



Biden’s wins in Arizona, Wisconsin certified

AFP, Washington

President-elect Joe Biden’s victories in Arizona and Wisconsin were certified on Monday, further cementing his win even as Donald Trump continues to make baseless claims of vote fraud.

“This election was conducted with transparency, accuracy and fairness in accordance with Arizona’s laws and elections procedures, despite numerous unfounded claims to the contrary,” Arizona secretary of state Katie Hobbs said during the vote’s final, official certification.

The last Democrat to carry the southwestern state in the race for the White House was Bill Clinton in 1996, marking a significant shift of the US electoral map this year.

Biden beat Trump by just over 10,400 ballots in a state where turnout was high, and shifting demographics saw a growing population of young Hispanic voters.

Trump has refused to concede to Biden, which delayed the start of the presidential transition by weeks, as he made baseless claims of fraud that have been shot down in state and federal courts.

Wisconsin, another hotly contested state which Trump narrowly won in 2016, also certified Biden’s win Monday, with Governor Tony Evers tweeting he had “carried out his duty.”

Biden won the electoral college vote by 306 to 232. In the popular national vote, Biden won by 51 to 47 percent. The Electoral College is all but certain to go through the formal motions of confirming Biden when it meets on December 14.

Tens of millions in dire straits

Says UN as pandemic pushes global aid needs to record \$35b for 2021; multiple famines looming

AFP, Geneva

The UN yesterday said that \$35 billion would be needed for aid in 2021, as the pandemic leaves tens of millions more people in crisis, and with the risk of multiple famines looming.

The world body’s annual Global Humanitarian Overview estimated that 235 million people worldwide will need some form of emergency assistance next year -- a staggering 40-percent increase in the past year.

“The increase arises almost entirely because of Covid-19,” United Nations emergency relief coordinator Mark Lowcock told reporters.

Next year, one in 33 people worldwide will be in need of aid, the report found, stressing that if all of them lived in one country, it would be the world’s fifth largest nation.

The annual appeal by UN agencies and other humanitarian organisations usually presents a depressing picture of soaring needs brought on by conflicts, displacement, natural disasters and climate change.

But now, it warned, the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed more than 1.45 million people worldwide, has disproportionately hit those “already living on a knife’s edge.”

“The picture we are presenting is the bleakest and darkest perspective on



humanitarian need in the period ahead that we have ever set out,” Lowcock said.

The money requested in the appeal would be enough to help 160 million of the most vulnerable people across 56 countries, the UN said.

For the first time since the 1990s, extreme poverty is set to rise, life expectancy will fall and the annual death toll from HIV, tuberculosis and malaria could potentially double.

“Possibly the most alarming thing... is the threat of the return of famines, potentially in multiple locations,” Lowcock said.

With only one true famine so far in the 21st century -- in Somalia nearly

a decade ago -- mass starvation had appeared to have been “assigned to the dustbin of history,” he said.

But now, he warned, “the red lights are flashing and the alarm bells are ringing.”

By the end of 2020, the number of acutely food-insecure people worldwide could swell to as much as 270 million -- an 82-percent increase over the pre-Covid-19 number.

Conditions in Yemen, Burkina Faso, South Sudan and northeastern Nigeria indicated they are already on the brink of famine, while a range of other countries and regions, including Afghanistan and the Sahel, were also

“potentially very vulnerable,” he said.

“If we get through 2021 without major famines, that will be a significant achievement.”

Raising the full \$35 billion needed at a time of global economic crisis could meanwhile be a daunting task -- the amount is more than double the \$17 billion raised so far this year.

That amount is already a record, but still falls far short of the nearly \$29 billion asked for during last year’s appeal, even before the pandemic reared its head.

“The crisis is far from over. Humanitarian aid budgets face dire shortfalls as the impact of the global pandemic continues to worsen,” UN chief Antonio Guterres said in a statement.

“Together we must mobilise resources and stand in solidarity with people in their darkest hour of need.”

Lowcock meanwhile insisted that while the total dollar amount asked for seemed high, it was actually tiny compared to the amounts wealthy countries are pumping in to rescue their tanking economies.

“What is at stake is the lives of huge numbers of vulnerable people, and the cost of safeguarding their lives is actually very small in relation to all of the other challenges we face.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

Lanka frees prisoners after pandemic sparks jail riot

Sri Lanka freed hundreds of prisoners and said it would release thousands more after a riot sparked by anger over coronavirus cases at one of its many overcrowded jails left nine inmates dead and 113 wounded. Guards opened fire at the high-security Mahara prison outside Colombo on Sunday night after prisoners went on the rampage demanding to be freed because of soaring coronavirus cases in jails. President Rajapaksa yesterday granted an amnesty to 637 convicts across the country and Justice Minister Ali Sabry said the government was working on expediting the release on bail of thousands of remand prisoners to ease congestion.

‘Pandemic’ chosen as Word of the Year

The 2020 prize for Merriam-Webster’s Word of the Year went to an obvious choice: pandemic. The term had the most online dictionary lookups of any word, Merriam-Webster said on its website, after a year in which at least 1.5 million people globally have died from the Covid-19 pandemic. The word’s Greek roots are “pan,” meaning all or every and “demos,” meaning people, Merriam-Webster said. Last year’s winner was “they” as used to describe someone who does not identify as male nor female. That follows winners “justice” in 2018, “feminism” in 2017 and “surreal” in 2016.

US Navy to scrap billion-dollar warship after major fire



The US Navy has decided to de-commission and scrap the USS Bonhomme Richard after a damage assessment found that restoring the ship would cost billions of dollars.

The amphibious assault ship was in port in San Diego in July so that it could be upgraded to accommodate the new Marine Corps F-35B jets when a massive fire broke out aboard the vessel. Navy officials said that restoring the ship would cost \$2.5 billion to \$3.2 billion and take five to seven years. Officials say the cause of the fire is still under investigation. The USS Bonhomme Richard cost \$750 million to build when it was commissioned back in 1998, which amounts to about \$1.2 billion in today’s dollars.

At least two killed after car hits pedestrians in Germany

At least two people were killed and several injured when a car drove into a pedestrian zone in the southwestern German city of Trier yesterday, police said, adding that the driver had been arrested. Police spokesman Uwe Konz told AFP that it remained unclear what exactly happened, saying “the background (to the incident) still needs to be clarified”. Although the incident has not been confirmed as an attack, it brought back memories of the 2016 truck rampage at a Berlin Christmas market that left 12 people dead.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

KILLING OF TOP IRANIAN NUCLEAR SCIENTIST

MPs push bill to ramp up uranium enrichment

REUTERS, Dubai

A bill requiring Iran’s government to step up uranium enrichment closer to the level needed for a nuclear weapon, and ignore other restraints on its nuclear programme agreed with major powers, cleared its first hurdle in parliament yesterday.

But the government promptly said the move, proposed in response to the assassination of a top nuclear scientist on Friday, could not change Iran’s nuclear policy, which was the province of the Supreme National Security Council.

“Death to America! Death to Israel!” some lawmakers chanted after the hardline-dominated parliament cleared the draft at its first reading in a session broadcast live on state radio.

Parliament has often demanded a hardening of Iran’s position on the nuclear issue in recent years, without much success.

In this case, the government must decide whether a sharp response to Friday’s killing of nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh might jeopardise the prospect of an improvement in ties with the United



States once Joe Biden takes over from Donald Trump as president.

A senior Iranian official said on Monday that Tehran suspected a foreign-based opposition group of complicity with Israel in the killing of Fakhrizadeh, whom Western powers see as the architect of an abandoned Iranian nuclear weapons programme. The group rejected the accusation.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office has declined to comment on the killing. Israeli cabinet minister Tzachi Hanegbi said on Saturday he did not know who had carried it out.

The bill still needs approval in a second reading and endorsement by a clerical body to become law.

Iran has already breached the limits set in its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, who scrapped sanctions in return for curbs to Iran’s nuclear programme, to protest at Trump’s withdrawal from the accord. The maximum fissile purity to which it has enriched uranium has remained around 4.5%, above the deal’s 3.67% cap but below the 20% Iran had achieved before, a relatively short step from weapons grade.

PROTESTS IN INDIA OVER FARM LAWS

No breakthrough in farmers-govt talks

AGENCIES

The Indian government yesterday offered to set up a committee to look into issues raised by farmers protesting against new farm laws, but it was rejected by representatives of 35 agitating organisations during their marathon meeting with three union ministers that ended without any resolution.

The meeting remained inconclusive and the government has called for another round of discussions tomorrow.

Laws rushed through parliament earlier this year by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government mean growers are now free to legally sell their produce anywhere in India instead of getting guaranteed prices from state-run markets.

The protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the laws would leave them at the mercy of big corporates.

The plight of farmers is a major political issue in India with thousands committing suicide in recent years due to debt and increasingly erratic weather patterns blamed on climate change.

Farmers were met with tear gas and water cannon when they marched on New Delhi last week and are now facing-off against heavily-armed security forces at two major entry points to the city.

Many of the demonstrators come from northern Punjab state which is controlled by the Congress party, the main opposition to Modi’s administration.



People cross a river by boat from Ethiopia to Sudan, near the Hamdeyat refugees transit camp, which houses Ethiopian refugees fleeing the fighting in the Tigray region, on the Sudan-Ethiopia border. The United Nations yesterday appealed to Ethiopian authorities for access to 96,000 Eritrean refugees in the northern Tigray region, where it said food is believed to have run out during the month-long conflict.

PHOTO: REUTERS

‘OIC RESOLUTION’ ON KASHMIR

India, Pakistan trade barbs

Al Jazeera Online

Pakistan and India have traded barbs over a “unanimous resolution” passed by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that criticised New Delhi’s decision to strip Indian-administered Kashmir of its special status last August.

The OIC resolution, a copy of which Al Jazeera has obtained, rejected India’s Kashmir decision and demanded that “India rescind its illegal step”.

Last August India stripped the Himalayan region’s limited autonomy and brought it under the direct rule of New Delhi. India has deployed more than half a million forces in Kashmir – home to 12 million people – making it one of the most militarised zones in the world.

Apart from Saudi Arabia and UAE, most of the OIC countries remain committed to Kashmir cause,” Al Jazeera reported.

The resolution, which also condemned India for use of live fire and pellet guns against civilians, attracted sharp reaction from New Delhi. “It is regrettable that OIC continues to allow itself to be used by a certain country ... to indulge in anti-India propaganda,” it said.

Pakistan’s foreign office reacted late on Monday. “Rather than dismissing the international community’s concerns as reflected in the OIC Resolution, India would be well-advised to pay heed and stop its state-terrorism in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK),” it said.

KSA allows Israeli planes to cross its airspace

Reuters, Washington

Saudi Arabia has agreed to let Israeli airliners cross its airspace en route to the United Arab Emirates after talks between Saudi officials and White House senior adviser Jared Kushner, a senior Trump administration official said.

Kushner and Middle East envoys Avi Berkowitz and Brian Hook raised the issue shortly after they arrived in Saudi Arabia for talks on Monday. “We were able to reconcile the issue,” the official told Reuters.

The agreement was hammered out just hours before Israel’s first commercial flight to the UAE was planned yesterday morning. The Israil Airlines flight was at risk of being canceled with no overflight agreement.

The direct flights are an offshoot of normalization deals Israel reached this year with the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan.

The UAE has already reaped benefits from normalisation, including the White House pushing forward with arms sales, including an advanced fighter jet, to the Gulf country.

“This should resolve any issues that should occur with Israeli carriers taking people from Israel to the UAE and back and to Bahrain,” the official said.

Kushner and his team were to meet Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman later this week, as well as the emir of Kuwait.

One goal of the trip is to try to persuade Gulf Cooperation Council countries to end a three-year blockade of Qatar.

Qatar has been under an air, land and sea blockade imposed by GCC members Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, and non-GCC member Egypt, since June 2017.

EU set to meet two of its three 2020 climate goals

Rights court OKs climate lawsuit against 33 nations

AGENCIES

A four-percent drop in greenhouse gas emissions in 2019 and the green effects of the pandemic will help the EU meet two of its three 2020 climate goals, a report published Monday showed.

Outlined in 2007 and adopted in 2009, the three goals include a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20 percent from 1990 levels, a share of at least 20 percent for renewables in energy consumption, and a 20-percent improvement in energy efficiency.

According to the European Environment Agency report, the two first goals will be met in 2020, while the third one, on energy efficiency, is not expected to be reached.

In 2019, emissions in the EU -- excluding Britain -- decreased by four percent year-on-year. That was the second-biggest annual decline after 2009 when the region was mired in a financial crisis, according to the EEA, and brought the region’s overall emissions 24 percent below the 1990 level.

Meanwhile, EEA preliminary figures show that renewables accounted for 19.4 percent of energy consumed in the EU in 2019, close to the 20-percent target.

Looking beyond 2020, the Commission is aiming for a 55-percent reduction of European emissions in 2030 from 1990 levels, with the goal of being carbon neutral by 2050.

Meanwhile, Europe’s top rights court said Monday that it would give priority status to a lawsuit filed by six young Portuguese citizens against 33 nations they say are not fulfilling obligations to limit climate change.

It is the first such lawsuit heard by the European Court of Human Rights, whose rulings must in theory be applied by all Council of Europe members.

The six Portuguese plaintiffs, aged eight to 21, say the fierce wildfires that have ravaged Portugal in recent years are due in part to a failure of governments to abide by their commitments as part of the 2015 Paris Accord to combat global warming.

AFP, Sao Paulo

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon surged again over the past year, hitting a 12-year high, according to official figures released Monday that drew a chorus of condemnation of President Jair Bolsonaro’s government.

A total of 11,088 square kilometers (4,281 square miles) of forest was destroyed in Brazil’s share of the world’s biggest rainforest in the 12 months to August, according to the Brazilian space agency’s PRODES monitoring program, which analyzes satellite images to track deforestation.

That is equivalent to an area larger than Jamaica, and was a 9.5-percent increase from the previous year, when deforestation also hit a more than decade-long high.

“Because of such deforestation, Brazil is probably the only major greenhouse gas emitter that managed to increase its emissions in the year the coronavirus pandemic paralyzed the global economy,” said the Brazilian Climate Observatory, a coalition of

BRAZILIAN AMAZON

Deforestation hits 12-year high



environmental groups.

Forests such as the Amazon play a vital role in controlling climate change because they suck carbon from the atmosphere. However, when trees die or burn, they release their carbon back into the environment.

Bolsonaro, a far-right climate-change skeptic, has presided over rising deforestation and wildfires since taking office in January 2019.

His government is pushing to

open protected lands to mining and agribusiness, and has slashed funding for environmental protection programs. Environmentalists say those policies fuel the destruction of the Amazon, about 60 percent of which is in Brazil.

The latest annual deforestation figure was the highest since 2008, when 12,911 square kilometers of forest were destroyed in the Brazilian Amazon.