

UN forecasts even warmer temperatures over next 5 yrs

AFP, Geneva

The annual mean global temperature is likely to be at least one degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels in each of the next five years, the World Meteorological Organization said yesterday.

The WMO said there was a 20 percent chance that it will exceed 1.5 C above 1850 to 1900 average levels in at least one year, according to its annual climate predictions for the coming five years.

The last five-year period has been the warmest five years on record, said the Geneva-based United Nations agency, which counts 193 member states.

Temperatures over the next five years, 2020 to 2024, are very likely to be within the range of 0.91 C to 1.59 C above pre-industrial levels.

Almost all regions, except parts of the southern oceans, are likely to be warmer than the recent past, which is defined as 1981 to 2010.



Protesters clash with police in front of Serbia's National Assembly building in Belgrade on Wednesday evening during a demonstration against a weekend curfew announced to combat a resurgence of Covid-19 infections. Serbia yesterday dropped plans for the lockdown after two days of violent protests. A government crisis group tasked with fighting the virus decided instead on a more limited ban on outdoor and indoor public gatherings of more than 10 people to minimize the risk of further infections.

PHOTO: AFP

Global cases top 12 million

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Millions of people in Australia's second-biggest city went into lockdown yesterday to battle another coronavirus outbreak, as the number of infections worldwide surged past 12 million.

Caseloads and death tolls have risen relentlessly in many of the world's biggest nations, with three million confirmed cases in the United States alone. The US recorded 55,000 new cases in 24 hours Wednesday, a tally by Johns Hopkins University showed.

India registered a record single-day hike of 24,879 infections, which took the nationwide tally to 767,296 yesterday.

In Melbourne, five million people began a new lockdown just weeks after earlier restrictions ended as Australia battles a Covid-19 resurgence, with residents bracing for the emotional and economic costs.

"The idea of not being able to see people that you love and care for is really distressing, really distressing," said a tearful Melbourne resident, Monica Marshall, whose 91-year-old mother recently entered a care home.

"I hope that people have got the message

that they really need to take notice -- it's very disconcerting watching some people on the news where they really don't care."

In Europe, where many nations have successfully suppressed their outbreaks, the French government said it remained on alert for a possible surge in cases too.

**CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC**

Millions placed under lockdown in Australia

US adds 55,000 new cases in 24 hours

India registers record single-day hike of 24,879 infections

Chinese state media has offered a rare glimpse of the lab at the heart of coronavirus conspiracy theories, as it seeks to push back against claims the facility was the source of the global pandemic.

Footage broadcast by state-run CCTV is believed to be the first from within the institute's P4 lab -- for highly-dangerous Class 4 pathogens -- since its inauguration

in 2017. However, it offered no new information on the lab's workings.

The global death toll from the virus passed 550,000, while about half of the 12 million reported cases have recovered.

In the Middle East, hard-hit Iran reported a record single-day death toll of 221, taking its total to over 12,300, reports AFP.

India yesterday registered a record single-day hike of 24,879 coronavirus infections which took the nationwide tally of cases to 7,67,296 today while the death toll climbed to 21,129 with 487 more fatalities, according to the Indian Health Ministry data update.

Despite the rising tolls, Indian Health Minister Harsh Vardhan yesterday said the country has one of the lowest deaths per million population. The global comparison between the five most-affected countries clearly depicted that India has one of the lowest Covid-19 cases per million (538) and deaths per million (15) compared the global average of 1453 and 68.7 respectively, he said addressing a meeting of Group of Ministers to review the pandemic situation across India.

Hunger to kill more than virus: Oxfam

Warns 12,000 could die per day

AGENCIES

Millions of people are being pushed towards hunger by the coronavirus pandemic, which could end up killing more people through lack of food than from the illness itself, Oxfam has warned.

Closed borders, curfews and travel restrictions have disrupted food supplies and incomes in already fragile countries, forcing an extra million people closer to famine in Afghanistan and heightening the humanitarian disaster in Yemen, where two-thirds already live in hunger.

Oxfam said that up to 12,000 people could die from hunger every day globally -- 2,000 more than died from Covid-19 each day in April.

Along with Afghanistan, the charity identified Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Venezuela, the west African Sahel, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, and Haiti as extreme hunger hotspots.

Oxfam said countries with existing problems, such as South Sudan and Syria, were already seeing hunger worsen but there was also concern for middle-income countries such as India and Brazil.

Mass unemployment was affecting all countries, but informal labourers were suffering the most, often unable to travel to work.

China landslides leave at least 14 dead or missing



Heavy rains and landslides in China have left at least 14 people dead or missing over the past day, burying houses and causing scenic areas to temporarily shut. Photos from the scene showed rescue workers clad in bright orange uniforms combing through mud and rubble in the mountainous regions of Tongren city in southwestern Guizhou province, where infrastructure had been reduced to a heap. At least 120 people have died or gone missing this year in China from flood-related disasters as of July 3, reported the state-run People's Daily, adding that the direct economic losses amount to some 41.6 billion yuan (\$5.9 billion).

Militants kill local BJP leader in Indian Kashmir

Suspected militants shot dead a local leader of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the restive territory of Kashmir on Wednesday, police said, an attack that could increase tensions in the region. The militants fired at Waseem Bari, a former district chief of the BJP, and his father and brother while they were in their shop in Bandipora district in north Kashmir, police said. All three died in hospital later. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP-led government last year revoked Muslim majority Kashmir's special autonomy in order to cement its grip over a region that has faced years of militancy and unrest. Militants have vowed to fight the change. All 10 security guards of the BJP leader were arrested after the attack, said Kashmir Police Chief, Vijay Kumar.

Melania Trump statue set on fire in Slovenia



A wooden sculpture of US first lady Melania Trump was torched near her hometown of Sevnica, Slovenia, on the night of July Fourth, as Americans celebrated US Independence Day, said the artist who commissioned the sculpture. Brad Downey, a Berlin-based American artist, told Reuters he had the life-sized blackened, disfigured sculpture removed as soon as police informed him on July 5th of the incident. "I want to know why they did it," said Downey, who had hoped the statue would foster a dialogue about the political situation in the United States, highlighting Melania Trump's status as an immigrant married to a president sworn to reduce immigration. In Washington, the office of Melania Trump did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

SOURCE: ANN, REUTERS, AFP



Trump must release tax return records

Rules US top court

REUTERS, Washington

The US Supreme Court yesterday made it clear that a sitting president cannot evade criminal investigations, ruling that a prosecutor in New York City can obtain President Donald Trump's financial records including tax returns.

The 7-2 ruling authored by Chief Justice John Roberts means that the subpoena issued to Trump's long-term accounting firm, Mazars LLP, for various financial records to be turned over to a grand jury as part of a criminal investigation can be enforced.

"Two hundred years ago, a great jurist of our Court established that no citizen, not even the President, is categorically above the common duty to produce evidence when called upon in a criminal proceeding," the court said. "We reaffirm that principle today."

The court was due to issue a second ruling imminently in related litigation involving subpoenas for Trump's financial records by Democratic-led House of Representatives committees.

Unlike other recent presidents, Trump has refused to release his tax returns and other documents that could provide details on his wealth and businesses.

TERRITORIAL DISPUTES WITH INDIA, BHUTAN

China was 'incredibly aggressive'

Says Pompeo over Ladakh clash; Beijing warns US against 'paranoia'

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday denounced China's "aggression" toward India and said that a fresh dispute over Bhutan showed Beijing's plan of "bullying."

The remarks were the most extensive by the top US diplomat since a deadly clash between the world's two most populous nations on June 15, which killed 20 Indian soldiers and sent tensions soaring.

Yesterday China's top diplomat replied warning the United States against "McCarthy-style paranoia" as tensions rise between the two superpowers over a slew of issues.

"The Chinese took incredibly aggressive action. Indians have done their best to respond to that," Pompeo

told a news conference, saying he had spoken about the tensions several times with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

Since the incident with India, China has taken issue with an international grant application by Bhutan for a wildlife sanctuary, saying the border with the Himalayan kingdom was in dispute.

Pompeo linked China's statements on Bhutan, whose foreign policy is guided by New Delhi, to Beijing's island disputes with Vietnam and Japan.

"There aren't many neighbors that can satisfactorily say that they know where their sovereignty ends and that the Chinese Communist Party will respect that sovereignty," Pompeo said.

"Beijing has a pattern of instigating territorial disputes. The world shouldn't

allow this bullying to take place."

"The current US policy toward China is based on strategic misjudgements... and McCarthy-style paranoia," China's foreign minister Wang Yi said, referring to US senator Joseph McCarthy, who led an anti-communist crusade in his country in the 1950s.

In a pre-recorded speech to a China-US think tank forum, Wang warned that "artificially creating various China threats may eventually lead to self-fulfilling prophecies."

But Wang said China is still willing to resume dialogue at all levels to resolve differences.

Experts say that India, despite a growing relationship with the United States, does not want to be seen as following Washington's lead on issues touching on its own sovereignty.



Visitors take photos in front of statues illustrating the fate of people who do not uphold the five precepts of Buddhism in a garden depicting a Buddhist version of hell at the Wat Saeng Suk temple in the Thai coastal province of Chonburi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Damaged and overturned vehicles are seen in a river following heavy rains and flooding in Hitoyoshi, Kumamoto prefecture yesterday. Japanese emergency services and troops scrambled yesterday to reach people cut off by catastrophic flooding and landslides that have killed dozens and caused widespread damage, with more torrential rain forecast.

PHOTO: AFP

Australia offers safe haven to Hong Kongers

China furious, warns of retaliatory actions

AFP, Sydney

Australia offered pathways to permanent residency for thousands of people from Hong Kong yesterday in response to China's crackdown on dissent, drawing a furious reply from Beijing.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said his government was suspending its extradition agreement with the city and, in addition to extending the visas of 10,000 Hong Kongers already in the country, threw open the door to thousands more wanting to start a new life Down Under.

Morrison said the decisions were taken in response to China's imposition last week of a tough new security law in Hong Kong, which he said "constitutes a fundamental change of circumstances" for the semi-autonomous territory.

"Australia is adjusting its laws, our sovereign laws, our sovereign immigration programme, things that we have responsibility for and jurisdiction over, to reflect the changes that we're seeing take place there," he said during a press conference.

Beijing shot back, condemning the Australian announcements as violations of "fundamental principles of international relations".

"China... reserves the right to take further reactions, all consequences will be borne by Australia," warned Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian.

"Any attempts to suppress China will never succeed."

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne said China's moves in Hong Kong were discussed earlier yesterday with Australia's so-called "Five Eyes" security partners -- New Zealand, the US, Britain, and Canada.

The new law, which followed sometimes-violent pro-democracy protests, is the most radical change in Hong Kong's freedoms since Britain handed the city back to China in 1997 under an agreement designed to preserve its way of life for 50 years.

Beijing in recent months has imposed tariffs on some Australian imports and impeded trade in other key commodities in response to Australian steps to counter Chinese interference in the country.