

FOSSIL FUEL USE

Environment chiefs of G20 ready fresh proposal

AFP, Chennai

G20 environment ministers in India readied a fresh bid yesterday to strike deals tackling climate change, days after heavy criticism for failing to agree on cutting fossil fuel use.

Environment chiefs from the Group of 20 major economies -- constituting more than 80 percent of both global GDP and CO2 emissions -- are focusing on critical topics including climate change adaption finance, biodiversity, and principles for ocean-based economic activities.

Those agreed by environment ministers during their one-day conference today will be signed off by leaders during a summit in New Delhi in September.

Global temperatures are hitting record highs, triggering floods, storms and heatwaves, climate experts say.



A general view of billowing smoke as supporters of the Nigerien defence and security forces attack the headquarters of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), the party of overthrown President Mohamed Bazoum, in Niamey yesterday. Inset: Supporters of the Nigerien defence and security forces gather outside the national assembly in Niamey.

PHOTO: AFP

Earth in ‘era of global boiling’

Warns UN chief as July set to be hottest month on record

AFP, United Nations

July 2023 is set to upend previous heat benchmarks, UN Secretary-general António Guterres said yesterday after scientists said it was on track to be the world's hottest month on record.

The UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service also said in a joint statement it was "extremely likely" July 2023 would break the record.

"We don't have to wait for the end of the month to know this. Short of a mini-Ice Age over the next days, July 2023 will shatter records across the board," UN Secretary-general António Guterres in New York said.

"Climate change is here. It is terrifying. And it is just the beginning," he told reporters, adding "the era of global boiling has arrived".

The effects of July's heat have been seen across the world. Thousands of tourists fled wildfires on the Greek island of Rhodes, and many more suffered baking heat across the US Southwest. Temperatures in a northwest China township soared as high as 52.2C (126F), breaking the national record.

While the WMO would not call the record outright, instead waiting until the availability of all finalised data in August, an analysis by Germany's Leipzig University released yesterday found that July 2023 would clinch the record.

This month's mean global temperature is projected to be at least 0.2C (0.4F) warmer than July 2019, the former hottest in the 174-year observational record, according to EU data.

The margin of difference between now and July 2019 is "so substantial that we can already say with absolute certainty that it is going to be the warmest July", Leipzig climate scientist Karsten Haustein said.

July 2023 is estimated to be roughly 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) above the pre-industrial mean. The WMO has confirmed that the first three weeks of July have been the warmest on record.

Commenting on the pattern, Michael Mann, a climate scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, said it was clear by mid-July that it was going to be a record warm month, and provided an "indicator of a planet that will continue to warm as long as we burn fossil fuels".

Niger military chief backs coup leaders

World condemns

AFP, Niamey

Niger's armed forces chief yesterday declared his support for troops who said they had overthrown the government, despite a defiant stand by the country's elected president and an outcry from the world community.

The latest target of a coup in the deeply troubled Sahel, President Mohamed Bazoum was confined at his residence on Wednesday by members of his presidential guard.

Hours later, their leaders, calling themselves the Defence and Security Forces (FDS), declared they had "decided to put an end to the regime," and all institutions were being suspended, the borders closed and a night-time curfew imposed.

Armed forces chief General Abdou Sidikou Issa yesterday swung his weight behind the putschists.

"The military command... has decided to subscribe to the declaration made by the Defence and Security Forces... in order to avoid a deadly confrontation between the various forces," he said in a statement.

Earlier, Bazoum defiantly stood his ground as condemnation of the putsch swelled from African and international organisations and allies France and the United States.

"The hard-won (democratic) gains will be safeguarded," Bazoum said on Twitter, which is

being rebranded as X.

"All Nigeriens who love democracy and freedom would want this,"

Foreign Minister Hassoumi Massoudou said Niger's "legal and legitimate power" was the one exercised by its elected president.

There had been a "coup bid" but "the whole of the army was not involved," he told France24 television.

"We ask all the fractious soldiers to return to their ranks," he said.

"Everything can be achieved through dialogue but the



institutions of the republic must function."

On Wednesday morning, disgruntled members of the Presidential Guard sealed off access to Bazoum's residence and offices and after talks broke down "refused to release the president", a presidential source said.

The coup leaders -- 10 men in military uniform -- appeared on television overnight.

Their leader, an officer named Colonel-Major Amadou

Abdramane, announced they were taking power following "the continued deterioration of the security situation, poor economic and social governance."

The parties in Niger's ruling coalition denounced "a suicidal and anti-republican madness" and condemnation poured in from regional and global leaders.

ECOWAS and the African Union each blasted an "attempted coup d'etat" while UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres attacked "the unconstitutional change in government."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he had spoken to Bazoum to offer support from Washington, which deploys about 1,100 troops in Niger.

France, a key ally which has 1,500 soldiers in Niger, called for "the restoration of the integrity of Nigerien democratic institutions."

Russia -- isolated internationally since invading Ukraine in February 2022 -- joined nations appealing for Bazoum's release.

All disputes should be resolved "through peaceful and constructive dialogue," it said.

Bazoum took office after elections two years ago, in Niger's first-ever peaceful transition since independence.

He had been interior minister and right-hand man to former president Mahamadou Issoufou, who voluntarily stepped down after two terms.

SUPER TYPHOON

Doksuri kills 25 ferry passengers off Manila

Storm headed to China

REUTERS, Beijing/ Taipei

Doksuri regained super typhoon strength yesterday in its final approach to southeastern China after pummelling Taiwan and the northern Philippines with rain and strong winds that led to the capsizing of a ferry in which at least 25 people died.

As of 5:00 pm Beijing time (0900 GMT), the winds around the eye of the storm had reached up to 187 km per hour (116 mph), putting Doksuri back on the top rung of China's tropical storm categorisation system after weakening earlier.

The ferry sank near the Philippine capital of Manila after passengers alarmed by strong winds rushed to one side of the boat, overturning it. As many as 36 people have been killed this week during Doksuri's transit off the northern Philippines.

Doksuri is expected to make landfall in China on this morning somewhere between Dongshan and Putian in the southeastern province of Fujian.

The China Meteorological Administration forecast that Doksuri would be weaker than 2016's Typhoon Meranti, the strongest storm to hit China's coast since 1949 which killed at least 11 people.

14 SUMMIT

Norwegian woman, Nepali sherpa set record

AFP, Islamabad

A Norwegian woman and her Nepali guide set the record Thursday for the fastest summit of all 14 of the world's 8,000-metre (26,000-foot) mountains, their team said in a statement.

Kristin Harila and Tenjin "Lama" Sherpa completed the feat in three months and a day after summiting Pakistan's K2, the last peak on their quest.

"Kristin said it was a very hard climb because of the amount of snow. She is grateful and extremely happy to share the record with Lama," Rigmor Berthier, from her press team, told AFP.

The record reflects "their unwavering determination, teamwork, and sheer tenacity throughout this monumental endeavour", a statement from her team said.

"Harila and Lama's collaboration has showcased the essence of mountaineering unity, transcending borders and cultures to achieve greatness together."

The pair surpassed Nepal-born British adventurer Nirmal Purja's record of six months and six days, set in 2019.

Both records were achieved with the help of oxygen and helicopters, which has drawn some criticism from the climbing community.

Pakistan is home to five of the world's 14 "super peaks", and climbing them all is considered the ultimate achievement of any mountaineer.

Besides being far more technically difficult to climb than Everest, K2 -- Earth's second-highest mountain -- has notoriously fickle weather and has only been scaled by 425 people since 1954, including around 20 women.

More than 40 people have summited the world's top 14 peaks, but only a few of them women.



JUDICIAL REFORMS

Israel president calls for calm

UN urges heeding to protesters

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel's president urged both sides of a dispute over moves to overhaul the judiciary to refrain from any violence, using the occasion of a Jewish fast yesterday to appeal for reconciliation as protesters planned more demonstrations.

Demonstrations for and against the judicial overhaul were on hold for Tisha B'av, the fast day mourning the destruction of two ancient Jewish temples in Jerusalem blamed by tradition on needless infighting, reports Reuters.

"I appeal on everyone: Even when the pain peaks, we must preserve the boundaries of the dispute and refrain from violence and irreversible measures," President Isaac Herzog, who plays a largely ceremonial role in Israeli politics, said on Facebook.

"We must imagine our lives together here - in another 40, 50 and 100 years - and how each action will impact on our children and grandchildren, and on the bridges between us."

UN human rights chief Volker Turk meanwhile called on Israel to heed those demonstrating for "the defence of democracy and fundamental freedoms" in the face of controversial judicial reforms, reports AFP.

Turk said he had been closely following developments, noting that for months, people from across Israeli society had been "demonstrating peacefully, building alliances for the defence of democracy and fundamental freedoms".



An aerial view of houses among burned land, as a wildfire burns on the island of Rhodes, Greece yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

900 migrants drowned off Tunisia this year

AFP, Tunis

More than 900 migrants have drowned off Tunisia's coast so far this year as they tried to reach Europe by boat, the North African country's government said yesterday.

The interior ministry said 901 bodies had been recovered by July 20 following maritime accidents in the Mediterranean Sea.

National Guard spokesman Houcem Eddine Jebabli earlier reported that almost 800 migrants had died by late June, and that more than 34,000 had been intercepted and rescued, most of them from sub-Saharan Africa.

Coastguard units had carried out over 1,300 operations -- more than double the number of missions for the same period last year.

Over 550 "organisers and intermediaries" of human trafficking had been arrested so far this year.