



Saudi king calls for unity to confront Iran

Qatar emir skips Riyadh summit

REUTERS, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's King Salman opened a Gulf Arab summit yesterday by calling for regional unity to confront Iran and secure energy supplies and maritime channels.

"Our region today is passing through circumstances and challenges that require concerted efforts to confront them as the Iranian regime continues its aggressive actions that threaten security and stability..." he said.

In a televised speech, he also urged the global community to address Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

Meanwhile, Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani skipped the summit in Riyadh that had been billed as a potential "reconciliation conference" amid signs of a thaw between Doha and a Saudi-led bloc.

Despite the no-show, Saudi Arabia's King Salman and the Qatari prime minister exchanged smiles and pleasantries when the Doha delegation arrived in Riyadh.

"The people of Qatar, welcome, to your second country," said the commentator on Saudi state television, in warm words that could still bode well for regional diplomacy.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut all diplomatic and transport ties with Qatar in June 2017 over allegations it backs radical Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and seeks closer ties with Saudi arch rival Tehran.

Qatar vehemently denies the allegations.

UN CLIMATE SUMMIT IN MADRID

Talks out of sync with demands

Minister-level talks begin as major emitters pledge nothing new; US, Saudi top offenders' list

AFP, Madrid

UN climate negotiations in Madrid remained bogged down in the fine print of the Paris treaty rulebook, out-of-sync with a world demanding action to forestall the ravages of global warming.

The 196-nation talks should kick into high-gear Tuesday with the arrival of ministers, but on the most crucial issue of all -- slashing the greenhouse gas emissions overheating the planet -- major emitters have made it clear they have nothing to say. Only the European Union is dangling the prospect of enhanced carbon cutting ambitions, to be laid out this week in its European Green New Deal.

Observers say the case for a global Marshall Plan on global warming has become overwhelming.

A quartet of recent UN science reports catalogued a crescendo of deadly heatwave, flooding and superstorms made more destructive by rising seas, and projected far



worse impacts just over the horizon. But governments are waiting until next year's deadline to unveil revised emissions reduction commitments.

"Negotiations, by their nature, are 'I'll give you this, if you give me that'," said Andrew Steer, President and CEO of the World Resources Institute, a Washington-based climate policy think tank.

"So we are standing and watching our house on fire. I've got a hose,

you've got a hose, but I'm not going to turn mine on until you do."

Negotiators are addressing a trio of politically-charged technical issues before the Paris Agreement becomes operational at the end of next year.

One is reworking rules for largely dysfunctional carbon markets.

Another is so-called "loss and damage". Under the bedrock UN climate treaty, rich nations agreed to shoulder more responsibility

for curbing global warming, and to help developing countries prepare for unavoidable future impacts -- the twin pillars of "mitigation" and "adaptation". But there was no provision for helping countries already reeling in a climate-addled world.

Meanwhile, The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) yesterday singled out The United States and Saudi Arabia as the major polluters who have shown "hardly any signs" of reducing their greenhouse gas production.

CCPI measures the emissions, renewable energy share and climate policies of 57 countries and the EU.

It found the US ranks last, followed by Saudi Arabia and Australia. China, the world's largest single emitter, was found to have taken "medium action" due to its high investment in renewables. However the index warned that Beijing could slump to the bottom rungs if it follows through on its plan to continue building coal-fired power plants.

Global demand for food to soar 80 per cent by 2100

Simultaneous heatwaves to batter food-growing countries

AGENCIES

Bigger people and growing populations could mean the world may soon face such an increase in demand for food, suppliers may be unable to keep up, scientists have warned.

A rising Body Mass Index (BMI), which evaluates weight in relation to height, alongside increasing body heights across most countries, are leading to a marked increase in global calorie requirements.

A study by academics at the University of Göttingen, which forecasts how caloric intake could change between 2010 and 2100, estimates global food consumption could rise by 80 per cent by the end of the century.

The vast majority -- 60 per cent of the increase -- would be due to population growth. Even if height and BMI remained static, demand for food is forecast to surge. But a further 20 per cent rise in demand will be due to the greater quantity of food required by larger humans.

In the UK, men and women have both seen an average height increase of 11cm over



the last century, with an average man now standing 178cm (5ft 10in) tall, while women are 161cm (5ft 3 in).

On Monday, scientists also warned that climate change could spur stronger crop-wilting heatwaves that hit several of the world's major grain producing regions simultaneously, potentially sparking food shortages and unrest.

Most vulnerable are the western regions of North America, western Europe, and western Russia and Ukraine, which together grow about a quarter of the world's staple grains such as wheat, maize, soy and rice, are very susceptible to such heatwaves.

RED LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES

30,000 face extinction

AFP, Madrid

Already facing the threat of habitat destruction, hundreds of plant and animal species are now under further pressure from manmade climate change, the IUCN yesterday said in its updated "Red List of Threatened Species".

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature added 1,840 new species to its catalogue of plants and animals that risk extinction.

The list now contains more than 30,000 species under threat of disappearing.

"Climate change is adding to the multiple threats species face, and we need to act urgently and decisively to curb the crisis," said IUCN acting director general Grethel Aguilar.

The IUCN said it had witnessed genuine declines in 73 species since its last assessment.

More than one million species are now at risk of vanishing as insatiable human demand puts them in danger of habitat loss, overexploitation, pollution and climate change.

Releasing its Red List update in the middle of COP25 climate talks in Madrid, the IUCN said it was increasingly clear that climate change on its own was a growing threat.

The latest update showed that 37 percent of Australia's freshwater fish species were threatened with extinction. Dozens of species of birds and plants are now also threatened by rising temperatures, the list found.

CHILEAN PLANE TRAGEDY NEAR ANTARCTICA

Search on for 38 missing on board

AFP, Punta Arenas

Rescue planes and ships yesterday searched the open sea between the southern tip of South America and Antarctica for a Chilean Air Force plane that went missing with 38 people aboard.

The C-130 Hercules cargo plane vanished after departing an airbase in the southern city of Punta Arenas Monday at 4:55 pm (19:55 GMT) en route to Chile's Antarctic base of Eduardo Frei, officials said.

Contact was lost with the plane at 6:13 pm (21:30 GMT), the Chilean Air Force said, adding that the plane had enough fuel to remain in the air for several hours beyond that time. But seven hours after losing communication officials declared that the plane had crashed.

The airplane pilot may have carried out an emergency ocean landing, said Eduardo Mosqueira, commander of the Fourth Brigade based in Punta Arenas, early yesterday.

Airplanes and ships from Uruguay, Argentina and Chile had joined in the search, officials said.

The plane went missing while flying over the Drake Passage, a maritime route between South America and Antarctica frequently hit by some of the world's worst weather.

The names of those aboard the missing airplane were released. Most were air force personnel, but also included three people from the army, two from a private construction company and an official from a Chilean university.



Protesters take part in a demonstration in support to the Rohingya Muslim minority in front of the Peace Palace in The Hague, yesterday, during the start of a three-day hearing on Rohingya genocide case at the UN's International Court of Justice.

PHOTO: AFP

UK PM pockets reporter's phone in hospital row



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was accused on Monday of grabbing a journalist's phone and putting it into his pocket to avoid looking at an image of a boy sleeping on a hospital floor. An ITV television reporter attempted to show Johnson the picture -- of a boy next to an oxygen mask -- but Johnson refused to look down at it and put the phone in his pocket. He eventually looked and said it was a "terrible, terrible photo", apologising to the families. The state-run National Health Service (NHS) has been one of the major battlegrounds in the run-up to the December 12 election. Johnson and his team have been involved in a series of high-profile gaffes during the election campaign but still enjoy a comfortable lead in the polls over the opposition Labour party.

2 Algeria ex-PMs get long jail terms in graft trial

An Algerian court yesterday sentenced two former prime ministers to long jail terms in the first of a series of high-profile corruption trials launched after longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned in the face of mass protests in April. Former prime ministers Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal, who were both close to the ousted president, were sentenced to 15 years and 12 years respectively. It was the first time since Algeria's independence from France in 1962 that former prime ministers have been put on trial. The state prosecutor had sought 20-year prison sentences for the two ex-premiers. The verdicts come just two days before Algeria is due to elect a president to replace Bouteflika in a vote bitterly opposed by the country's nine-month-old protest movement, which sees it as a regime ploy to cling to power.

NZ volcano toll rises to six

Fearing the volcano could erupt again, search parties were unable to set foot on New Zealand's White Island for eight people still missing yesterday, as police raised the death toll to six from the eruption a day earlier. Police doubted whether any more survivors would be found. They said latest victim died in hospital, having been among more than 30 people injured in the eruption on the uninhabited island, a popular sightseeing excursion for tourists. Police said 47 people were on White Island at the time of the eruption. Twenty-four came from Australia, nine from the United States, five from New Zealand, four from Germany, two each from China and the Britain and one from Malaysia. Police said an investigation into the deaths on White Island had been launched but clarified it was not a criminal investigation.

Toxic bushfire haze blankets eastern Australia



Toxic haze blanketed Sydney yesterday triggering a chorus of smoke alarms to ring across the city and forcing school children inside, as "severe" weather conditions fuelled deadly bush fires along Australia's east coast. Fire engines raced office-to-office in the city centre with sirens blaring, as inland bushfires poured smoke laden with toxic particles into commercial buildings. For weeks the east of the country has been smothered in smoke as drought and climate-fuelled bushfires have burned. But the scale of the problem on Tuesday shocked even hardened residents. Authorities recommended that the vulnerable cease outdoor activity altogether and that everyone stay inside as much as possible. As the day developed there were nearly 100 bushfire incidents in the state of New South Wales alone and dozens more in Queensland.

SOURCE: AFP

No 'political bias'

Says US Justice Department report on 2016 Russia probe

AFP, Washington

A US Justice Department report concluded Monday that political bias did not drive an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election -- rebutting President Donald Trump's claims that the FBI illegally spied on his campaign.

The DOJ inspector general found numerous procedural errors in the handling of the probe, which placed members of Trump's election team under surveillance over their Russian contacts.

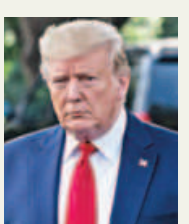
But it said the overall investigation, launched in July 2016 -- and probes of Trump campaign aides George Papadopoulos, Carter Page, Paul Manafort and Michael Flynn -- were justified.

"We did not find documentary or testimonial evidence that political bias or improper motivation influenced the decisions to open the four individual investigations," the report said.

The White House latched onto the FBI's errors and use of a British expert's private report on Russian activities to label the report "shocking" and

White House labelled report 'shocking' and claimed that Democrats drove the probe

Report came with Trump battling an impeachment inquiry in Congress



claim that Democrats drove the probe. "The American people should be outraged and terrified by this abuse of power," said White House spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham.

But DOJ inspector general Michael Horowitz's report ruled out political partisanship and said the Russia investigation was opened "in compliance with (Justice) Department and FBI policies."

Trump repeatedly blasted the probe as "attempted coup" and "witch hunt".

But Horowitz said FBI officials who opened the politically sensitive investigation, dubbed "Crossfire Hurricane," had "reason to believe" Russia was interfering.

"The FBI had an authorized purpose when it opened Crossfire Hurricane to obtain information about, or protect against, a national security threat or federal crime," Horowitz said.

Democrats said the long-awaited report showed the hollowness of Trump's attacks on the FBI as well as on former special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian meddling and the Trump campaign.

Gunman kills six at Czech hospital

AFP, Prague

A gunman killed himself yesterday after shooting dead six patients at a hospital in the eastern Czech city of Ostrava, in what the premier has called "an immense tragedy".

The attacker gunned down people at close range at the trauma ward of the Faculty Hospital in Ostrava, a steel hub located some 300 kilometres east of Prague.

Four men and two women died during the assault, which police said lasted only a few seconds.

Two other people were seriously wounded. A third person sustained light injuries.

Police said they had not yet determined what drove the 42-year-old to launch the attack but reports suggested he was mentally unstable.

ICJ AND GENOCIDE TRIAL

FIVE THINGS TO KNOW

Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday appeared at the International Court of Justice to defend her country against claims it committed genocide against Rohingyas. Here are some key questions about how the UN's top court, which was set up in 1946 to arbitrate disputes between countries, deals with the issue:

WHAT IS GENOCIDE?

"Genocide" was used for the first time within a legal framework at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi officials after World War II over the deaths of six million Jews in the Holocaust unleashed by Adolf Hitler's Germany. Coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew, the term is derived from the Greek word "genos" for race or tribe, and the suffix "-cide" from the Latin word for "to kill." The term became part of international law in 1948 under the UN Genocide Convention -- the same convention now invoked by Gambia against Myanmar -- and is defined as an "act committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group."

IS GENOCIDE HARD TO PROVE?

Yes. According to Cecily Rose, an assistant professor in international law at Leiden University, genocide "is a highly specific international crime which does not occur very often." The hardest part is proving the "requisite mental element of the offence," meaning to prove that a person or a state

intentionally set out to commit genocide.

"The bar is very high," she said.

HAVE THERE BEEN OTHER ICJ GENOCIDE CASES?

Only twice in the ICJ's 73-year history have cases based on the Genocide Convention reached the so-called merits stage, where a case is dealt with in depth. Both related to the 1990s Balkans wars which broke out after the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. The ICJ, following on a previous ruling by the Yugoslavia war crimes tribunal (ICTY), ruled that genocide was committed at Srebrenica in July 1995, when almost 8,000 Muslim men and boys were slaughtered by Bosnian Serb troops. The Democratic Republic of Congo brought a case against Rwanda in 2002 based on a wide range of multilateral treaties including the Genocide Convention, but the ICJ found that it did not have jurisdiction over the genocide claims.

IS THE ICJ THE RIGHT COURT?

The ICJ only rules in disputes between countries, not on individuals. But the crime

of genocide "rarely" unfolds as an dispute between states like the one brought by Gambia against Myanmar, said Dimitry van den Meerssche, of the Hague-based Asser Institute. "There are a range of other judicial venues where these claims can be brought. Considering that these are specifically built to address war crimes and crimes against humanity or genocide, they might be the preferred venue," he said. The International Criminal Court, a separate tribunal set up in the Hague in 2002 that tries individuals for war crimes, has launched a formal investigation into the Rohingya crisis, he noted.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Gambia has asked the ICJ for emergency measures to protect the Rohingyas but this is "only the first step," said Mike Becker, assistant international law professor at Trinity College in Dublin. "These hearings will provide a preview of the overall case, but a full hearing on the merits is still years away," Becker said.

SOURCE: AFP