

Drought in Europe exposes ancient treasures, hazards

REUTERS

Weeks of baking drought across Europe have seen water levels in rivers and lakes fall to levels few can remember, exposing long-submerged treasures - and some unwanted hazards.

In Spain, suffering its worst drought in decades, archaeologists have been delighted by the emergence of a prehistoric stone circle dubbed the "Spanish Stonehenge" that is usually covered by the waters of a dam. Officially known as the Dolmen of Guadalperal, the stone circle currently sits fully exposed in one corner of the Valdecanas reservoir, in the central province of Caceres, where authorities say the water level has dropped to 28 percent of capacity.

Memories of past droughts have also been rekindled in Germany by the reappearance of so-called "hunger stones" along the River Rhine. Many such stones have become visible along the banks of Germany's largest river in recent weeks.

Another of Europe's mighty rivers, the Danube, has fallen to one of its lowest levels in almost a century as a result of the drought, exposing the hulks of more than 20 German warships sunk during World War Two near Serbia's river port town of Prahovo.

Italy has declared a state of emergency for areas around the River Po, and in late July a previously submerged 450-kg (1,000-pound) World War Two bomb was discovered in the low-running waters of the country's longest river.



Wreckage of a WWII German warship is seen in the Danube in Prahovo, Serbia, on August 18, 2022; the dolmen of Guadalperal is seen due to the receding waters of the Valdecanas reservoir in the outskirts of El Gordo, Spain, on August 3, 2022; A WWII bomb discovered in the dried-up river Po is being detonated in Medole, Italy, on August 7, 2022; An aerial view shows a branch of the Loire River as historical drought hits France, in Loireauxence, France, on August 16, 2022.

PHOTO: REUTERS



HUNGER STONES

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The ongoing drought in Europe has re-exposed the so-called "hunger stones" along certain Czech and German rivers. The rocks are embedded in rivers during droughts to mark the water level and warn future generations of the likely famine and hardship to come whenever the stones became visible again. Bearing dates and people's initials, some see their re-emergence as a warning and reminder of the hardships people faced during former droughts.



MONSOON FLOODS 15 killed in northern India

AFP, Shimla

At least 15 people were killed in India after heavy monsoon rains triggered flash floods and landslides near the Himalayan foothills, authorities said yesterday.

Flooding and landslides are common and cause widespread devastation during India's treacherous monsoon season.

Experts say climate change is increasing the number of extreme weather events around the world, with damming, deforestation and development projects in India exacerbating the human toll.

Rescue officials were rushed to Mandi district in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh where a torrent of floodwater swept away two houses and killed eight people, a government statement said.

Landslides and flooding claimed seven other lives across the state, the release added. Television news footage showed part of a railway bridge washed away by the deluge in nearby Kangra district.

Picturesque Himachal Pradesh is famed for its snow-capped mountains and is popular with tourists.

Last month, eight people died after flash floods triggered by a sudden downpour struck a camp for pilgrims in nearby Kashmir.

Heavy rains battered India's remote northeast in June, with nearly 40 killed in a landslide that swamped a camp housing railway workers and army reservists in Manipur state.

Iran nuclear deal 'imminent'

Report says sanctions on Tehran will be removed

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

A European proposal to revive the nuclear agreement between Western countries and Iran is imminent and includes the release of billions of dollars in frozen Iranian funds and oil exports in return for the scaling back of its nuclear programme.

The new deal will be carried out in four phases over two 60-day periods, sources with knowledge of the proposed agreement told Al Jazeera Arabic.

Iran recently voiced optimism about an agreement on a renewed version of the 2015 nuclear deal with the United States and other foreign powers, formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Iran's negotiating team adviser Mohammad Marandi said earlier this week "we're closer than we've been before" to securing a deal and the "remaining issues are not very difficult to resolve".

The European Union's "final text" proposal for the accord, submitted last week, was approved by the US, which says it is ready to quickly seal the agreement if Iran accepts it.

According to sources with knowledge of the matter, the proposal stipulates on the day after the agreement is signed, sanctions on 17 Iranian banks as well as 150 economic institutions will be lifted.

It also says Tehran will immediately begin to reverse the steps it took to advance its nuclear technology, which is now beyond the scope of what the United Nations nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the 2015 deal's original signatories say is acceptable.

Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium is now

at 60 percent enrichment, its highest ever and a jump from the 3.67 percent limit set out by the 2015 deal. Enrichment at 90 percent is needed to build a nuclear bomb.

Within 120 days of signing the agreement, Iran will be permitted to export 50 million barrels of oil per day. The deal also includes the release of \$7bn of Iran's funds, which are currently being held in South Korea, the sources said, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

The US will have to pay a fine in the event it withdraws from the nuclear agreement again, as it did under the administration of former President Donald Trump in 2018, according to the sources.

With a revived nuclear deal, the US and the deal's other signatories - France, the United Kingdom, Germany, China and Russia, known collectively as the P5+1 - aim to contain the nuclear programme and prevent what many warn could be a nuclear weapons crisis in the Middle East.

One of the main sticking points to reviving a deal appears to be a safeguards inquiry into Iran's nuclear programme by the IAEA, which Tehran wants closed for good before the JCPOA is restored.

The nuclear watchdog has demanded more cooperation on traces of man-made nuclear particles found at several Iranian sites years ago, saying that is the only way the inquiry could be terminated.

Another factor is the US designation of Iran's elite military force, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as a "foreign terrorist organisation". The US appears reluctant to meet Tehran's demand to remove the IRGC from the blacklist to seal the deal.



Russian crops, fertiliser must move freely

Says UN chief

AFP, Istanbul

Russian fertilisers and agricultural products must be able to reach world markets "unimpeded" or a global food crisis could strike as early as next year, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said Saturday.

"It is important that all governments and the private sector cooperate to bring them to market," he said from the Joint Coordination Center (JCC).

The JCC oversees the implementation of the Ukrainian grain export agreement signed in July by Kyiv and Moscow with the UN and Turkey as guarantors.

The agreement also guarantees Russia the right to export its agricultural products and fertilisers despite Western sanctions.

"Without fertiliser in 2022, there may not be enough food in 2023. Getting more food and fertiliser out of Ukraine and Russia is crucial to further calm commodity markets and lower prices for consumers," he said.

Under the agreement signed in July, 650,000 tons of Ukrainian grain and agricultural products have left the Ukrainian ports of Odessa, Chornomorsk and Pivdenny since August 1.

Ships must use a safe corridor to travel in the Black Sea and then be inspected by the JCC before being allowed to cross the Bosphorus Strait.

TALIBAN TRAVEL BAN WAIVER UN fails to reach deal

AGENCIES

A United Nations waiver allowing 13 Afghan Taliban officials to travel abroad expired on Friday, as the Security Council failed to reach an agreement on whether to extend the travel exemptions. China and Russia have called for an extension, while the United States and Western nations have sought a reduced list of Taliban officials allowed to travel to protest against the Taliban's rollback of women's rights and failure to form an inclusive government as it promised. Under a 2011 UN Security Council resolution, 135 Taliban officials are subject to sanctions that include asset freezes and travel bans. But 13 of them were granted exemptions from the travel ban to allow them to meet officials from other countries abroad for peace talks. If no member of the council objects to the travel ban by Monday afternoon, it will come into force for three months.

Literature world holds NY rally for Rushdie

AFP, New York

Prominent literary figures including Paul Auster and Gay Talese gathered Friday in Manhattan for a reading of Salman Rushdie's works, in solidarity with the author seriously injured in a stabbing attack. More than a dozen acclaimed writers, including friends and colleagues of Rushdie, spoke at the steps of the New York Public Library for the event, which organizers said the novelist had been invited to watch from the hospital. One week ago Rushdie was about to be interviewed as part of a lecture series in upstate New York, when a man stormed the stage and stabbed the 75-year-old writer repeatedly in the neck and abdomen. Rushdie's condition remains serious after emergency surgery but he has shown signs of improvement, and no longer requires assisted breathing.



Women rest in the basement they live in due to constant shelling in Siversk, Donetsk region, yesterday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

Serbia, Kosovo fail to break car number plate impasse

Agree more talks ahead of Sept 1 deadline

REUTERS, Brussels

The leaders of Serbia and Kosovo failed to resolve differences fuelling tension between the estranged Balkan neighbours during talks yesterday, but they agreed to resume discussions ahead of a Sept. 1 deadline that could stoke further unrest.

"Unhappily, we did not yet (come) to an agreement today," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told reporters after several hours of closed door talks in Brussels between Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti.

"But it is not the end of the story. Both leaders agreed that the process needs to continue and the discussion will resume in the coming days," he added.

Tensions between Serbia and Kosovo flared this month when Pristina said it would oblige Serbs living in the north, who are backed by Belgrade and do not recognise Kosovo institutions, to start using car licence plates issued in Pristina.

The situation calmed after Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti, under US and European Union pressure, agreed to postpone the number plates rule until Sept. 1 and Nato peacekeepers oversaw the

removal of roadblocks set up by Serbs.

"There is still time until September 1, I don't give up," Borrell said after the talks that were facilitated by the EU.

Borrell said he told the leaders that, with war raging in Europe, now was a moment to seek peace and stability, not air longstanding differences.

Kosovo won independence from Serbia in 2008, almost a decade after a guerrilla uprising against repressive Belgrade rule.

Serbia legally still considers Kosovo an integral part of its territory. It denies whipping up tensions and conflict there, and accuses Pristina of trampling on the rights of minority Serbs. Ethnic Serbs account for 5 percent of Kosovo's 1.8 million population, which is 90 percent ethnic Albanian.

"A difficult day is behind us," Vucic said in a statement on his Instagram profile. "I will refrain from any further comments because I hope that we will be able to reach a compromise in the coming days."

Vucic said that he would address the nation in the next 48 hours.

Nato has increased its presence in the north part of the country, and a Reuters witness on Thursday saw US and Polish troops patrolling two roads leading to the border with Serbia.