



In this aerial view released yesterday, shows destroyed homes and businesses after a tornado ripped through town the previous evening in Mayfield, Kentucky; amid rubbles of their home, a father comforts his daughter in Dawson Springs, Kentucky; and people retrieve merchandise from a store in Mayfield.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

Quote of the day



“I made it absolutely clear to President (Vladimir) Putin ... that if he moves on Ukraine, the economic consequences for his economy are going to be devastating, devastating.”

US PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN ISSUES STARK WARNING TO RUSSIA AMID RISING TENSIONS

‘We never had anything like this here’

Grief, despair in tiny Kentucky town after tornadoes

AFP, Mayfield

Buildings razed, cars overturned, trees ripped from the ground -- there were end-of-the-world scenes in the small Kentucky town of Mayfield.

Stunned and shaken, its residents on Saturday tried to grasp the extent of the damage caused by a series of tornadoes that swept across six US states, killing more than 80 people.

On Broadway, the main street in this town of 10,000 people, old red brick buildings that were once a source of local pride were shattered by the storm.

Mitchell Fowler’s restaurant was a family business for nearly four decades, until the tornado destroyed it. The windows were blown out, the kitchen damaged, the roof torn off, and a section of the exterior wall fell.

On Friday, after a tornado warning from local authorities, Fowler closed the restaurant around 8 pm, told his employees to go home and set off for his own home

some 8 miles (13 kilometers) outside town.

“Before I got home, it was gone,” Fowler said of the restaurant.

“This was my restaurant, a family business for 38 years, I raised my family here, all my kids work here. It’s devastating,” Fowler told AFP.

Next to his restaurant, dozens of cars lay upside down or turned to the side.

An old green and white car was miraculously left intact by the storm, but the roof of the garage that housed was gone.

The tornado wreaked havoc over a strip about a kilometer wide, crossing the city from west to east.

Torn electric poles littered the ground.

“It looks like a bomb has exploded in our community,” Mayfield resident Alex Goodman told AFP.

“We knew it was coming, but we did not have anywhere to go,” said David Norseworthy, 69, a resident who works in construction.

“We never had anything like this here.”

G7 warns Iran and Russia

Threatens Moscow with ‘massive consequences’ if Ukraine attacked; tells Tehran that time is running out for a new nuclear deal

AFP, Liverpool

The G7 yesterday said time was running out for Iran to agree a deal to curb its nuclear ambitions, and warned Russia about the consequences of invading Ukraine.

Foreign ministers from the world’s richest nations have held a two-day meeting in Liverpool, northwest England, seeking to present a strong, united front against global threats.

On Iran, G7 host Britain said resumed talks in Vienna were the Islamic Republic’s “last chance to come to the negotiating table with a serious resolution.”

“There is still time for Iran to come and agree this deal,” Foreign Secretary Liz Truss told a news conference as talks wrapped up.

Negotiations restarted on Thursday to try to revive the 2015 deal between Iran and world powers, which the United States withdrew from under Donald Trump in 2018.

Iran claims it only wants to develop a civilian capability but Western powers say its stockpile of enriched uranium goes well beyond that, and could be used to develop a nuclear weapon.

US President Joe Biden has said he is ready

- » G7 is concerned about China’s ‘coercive’ economic policies
- » Blinken heads to Southeast Asia to deepen cooperation on China pushback
- » Kremlin says Putin, Biden agreed to hold more talks despite disagreements

to return to the agreement and Iranian officials maintain they are serious about committing to the talks. But Western powers have accused Tehran of backsliding on progress made earlier this year and are playing for time.

Truss’ comments are the first time a signatory to the original deal has given an ultimatum for the talks.

Britain, which hands over the G7 presidency to Germany next year, portrayed the two-day conference in Liverpool, northwest England, as a chance to stand up to authoritarianism around the world.

As well as Iran, Russia’s build-up of troops on the border with Ukraine dominated talks, given

fears of a possible invasion of the former Soviet state. Truss said there was “very much a united voice... that there will be massive consequences for Russia in the case of an incursion into Ukraine.”

Russia says the military build-up is a defensive measure against Ukraine moving closer to Nato.

And despite the warning, the Kremlin yesterday said Russian President Vladimir Putin and his US counterpart Biden have agreed to hold more talks amid tensions over a Russian troop build-up near Ukraine.

From Liverpool, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken flies on to southeast Asia as part of Washington’s push for “peace, security and prosperity” in the Indo-Pacific region.

Truss said she and her counterparts were concerned about China’s “coercive economic policies” and there was a need to counter them with their own initiatives as an alternative.

“What we want to do is build the investment reach, the economic trade reach of like-minded freedom-loving democracies,” she added.

“That is why we’re stepping up our investment into low and middle-income countries.”

MORE NEWS



Modi’s Twitter hacked again

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Twitter account was hacked yesterday with a message declaring his country had adopted bitcoin as legal tender and was distributing the cryptocurrency to citizens. Modi is a prolific tweeter and is the world’s most popular incumbent politician on the platform, with more than 73 million followers on his main account. His office tweeted that the account was “very briefly compromised” and that Twitter had since restored control. It was the second time one of Modi’s Twitter accounts was hacked, after another was taken over last year to send out a tweet urging the public to donate to a fake coronavirus relief fund.

Israeli PM visits UAE

Israel’s Naftali Bennett yesterday headed to the United Arab Emirates for the first official visit by a premier of the Jewish state since they established diplomatic ties last year. Bennett today meets Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan to discuss “deepening the ties between Israel and the UAE, especially economic and regional issues,” the prime minister’s office said. The UAE last year became the third Arab nation to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel after Egypt and Jordan. Bahrain and Morocco then followed as part of a series of deals brokered by former US president Donald Trump.

New Caledonia rejects independence from France

Residents of the Pacific territory of New Caledonia voted overwhelmingly yesterday to remain part of France in a third referendum that was boycotted by pro-independence groups, reports say. Police reinforcements have been sent to the territory known as “the pebble”, which is of strategic importance to France and is part of a wider tussle for influence in the Pacific between Western countries and China. Local television channel NC la 1ere reported that, with 90.23 percent of ballots counted, 96.32 percent of voters had voted “No” to independence in a result that will raise fears of unrest and questions about the legitimacy of the process.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

BREACH OF COVID-19 RULES

New photo emerges to add pressure on UK PM

AFP, London

Boris Johnson yesterday faced fresh questions about alleged government breaches of coronavirus restrictions after a photo emerged of him at a Christmas event last year.

The British prime minister has faced a barrage of criticism and calls to quit over claims of an illegal Downing Street party on December 18, 2020. He has repeatedly said he was assured the gathering complied with social distancing restrictions in place at the time and has ordered an internal investigation.

But the Sunday Mirror published a photograph of Johnson said to have been taken three days before that party, at a “virtual quiz” for his staff, in which four teams of six people took part to raise funds for charity.

Christmas lunches and parties that were “primarily social activity” were banned at the time, as Britain -- one of the worst-hit countries by Covid-19 -- battled a surge in cases of the Delta coronavirus strain.

Mixing of more than two people from two households indoors was banned, scuppering Christmas plans for millions after months of tight restrictions, including lockdown.

The left-leaning Sunday Mirror said Johnson took part for up to 15 minutes and asked questions as quizmaster in one round.

The main opposition Labour party said it showed Johnson presided over “a culture of disregard for the rules at the heart of government”, after a slew of claims that parties were held across Whitehall last Christmas.

An Opinion poll for The Observer put Labour nine points ahead of Johnson’s Conservatives, and suggested 57 percent of people think he should quit -- up nine points from just two weeks ago.

Who will be the judge of countries’ climate plans?

AFP, Paris

Countries have until the end of next year to ensure their climate commitments meet the Paris agreement’s cap on global warming. But who will check that their promises really do stack up?

The question is so sensitive that, for now, the answer is: the countries themselves.

While nations have agreed to a global target aimed at avoiding the most catastrophic impacts of climate change, fossil fuel and other greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise when they should be falling.

And there is no formal organisation tasked with making sure individual nations are on track.

“There are no ‘police’ to check; this is a weakness of the process,” climatologist Corinne Le Quere told AFP.

Nearly 200 countries signed up to the landmark Paris deal in 2015, committing to halt warming “well below” two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, preferably limiting it to 1.5C.

And in November at the COP 26 climate summit in Glasgow, nations called for all governments to ensure their emissions plans for this decade align with the Paris temperature goals, strengthening them if necessary, by the end of 2022.

But each country will effectively mark its own climate homework.

The process means countries can move forward “at the pace suited to their political system”, said Le Quere.



So far, it has not pulled down emissions nearly fast enough.

At a global level, the United Nations’ climate change body estimates that countries’ 2030 emissions reduction plans will lead to warming of a devastating 2.7C.

A separate annual analysis by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), which looks at the gap between climate commitments and actual reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, drills down into slightly more detail.

It includes a particular focus on richer nations from the G20, responsible for around 80 percent of emissions.

“We don’t name and shame but we do point to the G20 members that are definitely not on track” like

Australia and Mexico, said Anne Olhoff, one of the authors of the UNEP report.

But going further would be “so political, I don’t see it happening in a UN context to be quite honest”, she told AFP.

In fact, experts doubt that nations would agree to any formal external scrutiny.

Even the most ambitious countries will have to “sharpen their arguments” to convince people that their numbers add up, said Lola Vallejo, from the IDDRI think tank.

Civil society, the media, and even other nations will all push governments to do more.

The Paris agreement underlines the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” according to national situations.

So some believe that wealthy countries, largely responsible for global warming, have a duty towards the poorest, and should therefore do more to achieve a “fair” contribution.

There are multiple ways to measure this: historical emissions, emissions per capita, carbon footprint that takes into account emissions generated by imported goods, aid to poor countries.

But essentially the key message remains the same, said Olhoff.

If they hope to curb global warming, she said, “all countries need to go back and see if there is anything we can do more and quicker”.



Activists pour red liquid used as blood on false fish during a demonstration by Ocean Rebellion a movement affiliate with Extinction Rebellion, in front if the European Commission headquarters, in Brussels, Belgium, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



DECEMBER 13

- 1937 - Japanese forces captured the Chinese city of Nanking (Nanjing).
- 1949 - Israel declares Jerusalem as its capital.
- 2001 - A group of armed men opened fire in India’s parliament complex killing nine people.
- 2003 - US troops found former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein in a hole in the ground behind a shepherd’s hut near his home town of Tikrit.

SOURCE: REUTERS