



Britain's Queen Elizabeth and Anne, Princess Royal gather around a grill as they visit a community project in Glasgow, as part of the Queen's traditional trip to Scotland for Holyrood Week, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Asian coal plant drive threatens climate goals

Report says 5 Asian countries responsible for 80pc of new coal power plants planned around the world

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

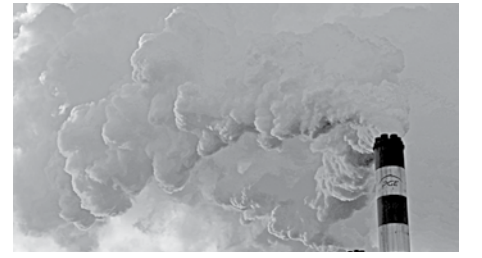
Five Asian countries are responsible for 80 percent of new coal power stations planned worldwide, with the projects threatening goals to fight the climate crisis, a report warned yesterday.

China, India, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam are planning to build more than 600 coal plants, think-tank Carbon Tracker said. The stations will be able to generate a total of 300 gigawatts of energy -- equivalent to around the entire electricity generating capacity of Japan.

The projects are being pursued despite the availability of cheaper renewables, and they threaten efforts to meet the Paris climate deal goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the study said.

"These last bastions of coal power are swimming against the tide, when renewables offer a cheaper solution that supports global climate targets," said Catharina Hillenbrand Von Der Neyen, Carbon Tracker's head of research.

Experts see phasing out coal, which produces greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, as key in battling a climate crisis whose impacts -- ranging from species extinction to unlivable heat -- are expected to accelerate markedly.



Asia-Pacific consumed over three-quarters of all coal used globally in 2019, according to BP's statistical review of world energy.

China, the world's biggest coal consumer and greenhouse gas emitter, tops the list of countries planning new coal plants, according to Carbon Tracker.

It has 368 power stations in the pipeline with 187 gigawatts of capacity, the think-tank said -- despite a pledge by President Xi Jinping that China will become carbon neutral by 2060.

India, the second-biggest coal consumer, is planning 92 plants with about 60 gigawatts of capacity, according to the London-based think-tank, which focuses on the impact of the energy transition on financial markets.

Indonesia is planning 107 new plants, Vietnam 41, and Japan 14, it said.

NEWS IN brief

Seven killed in Bali ferry sinking

Indonesian rescuers were searching for 11 people still missing after a passenger ferry sank off the coast of Bali in rough seas, killing at least seven, authorities said yesterday. Dozens of survivors were plucked from the water Tuesday evening after the KMP Yunicee, carrying 57 passengers and crew, went down near Gilimanuk port at the western end of the holiday island. It had been travelling across a narrow strait from Java island. It was unclear what caused the accident. Marine accidents are common in Indonesia, an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, where many use ferries and other boats to travel despite poor safety standards.

Myanmar junta to release 700 prisoners

Myanmar's authorities will free around 700 prisoners from Yangon's Insein jail yesterday, prison chief Zaw Zaw told Reuters, in a release that is expected to include some of the thousands of people detained for opposing military rule. A crowd of people gathered ahead of the release outside the Insein prison, a colonial-era jail on the outskirts of the commercial hub of Yangon, photographs on social media showed. The Myanmar Now news portal reported that across the country about 2,000 prisoners would be released.

7 migrants drown as boat capsizes off Italy

At least seven migrants, one of them pregnant, drowned after a boat carrying them capsized five miles off the Italian island of Lampedusa early yesterday, officials said. About 10 other people were missing, Luigi Patronaggio, the chief prosecutor of a team leading investigations into the deaths, told Reuters. The migrants are believed to have started their journey in Tunisia. Coastguard units managed to rescue about 46 other migrants from the 8-metre-long boat after it overturned, and bring them back to Lampedusa, officials said. The identity of the victims were not available.

Death toll jumps in Russia

669 deaths reported in last 24 hours; cases spread to remote Australian outback

AGENCIES

Russia yesterday reported its highest daily coronavirus death toll and infections reached Australia's vast outback wilderness as the highly infectious Delta strain has caused mayhem around the world.

Despite Russia reported 669 coronavirus deaths over the past 24 hours, a pandemic high of fatalities for the second day in a row, President Vladimir Putin said he was opposed to mandatory coronavirus vaccinations for Russians.

Russia in mid-June saw infections spike in a third wave driven by the highly transmissible Delta variant first identified in India, authorities have said, and worsened by a sluggish inoculation drive.

Although free jabs have been available since early December, only around 15 percent of Russia's population had received at least one dose as of yesterday according to the Gogov website, which tallies Covid figures from the regions.

In Australia, the Covid scare yesterday reached the far-flung town of Alice Springs, as officials issued stay-at-home orders after a potentially infected traveller used the airport.

In the past few days, Sydney, Perth, Brisbane and Darwin imposed lockdowns, though the number

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
Indonesia considers broader curbs as coronavirus crisis deepens
Top North Korean officials sacked after 'crucial' Covid-19 incident
Thailand prepares for Phuket reopening despite Covid surge

of cases recorded daily nationwide were still being counted in tens rather than hundreds.

Around one in two Australians are now under stay-at-home orders, with millions of others subjected to movement curbs and mandatory mask-wearing amid flare-ups of the highly contagious strain in several locations.

The pandemic has killed at least 3,940,888 people since the virus first emerged in December 2019, according to an AFP compilation of official data at 1000 GMT yesterday.

The United States is the worst-affected country with 604,467 deaths, followed by Brazil with 515,985, India with 398,454, Mexico 232,803 and Peru with 192,163.

In Asia, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un replaces several senior officials after a "crucial" coronavirus incident, state media reports, potentially signalling a breach in the country's epidemic defences.

Pyeongyang closed its borders in January 2020 and has not confirmed any cases, but analysts say it is now clear there have been infections.

Meanwhile, Indonesia is finalising emergency measures aimed at controlling Southeast Asia's worst coronavirus epidemic, its president said yesterday, as the country reported record Covid-19 cases for the second day this week.

President Joko Widodo said authorities were mulling whether to tighten restrictions for one week or two weeks and urged the public to remain vigilant. Indonesia reported 21,807 Covid-19 cases yesterday and 467 deaths.

In Thailand, authorities yesterday prepared to reopen the holiday hotspot of Phuket to tourists quarantine-free, even as the country registered its highest single-day death toll (53) from Covid-19.

High hopes have been pinned on the so-called "Phuket sandbox" -- a model that will allow vaccinated travellers to visit without a quarantine period in an effort to revive Thailand's battered tourism industry.

UN states okay \$6b peacekeeping budget

REUTERS, New York

United Nations member states agreed on Tuesday to a budget of some \$6 billion for the world body's 12 peacekeeping missions for the next year, diplomats said, narrowly averting a possible shutdown of the operations.

The 193-member UN General Assembly budget committee agreed to the peacekeeping budget for the year through June 30, 2022. It will be formally adopted by the General Assembly on Wednesday.

Top UN officials said on Monday that UN peacekeeping missions - most of which are in Africa and the Middle East - had been advised to start putting contingency plans in place in case a new budget was not adopted by June 30.

Some diplomats said changes to negotiating procedures, issues with logistics and tough talk pitting China against Western countries had threatened to delay an agreement.

"Our chronic inability to respect deadlines puts the entire peacekeeping architecture in unprecedented jeopardy," European Union diplomat Thibault Camelli told the budget committee on Tuesday. "Going forward, and for the future negotiations, we owe it ... to the women and men in the field who carry out the peacekeeping mandates to finish our work in a timely fashion."

The United States is largest assessed contributor to the peacekeeping budget, responsible for about 28%, followed by China with 15.2% and Japan with 8.5%.

SECURITY VACUUM IN AFGHANISTAN

Civilians take up arms as violence surges

Italy, Germany complete troops pullout

AGENCIES

Gun in hand, 55-year-old Dost Mohammad Salangi recites poetry as he leads a small group of men to a look-out post high in the rugged hills of Parwan province, north of the Afghan capital Kabul.

Heavily bearded and wearing a traditional circular pakol hat to keep off the sun, he has a warning for the Islamist militant Taliban movement, which has increased attacks on Afghan forces and claimed more territory as foreign troops withdraw.

"If they impose war on us, oppress us and encroach on women and people's property, even our seven-year-old children will be armed and will stand against them," he told Reuters.

Salangi is one of hundreds of former "mujahideen" fighters and civilians who have felt compelled to take up arms to help the army repel a growing Taliban insurgency.

The group's ascendancy on the ground comes as the last US-led international forces prepare to leave after two decades of fighting that ended with no clear

victory for either side.

"We have to protect our country ... now there is no choice as the foreign forces abandon us," said Farid Mohammed, a young student who joined a local anti-Taliban leader from Parwan.

He was speaking as the German military concluded the withdrawal of the second largest contingent of foreign troops after the United States with around 150,000 soldiers deployed over the past two decades.

Italy also said yesterday that it had completed its troop pull-out from Afghanistan. According to the ministry, 50,000 Italian soldiers were deployed to Afghanistan over the past 20 years.

Italy was one of the five countries most involved in Afghanistan along with the United States, Turkey, Britain and Germany as part of "Resolute Support."

US President Joe Biden and Nato said in mid-April they would pull out the roughly 10,000 foreign troops still in Afghanistan by Sept 11, the 20th anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York that prompted the mission.



Journalists react as police face them during clashes with demonstrators as anti-government protests take place in Bogota, Colombia, on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Revolution Love' sweeps Myanmar

AFP, BANGKOK

With bars shuttered, universities empty and hook-up apps poleaxed by internet blackouts, dating got much harder in post-coup Myanmar, but young people are still finding love -- often in the heady rush of anti-junta protests.

Since the military seized power in February, ousting civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and ending a decade-long experiment with democracy, outrage on the streets has been met with a brutal crackdown on dissent.

Among protesters who came of age during Myanmar's flirtation with parliamentary rule, "Taw Lan Yay Puu Sar" -- "Revolution Love" in Burmese -- is thriving alongside the anger and despair, making and breaking relationships.

"Meeting someone at a protest is very different and I think it is more exciting," Zan, a 19-year-old student who met his girlfriend at an anti-junta demonstration in February, told AFP.

They got chatting after he offered her some oranges during a protest. A few days later she contacted him on Facebook.

They started going to protests together, and romance blossomed against the backdrop of gunfire, burning tyres and chaos of the junta's intensifying crackdown.

The lovebirds had a close call in March when



police suddenly broke through the barricade they were sheltering behind, sending them fleeing for a safehouse where they had to hide for several hours.

"When I am at a protest, it is not just me, but she is with me," Zan said.

"So, when I must run, I will also make sure she gets to safety with me."

Stories like his have spawned a "Revolution Love" hashtag, with young protesters sharing stories, memes and viral posts of young love against the junta.

Pro-democracy posters and the three-fingered salute associated with anti-military rallies have appeared frequently in Tinder profiles after the generals restored access to the dating app.

HK security law created 'human rights emergency'

Says Amnesty; China slams 'malicious slander'

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong's national security law has created a "human rights emergency", Amnesty International said yesterday, a year after China imposed it on the city to crush a pro-democracy movement.

The legislation -- which criminalises anything authorities deem subversion, secession, collusion with foreign forces and terrorism with up to life in prison -- has radically transformed Hong Kong's political and legal landscape.

"In one year, the National Security Law has put Hong Kong on a rapid path to becoming a police state and created a human rights emergency for the people living there," Amnesty's Asia-Pacific Regional Director Yamini Mishra said.

Beijing insisted the legislation was required to restore stability after huge and sometimes violent pro-democracy demonstrations in 2019, but promised it would target only an "extreme minority".

Police and prosecutors have since applied the law broadly, with the vast majority of charges targeting political speech, renege on China's assurances that Hong Kong would be allowed to maintain its key liberties and autonomy after its 1997 handover from Britain.

Amnesty released the report a week after pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily was forced to shut down following the arrests of its senior executives and lead editorial writer, and a freeze on its assets.

"From politics to culture, education to media, the law has infected every part of Hong Kong society and fomented a climate of fear that forces residents to think twice about what they say, what they tweet and how they live their lives," Amnesty said.