

CO2 level hits record pace in 2016: UN

REUTERS, Geneva

The amount of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere grew at record rate in 2016 to a level not seen for millions of years, potentially fuelling a 20-metre rise in sea levels and adding 3 degrees to temperatures, the United Nations said yesterday.

Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO2), the main man-made greenhouse gas, hit 403.3 parts per million (ppm), up from 400.0 in 2015, the UN World Meteorological Organization said in its annual Greenhouse Gas Bulletin.

That growth rate was 50 percent faster than the average over the past decade, driving CO2 levels 45 percent above pre-industrial levels and further outside the range of 180-280 ppm seen in recent cycles of ice ages and warmer periods.

"Today's CO2 concentration of 400 ppm exceeds the natural variability seen over hundreds of thousands of years," the WMO bulletin said.

The latest data adds to the urgency of a meeting in Bonn next month, when environment ministers from around the world will work on guidelines for the Paris climate accord backed by 195 countries in 2015.

The agreement is already under pressure because US President Donald Trump has said he seeks to pull the United States out of the deal, which plans to limit the rise in temperatures to "well below" 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial times.

Human CO2 emissions from sources such as coal, oil, cement and deforestation reached a record in 2016, and the El Niño weather pattern gave CO2 levels a further boost, the WMO said.



A man holding a Catalan separatist flag (L) looks at men holding a Spanish flag outside the Generalitat Palace, the Catalan regional government headquarters in Barcelona, Spain, yesterday. Calm reigned in streets of Barcelona despite calls for civil disobedience from secessionist politicians, in early signs the draft rule imposed to stop an independence bid was taking hold.

Kenyatta wins Kenyan poll re-run

AFP, Nairobi

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta was yesterday declared victor of the country's deeply divisive elections, taking 98 percent of the ballots cast in a poll boycotted by his rival Raila Odinga, sparking fears of further violence in a sharp opposition stronghold.

Despite his crushing win, the turnout of just 38.8 percent among 19.6 million registered voters is set to raise questions about the credibility of an election that has plunged East Africa's most stable democracy into its worst crisis in decades.

Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) chairman Wafula Chebukati said Kenyatta had received 7,483,895 votes to Odinga's 73,238 — less than one percent of votes cast — in a sign the boycott had held.

A total of 7,616,217 cast ballots in Thursday's protest election.

The vote was the chaotic climax of two months of political drama after the Supreme Court overturned Kenyatta's

N Korea a 'global threat'

Says Nato chief as US, S Korea, Japan urge Pyongyang to walk away from its 'destructive and reckless path' of weapons development

AGENCIES

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg called North Korea a "global threat" yesterday and said it backed tighter sanctions against it during a visit to Japan, which has been targeted by Pyongyang's provocations.

Stoltenberg is in Japan to meet Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other senior officials including defence minister Taro Kono later in the day.

"We are as concerned as you are about the provocative, reckless behaviour of North Korea," he said in a speech at a group of security experts and defence officials.

"It is really dangerous, it poses a direct threat to countries in this region (including Japan), but it is also a global threat," he added.

Pyongyang has sparked global alarm in recent months by conducting its sixth nuclear test and test-launching missiles capable of reaching the US West Coast. The president Donald Trump and the North's young ruler

Kim Jong-Un have traded threats of war and personal insults.

It fired two projectiles over northern Japan in less than a month, ringing alarm bells in Tokyo as a being called for a get-tough approach towards Pyongyang.

"Nato strongly support political, diplomatic, economic pressure on North Korea," he said.

"But even more important, we need to be sure that sanctions are fully and transparently implemented."



North Korea and the welcome's strengthening of the sanctions through the UN Security Council in September, Stoltenberg said.

"But even more important, we need to be sure that sanctions are fully and transparently implemented," he added.

Stoltenberg's visit comes after Abe

Qatar warns against military confrontation

AGENCIES

Qatar's emir has warned against any military confrontation over the ongoing diplomatic dispute between his country and four other Arab nations, saying it would only plunge the region into chaos.

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani said US President Donald Trump has offered to host a meeting between Qatar and its opponents — Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — to end the crisis between the American allies.

Speaking to the American television network CBS's "60 Minutes" news program, Sheikh Tamim said so far, however, there's been no response from the boycotting nations.

"It was supposed to be very soon, this meeting," he said.

The threat of a military confrontation between the countries loomed in the initial days following the start of boycott on June 5. Arabic language media in the boycotting nations suggested the need for a "Peninsula Shield" operation, which is the military arm of the Gulf Cooperation Council, though army officials downplayed the idea at the time.

Saudi and UAE forces attached to Peninsula Shield previously deployed into Bahrain to put down its 2011 Arab Spring protests.

When meeting in Washington with Trump in September, Kuwaiti emir Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah said that mediation by the American president helped avoid any violence, reported AP.

"Thank God, now, what is important is that we have stopped any military action," said Sheikh Sabah, who himself has been trying to mediate the dispute.

In the "60 Minutes" interview, which was aired on Sunday night in the US, Sheikh Tamim acknowledged the alleged military threat.

Meanwhile, Bahrain's foreign minister yesterday suggested suspending Qatar's Gulf Cooperation Council membership until it accepts the demands of its Arab adversaries in the region's worst crisis in years, reported AP.

GULF DISPUTE

So far, no response from boycotting nations: Qatar emir

Bahrain suggests freezing Qatar's GCC membership

GANGA POLLUTION

India turns to sewage-eating microbes

TNN, New Delhi

As urgency grows to show results for its Clean Ganga mission, Indian government is turning to bacterial bioremediation techniques to cut down the time lag in commissioning of sewage treatment plants (STP).

While STPs typically take two to three years to come up, large-scale application of bioremediation using "sewage-eating microbes" quickens the process of improvement in the quality of river water, though only to an extent.

Under bioremediation technique, the selected microbes eat up contaminants such as oil and organic matter. The bacteria play a vital role in treatment of sewage without causing any release of foul odour. The process thus also reduces stretch from raw sewage.

During the process of heavy metals and toxic chemicals are reduced. The microbial dosing under the technique is done as per requirement assessed in terms of organic pollutants (microbial food) content in sewage.

Having successfully tested the technique at Bakarganj Nala in Patna, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) authority has recently approved two more pilot projects — one each in Patna and Allahabad — and planned to scale it up to 17 other identified 54 drains across four states (30, West Bengal (20), Bihar (3) and Jharkhand (1) — where bioremediation techniques can be used to prevent polluted water from flowing directly into the Ganga.

The cost of the NMCG's identified projects ranges from 77 crore, depending on sewage flow into the drain.



This undated picture released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on Sunday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un (C) inspecting the Pyongyang Cosmetics Factory, as his wife Ri Sol-Ju (R) looks on.

INDO-PAK TENSION

Military commanders trade barbs in rare call

AFP, Islamabad

Indian and Pakistani military commanders fired off heated accusations yesterday over a rare telephone conversation between the nuclear-armed rivals over repeated cross-border firing in disputed Kashmir.

"I Gen A.K. Bhatt emphatically stated that retaliatory firing by Indian troops has only been carried out in response to unabated support given by Pak Army to armed terrorists who infiltrate across the border and target Indian Army posts with heavy caliber weapons," said a statement released by the Indian side.

Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the end of British colonial rule in 1947, but both claim the territory in full.

The neighbours regularly exchange fire across the border despite signing a ceasefire in 2003.

Don't treat us as heroes

Says bailed Hong Kong activist Wong who led anti-China democracy movement in 2014

AFP, Hong Kong

Ten weeks in jail has had an effect on Joshua Wong, he is pensive, reflective and thinner. It is an experience that has forced him to weigh up the cost of being the most recognised face of Hong Kong's democracy campaign.

His imprisonment alongside two other leading activists for their role in the massive 2014 Umbrella Movement rallies, which called for fully free leadership elections, came after the party's Beijing-backed government pursued jail terms for the trio.

That was widely seen as another illustration of the pressure semi-autonomous Hong Kong is under from an increasingly assertive China, and brought into question whether its cherished independent judiciary has been compromised.

Wong, 21, and fellow activist Nathan Law, 24, were released last week on bail pending an appeal against their jail terms. If they lose, they could be sent back to serve the remainder of their sentences — Wong was given six months, Law eight months.

"Prison demands 'absolute submission' to the authorities there, Wong says, describing his anger at how marginalised young people he met in jail were treated.

He was housed in a cell measuring around 50 square feet (4.5 sq m), and recalls how he was forced to crack naked in front of one officer.

"We'd just had our body checks, which were not a problem, but after that he didn't let me put back on my clothes, and made me squat, all I need to do was talk to him. Wong is not a place to have dignity," Pringle told AP.

In addition to the current jail term, Wong is also awaiting sentencing on another charge relating to the 2014 protests.

"I hope as people continue to show their support, they won't treat us too much like heroes," said Wong.

He has become particularly conscious of the toll on his family.

Wong still lives with his parents and shares a bedroom with his brother, which is filled with books and the young activist's robot collection.

'Xi Thought' will now be taught in China

AFP, Beijing

Xi Jinping Thought will now be taught, researched and promoted in universities across China, ensuring that the leader's eponymous philosophy is implanted in students' hearts and minds.

At least twenty universities have established research institutes for Xi's ideology, which was enshrined in the Communist Party's constitution during its 19th national congress this year.

The distinction places Xi on a par with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. It means that his dogma — "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" — will become a mantra for a new generation.

According to media reports Sunday, the research institutes will not "hide in the ivory tower" but advocate the incorporation of Xi thought in all aspects of daily life.

"We will gather many experts and professors to disseminate and preach Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era in businesses, neighbourhoods and villages," Jiang Hongxin, head of Human Normal University's newly-founded Xi Thought research centre, told the People's Daily, the party mouthpiece.

Liu Ying, party secretary of the Tianjin University of Technology's Communist Youth League, told AP the idea of forming a Xi Thought "learning group" came to her spontaneously during his March speech at the congress's opening.

NEWS IN brief

Fresh Syria talks open in Astana

AFP, Astana

A fresh round of peace talks seeking to end the Syrian war opened in the Kazakh capital Astana yesterday, as part of a Moscow-led push supported by Iran and an opposition-backed Turkey. The latest round of talks begins days after the Islamic State jihadist group was forced out of its de facto capital Raqqa in Syria.

US pledges \$60m to regional Sahel force

AFP, Washington

The United States will pledge \$60 million to support the new G5 Sahel regional counter-terrorism force, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said yesterday. "This is a fight we must win, and these funds will play a key role in achieving that mission," he said.

Five dead in Nigeria suicide bombing

AFP, Kano

At least five people were killed yesterday when a suicide bomber blew himself up inside a mosque in northeast Nigeria, with the explosion assisting the military against Boko Haram jihadists said. The leader of the Civilian Joint Task Force said the attack happened at about 4:30 am.

Kuwait's ruler accepts cabinet resignation

REUTERS, Kuwait

Kuwait's ruling emir accepted the resignation of the prime minister and his cabinet yesterday, state news agency KUNA reported, asking them to continue important duties until a new cabinet is sworn in. Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah tendered his resignation earlier yesterday at the end of