

Oil, gas groups ‘destroying’ climate talks
Accuse NGOs

AFP, Paris

Oil and gas groups were yesterday accused of seeking to influence climate talks in Madrid by paying millions in sponsorship and sending dozens of lobbyists to delay what scientists say is a necessary and rapid cut in fossil fuel use.

A day after tens of thousands marched in the Spanish capital demanding climate action, seven environmental groups raised concerns to AFP over the role of fossil fuel representatives at the COP25 summit.

Spanish energy giants Endesa and Iberdrola stepped in to sponsor the conference, which brings together more than 20,000 negotiators, scientists, NGOs and journalists from around the world.

AFP has been told that each company paid 2 million euros to be COP25 “Platinum” sponsors, affording them prominent branding and trade stalls at the event.

Endesa is one of Spain’s largest greenhouse gas emitters, producing just over 60 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent last year alone. Iberdrola produced 24.6 million tonnes in 2018.

“Bankrolling the global climate negotiations is a classic trick from the polluter’s playbook,” said Jean Su, energy director with the Center for Biological Diversity.

Environmental groups including Oil Change International, Corporate Europe Observatory, the Observatorio de Multinacionales en America Latina, and Power Shift Africa all told AFP they considered oil and gas presence at COP25 as unacceptable.

“Our hard work and determination is easily overpowered by the vast resources of the biggest polluting corporations,” said Sarah Dobson, from the UK Youth Climate Coalition.

“These companies are destroying our planet and our right to fair climate negotiations free from their influence.”

RIISING GLOBAL DISCONTENT OVER CLIMATE INACTION

Scientists warn of social ‘tipping point’

Say the effects of a warming world will worsen inequality and poverty worldwide

REUTERS, Lisbon

With young climate activists taking to the streets of Madrid, the UN climate chief and a leading scientist warned of a growing risk of social unrest as the effects of a warming world worsen inequality and poverty worldwide.

Speaking on the sidelines of a UN climate summit in the Spanish capital, they said governments were so far failing to meet growing public demands for urgent action to halt rising global temperatures and curb the damage as extreme weather intensifies and melting ice pushes up sea-levels.

“It’s clear - and this is very painful to recognise - that the political leadership in the world is lagging behind the sentiments among youth (as well as) the state of science and even what business leadership thinks,” said Johan Rockström, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. Rockström, as part of an international team of scientists, highlighted how the world may be nearing a “social tipping point” on climate change that could bring about rapid and exponential changes in behaviour, lifestyles and technologies.

An analysis published on Friday, entitled “10 New Insights in Climate Science 2019”, noted that public opinion polls indicate an increasing number



of citizens in a range of countries are seriously concerned about climate change.

Meanwhile, recent large-scale civil protests are getting close to a size where social scientists predict governments could be forced into action, according to the analysis put together by several climate research organisations.

Rockström noted that, according to social scientists, when roughly 3.5% of a nation’s population joins “civil and non-violent uprisings” it can be enough to force change, even in a dictatorship. In Germany, numbers at the climate demonstrations on Sept. 20 were

estimated at nearly 2% of the population, and in New Zealand at 3.5%, he said.

UN climate chief Patricia Espinosa acknowledged on Friday that the world is “not where we need to be”, with global average temperatures currently on track for a rise of 3 degrees or more above pre-industrial times.

The new analysis warned that failure to address and adapt to climate change would have disastrous consequences for hundreds of millions of people, mainly the very poorest, who are most vulnerable to climate-related disasters like floods and drought.

Espinosa, a former diplomat for

Mexico, warned that climate change, as a “threat multiplier” would deepen problems of social inequality and poverty around the world.

“It is really an issue that is very closely related to the wellbeing of societies, and in that regard you can understand that it is very likely to create social unrest,” she said in response to a question from the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Globally, there is widespread dissatisfaction with institutions and systems, she noted.

Protests - sometimes violent - have erupted from France to Chile in the past year, often provoked by a perceived political insensitivity to ordinary people’s struggles for a decent life.

That struggle is also hampered by environmental degradation, analysts said. Addressing climate change is “one way” to work on those problems, Espinosa said.

He questioned whether, at some point, it would start to become morally unacceptable to cause people’s deaths with car exhaust, as happened with cigarette smoking.

In New Delhi, at some times of the year, young people are inhaling toxic pollution equivalent to smoking 10 cigarettes a day, killing over 7,000 people a year in the city, he noted.



Gulf crisis has moved from stalemate: Qatar FM

Qatar’s foreign minister has spoken of “some progress” in talks with Saudi Arabia on ending a bitter two-year-old rift between Doha and the kingdom and its allies. A Saudi-led bloc including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut all diplomatic and transport ties with Qatar in June 2017. They broke with Doha over allegations it backs radical Islamists and seeks closer ties with Saudi arch rival Iran. Qatar vehemently denies the charges. “In recent weeks we have moved from a stalemate to some progress,” Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said in Rome at the Mediterranean Dialogue Forum. “We hope these talks will lead to a progress where we can see an end to the crisis.”

US resumes talks with Taliban in Doha

Washington resumed talks with the Taliban in Qatar yesterday, a US source said, three months after President Donald Trump abruptly halted diplomatic efforts that could end America’s longest war. In September, the United States and the Taliban had appeared on the verge of signing a deal that would have seen Washington begin withdrawing thousands of troops in return for security guarantees. It was also expected to pave the way towards direct talks between the Taliban and the government in Kabul and, ultimately, a possible peace agreement after more than 18 years of war. But that same month, Trump abruptly called the year-long effort “dead” and withdrew an invitation to the insurgents to join secret talks at his US retreat at Camp David after the killing of an American soldier. During a surprise visit to a US military base in Afghanistan last week, Trump said the Taliban “wants to make a deal.”

Travel misery in France as nationwide strike continues

The most serious nationwide strike to hit France in years caused new misery for weekend travellers yesterday, with defiant unions dismissing proposals by the government and warning walkouts would last well into next week. The challenge thrown to President Emmanuel Macron over his plans for radical pension reform has seen hundreds of thousands take to the streets and key transport services brought to a standstill. The strikes, which began on Thursday, have recalled the winter of 1995, when three weeks of huge stoppages forced a social policy U-turn by the then-government. Unions have vowed a second series of mass demonstrations nationwide on Tuesday and there is expected to be little easing of the transport freezes over the coming days.

SOURCE: AFP

Indian rape victim dies after being set ablaze by rapists

REUTERS, Unnao

A 23-year-old rape victim set on fire by a gang of men, which included her alleged rapists, has died in a New Delhi hospital, prompting protests from opposition leaders who blamed the ruling party for failing to check incidents of violence against women.

The woman was on her way to board a train in Unnao district of northern Uttar Pradesh state to attend a court hearing over her rape when she was doused with kerosene and set on fire on Thursday, according to police.

She was airlifted to New Delhi for treatment later that day.

The attack, the second major case of violence against women in the past two weeks, has sparked public outrage in India.

The woman died on Friday after suffering a cardiac arrest, Dr Shalabh Kumar, the head of burns and plastic department at New Delhi’s Safdarjung Hospital told Reuters.

The woman had filed a complaint with Unnao police in March alleging she had

been raped at gun-point on December 12, 2018, police documents showed. The woman named two local men, one of them was arrested by police, the other absconded.

Having been subsequently jailed, the alleged rapist was released last week after securing bail, police officer SK Bhagat said in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh state.

On Thursday, the rape victim was seized by five men, including the two people she had named in her complaint, and beaten, stabbed and set on fire, local media reported citing her statement to police.

Still ablaze, she walked nearly a kilometre, seeking help before finally calling the police herself, according to Aaj Taj TV news channel.

All five of the accused have been arrested and are in 14-day judicial custody, Vikrant Vir, superintendent of police, Unnao, told Reuters. A fast-track court would hear the case and the guilty would not be spared, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said.



US House endorses two-state solution

AFP, Washington

The US House of Representatives on Friday threw its weight behind a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians, in a warning to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as he mulls annexing the West Bank.

Passed largely along party lines, the House resolution also marked a shot across the bow to President Donald Trump, who has stood squarely behind Netanyahu.

In its first-ever resolution on a West Bank annexation, the House said that a two-state solution “can both ensure the state of Israel’s survival as a Jewish and democratic state and fulfill the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for a state of their own.”

US should “discourage steps by either side that would put a peaceful end to the conflict further out of reach,” the resolution said. Such steps include “unilateral annexation of territory or efforts to achieve Palestinian statehood status outside the framework of negotiations with Israel,” it said.

Representative Eliot Engel, the Democrat who heads the House Foreign Affairs Committee, recalled his longtime support of Israel and how he backed Trump’s shift of the US embassy to the disputed holy city of Jerusalem.

But he said, in a choice turn of phrase, US security was being “trumped by decisions about our own political interests.”

“Those of us that are strong supporters of Israel understand that Israel is best served by a two-state solution, that a two-state solution is good not only for Palestinians but also good for Jews,” Engel said on the House floor.

‘One comfort woman for every 70 soldiers’

Japanese WWII records show how Korean, Filipino women were forced to work in brothels

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

The Imperial Japanese Army asked the government to provide one “comfort woman” for every 70 soldiers, Japan’s Kyodo news agency said, citing wartime government documents it had reviewed, shedding fresh light on Tokyo’s involvement in the practice.

“Comfort women” is a euphemism for the girls and women - many of them Korean - forced into prostitution at Japanese military brothels. The issue has plagued Japan’s ties with South Korea for decades.

Later, there were also several “comfort women” reported from the Philippines during the second world war.

One dispatch from the consul general of Qingdao in China’s Shandong province to the foreign ministry in Tokyo, says that the Imperial Army asked for one woman to accommodate every 70 soldiers, Kyodo reported late on Friday.

Another dispatch, from the consul general of Jinan, also in Shandong province,

notes “at least 500 comfort women must be concentrated here” as the Japanese forces made further advances, Kyodo said.

The 1993 “Kono Statement”, named after then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono in whose name it was issued, acknowledged Japanese authorities’ involvement in coercing the women to work in the brothels.

No officials were immediately available for comment at Japan’s Cabinet Secretariat, which Kyodo said collects official documents concerning comfort women.

South Korea reached a settlement with Japan to resolve the comfort women dispute in 2015, in which Japan apologised to victims and provided 1 billion yen (\$9m) to a fund to help them.

Relations between the two East Asia neighbours have deteriorated since South Korea’s top court ruled in favour of South Koreans seeking compensation from Japanese firms for wartime forced labour.

BAGHDAD PROTEST CAMP ‘SLAUGHTER’

Anger simmers after 23 killed

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq’s anti-regime protesters gathered in the capital and south yesterday, grieving but defiant after 23 were killed in an attack demonstrators described as “slaughter”.

The protest movement faced another worrying turn yesterday after an armed drone targeted the home of Iraqi cleric Moqtada Sadr, an attack his office said could lead to “civil war.”

The dramatic developments have threatened to derail the anti-government rallies rocking Iraq since October, the largest and deadliest grassroots movement in decades.

Late Friday, at least 23 people were killed and dozens wounded when unidentified gunmen attacked a large building where protesters had camped out for weeks, medics said.

“Government forces were one kilometre away and didn’t interfere,” said a young volunteer medic who had treated wounded people overnight.

The violence pushed the protest toll past 440 dead and nearly 20,000 wounded, according to an AFP tally compiled from medics, police and a national rights commission.

Under stormy skies yesterday, young men in central

Baghdad prayed over an Iraqi flag to mourn those who died the previous night.

They sobbed heavily, their shoulders shaking. Small clusters of protesters stood near the charred parking complex that was attacked, as larger crowds flocked to nearby Tahrir Square.

“They fired intensely, mercilessly on the protesters,” one witness told AFP.

“They wouldn’t let us evacuate the wounded. It was slaughter.” After the attack, panicked demonstrators sent out calls through social media for people to join the rallies in Tahrir, hoping to gain strength in numbers.

“I came after the incident and there were tons of people in Tahrir and by Al-Sinek,” one demonstrator told AFP.

Many of the new arrivals appeared to be members of Saraya al-Salam (Peace Brigades), which is headed by Sadr.

The notoriously versatile cleric was one of the main sponsors of the current government but then backed the protests.

Diplomats in Baghdad said they were “outraged and deeply saddened at last night’s killings” and urged the government hold the perpetrators accountable.



PHOTO: AFP

A Yemeni artist sitting atop the rubble of a collapsed buiding, plays the aoud during a street performance in Yemen’s third city of Taez, Friday. The Yemeni conflict between Saudi-backed government forces and Iran-backed Huthi rebels has raged since 2015, sparking what the United Nations terms the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.