

2022 among 8 hottest years on record: UN

AFP, Geneva

The past eight years were the hottest since records began, the United Nations confirmed Thursday, despite the cooling influence of a drawn-out La Nina weather pattern.

Last year, as the world faced a cascade of unprecedented natural disasters made more likely and deadly by climate change, the average global temperature was about 1.15 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the World Meteorological Organization said.

The US NOAA and Nasa released similar 2022 global temperature figures on Thursday and Bill Nelson, head of the US space agency, described them as "alarming."

The WMO, a UN agency, said the past eight years "were the warmest on record globally, fuelled by ever-rising greenhouse gas concentrations and accumulated heat."

The hottest year on record was 2016, followed by 2019 and 2020, it found.

Last year marked the eighth consecutive year that annual global temperatures were at least one degree over the pre-industrial levels seen between 1850 and 1900.

The Paris Agreement, called for capping global warming at 1.5C, which scientists say would limit climate impacts to manageable levels.

The UN agency highlighted that the warmest eight years on record had all been since 2015, despite consecutive La Nina events since 2020.

The weather phenomenon has a cooling effect on global temperatures.



Palestinian relatives mourn the death of Abdulhadi Nazzal, reportedly killed during a raid by Israeli forces in Qabatia town, during his funeral in the same village in the occupied West Bank, yesterday. Israeli forces killed three Palestinians in two separate incidents in the occupied West Bank Thursday, the Palestinian health ministry said.

PHOTO: AFP

FINANCIAL CRISIS Sri Lanka to cut army by half

AFP, Colombo

Bankrupt Sri Lanka will drastically slash its military, the defence ministry said yesterday, as the government works to overhaul its shambolic finances after an unprecedented economic crisis.

The island nation is still reeling from months of food and fuel shortages that made daily life a misery for its 22 million people last year.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe has hiked taxes and imposed harsh spending cuts to smooth the passage of an expected International Monetary Fund bailout following a government debt default.

Sri Lanka's armed forces are next on the chopping block, with the defence ministry announcing it would retire 65,000 soldiers from its 200,000-strong army over the year.

The cuts make up the lion's share of plans to downsize Sri Lanka's land forces to



100,000 by the end of the decade.

"The overall aim of the strategic blueprint is to broach a technically and tactically sound and well-balanced defence force," a ministry statement said.

Sri Lanka's armed forces remain bloated more than a decade after the end of the country's traumatic ethnic civil war.

Nearly 400,000 people served in the

military at its peak strength in 2009, the year government forces crushed the Tamil Tigers separatist movement during a no-holds-barred offensive that saw thousands of civilian casualties.

Defence accounted for nearly 10 percent of public spending last year, and according to expert analysts, pay for security force personnel makes up half the government's salary bill.

Sri Lanka warned this week it had barely enough revenue to pay public employees and pensions despite huge tax hikes at the start of the year. The economy shrank an estimated 8.7 percent last year as the public endured lengthy blackouts, long queues for petrol, empty supermarket shelves and runaway inflation.

The crisis peaked in July when protesters angered by the crisis stormed the official residence of then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who briefly fled the country and tendered his resignation from abroad.

Trump Org fined \$1.6m for tax fraud

AFP, New York

A New York judge yesterday fined Donald Trump's family business the maximum penalty available of \$1.6 million for committing tax fraud.

The sum, paltry to the billionaire real estate developer, is symbolically significant as the ex-president eyes the White House again amid a host of legal woes.

The Trump Corporation and Trump Payroll Corp., entities of the Trump Organization, were found guilty last month of running a years-long scheme to defraud and evade taxes through falsifying business records.

They were convicted of all 17 counts following a trial, marking the first time the companies had ever been convicted of crimes.

Trump himself was not charged but the verdict inflicted further reputational damage as he seeks nomination for the presidency in 2024.

Longtime CFO Allen Weisselberg was sentenced to five months in prison on Tuesday, and agreed to pay \$2 million in fines, for his role in the scam. He pleaded guilty to scheming with the company to receive undeclared benefits such as a rent-free apartment in a posh neighborhood, luxury cars for him and his wife and his grandchildren's fees at an expensive private school.

The 75-year-old admitted 15 counts of tax fraud and testified against the Trump Organization as part of a plea bargain.

Lisa Marie Presley, daughter of Elvis, dies

AFP, Los Angeles



Singer-songwriter Lisa Marie Presley, the only child of rock and roll legend Elvis Presley, died

Thursday hours after being hospitalized, her family said. She was 54. Presley, who led a tumultuous life in the sprawling shadow of her world-famous father, and who attended a high-profile awards ceremony just this week, had

been rushed to a California hospital's intensive care unit for cardiac arrest. Presley was found "unresponsive" by her housekeeper at home Thursday morning in the celebrity-studded Los Angeles suburb of Calabasas, entertainment website TMZ reported. Lisa Marie Presley was Elvis's only child. She previously controlled Elvis Presley Enterprises, but sold the bulk of shares in the company to a private equity firm in 2005.

Momen says

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Bangladesh and the United States," Momen said.

Donald Lu will have meetings on a range of priorities including energy, trade, security cooperation, religious freedom, labour, and human rights.

He will meet with senior Bangladeshi officials and civil society leaders to discuss strengthening their bilateral relationship, expanding economic engagement, and hear their perspectives on labour and human rights, according to the US Department of State.

Momen said Bangladesh and the US believe in the same values and promote democracy and human rights.

Bangladesh has set an example in the world by sacrificing 30 lakh lives to establish democracy, and ensure justice and human rights, Momen said, adding that "Our principles and values are almost the same."

He said the US is a friendly country and Bangladesh accepts if they come up with any constructive suggestions.

Train runs over

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Sumi Begum jumped in front of the train with her children, but police have started looking into the matter.

The condition of the rescued child is not good. If necessary, he will be sent to Rangpur Medical College Hospital for advanced treatment, said the OC.

Bangladesh

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make the semifinals before the final on January 29 at Potchefstroom

Alongside Bangladesh, Group A contains Australia, Sri Lanka and the USA. Bangladesh will be buoyed by their wins in warm-up fixtures leading up to the showpiece event. They defeated South Africa by seven runs (D/L) method on Monday before defeating India in a tight game by just three runs on Wednesday.

Bangladesh will play their next match against Sri Lanka on January 16 before taking on the USA on January 18, both at the same venue.

Among the 15-member squad, which left for Johannesburg on January 1, captain Disha Biswas along with Marufa Akter and Dilara Akter have played in international fixtures, with the skipper having featured for the senior team during their tour of New Zealand.

South Africa had been a happy hunting ground for the men's U-19 team in 2020 and the women's side will be hoping to create some memories of their own this time around as the first edition of the tournament commences.

UP chairman's men

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including Adu Nagar and Sufinagar areas.

The UP chairman spearheading the operation of damaging the environment, is known as a "hill-grabber", said Anwar Kamal, president of Co-Management Committee, which coordinates volunteers with the help of the Forest Department to protect Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary.

"The UP chairman has deployed people to extract sand from the stream and by ripping apart hillocks. A few weeks ago, a worker died while cutting trees. Last year this time around, he used to fell trees on a regular basis to feed brick kilns," he said.

Sanjida Rahman, whose family has been involved in raising awareness for generations to conserve the forest, also confirmed that the local UP chairman has been tearing down trees in the forest without any interruption.

"Every day, dozens of trucks take away sand, earth and trees from various parts of the forest. Once celebrated for its conservation feat, the forest has now lost its grandeur due to mindless grabbing," she said.

Contacted, Chunati Union Parishad Chairman Joydul Abedin denied his involvement in razing hillocks.

"I didn't touch any forest there, nor did I raze any hillock. You can visit the spot to verify the allegations," he

claimed over the phone.

When this correspondent provided evidence of speaking to locals, labourers and truck drivers who said that he was behind the razing, Joydul Abedin abruptly ended the call.

Kamruddin, grandchild of the chairman, denied the allegation as well, claiming they did not even enter the forest.

Mahmud Hossen, range officer of Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, told The Daily Star that the area was barricaded with bamboo so that no truck could enter the forest. He also mentioned that they have planted saplings to stop environmental degradation.

"We have utilised our sources there in an effort to collect evidence for filing cases against the perpetrators," he said.

Asked about the identities of the perpetrators, Hossen said they heard the name of the local UP chairman as well as another group. "But we can't file a case without evidence."

Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary consists of 7763.4 acres of forest land and is divided into two ranges -- Chunati and Jaldi.

Compared to other Asian countries, Bangladesh has less designated forestry -- only 17 percent of its total area -- according to FAO. Various research studies have warned against continuous degradation of the hill forest of the Chunati beat.

World's longest river cruise

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He emphasised the need to build a modern multi-modal network of waterways and talked about partnerships with Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries that have strong water connectivity with the northeastern part of India, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

After the virtual launching, the private cruise vessel MV Ganga Vilas left Modi's parliamentary constituency Varanasi on its maiden journey with 32 tourists from Switzerland who signed up for the entire length of the journey.

Operated by India's Antara Cruises, a private enterprise, MV Ganga Vilas will travel 3,200km through five states in India and parts of Bangladesh over 51 days.

The 62-metre-long vessel with three decks has 18 suites. Equipped with a gym and spa, the vessel can accommodate 36 tourists. For a tourist,

the cruise will cost between 25,000 rupees to 50,000 rupees per day, the cruise's director Raj Singh said.

According to the website of the operator of the cruise, tourists who prefer a shorter itinerary can do so in two parts -- a 20-night trip from Varanasi to Kolkata (or vice-versa) along the Ganges, and a 30-night trip from Kolkata to Sivasagar (or vice-versa) via Bangladesh.

Besides connecting India's National Waterway 1 (NW1) which includes the Ganges and National Waterway 2 (NW2) on Brahmaputra, the cruise will cross 27 river systems.

The cruise is planned to touch 50 tourist spots including World Heritage Sites including the Sundarbans, Kaziranga national park in Assam, river ghats, historical sites and major cities like Patna in Bihar, Sahibganj in Jharkhand, Kolkata in West Bengal, Dhaka in Bangladesh and Guwahati in Assam.

Russia claims

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But Serhiy Cherevatyi, spokesperson for Ukraine's eastern military command, told Reuters by telephone Soledar had not been captured: "Our units are there, the town is not under Russian control."

CNN said on its website that a reporting team just outside the town could hear mortar and rocket fire yesterday afternoon and saw Ukrainian forces ferrying troops in what appeared to be an organised pullback.

A Ukrainian officer in the area, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to speak to the media, also told Reuters by telephone the Russians had not fully taken the town.

Ukrainian officials said on Thursday more than 500 civilians, including 15 children, were trapped inside Soledar.

In an overnight video address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked two units in Soledar he said were "holding their positions and inflicting significant losses on the enemy." He did not give more details.

After Ukrainian forces drove Russia into humiliating retreats for much of the second half of 2022, the front lines have barely budged for the past two months. Meanwhile, the battles around Bakhmut and Soledar became what both sides called a "meat grinder" -- a brutal war of attrition claiming the lives of thousands of soldiers.

Kyiv's Western allies see it as a fight for marginal gains on a stretch of front where neither side can make a big breakthrough, a sideshow from battles further north and south, where Ukraine hopes to push through Russian lines.

"Even if both Bakhmut and Soledar fall to the Russians, it's not going to have a strategic impact on the war itself," US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters at the White House, "and it certainly isn't going to stop the Ukrainians or slow them down."

Meanwhile, Ukraine's defence minister said the country has effectively become a Nato member despite the military alliance's reluctance to get embroiled in a wider conflict with Russia.

Oleksiy Reznikov said he was confident that Western allies would shed their inhibitions about supplying Ukraine with heavier weapons such as tanks and fighter jets.

"This concern about the next level of escalation, for me, is some kind of protocol," he told the BBC in an interview broadcast Friday, dismissing Nato fears about provoking Russia.

Biden probed over

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the White House of a cover-up over the affair, swiftly announced their own inquiry to run independently of the criminal probe.

The disclosures have prompted comparisons to the special counsel investigation of Trump's hoarding of hundreds of classified materials at his Florida beachfront home and his alleged obstruction of government efforts to get them back.

"I take classified documents and classified material seriously. We're cooperating fully (and) completely with the Justice Department's review," Biden told reporters.

"As part of that process, my lawyers reviewed other places where documents from my time as vice president were stored, and they finished the review last night."

The president said a "small number" of documents with classified markings had been found in storage areas and his library and that the Justice Department was notified immediately.

Biden declined to take shouted questions from the press, but a White House lawyer said later the documents had been "inadvertently misplaced."

Hur is a former assistant US attorney who worked in the DOJ from 2007 until 2014 and returned to public service under Trump as the principal associate deputy attorney general.

He promised a swift investigation

and pledged to be "fair, impartial and dispassionate."

The first cache of Biden documents was discovered a week before last year's midterm elections but only acknowledged by the White House on Monday, prompting accusations from Republicans that it was kept secret for party political reasons.

James Comer, head of the powerful House oversight committee, said he would be leading an investigation into the "mishandling of classified documents and the Swamp's efforts to hide this information."

"There are many questions about why the Biden administration kept this matter a secret from the public, who had access to the office and the residence, and what information is contained in these classified documents," he said.

Trump, who is facing multiple criminal and civil probes, took to his Truth Social platform to call for an immediate end to his investigation "because I did everything right."

Legal analysts have pointed to major differences between the cases, particularly over the size of the huge hoard of documents Trump had stored at his residence after leaving the White House in 2021.

The FBI carted away some 11,000 papers after serving a search warrant in August, and Trump could face obstruction of justice charges after spending months resisting efforts to recover his trove.

Pharaoh Ramses II's

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to San Francisco and will not be included when the rest of the exhibition packs up and heads to Sydney.

The gesture marks gratitude towards Paris, where scientists preserved Ramses II's mummy by treating it against fungus when it was exhibited in 1976.

This time, the sculpted coffin will be shown empty, as Egyptian law now forbids transporting royal mummies abroad.

It depicts the recumbent king in bright colours with his arms crossed on his chest holding his sceptre and whip of office.

His eyes outlined in black, he wears a striped pharaonic headdress and a braided false beard.

One of the best-known pharaohs, reputed as a great warrior and builder of temples, Ramses II ruled from 1279-1213 BC.

Inscriptions on the sarcophagus' sides detail how his body was moved

three times from 1070 BC, after his tomb in Luxor's Valley of the Kings was raided by grave robbers.

Its final resting place was discovered in 1881, just as it too was being pillaged.

As well as the coffin, the Paris exhibition will include vast numbers of ancient Egyptian objects, solid gold and silver jewels, statues, amulets, masks and other sarcophagi.

Only animal mummies will be on show, including cats which were "raised and sacrificed to the gods", Farout said.

Other treasures come from the capital Tanis that Ramses II built east of the Nile Delta, including a solid silver coffin, finger and toe sheaths and solid-gold masks decorated with jewels.

Exhibition organisers hope large numbers of people will make the trip to the La Villette exhibition centre in northeast Paris. A previous exhibition about Tutankhamun drew 1.4 million visitors to the same place in 2019.