETTLER HOMES Israel PM backtracks on new settlements

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu late Tuesday cancelled plans to build 20,000 new settler homes in the West Bank, hours after their announcement sparked US and Palestinian criticism.

Netanyahu ordered Israeli Housing Minister Uri Ariel "to reconsider all of the steps for evaluating planning potential (for the settler homes) that he distributed without any advance coordination," a statement from Netanyahu's office said.

The prime minister's order came after Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas warned the construction plans, announced earlier Tuesday by Ariel's ministry, would prompt him to declare the peace process over if they went ahead.

Washington expressed "deep concern" at the move, which threatened to add sharply to the 550,000 Israeli settlers already living in the occupied West Bank, including annexed Arab east Jerusalem.



Netanyahu made it clear the housing ministry's call for tenders for the homes threatened to distract from his efforts to convince world powers to not sign a deal with Iran, over its nuclear programme, he considered inadequate.

"At this time, the attention of the international community must not be diverted from the main effort—preventing Iran from receiving an agreement that will allow it to continue its military nuclear program," Netanyahu said, according to the statement.

Iran and the world powers it is negotiating with over its nuclear programme came close last weekend to agreeing a preliminary accord opening the way to a more comprehensive pact.

But differences prevented a breakthrough, and the two sides are scheduled to meet again in Geneva on November 20.

Netanyahu has furiously denounced the agreement being worked on as "dangerous" claiming it is entirely in Iran's favour.

## Iraq attacks kill 23 ahead of Ashura

AFP, Baghdad

Violence across Iraq, including bombings against Shias, killed 23 people yesterday as worshippers massed in a shrine city on the eve of major commemoration rituals often targeted by militants.

The bloodshed was the latest in a months-long surge in unrest that has forced Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to appeal for Washington's help in combatting militancy as Iraqi action has failed to stem the unrelenting wave of attacks.

Bombings yesterday mostly struck north and west of Baghdad, targeting Shia Muslims and members of the security forces.

Millions of Shias from Iraq and around the world mark Ashura, which this year climaxes on Thursday.

## Anger turns deadly in Philippines

AFP, Tacloban

Gunfire forced the cancellation of a mass burial in the typhoon-ravaged Philippines yesterday as authorities struggled to dispose of the dead, while anger among survivors at the slow trickle of aid turned deadly.

Thousands of people jostled and begged for seats on scarce flights out of the ruined city of Tacloban, where putrefying corpses compounded a growing health menace after one of the strongest storms on record killed thousands.

Attempts to bury some of the victims of Super Typhoon Haiyan suffered a setback when gunshots halted a convoy travelling towards a communal grave.

Adding to the grim body count, news emerged that eight people were crushed to death Tuesday when a huge crowd of survivors from the typhoon rushed a government rice store.

Five days after Haiyan ripped apart entire coastal communities, the situation in Leyte's provincial capital Tacloban was becoming ever more dire with essential supplies low and increasingly desperate survivors clamouring to leave.

"Everyone is panicking," Captain Emily Chang, a navy doctor, told AFP.

The United Nations estimates 10,000 people may have died in Tacloban alone, where five-metre (16-foot) waves flattened nearly everything in their path.

However, Philippine President Benigno Aquino said late Tuesday he believed that number was "too much", adding that 2,500 "is the figure we're working on", despite the rapidly climbing toll and the bodies still littering the streets of Tacloban.

## 'E-cigarettes could save millions'

AFP, London

Switching to e-cigarettes could save millions of smokers' lives, a conference on the increasingly popular devices heard Tuesday, though some experts warned more research on the health effects is needed.

The merits of e-cigarettes were thrashed out at a one-day gathering of some 250 scientists, policymakers, industry figures and enthusiasts at the Royal Society in London.

The use of electronic cigarettes—battery-powered devices that simulate smoking by heating and vaporising a liquid solution containing nicotine—has grown rapidly, with tobacco manufacturers jumping on the trend.

Sales have doubled annually for the last four years and there are an estimated seven million users across Europe, organisers said.

European lawmakers in October threw out a bid to curb sales of e-



cigarettes by classifying them as medicinal products.

"Cigarettes are killing 5.4 million people per year in the world," said Robert West, a health psychology professor and the director of tobacco studies at Cancer Research UK.

He told delegates switching to e-cigarettes could save millions of lives, but the debate was about "whether that goal can be realised and how best to do it".

The professor said almost a third of attempts to quit smoking involved e-cigarettes.

Though they are estimated to be between 95 and 99 percent safer than smoking tobacco cigarettes, some countries have banned them and attendees debated the thorny issue of whether regulation—possibly under medicinal rules—should be brought in.

They also discussed their potential as a tool to quit smoking or whether they might become a gateway for those who

## Afghan opium cultivation hits record high Says United Nations

AFP, Kabul

Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan reached a record high in 2013 as farmers seek to "insure" themselves before Nato forces withdraw next year, the United Nations said yesterday.

The area planted with poppy rose by 36 percent in 2013, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in its annual report on Afghanistan, while production of opium, the main ingredient in heroin, jumped almost 50 percent compared with last year.

There are fears that the departure of most of the US-led Nato troops, who currently number around 75,000, by the end of 2014 will throw the war-torn nation into chaos.

Afghan officials blamed insecurity as the main factor behind the surge, which has



continued for a third straight year.

"More than half of the opium cultivation takes place in Helmand," Din Mohammad, the acting Afghan counter-narcotics minister, told a news conference.

Helmand in the south is one of the most troubled regions in Afghanistan where the Taliban are most active. Poppy farmers are taxed by the Taliban, who use the cash to help fund their insurgency.

The report said that in 2013 the area under opium poppy cultivation rose to 209,000 hectares from the previous year's total of 154,000 -- higher than the previous peak of 193,000 hectares in 2007.

Despite the presence of tens of thousands of foreign troops since a US-led invasion ousted the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan produces about 90 percent of the world's

# Always on the wrong side of history

DAWN ONLINE

The Jamaat-e-Islami never misses an opportunity to be on the wrong side of history. Since its inception, it has acted against the very interests of the people it pretends to serve.

Last week Syed Munawar Hassan, who heads Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), declared the former head of the Pakistani Taliban, Hakeemullah Mehsud, a martyr. Mehsud reportedly died of a missile fired from an unmanned drone in North Waziristan. The Pakistan Army took serious offense to the statement by Hassan and found it insulting to the memory of thousands of soldiers who have died fighting militants.

The Jamaat's long history of being on the wrong side of history started in 1947 when it opposed an independent homeland for the Muslims of South Asia. In 1971, it sided with the military in its campaign against the populist freedom struggle in Bangladesh. Later in 1985, the Jamaat sided with yet another military dictator, General Ziaul Haq, and assisted him in subverting democracy and radicalising the youth to fuel the war against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.

Today, the Jamaat has come in support of the militants who have declared war on Pakistan's establishment and its civil society. For these reasons, and despite its organisational structure, the Jamaat has failed to win over the imagination of the electorate in either Pakistan or Bangladesh.

It had an opportunity to lay the blame on Hassan and absolve itself of any direct responsibility. However, the party, which appears to be on a collision course with the state and the constitution for decades, yet again opted for collision rather than collaboration.

### JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI



Mehsud Munawar Hassan

Fareed Paracha, Jamaat's spokesperson, rejected the impression that the party had distanced itself from Hassan's statement. Instead, Paracha argued that Hassan's statement reflected views of the Jamaat.

Angered by the statement, a political adviser to the PPP, Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, served a legal notice on Jamaat-e-Islami chief and asked the Election Commission of Pakistan to cancel the party's registration.

The war in Bangladesh resulted in the death of tens of thousands of people (three million). The Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh provided recruits for militias who joined the military campaign against the Bengalis by the East Pakistan-dominated Army. The Jamaat was banned in 1971 after Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan. The Jamaat's leadership in Bangladesh fled to Pakistan. More recently, the Bangladesh Supreme Court in August this year declared the Jamaat's registration illegal, thus restricting it from contesting elections at least for now.

It is rather surprising to see Pakistan's army taking a stand against the Jamaat, which has always found a way to support the Army whenever it suspended the constitution or the democratic process. However, given the large number of dead and injured soldiers in the fight against the militants, the army felt compelled to take issue with the Jamaat that declared the former head of the Taliban a martyr.

The Jamaat has always acted as a spoiler in Pakistan. Knowing that the electorate has rejected the Jamaat in every election, it runs the election campaigns on false promises, knowing that it will never be asked to deliver on the claims it made. However, this makes the life

## NEWSIN brief

### Obama's popularity at all-time low

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama's popularity has slumped to an all-time low, a new survey showed Tuesday. The Quinnipiac University Poll found that Obama's approval rating had nosedived to the level of unpopularity faced by George W Bush at the same stage of his presidency. Overall, the poll said 54 percent disapproved of the job Obama was doing against 39 percent who

### Morsi to sue Egypt rulers over 'coup'

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's deposed Islamist president Mohamed Morsi intends to sue the army-installed authorities over his ouster in July, his lawyer told reporters yesterday.

Mohamed al-Damati and a team of lawyers visited Morsi in jail on Monday, where he is awaiting the next hearing in a trial on charges of involvement in the deaths of protesters

### Chevron ordered to pay Ecuador \$9.51b

AFP, Quito

An Ecuadoran court upheld a ruling that US oil giant Chevron was liable for environmental damage in its Amazon basin region by sister company Texaco, but ordered it to pay a reduced \$9.51 billion from a 2012 ruling which ordered to pay \$19 billion.

Thousands of villagers say they were sickened and many have cancer from the oil spillage's effect on their water supply. The case could have implications for lawsuits in Canada and Brazil, where the plaintiffs are

### Former Aussie PM Rudd quits politics

AFP, Sydney

Former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd announced an end to his chequered political career yesterday, quitting politics two months after being ousted from office by Tony Abbott.

The charismatic 55-year-old Labor stalwart, who led Australia twice and was foreign minister in Julia Gillard's government, said he would leave parliament at the end of

### Israel troop dies after Palestinian stabbing

AFP, Jerusalem

An Israeli soldier died yesterday after a Palestinian youth stabbed him on board a bus in the north of the country, police said.

The 16-year-old Palestinian from Jenin in the northern West Bank was detained by passengers and security forces on the bus, Rosenfeld said. According to police, the Palestinian youth did not have a permit to be

## ODDLY enough



### Rescued dog tackles Everest

AFP, Kathmandu

An abandoned puppy rescued from a rubbish dump in India has trekked to Everest Base Camp, becoming what is believed to be the first dog to tackle the peak.

Joanne Lefson told AFP she adopted the 11-month-old dog, called Rupee, in the mountainous Indian town of Leh last September and decided to take him on a trip to base camp at 5,364 metres.

The pair began their expedition in the Himalayan town of Lukla on October 14, intending to raise awareness about the plight of homeless dogs and promote pet adoption. They accomplished their record-making feat thirteen days later, describing it as "one giant leap for dog-kind" on Facebook.