

MORE NEWS

Facebook can pursue lawsuit against NSO Group: US court

A US appeals court said Facebook can pursue a lawsuit accusing Israel's NSO Group of exploiting a bug in its WhatsApp messaging app to install malware allowing the surveillance of 1,400 people, including journalists, human rights activists and dissidents. Facebook, now known as Meta Platforms Inc, sued NSO for an injunction and damages in October 2019, accusing it of accessing WhatsApp servers without permission six months earlier to install its Pegasus malware on victims' mobile devices. NSO has argued that Pegasus helps law enforcement and intelligence agencies fight crime and protect national security.

2 more killed in targeted attack in Indian Kashmir

Two people, including a police officer, have been shot dead in Indian-administered Kashmir — the latest in a series of targeted attacks in the disputed region that began last month. On Monday evening, Muhammad Ibrahim Khan, a resident of Astengo in Bandipora district, was critically wounded when suspected rebels fired at him near a grocery shop in Bohri Kadal area of the main city of Srinagar. Khan, who worked at the shop owned by a Kashmiri Hindu, succumbed to his injuries at a nearby hospital. Recently, a fresh wave of killings by suspected rebels has seen them targeting Kashmiri Hindus, known locally as Pandits, and non-Kashmiris, mainly migrant workers. Since last month, a total of 42 people, including 13 civilians, 19 suspected rebels and 10 soldiers, have been killed in the restive region.



At least 26 children die in Niger school fire

At least 26 children aged between five and six burnt to death on Monday when their straw and wood classrooms caught fire in southern Niger, seven months after a similar tragedy in the capital Niamey. Niger, one of the poorest countries in the world, has tried to fix shortages of school buildings by constructing thousands of straw and wood sheds to serve as classrooms, with children sometimes sitting on the ground. Fires in the highly flammable classrooms are common but rarely result in casualties. Three days of mourning have been declared in the Maradi region from today.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

'LOSS AND DAMAGE'

Not even on official negotiation agenda

AGENCIES

When countries first signed up to the COP negotiations process more than 30 years ago, climate change was viewed as a future problem.

Then in 2009 richer nations -- historically responsible for the vast majority of plant-warming greenhouse gas emissions -- vowed to provide \$100 billion annually by 2020.

The cash was earmarked for two tasks: mitigation, or helping countries to limit further warming by decarbonising their economies, and adaptation, helping them plan for higher seas and more intense downpours in the decades to come.

But today, with just 1.1C of warming so far, nations around the world are already being battered by extreme weather, with climate-linked disasters displacing tens of millions and inflicting hundreds of billions worth of damage.

Yet funding for loss and damage is not even on the official negotiation agenda in Glasgow.

The annual \$100 billion outlay promised for climate adaptation and mitigation will eventually be ready from 2022 or 2023 -- several years behind schedule.

But loss and damage will soon dwarf that figure.

Studies show that damage inflicted by climate change could top \$500 billion a year by 2030.

An analysis by Christian Aid showed Monday that the 65 most vulnerable nations could see GDP drop 20 percent on average by 2050.

Yamide Dagmet, director of climate negotiations at the World Resources Institute, said that loss and damage is a touchy subject for developed nations, whose emissions have driven the destruction.

"It's mainly the rich countries' fear or even paranoia of liability or compensation," she said.

Asked whether the European Union should consider a loss and damage fund separate from funding for mitigation and adaptation, Juergen Zattler, head of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, on Monday said he believed the question was premature.

"I don't think the discussion is at that stage yet," he told reporters at the Glasgow summit. "We do not know yet what loss and damage actually is, how it is different from adaptation. We are poking in the dark here."

Like Mozambique after cyclones Idai and Kenneth, many countries have been forced into accepting loans to help recover after extreme events.

Aiyaz Sayed-Khaimy, Fiji's minister for economy and climate change, said that had left nations mired in climate debt.

"It is akin to forcing us to fork out protection money to the mafia of fossil fuel investors, who are responsible for inflicting the terror of this crisis upon us," he said.



The 'lungs of the Earth' dying

The Amazon forest closes to 'tipping point' as it now emitting more carbon than it absorbs

AFP, Sao Felix do Xingu, Brazil

Something is wrong.

Holed up in her lab, Brazilian atmospheric chemist Luciana Gatti crunches her numbers again and again, thinking there is a mistake.

But the same bleak conclusion keeps popping up on her screen: the Amazon, the world's biggest rainforest -- the "lungs of the Earth," the "green ocean," the thing humanity is counting on to inhale our pollution and save us from the mess we've made of the planet -- is now emitting more carbon than it absorbs.

Splashed across South America in an exuberant blob of deep green, the Amazon basin is one of the world's great wildernesses, a place where life teems in the heat of the tropics, fed by the myriad rivers criss-crossing the jungle like blue blood vessels.

Home to more than three million species, the rainforest bursts with lush vegetation, which absorbs huge amounts of carbon through photosynthesis -- a key fact as humankind struggles to stop heating the planet with greenhouse gases.

As carbon dioxide emissions have surged by 50 percent in 60 years, to nearly 40 billion tonnes worldwide, the Amazon has absorbed a large amount of that pollution -- nearly two billion tonnes a year, until recently.

But humans have also spent the past half-century tearing down and burning whole swathes of the Amazon to make way for cattle ranches and farmland.

Gatti, who works at Brazil's national space agency, has been tracking how much carbon the region emits and absorbs, watching for signs of a looming nightmare: that the destruction could push the Amazon to a "tipping point" where much of the rainforest dries up and turns to savannah.

Climate scientists say passing that point would be catastrophic: instead of helping curb climate change, the Amazon would suddenly accelerate it. Plummeting rainfall would cause its trees to die off en masse, releasing up to a decade's worth of worldwide carbon emissions back into the atmosphere -- and dooming our efforts to hold global warming somewhere near a livable limit.

In July, Gatti and her team published their grimmest findings yet, in the journal Nature.



First: the Amazon is now a net carbon source, mainly because of humans setting it on fire. Second: even subtracting emissions caused by fires, the southeastern Amazon is now a net carbon emitter.

Gatti's is one of several recent studies to sound a blaring alarm on the Amazon. It is based on data from 2010 to 2018.

Since then, the destruction has accelerated -- especially in Brazil, home to 60 percent of the Amazon, where far-right President Jair Bolsonaro took office in 2019 with strong backing from the farm lobby, pushing to open protected lands and indigenous reservations to agribusiness and mining.

Under Bolsonaro, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has surged from an average of 6,500 square kilometers per year during the previous decade to around 10,000 -- an area nearly the size of Lebanon.

Scientists say it is impossible to be sure just how close the rainforest now is to the tipping point. But Gatti's findings suggest we are teetering on the brink -- if not tumbling over it already, at least in part of the Amazon.

According to one widely cited study, the Amazon will reach the tipping point when 20 to 25 percent of it is deforested. We are currently at 15 percent -- up from six percent in 1985.

Of course blame for the Amazon's degraded state goes beyond Bolsonaro, and Brazil. Gatti, the atmospheric chemist, argues the whole world bears responsibility.

Illegal Amazon timber is exported to the United States and Europe. Massive quantities of beef produced on razed rainforest are shipped around the world. Soy grown in the Amazon helps feed cows, chickens and pigs across the globe.

Governments should ban those imports, Gatti says.

"If you want to protect the Amazon, stop consuming the products that fuel its destruction."

Erika Berenguer, an Amazon ecologist at Oxford and Lancaster universities, is one of the most prominent scientists studying how the rainforest functions when humans throw it off balance.

"That's the million-dollar question," she said when asked about the tipping point of Amazon.

"We'll never know the tipping point until we're past it. That's the definition of a tipping point. ... If we pass the tipping point, it's the end. And I don't say that lightly. We're talking about the most biodiverse place on the planet collapsing," she said adding millions and millions of people in Brazil and billions around the world will be affected.

"We cannot live in a world without the Amazon."



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Kabul University campus before the Taliban took control of Afghanistan.

'We don't have a future'

Despite promises by the Taliban, Afghan female students see no hope

MOSTAFA SHABUJ

In Taliban's first news briefing since their return to power in Kabul, the group's spokesperson said the new regime would be "positively different" from their 1996-2001 stint, which was infamous for deaths by stoning, girls being banned from school and women from working in contact with men.

On August 17, two days after seizing power in a lightning offensive, the movement's main spokesman said women would be allowed to work and study.

But months have passed since then and the promises are now beginning to sound hollow. Despite the assurances, nearly a million of country's female-students' future looks bleak.

The Taliban have opened schools for both boys and girls. They have also allowed private universities to run classes. However, only a few students and teachers are attending those, signaling a deep-rooted fear among the educated Afghans for the hardened Islamist group.

Sana Tahah, 20, a second year student of the Kabul University at the Archeology and Anthropology Department, narrated how she hurried back home with her school-going sister when Kabul fell to the Taliban.

"At that evening, I thought everything we gained in last 20 years had been lost. Still I can't sleep at night," said Sana adding that her younger sister is still traumatised.

"She still shut all the windows and doors every time when she feels the Taliban are near our house to take us away."

Saiema Sultani, 23, a second year-student of the International Relations Department at the Kateb university, shared similar experiences.

"Although our university reopened, only around 10 percent of female students are attending classes. They are too afraid

to come."

She said the Taliban have divided the boys and girls by curtains in the classrooms.

The Taliban have told the UN that they are working on a framework which would allow the Afghan female students to attend the classes as they have to ensure their safety first.

"The reality is that the Taliban are just lying. They are acting that they have changed because they need the recognition from the international community. When they will get that they will force the women to stay home," said Saiema.

For 20-year-old Sofia Karimi, a second year student of the Law and Political Science Department at the Kabul University, of the society before the latest Taliban rule wasn't an ideal one either. The women rights were only on papers and the society treated women no better than the Taliban.

But the legal rights, which Afghan women had to earn after the brutal Taliban rule which ended in 2001, built an air of freedom and promised a better future to fight for.

"But now we have no hope, no future," said Sofia, adding that most of the successful women are hiding after quitting their businesses and works to save themselves from the Taliban's wrath.

"If Taliban want to rule Afghanistan, I think they should allow women to study and work," she added.

Sana Tahah said how her life has been upended since August 15.

"I used to go to university, art classes. After that I used to volunteering in an orphanage to help the kids. I participated in sports too. But now, I am only spending worried days at home."

"It's not just me, it's happening to every girl of the county," said a dejected Sana Tahah.

Covid-19 pills no substitute for vaccines

Say disease experts

REUTERS, Chicago

Oral antiviral pills from Merck & Co and Pfizer Inc/BioNTech SE have been shown to significantly blunt the worst outcomes of Covid-19 if taken early enough, but doctors warn vaccine hesitant people not to confuse the benefit of the treatments with prevention afforded by vaccines.

While 72% of American adults have gotten a first shot of the vaccine, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll, the pace of vaccination has slowed, as political partisanship in the United States divides views on the value and safety of vaccines against the coronavirus.

Some disease experts fear the arrival of oral Covid-19 treatments may further impede vaccination campaigns. Preliminary results of a survey of 3,000 US citizens by the City University of New York (CUNY) School of Public Health suggest the drugs could "hamper the effort to get people vaccinated," said Scott Ratzan, an expert in health communication at CUNY, who led the research.

Ratzan said one out of every eight of those surveyed said they would rather get treated with a pill than be vaccinated. "That is a high number," Ratzan said.

The concern follows news on Friday from Pfizer, maker of a leading Covid-19 vaccine, that its experimental antiviral pill Paxlovid cut the risk of hospitalization and death from the disease by 89% in high-risk adults.

Six infectious disease experts interviewed by Reuters were enthusiastic about the prospect of effective new treatments for Covid-19 and agreed they were no substitute for vaccines.

ASIAN UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN

Asian University for Women (AUW), an independent international university chartered by the Parliament of Bangladesh and located in the Port City of Chittagong is inaugurating a two-year Masters of Education course beginning on January 16th, 2022. The program is open to female candidates of origin from across the world who have completed at least a Bachelor of Arts or Sciences degree with excellent results. This course will be taught in the English language in a hybrid form within fully equipped digitalized classrooms featuring both remote delivery of classes from Johns Hopkins University, Cornell University and Boston College and in-person group discussions led by highly trained graduate teaching fellows.

The program is primarily geared towards young women from Bangladesh and throughout the region who aspire to become secondary school leaders — in classroom teaching, educational entrepreneurship and management in creating new schools within underserved locations including in refugee settlements and in remote areas where quality education remains inaccessible. The course will also prepare students to employ empirical data, technical and analytical skills with a predisposition to critical analysis, monitoring and evaluation of outcomes in order to conduct social and economic analyses as well as shape effective evidence-based education policies and practice transformation. All admitted students will be required to complete a series of practical internships to bridge their theoretical understanding of relevant matters with appreciation of practical opportunities to deploy new skills and ideas. Furthermore, students will also be required to learn a UN language and be certified proficient in it upon graduation.

Annual cost of room, board and tuition is USD \$15,000. AUW awards full scholarships that cover all such costs to admitted students who demonstrate financial need and a passion for promoting excellence and equity for adolescent girls' education.

AUW adheres to principles that foster meritocracy and exercises the preferential option in choosing candidates from marginalized backgrounds. It does not discriminate based on race, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation. Please check the official announcement for this program to find out more at <https://asian-university.org/2021/10/29/masters-in-education/>.

To apply, please go to <https://bit.ly/3EXhmFD>.

Please note that a \$10 application fee is applicable upon submission of an application. The deadline for application is **December 3rd, 2021**.

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