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If Iran shows seriousness, we can and should reach an understanding on mutual return to full implementation of the JCPOA within days. ... But anything much beyond that would put the possibility of return to the deal at grave risk.

A US State Department spokesperson on ongoing talks on the 2015 accord

EASTER BOMBINGS Lanka clears top officials

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's High Court yesterday acquitted two top officials accused of "crimes against humanity" for failing to prevent the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed 279 people.

The three-judge panel dismissed all 855 charges against Hemasiri Fernando, then secretary to the ministry of defence, as well as then inspector general of police Pujith Jayasundara.

The attacks, blamed on a homegrown Islamic extremist group, targeted three churches and three hotels.



People struggle in the wind as they walk across Westminster Bridge, near the Houses of Parliament in central London, England, yesterday. Millions hunkered down as Storm Eunice pummeled southern Britain with fearsome winds and crashing waves, leaving the streets of London virtually deserted and triggering broader warnings in Europe. The UK capital was placed under its first ever "red" weather warning, meaning there is "danger to life", and the same level of alert was in place across southern England and South Wales, where schools were closed and public transport paralysed.

PHOTO: AFP

World funding its own destruction

Major study says \$1.8 trillion subsidies in key industries destroying nature

AFP, London

The world must by 2030 slash \$1.8 trillion in annual subsidies that destroy the environment, in order to "finance a net-zero global economy", according to a study Thursday from business groups including one founded by tycoon Richard Branson.

The report, estimating the value of damaging state subsidies, was commissioned by Branson's nonprofit initiative The B Team and global coalition Business for Nature, which comprises academic, corporate and environmental organisations.

The vast subsidies, totalling two percent of global gross domestic product, fund the "global destruction of nature" and governments worldwide must act, the two organisations said in a statement.

The study "finds the fossil fuel, agriculture and water industries receive more than 80 percent of all

environmentally harmful subsidies per year", the organisations concluded.

At least 20 nations were subsidising the price of gasoline or petrol, sparking higher emissions of carbon and other dangerous air pollutants, the research suggested.

Beef and soy production were also stimulated by "significant" subsidy flows that are a cause of tropical rainforest loss in Brazil, the report found.

European policies on biofuel blending biofuels with motor fuel meanwhile ramped up pressure for new cropland, often at the expense of tropical biodiversity hotspots, the study added.

And illegal logging, often via corruption and favouritism over lumbering concessions, contributed to climate change, deforestation and ecosystem destruction.

"Nature is declining at an alarming rate, and we have never lived on a planet with so little biodiversity," said Christiana Figueres,

head of The B Team's climate group.

Governments across the world pay an estimated \$640 billion in support to the fossil fuel industry, contributing to climate change, air and water pollution and land subsidence, the study found.

Agriculture receives some \$520 billion in subsidies that contribute towards soil erosion, water pollution, deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions and loss of biodiversity and natural habitats, it claimed.

And another \$350 billion in subsidies for the water industry is said to help fund water pollution and risk ocean and waterway ecosystems.

Figueroes said that "harmful subsidies must be redirected towards protecting the climate and nature, rather than financing our own extinction".

The study was published one month before the next phase of the UN biodiversity summit COP15 in Geneva.

Fraud probe: Trump ordered to testify

AFP, New York

A US judge ruled Thursday that former president Donald Trump and his eldest children must testify under oath in New York's civil probe into alleged fraud at his family business. The Trumps have repeatedly tried to shut down the investigation by New York Attorney General Letitia James, who last month said she had uncovered "significant evidence" of fraudulent or misleading practices at the Trump Organization. Following more than two hours of oral arguments, state judge Arthur Engoron rejected a plea by Trump, Donald Jr and Ivanka to quash subpoenas issued by James in December. He ordered the trio to sit for depositions with James's office within 21 days. The Trumps are expected to appeal.

Abbas, Pelosi hold rare West Bank meet

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas met with US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in the Israeli-occupied West Bank Thursday for talks on reviving a two-state solution to the conflict, Abbas's office said. It was one of the highest-level meetings with an American official in recent years for the 86-year-old Palestinian president. Pelosi earlier met top Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, and affirmed "America's ironclad commitment to the State of Israel".

Cops arrest Canada protest leaders

AFP, Ottawa



Canadian police on Thursday began arresting leaders of the trucker-led protest that has choked the capital's streets for three weeks and provoked the government into calling on rarely used emergency powers. The convoy had started with truckers protesting against mandatory Covid vaccines to cross the US border, but its demands have grown to include an end to all pandemic restrictions and, for many, a wider anti-establishment agenda.

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